

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Revisiting of Flaubert's Literary Biography in Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the  
Degree of Master of Art in English

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August 2011

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**Letter of Recommendation**

Mr. Kailash Tmang has completed his thesis entitled “Revisiting of Flaubert’s Literary Biography in Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot*” under my supervision. He carried out this research from February 2011 to August 2011. I hereby recommend this thesis to be submitted for viva voce.

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Approval Letter

This thesis entitled “Revisiting of Flaubert’s Literary Biography in Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Kailash Tamang has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to thank Mr. Badri Prasad Acharya for his incessant kind help and guidance to accomplish this dissertation. Without his sharp suggestions and supervision, I would have probably been still trackless and bewildered by the over stress of writing a good thesis. My words are insufficient to repay his kind help to provide me with enough materials and show me the right track to walk on. I feel really fortunate to complete this thesis under his guidance, and it has also been a matter of great satisfaction to have this work done under a perfectionist like him.

I am also very thankful to Prof. Ammaraj Joshi, the Head of Central Department of English for his easygoingness and encouragements.

I am also grateful to Dr. Beerendra Pandey, Dr. Rebati Prasad Neupane, Baikuntha Paudel, Dr. Shiva Rijal, Ghanshyam Bhandari, Pushpa Raj Acharya, Saroj Sharma Ghimire, Shankar Subedi, Sarad Chandra Thakur, Mahesh Paudel, Raju Baral, Shuvaraj Ranabhat, Taralal Shrestha, Pom Bahadur Gurung, Jivanath Lamsal, Deepak Giri, Bal Bahadur Thapa, H.L. Pandey, Harihar Gyawali and all the *Gurus* of English Department.

I have equal gratitude to all my friends and my family who supported and inspired me to complete this research.

August 2011

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### Abstract

Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* is a historical novel that reinterprets Flaubert's life from postmodernist perspective. It stands out of conventions of writing fiction in its content and style of historical representation; it is 'a novel about novel' which tells three separate stories of Flaubert's life, the writer himself and Louise Coulet. The writer uses Geoffrey Braithwaite as the main narrator. The narrator is very obsessive about Flaubert's life and wanders in research of the authenticity of 'Flaubert's parrot' which Gustave Flaubert had taken from a Museum for writing his novel *Un Coeur Simple*. While revisiting Flaubert, he even adds his own personal stories. Thus, this novel is an outcome of a blending between 'historical fact' and 'fiction or the subjectivity of the writer'. Barnes's reinterpretation of Flaubert's literary biography, in new historical perspective, questions on truth, problematizes historical understanding and unveils the realities of Flaubert's life. The history itself is shown to be in crisis of autonomous existence through intertextuality and blurring of genres. New history explores the facts what previous historians forgot to write. Flaubert's unquestioned literary personality has been shaken on the ground of his patriarchal values, and his authorial failure to escape the subjective reality despite his claim on scientism in style and Platonic belief in beauty, that he wanted a writer to write from observed fact and events and not to give solution or explanation to the problem but to represent social reality.

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## I. Introduction to Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* as a historical Fiction

This research aims to expose the basic motives of Julian Barnes to write the novel about a writer, Gustave Flaubert. It will explore how Barnes reinterprets Flaubert's life and unfolds the difficulty of finding the past reality and the truth about him in his novel *Flaubert's Parrot*. This book is an exploration of truth created through history and the reality about Gustave Flaubert's life. For Barnes, truth is a kind of creation and is determined by some particular historical tenets, personal psychology and the characters involved in its narration. Historiography tries to fix truth creating certain discourses out of collected data. But the truth about the past is never possible as it contains just a series of grand narratives. There is a great role of power politics to form such discourses about truth. Flaubert's biography of life-sketch was written with such history that overlooked many facts and relied only on some fixed dates and created one-sided truth about him. Barnes explains about what Flaubert was in reality as "Gustave imagined he was a wild beast -- he loved to think of himself as a polar bear, distant, savage and solitary. I went along with this, I even called him a wild buffalo of the American prairie; but perhaps he was really just a parrot." (Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*, 151) While he brings out every detail of Flaubert's life that are best supportive in better understanding about his life. And he also proves that the past cannot be accessed and represented as it was. Therefore, this research is more concerned with close observation of the reality of Flaubert's life which is best attempted by Julian Barnes by his reinterpretation of Flaubert's life and history in his book *Flaubert's Parrot*.

Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* shows the difficulties of interpreting the past and questions the authenticity of the established truth as according to Barnes truth of the past is inaccessible and therefore it is never recorded in any written history. In

Flaubert's historical biography too there are so many incomplete stories which make us difficult to go into a conclusion. But the established historians claim to have truth out of their collected series of information. And it is what Julian Barnes attempts to disqualify by giving a new light to the life of Flaubert and ending history with open-endedness, possibilities, self-reflexivity and interconnectedness.

Julian Barnes is a postmodernist writer who serves as a journalist for British newspaper and magazines. He looks history with a new perspective. Unlike so called historians, he sees multiplicity, inconclusiveness, interconnectedness and discontinuity in the history. *Flaubert's Parrot* is the result of his obsession of Gustave Flaubert's life presented in such complex style. His previous novels *Metroland*(1980) and *Before She Met Me* (1982) also share the theme of obsession. Unlike his previous work, *Flaubert's Parrot* is in postmodernist narrative style. It deconstructs general understanding of history, biography, autobiography, philosophical dialogue, critical essay, manifesto, dictionary, examination paper and pure story in terms of chronology, interconnectedness and intertextuality.

This book has been a great help for his world fame and to be awarded with prestigious literary awards like, the Booker Prize, the Geoffery Faber Memorial Prize, and E.M. Foster Award from various renowned literary organizations. And the book is also known as the most translated book in the world. Besides this, Julian Barnes has written numerous other intelligent works on fiction, short stories, essays and articles and has been successful to accumulate several other awards . He is a writer, a lexicographer, a translator and a journalist. Especially, his works deal with the themes of history, reality, truth and love.

Barnes was born in Leicester on January 1946 and was educated at the City of London School and Magdalen College, Oxford. He worked as a lexicographer on the

*Oxford English Dictionary*, and later began his career as a journalist respectively for the *Times Literary Supplement*, *New Review*, *New Statesman Magazine*, *Sunday Times* and *The Observer* during the 70s and the 80s. He began his career as a novelist in 1980 when he published *Metroland*, a novel about a youthful London suburbanite. In 1982 this work was followed by *Before She Met Me*, a novel chronicling love, obsession, and jealousy. Two years later, in 1984 *Flaubert's Parrot* was met with much critical acclaim, including nomination to the short list for the Man Booker Prize for Fiction. Now he has a great profile in whole literary history and has achieved innumerable most prestigious awards.

Barnes became one of Britain's leading literary figure during the 1990s. A *History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* was published amidst the historical and momentous turmoil of 1989, to much critical acclaim again. Described by Salman Rushdie as "frequently brilliant, funny, thoughtful, iconoclastic and a delight to read," the work once again transcends genres of history, literary theory, and fiction thus establishing Barnes as an interdisciplinary intellectual, postmodern 1<sup>st</sup> writer in his questioning of the grand narratives of modernism, and his transgression and admixture of theoretical boundaries, literary conventions, and narrative structures.

*England, England* (1998) is another masterpiece which made Barnes find himself again shortlisted for the *Man Booker Prize* for fiction. This novel also meditates on history with a serious, comic and satiric core. His next fictional text *The Porcupine* is set in an eastern European country in the aftermath of the fall of communism. In this novella Barnes points out how difficult it is to escape from the past, from history, and illusions and delusions. *Love* (2000), is a sequel to *Taking it Over* (1991) and *Nothing to be Frightened of* is a memoir meditating on life and its unavoidable end. *New York Times* listed this book as one of "10 Best Books of

2008". His latest collection of short stories, *Pulse* (2011) comes with the theme of love, body and sex.

Among his best works, *Flaubert's Parrot* receives considerable praise for its less parochial form and technique and going beyond traditional conventions of writing fiction of the time. This book appears in the form of fiction, biography, history and at the same time a literary criticism. The story centers in Geoffery Braitwaite, an English medical doctor in his sixties, a widower, with a deep obsession of the French writer, Gustave Flaubert.

In simple words, *Flaubert's Parrot* is an obsessive search for the 'real parrot' which was linked with Flaubert's life. In other words, it is search for the truth, unknown or neglected history about the writer. The truth behind his respect for animal life and his purpose to write "*A Simple Heart*" on a bird must be an obsession because Flaubert concludes his touching story as:

Felicite, the simple and devoted servant, gives herself without reserve to those she serves and loves, yet loses each in turn, including her one true possession, the parrot Loulou. But she has Loulou stuffed and puts him in a place of honor in her room. As the house decays around her, Felicite, suffering and nearly blind, dies imagining Loulou has become the Holy Spirit receiving her into Heaven.(6)

The obsession leads the character towards understanding the truth and reality about himself. Braithwaite while making an attempt to discover real parrot out of two different stuffed parrots, explores the relationship between Flaubert and his own history. His obsession for the discovery of the parrot finally proves to be the obsession of his own story which he ever wanted to reveal through some means. So

the truth ironically seems elusive even in Julian Barnes's story. What he was doing before moves to a different direction. It shows the inaccessibility of the past and truth about it; whoever strives to go deep into something to bring out the fact, the subjectivity of the writer hinders it and on the other hand, truth is always elusive.

Barnes's novel is widely known as a postmodern text in terms of its content and style of presenting history. This feature has been talked a lot by most of the literary critics. And so it is an undeniable fact that there are lots of such elements that confirm this novel to be a postmodern text. The notable thing he did in this book is he makes an experiment with totally new style for realist representation of past by subverting the traditional realist style. Merritt Moseley in *Understanding Julian Barnes* says that there is the postmodern theory of deconstruction as explained by Higdon. Barnes's text deconstructs prose genre taxonomies or the conventional distinction between fiction and non-fiction.

As a postmodern book, *Flaubert's Parrot* opens a wide range of interpretations. This multiplicity of interpretation is one specialty of this novel. It accompanies several disciplines at the same time. The text takes multiple forms itself; it is a research, meditation, an examination paper, a playful latter-day commentary, history, pure story and an autobiography. Larry Shiner observes Julian Barnes's text as an attempt to give 'reality effect' to 'fiction effect' just like Flaubert did in his *A Simple Heart* and *Madame Bovary*. For him, the purpose behind this is "not to go closer to the reality- but for the certain images and metaphors, and in order to avoid phonic redundancies"( 144). He further says:

The "reality effect, "as Barthes conceived it, is part of an economy of difference. Amid the esthetically or pragmatically determined indices of descriptive discourse, one sows fragments of pure reference which

have no other purpose than to be there as general markers of the real. But these fragments can only generate a reality effect in juxtaposition with a larger body of indexically charged descriptions. (58)

As history is uncertain, Barnes's most of the novels center into his idiosyncratic approaches to history. His text is an interrogation to history rather than an acquiescent surrender to its historical force. Jackie Buxton reviews Julian Barnes's thesis on history as a text that "brush[es] history against the grain":

Although both texts appear in deliberately disjointed formats, and both focus on questions of tradition, authority, damnation, and salvation, the links between them go far beyond these superficial formal and thematic resemblances; it is Benjamin's and Barnes's idiosyncratic approaches to history that reveal the deep interconnections between their work.[...]By brushing history against the grain of biblical tradition, Barnes's opening chapter certainly fulfills Benjamin's demand for a critical historiography, one that reveals the present by means of a Nietzschean interrogation of the past. Taken as a whole, Barnes's "theses"-like Benjamin's-proffer an apocalyptic philosophy of history rooted in a vehement disavowal of the concept of historical progress.(58)

History is not a logical progression of events; it may not sound fair to imagine history as what a historians think it to be. Past cannot be accessed as it was so it is useless to claim in the truth in the noted details. Buxton further opines that the classical historicism takes every past narrative as the truth and does not bother to interrogate it and oppose it.

He says Benjamin and Barnes have the similar view on history as they, unlike classical historicists, find only a trail of violence and destruction on history.

Both Barnes and Benjamin proffer accounts of human history that challenge the optimistic tenets of classical historicism. Where historicists see "the march of events" as a linear succession of triumphant human advances, Benjamin and Barnes see only a trail of violence and destruction. (76)

It suggests similar notion to Foucault's concept of discontinuity in the formation of human history where history is hardly believed to have series of logical events like in fairy tales.

Zamora and Faris argue that Barnes uses magic realism by ridiculing form and conventions for psychological, social and political cause:

His parodic pastiche of magical realism moves back and forth, as do many of literary texts we consider here, between the desperate world of what we might call the historical and imaginary. Propinquity – Barnes' word – is indeed a central structuring principle of magical realist narration. Contradiction stand face to face, oxymoron's march in locked step - too predictably, Barnes insists – and politics collide with fantasy. In his reference to religion and banditry and the miraculous impregnation of the hacienda owner's haughty wife, Barnes implies that bad politics has become an expected ingredient of the form. In ridiculing the forms and conventions of magical realism, Barnes helps us distinguish them. As in all effective parody, he turns the form against itself, uses its conventions to critique its conventions. His hyperbole parodies the hyperbole magic realism for excess is a

hallmark of the mode. His distillation of characters into types suggest the shift in emphasis in magical realism from psychological to social and political concerns.

Zamora and Faris find to and fro magical realist movement of historical and imaginary and a collision between politics and fantasy in the novel.

The interpretations have been done in several ways on this text. The various issues have got its dominant effectiveness and suitability in the interpretations. There is no doubt that this novel has got multiple dimensions to be looked at.

Postmodernism is the widely talked issue out of them. Likewise, there have been enough research on historiographic metafictional parody, magic realism, and intertextuality and so on. This research is going to look into the text with slightly different tone that is Julian Barnes' text as new historicist reinterpretation of Flaubert's life. In other words, this research will explore what Barnes aim to tell us by revisiting the life of Flaubert which is already recorded in the history. Is this done to say something different about our general understanding about him? Does he want to prove history as similar to fiction? And how truth is formed in history? These are the major concerns throughout this research.

History affirms the realist manifestation held to be an objective form of representation as opposed to the subjective imaginings of literature. Historiography is the genre of writing records of the findings of the historians which is thought to be objective but this ideal of academic certainty is just a myth. Historians, like scientists, do not record objective data; they select and organize data to construct a narrative.

Julian Barnes does new historicist query in the objectivity of the history about Flaubert's life and mixing the objectivity and subjectivity together. The title *Flaubert's Parrot* itself suggests Barnes's temptation to reinterpret Flaubert through a different light. Barnes chooses stuffed parrot in order to have study from the margin

so that he can know him better and find new things for interpretation. To some extent, he is able to gather the information and reinterpret him, but he also self-consciously proves that as history cannot capture the truth his history also fails to approach to the truth.

Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt write, “New historicism is history of possibilities: while deeply interested in the collective, it remains committed to the value of the single voice, the isolated scandal, the idiosyncratic vision, the transient sketch” (54). According to them new historicism does four things; reinterpretation of art, investigations of the history of the human body and the human subject, the discovery of unexpected discursive contexts for literary works by pursuing their ‘supplements’ rather than their overt thematic, and the gradual replacement of ‘ideology critique’ with discourse analysis.

According to Gregory J. Rubbinson, there is no ‘objective’ view of history to be obtained by strictly following the axioms of traditional realist historical approach. As Hayden White points out, new historicists have “discovered [...] that there is no such thing as a specially historical approach to the study of history, but a variety of such approaches, at least as many as there are positions on the current ideological spectrum” (Vesser 203).

History has been one of the major topics of research for several writers and critics. It has been a source of knowledge and a subject to generate critical insights. History or past is supposed to determine the present and future of a person. It can inspire as well as guide a person with the records of noble or great deeds. But at the same time, it needs to be questioned to save the whole human race from being enslaved by doubtful past. Harold Bloom argues that our predecessors always inferiorize us because every good and noble things have already been done by them. And to have our own stance, criticism is the only best way. To counter the matter,

new historicism is a challenge to the history as well as the best help for us to save us from the feeling of degeneration and march against the false narratives of history with a critical view. The following chapters of this research will employ Foucault's concept of new historicism including the ideas of other major new historicists. The point of this thesis is to analyze how history skips the truths and blind spots, and how it fails in its objective principle to impart the reality.

## II. Revisiting of Flaubert's Literary Biography in Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*

### Blurring the Generic and Disciplinary Boundaries in Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*

*Flaubert's Parrot* exists as a novel with various genres merged into it. The crossing of the boundaries has produced a new genre as hybrid one having several fields of knowledge gathered as belonging to single one. This experimentation of new hybrid genre has not only crossed the boundary of fact and fiction, but also blurred the genre distinction. Consequently, the genre hybridity has appeared as travelogue, historiographic metafiction, and other postmodern variants of historical fiction, and the fictional biography. On being asked to talk about the fragmented structure of *Flaubert's Parrot*, Julian Barnes describes his book as a non-conventional upside-down novel, "half homage and half junk-shop"(1). He says that he deliberately avoids the official mode of writing a biography, for example undermining conventional chronologies by proposing three different versions; Flaubert's biography, narrator's own pure story and the story of a woman who is connected with Flaubert's life once.

*Flaubert's Parrot* begins with a subjective description of Gustave Flaubert's statue and reflection over his denouement of his fame in new generation. His first description gives a smell of his satiric denunciation rather than heroizing his hero of his book. "Let me start with the statue: the one above, the permanent, unstylish one, the one crying cupreous tears, the floppy-tied, square-waistcoated, baggy-trousered, straggle-moustached, wary, aloof bequeathed image of the man"(1). This starting sounds like Barnes is going to make a criticism of a phony character with all his strength to get him down from the sky to the earth. But following chapters make sure that he is neither against him nor on his side. Actually, his project seems to be a biographical work. Under the chapter 'chronology', he gives a clear biographical life-sketch of Flaubert with fixed dates and events.

1821

Birth of Gustave Flaubert, second son of Achille-Cléophas Flaubert, head surgeon at the Hôtel-Dieu, Rouen, and of Anne-Justine-Caroline Flaubert, née Fleuriot. The family belongs to the successful professional middle class, and owns several properties in the vicinity of Rouen. A stable, enlightened, encouraging and normally ambitious background. [...]

1825

Entry into service with the Flaubert family of Julie, Gustave's nurse, who remains with them until the writer's death fifty-five years later. Few servant problems will trouble his life[ ...]

1880

Impoverished, lonely and exhausted, Gustave Flaubert dies.(10-17).

This is a clear biographical mode of writing Barnes uses in his novel. But this is mixed in a new style with subjectivity. The every positive and negative aspects have been presented taking the writer's personality away from it. He has attempted to capture every impulse that the writer expressed in his life. Unlike the traditional biography, it includes not only the dated surface details but also adds his feelings, desires and sufferings in it.

Barnes even criticizes biographers for not writing such details which could spoil the image of Flaubert:

Biographers disagree about Juliet Herbert. For some, the shortage of evidence indicates that she was of small significance in Flaubert's life;

others conclude from this absence precisely the opposite, and assert that the tantalising governess was certainly one of the writer's mistresses, possibly the Great Unknown Passion of his life, and perhaps even his fiancée(19).

He raises questions on being overlooked this matter and deducing his love for her than to a greyhound.

Other interesting blending of personal stories in biography, which makes this novel a mixture of multiple genres, are 'Loise Colet's version' and 'pure story':

#### 11: Louise Colet's Version

Now hear my story. I insist. Look, take my arm, like that, and let's just walk. I have tales to tell; you will like them. We'll follow the quai, and cross that bridge—no, the second one—and perhaps we could take a cognac somewhere, and wait until the gas-lamps dim, and then walk back. Come, you're surely not frightened of me? So why that look? You think I am a dangerous woman? Well, that's a form of flattery—I accept the compliment. Or perhaps...[...]

13: Pure Story: This is a pure story, whatever you may think When she dies, you are not at first surprised. Part of love is preparing for death. You feel confirmed in your love when she dies. You got it right. This is part of it all...(79-91)

This part of the book shows pure subjective feelings and provides a symptom of a novel switched from a biography of Flaubert to different stories of different people.

Likewise, other genres like dictionary, letters and exam paper make this text more interesting to read the variety.

This novel goes beyond the traditional distinction among the literary genre and blurs every boundary so as to break the hierarchy and the canonicity of literary genres. The several genre like biography, history, dictionary, exam paper, letters, and pure story come at a single place in Barnes's text and finally takes a form of hybrid fiction which can be said as historiographic metafiction. This intertextuality makes Barnes's text a new historicist approach to interpret Flaubert's biography. It also suggests writer's post-structuralist endeavor to impose the notion of multiple voices to genre of novel. As Barthes believes a novel is a kind of cacophony where multiple voices come together, Barnes seems to practise the notion at his best by bringing up several fragmented stories through different genres. And its metafictional achievement along with its multiplicity also cannot be overlooked. As a metafiction it encompasses the speaker's active participation and criticism of its own.

Having been confronted with many genres, Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* is successful to establish its own value as a distinct and perfect work of postmodern art. And it has successfully attracted the new historicist reading as it supports the new historicist multiple interpretive tendency as viewed by Louis Montrose:

New Historicism has been constituted as a terminological site of intense debate, of multiple appropriations and contestations, not only within Renaissance studies but in other areas of literary criticism, in history and anthropology, and within the cross-disciplinary space of cultural studies.(407)

Consequently, *Flaubert's Parrot* is a multi-generic novel that not only blurs the disciplinary boundary but also blends fact and fiction with the presentation of layers of story, history, biography and so on. In the first layer of story about parrot can be seen in the paradigm of traditional detective story. But *Flaubert's Parrot* as a postmodern novel does not uncover the mystery like in detective fictions rather it leaves in possibilities.

Secondly, he brings biography of Gustave Flaubert that focuses mostly on his literary career and affairs. In the biography, he presents three chronologies where he mixes first person and third person narrative styles. The content of each biography is different. The first one, the heroic depiction of Flaubert and his literary career. This positive picture of author is juxtaposed with the second chronology that is of failure, distress and losses. The last one is inner picture of Flaubert supposed to be written by Flaubert himself. The last part of the novel is devoted to Braithwaite's personal story. It is a story that is kept differed in the narrative which reveals his relationship with his wife, wife's adultery and suicide. In the partial autobiography the narrator has an existential motivation to narrate through which he seeks some sort of salvation.

Likewise, along with this layer, 'Braithwaite's Dictionary of Accepted Ideas', 'Examination Paper' and 'chronology' are other astonishingly experimented genres in the novel. It seems as if the writer has just collected some piece of paper having different field of knowledge and bound together. But the fact that his deliberate breaking of the conventions makes the writing worthwhile and having an active purpose behind it. The purpose is to blur the generic boundary among the subjective and objective, or fact and fiction. This intertextuality is in a way a rhetoric borne with certain motives. And obviously it is to try to show the link between one text and another. It means to avoid the sharp distinction among the texts of different fields.

Frank J. D'Angelo quotes in “The Rhetoric of Intertextuality” Julia Kristeva’s idea of intertextuality as:

According to many critics, the term *intertextuality* was coined by Julia Kristeva. For example, in *Revolution in Poetic Language*, Kristeva defines intertextuality as “the transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another”(60). And in “Word, Dialogue, and Novel,” referring to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, which she introduces into French literary criticism, Kristeva comments that “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (37). In other words, every text is connected to other texts by citations, quotations, allusions, borrowings, adaptations, appropriations, parody, pastiche, imitation, and the like. Every text is in a dialogical relationship with other texts. In sum, intertextuality describes the relationships that exist between and among texts. What follows is a discussion of the strategies of intertextuality.(2)

This definition links intertextuality with adaptations, appropriations, parody, pastiche, and imitation. Similarly, Julian Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot* matches with Kristeva’s textual notion and has undertaken the experiment of mixing them together as they go with. As any text is supposed to be connected to other text in some way, Barnes text clearly shows the truth and reality i.e. the novel can be read as various disciplines at the same time.

The tradition of blurring boundary between genres and within art began with new historicists’ questionings to the established hierarchy and divisions among art and genre. Raymond Williams and Richard Hoggart, in cultural studies, have a great

contribution to coin the interdisciplinary approach to study art and culture. In “Victorian Studies”, George Levine says, “Before 60s Victorian literature was not considered to be good. It was ignored and rejected. Only after 60s serious study of Victorian literature began and it was given continuous by Fredric Jameson Edward Said, Bakhtin etc”(1). This hierarchy even in art and literature was started to be questioned by Raymond Williams’s notion of cultural studies. Before the advent of New Historicism, science, history, and literature were supposed to be distinctively different genres, but the boundaries between these genres were blurred by new historicists by saying literature can be fictional and historical, and science can be fictional, fiction can be scientific.

With similar notion, John Brannigan writes:

New historicism is also useful practice for its practice of interdisciplinary. It tends to blur the distinctions between history and literature, between history and social sciences, between what is assumed to be background information and what is read closely in the foreground. It loosens the constraints imposed on reading practices and expectations by rigid disciplinary boundaries, and accepts that a literary text may be read as a work of history or an anecdotal report might become a way of explaining the culture and political logic of the time.[...] New historicism diminishes the capacity of those texts to continue to produce and represent the interest of power. In this sense, new historicism plays a vital role of situating literary texts in a network of power relations, revealing the political acts and historical functions of those texts. (152-3)

Since new historicism deals with issues related to historical facts, and the formation of such separated communities is one example of a historical fact, along with the interpretation and the different readings that are possible to be made of them, some theoretical accounts of new historicism may help in this reading.

According to H. Aram Vesser, new historicism is a new approach to history which gives opportunities to cross the boundaries and question on politics and power in history:

[...] New Historicism has given scholars new opportunities to cross the boundaries separating history, anthropology, art, politics, literature, and economics. It has struck down the doctrine of noninterference that forbade humanists to intrude on questions of politics, power, indeed on all matters that deeply affect people's practical lives – matters best left, prevailing wisdom wets, to experts who could be trusted to preserve order and stability in "our" global and intellectual domains (1989, p. ix).

In this sense, new historicism has given an inclusive platform for various disciplines and genres to approach the truth as closely as possible. The boundaries of one genre to another has been blurred and made possible for crossing it by redrawing the boundaries which had separated different subjects and disciplines in the past. In other words, the existing hierarchy has been dismantled with this new outlook.

Barnes revisits Flaubert going through the path of new historicism that he opens a wide area interpretation and representation. He explains Flaubert by all the dimensions of life. His ideas do not show a monotonous progression like in most

stories; the variety of tension has been shown by eliminating the generic distinction and making the text as complex as life is in reality.

#### Madame Bovary and Historicity of *Flaubert's Parrot*

*Flaubert's Parrot* is based on the life of a nineteenth century renowned French novelist Gustave Flaubert. This novel can also be described as a biography of a writer but in a totally new style and form. This form is, as already talked, Barnes' strategy to show the difficulty on seizing the personal true history. Although Barnes stitches the novel with fragmented stories and events, the whole plot centers into finding out of the real parrot which remained with Flaubert for three weeks when he was writing *Un Coeur Simple*; and in the deep level it is about finding of the great writer himself. Julian Barnes's main character, Braithwaite is shown with the deep obsession of Flaubert's real parrot and employs him in great attempt on finding it out. In the long run of search for the true parrot, Julian Barnes goes on exploring the Flaubert through all shades; good thing about him and all the dark sides which was never known or recorded. In this sense, it can also be better described as a critical biography. Barnes says in an interview that, before writing this novel, he was filled with questions and curiosities about Flaubert's life as he, till the time, sounded very great being in the entire literary history as a meticulous craftsman, stylistic "as rhythmical as verse and as precise as the language of science", psychological realist and as the herald of modernist thought in literary field. And Barnes picks up a different but quintessential way of approaching Flaubert's life, i.e. the parrot, which made Flaubert create a beautiful piece of art that depicted French peasant woman, Félicitié, who works for the same employer as a servant for her entire life. A loyal, kind-hearted, devout woman, Félicitié is left or forgotten by her closest family members and friends. However, her life takes a turn when she inherits a parrot that becomes her constant

companion. After the bird's death, she cannot bear to part with it and has it stuffed. Associating its image with the Holy Spirit, she begins to pray to the stuffed body of the parrot.

Flaubert is known as one of the most influential novelists, short story writers, dramatists, and letter writers of the nineteenth century primarily remembered for the stylistic precision and dispassionate rendering of psychological detail found in his masterpiece *Madame Bovary* (1857); A meticulous craftsman, Flaubert diligently researched his subjects and infused his works with psychological realism with the goal of achieving a prose style “as rhythmical as verse and as precise as the language of science”(1).

Flaubert was born in Rouen, where his father was chief surgeon at the city hospital and his mother was a respected woman from a provincial bourgeois family. As a child, Flaubert attended school at the Collège Royal de Rouen. During a summer vacation with his family in Trouville, Flaubert met Elisa Schlésinger, a married woman for whom he harbored a lifelong infatuation. Upon receiving his baccalaureate degree, Flaubert honored his parents' wishes and reluctantly registered for law school in Paris, despite his stronger interest in literature. In 1844, however, he experienced an attack of what is now believed to have been epilepsy; he subsequently abandoned his law studies and devoted himself entirely to writing. In 1845, Flaubert completed the first draft of *L'éducation sentimentale* (*Sentimental Education*). Following the death of both Flaubert's father and sister in 1846, Flaubert moved to the family home at Croisset, near Rouen, with his mother and infant niece. Flaubert was occupied with the writing of *Madame Bovary* from 1851 to 1856. After the first publication of the novel in serial

form in *Revue de Paris*, Flaubert was charged with offenses against public and religious morals and an obscenity trial ensued. Flaubert expressed his distress for such charge as "I am planning a thing in which I give vent to my anger[...] I shall vomit over my contemporaries the disgust they inspire in me[...] It will be big and violent"(1).

Flaubert's defense argued successfully that the novel was indeed a moral work, and Flaubert was acquitted. Published in book form two months after the trial, *Madame Bovary* enjoyed widespread sales and significant critical commentary. Towards the end of his career, Flaubert wrote his short fiction collection *Trois Contes* (*Three Tales* 1877). With the exception of occasional trips abroad and to Paris, Flaubert lived at his family's home in Croisset until his death in 1880.

*Encyclopedia of World Biography* describes him as "The French novelist Gustave Flaubert was one of the most important forces in creating the modern novel as a deliberate art form and in introducing this objective form of writing in France"(45). Ezra Pound writes "Flaubert having recorded provincial customs in *Bovary* and city habits in *L'Education*, set out to complete his record of nineteenth century life by presenting all sorts of things that the average man of the period would have had in his head"(3).

Barnes's version of chronicle of Flaubert's life includes details of his writings, events, feelings on certain dates. The details are put under a term 'chronology' beginning with Gustave Flaubert's date of birth; 1821,12Dec. According to Barnes, Flaubert began his writing career in 1830 with essays. His biography includes not only the series of events but also the writer's psychic reality. Barnes is

neither only criticizing him nor taking his side; he stands in a position of neutrality and evaluates his personality as exactly as possible. The both best and the bad aspects of his personality have been demystified. Regarding the best part, he is described to be really a man of noble idea and art in his representation of sentimentality.

Regarding the negative aspects, he describes his lust for women, failures, illness and his pretention of living completely out of touch of society and social relations:

Gustave's sexual initiation with one of his mother's maids. This is the start of an active and colourful erotic career, veering from brothel to salon, from Cairo bath-house boy to Parisian poetess. In early manhood he is extremely attractive to women and his speed of sexual recuperation is, by his own account, very impressive; but even in later life his courtly manner, intelligence and fame ensure that he is not unattended(*Flaubert's Parrot*.10-11).

In these lines Barnes gives a complete image of Flaubert according to his view.

Flaubert's is described as both intelligent and lecherous for women. His living in seclusion has been put under a doubt by looking at his courtly manners and fame in his contemporary.

There is another version of this chronology too; one is mostly about the happenings which is just discussed above and next is the autobiographical information which mainly foregrounds his psychological realities. It includes the writer's definition of himself " I am like a cigar: you have to suck me on the end to get me going[...] I am the obscure and patient pearl-fisherman who dives into the deepest waters and comes up with empty hands and blue face"(15). It even includes his tiredness, boredom, criticism of society, his feeling of love and his anger. This makes the project of Barnes clear to us that he is giving the impossibility of

approaching a text through only one way. The truth is never totally represented in only history, only biography, and only autobiography. Thus, Barnes has been successful to give maximum understanding of Flaubert with the help of use of all these genres and disciplines.

The novel *Madame Bovary* was the most famous work of Flaubert that helped him to be recognized as a modern thinker of the time. But in the beginning it created a lot of disturbance in his life as he was charged of contributing to public immorality. This novel analyzes the rural middle class, as well as tells of Emma Bovary, a girl who goes through life with romantic obsessions that she cannot resolve. At the end of the novel, she finds her dream world in shreds around her, and she prefers death to accepting a world that does not meet with her fantasies, so she takes her own life

*Madame Bovary* displayed a new technique for writing. He uses his all skills as a realist, perfectionist, and follower of scientism in representation, and advocates his Platonic base of truth and beauty. He follows the Platonic idea of art, reinforced by scientism, that beauty is inherent in objectivity, accuracy and truth. Flaubert believes that writers must write from observed facts and events. He wanted writers to be like scientists—objective, unprejudiced (fair), withdrawn, and impassive. He suggests scientists and artists not to make a temptation to explain the incomprehensible and remain in neutral position while representing the social reality in a novel. Flaubert asked the writer to generalize his observations into an ideal, a type whose dynamic power becomes apparent through the artistry of its presentation.

*Madame Bovary* is an almost universally known classic, burdened by its own reputation: it is almost impossible to come to the text without some sense of who this famous character is and what she does in these

pages. Still, Flaubert's ruthless portrait of Emma, and her relentless pursuit of passion are striking, whether read for the first or fifth time. She is not a sympathetic character -- her treatment of her daughter alone is enough to put most readers off -- but one can understand her dreams and desires. [...] Charles is a kind fellow, but obviously not a match for a wife with such passionate dreams. Flaubert presents the story very well, with an eye for detail and revealing observation. [...] He uses many minor characters to convey the whole societal order shuddering in these times...[...]. It's a strange, bold, odd tapestry, both beguiling and unpleasant. A fine, weighty, and haunting read.(249)

*Madame Bovary* creates a landmark for the ways he blends romanticism and realism. Gustave Flaubert imprints his image as an experimenter of realism in new style, a nasty individual who despises phoniness of the bourgeoisie, of which he was a part. He believes in few things beyond himself and his friends, including that life was meant to be enjoyed.

When Barnes heard the true story which *Madame Bovary* is based on and decided to write a novel about the story, he thought it a great chance to paint “a scathing picture of the bourgeois”(23). Though Flaubert was an enemy of bourgeois society and loved to attack the social reality victimized by romanticism standing on the neutral position, he himself couldn't escape the reality which he was living secretly. Barnes project opens all those wrong doing of Flaubert and postulates the reality of realist ironically.

### Fictionalization of Flaubert's Biography in Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*

Julian Barnes fictionalizes the biography of Gustave Flaubert in *Flaubert's Parrot*. The question "how do we seize the past?" problematizes the authenticity of history and personal biography. The whole novel centers on exploration of Flaubert's minute life information so as to have doubt on existing truth and unfold the hidden realities through the new historical perspective. New historicism problematizes established truth and questions history written in conventional way. According to this theory, historian always writes history from the perspective of people in power and the presence of subjectivity of the historiographer also cannot be denied. Thus, history is nothing except what a historian finds it to be like, and what socio-political power tame it in their favour. Foucault opines power always holds "a discursive relation rather than something which a person or group wields or bears"(21). He goes to the extremities of power more than 'official discourses' that over-asserts in its authority. His concept of power appears less legitimate, less legal in character. He thinks "power installs itself and produces real material effects" (21) when the field of power is created out of discourses. To be more precise, power, for Foucault, is not just "the ruthless domination of the weaker by the stronger [...] Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere"(39). Foucault's concept of power is deeply linked with 'truth' created through 'discourse' or 'knowledge' in a society. The discourses come and exist in both documented forms like history and literature and verbal forms.

Julian Barnes aims to present the history in such a way that fictionalizes every events and shows the skeptical view on the validity of real history. He makes parody of what was believed and written in history about Flaubert. He expresses his

dissatisfaction with the objectivity of biography about writer; unlike other few writers, he likes to go beyond it and look into it with subjective inquiries:

Why aren't the books enough? Flaubert wanted them to be: few writers believed more in the objectivity of the written text and the insignificance of the writer's personality; yet still we disobediently pursue. The image, the face, the signature; the 93 percent copper statue and the Nadar photograph; the scrap of clothing and the lock of hair. What makes us randy for relics? Don't we believe the words enough? Do we think the leavings of a life contain some ancillary truth? When Robert Louis Stevenson died, his business-minded Scottish nanny quietly began selling hair which she claimed to have cut from the writer's head forty years earlier. The believers, the seekers, the pursuers bought enough of it to stuff a sofa.(3)

Barnes is more serious to know about the personality of the writer rather than the mere objective description of who he is. It shows his restlessness to know about the reality and go beyond the words. The history relies only on words and takes it to be the truth. But Barnes thinks it insufficient for anyone because there is something else we always wish to know besides the facts in words. They are the personal feelings, passion for something and desires or subjectivity. Such things are deliberately avoided from history and so Barnes attempts to rewrite the history with a different tone and colour. He tries to represent the reality as best as possible by writing history with such mixtures and complications that go similar with the life itself.

The form of history or biography has been violated and fictionalized in following three points: 1) Intertextuality , 2) postmodern concept of originality and truth and 3) Trans-historical narration. For this, he takes Geoffrey Braithwaite, the

protagonist of Barnes's most highly acclaimed novel to date, is an elderly doctor who introduces himself as a devoted admirer of Gustave Flaubert. Throughout the text he collects facts about the life and works of the French master, tells stories and anecdotes about him, quotes his novels, letters and diaries and defends him against the accusations that have been levelled at him by literary critics and historians. However, Braithwaite finds himself unsatisfied with the essential dryness of his knowledge about Flaubert.

At the very beginning of the novel he complains that "all that remains of [Flaubert] is paper[:] ideas, phrases, metaphors, structured prose which turns into sound" (2). He desires to know him intimately, to gain a more profound insight into his genius. What serves as this intimate link between Braithwaite and Flaubert is a stuffed parrot, which he discovers one day at the Hotel-Dieu in Rouen. The parrot, named Loulou, is reputedly the one which Flaubert once borrowed from the museum to serve him as inspiration when he was working on his novella *Un coeur simple*. Braithwaite admits that at the sight of Loulou he feels "ardently in touch" with Flaubert and from then on imagines it to be "the emblem of the writer's voice" (7,12). The importance of the epiphany he experiences makes him want to establish whether the exhibition at the Hotel-Dieu is indeed the parrot that Flaubert had in front of him when writing *Un coeur simple* or the parrot on display in the near-by Croisset is the authentic one.

The novel, then, takes the form of a very loosely structured account of the quest for the genuine parrot intertwined with numerous digressions about Gustave Flaubert. As the novel unfolds, however, it becomes increasingly clear that Braithwaite's story about Flaubert and the parrot is to a large extent a mere pretext for telling (or withholding?) the tragic story of the protagonist's late wife Ellen. The text

is peppered with aposiopeses, moments of sudden breaking off in speech, which take place whenever Braithwaite attempts to overcome his embarrassment and shyness and begin his own painful story: “I remember... But I’ll keep that for another time” (82), “My wife... Not now, not now” (120). At one point, in the midst of his discussion of *Madame Bovary*, he suddenly confesses, “Three stories contend within me. One about Flaubert, one about Ellen, one about myself. My own is the simplest of three [...] and yet I find it the hardest to begin. My wife’s is more complicated and more urgent; yet I resist that too[...] Ellen’s is a true story; perhaps it is even the reason I am telling you Flaubert’s story instead” (94-5).

Flaubert’s story becomes thus a story that is being told instead of a different, personal one, which the narrator feels unable to begin. Several questions seem to arise at this point. If the story about Gustave Flaubert is not being told for its own sake, what purpose does it serve? Why to tell a story at all? Does writing about Flaubert prepare Braithwaite for telling his own story? And ultimately: Why does he choose to write about Flaubert and not somebody else? As is usually the case with Barnes’s novels, there is not one answer to any of the questions; there are only answers in plural, often contradictory ones. The reasons why Geoffrey Braithwaite chooses to tell Flaubert’s story rather than his own are complex and equivocal. On the one hand, Braithwaite is afraid of confronting the pain of his personal tragic story and therefore defers it until he can work up the courage to share it with the reader.

On the other hand, however, he writes about Flaubert because he hopes to find consolation in telling his story. But what sort of consolation is he seeking? And how can Flaubert and his art provide it? These are the questions that in the remaining part of this section will be discussed. In order to examine these questions, one needs to be familiar with one of the last chapters of *Flaubert’s Parrot* entitled *Pure Story*, in

which Geoffrey Braithwaite finally confronts the tragic events of his past. He talks about his long-time marriage with Ellen, which he describes as “happy... unhappy... happy enough” (197). What he also confides to the reader is the painful and embarrassing fact that Ellen used to have numerous affairs with other men, a thing he never mentioned to her and pretended not to notice. Eventually, Braithwaite confesses that his wife in all probability committed suicide and that he was the one to switch off her respirator. The reason for Ellen’s decision to take her life was never clear to Braithwaite and the ignorance of it has haunted him ever since. He does realise, however, that despite the fact that she seemed to have everything she needed: “a husband, children, lovers, job[... ]friends, and what are called interests”(197), she suffered from depression and a pervading sense of emptiness. She was not religious, he suggests, and at some point she simply could no longer think of a good reason to go on. Despite the years that have passed, Ellen’s suicide still remains an event that Braithwaite cannot reconcile himself to. The critic Georgia Johnston refers to his wife’s tragic death as “the crux of his life” (65). In default of any consolatory narrative to account for Ellen’s suicide enables him to understand her decision or make sense of it (Braithwaite is not religious either), he turns to art.

The reasons why he chooses Gustave Flaubert are manifold and some of them will be discussed further in this section. One of the crucial ones, however, and the one that explains why Braithwaite intertwines Flaubert’s story with the highly confessional story about Ellen is French writer Flaubert’s masterpiece, *Madame Bovary*. The eponymous character of Flaubert’s most famous novel is a middle-aged woman who (simplifying to the extreme) repeatedly betrays her husband and in the end commits suicide, thus becoming a counterpart to Ellen. The plot of *Madame Bovary* becomes for Geoffrey Braithwaite a context of interpretation, which enables him to identify with Charles Bovary, the betrayed and abandoned widower, and to

understand Ellen better through the figure of Emma Bovary. Georgia Johnston captures the reasons for Braithwaite's interest in Flaubert very succinctly:

The autobiographical 'I' cannot understand his wife's suicide; that inability to understand provides the impetus of Braithwaite's current life. The quest to find Flaubert's parrot, while unable to give direct information about Ellen's suicide, can and does present information about Flaubert and about Madame Bovary. By presenting information about the real Flaubert, the fictional Braithwaite invokes Emma Bovary's suicide, and her suicide provides a textual parallel to Ellen's suicide. (66)

The parallels that the narrator finds between his sad story and the life and works of Gustave Flaubert, argues Johnston, "become sources of meaning for Braithwaite's life, an ideological structure through which he understands himself" (69). The idea that what the protagonist of *Flaubert's Parrot* desperately seeks in art is the ability to understand his personal tragedy is shared by several critics. Matthew Pateman suggests that Braithwaite's "desire to be able to understand his relationship with Ellen and his relationship with himself" is what "necessitates the construction of [the] contexts" of Flaubert and Emma Bovary (29). He argues that the reason why Braithwaite pursues the parrot also results from the same desire: "In trying to understand his loss, [he] needs to understand Flaubert; in order to understand Flaubert, he feels he needs to understand the parrot" (28).

What remains to be considered are other expectations that Geoffrey Braithwaite has of art and different reasons why he turns to Flaubert and his writings. It becomes apparent in "Pure Story" that Braithwaite needs Flaubert in order to define himself and articulate his own thoughts. It is significant that even in the most personal part of his narrative – in which he promises to leave Flaubert aside for a while and

finally tell his own story – Braithwaite cannot express his thoughts and feelings without having recourse to his literary master. While talking about the insufficiency of the language of bereavement that he experienced after Ellen’s death, he feels compelled to quote Flaubert’s definition of language as “a cracked kettle”. While pondering Ellen’s unhappiness, he follows Flaubert in concluding that stupidity and selfishness are necessary requirements for achieving happiness (198). What these observations testify to is the fact that Flaubert has become for Braithwaite such an important (arguably indispensable) context of identification and interpretation that the latter cannot define himself without recourse to his beloved writer. One of the ways to account for this phenomenon is the postmodern theory of the death of the autonomous subject.

The self is no longer construed as a unified whole but rather as a decentred and free-floating construct of multiple texts and discourses. The figure of Flaubert can therefore be seen as one of the forces that constitute Braithwaite’s identity. The protagonist of the novel looks up to Flaubert as a teacher and as an aesthetic as well as moral authority. In “The Case Against” he lists the qualities and attitudes that Flaubert “teaches” in his life and in his writings, among which are the following: “courage, stoicism, friendship”, “to gaze upon the truth and not blink from its consequences”, “to sleep on the pillow of doubt” (157). Elsewhere, he mentions Flaubert’s “lesson” that one should not participate in life, for “happiness lies in the imagination, not the act” (201) and subscribes to his argument that “one must have the religion of despair” (217). A few critics have also suggested that Braithwaite models himself on Flaubert and strives to adopt some of his characteristics. David Higdon argues that the manner in which Braithwaite tells his own story bears witness to the fact that he tries to imitate “Flaubertian detachment, objectivity and impersonality” (Guignery 47).

Similarly, Andrzej Gasiorek points out that Braithwaite wishes to adopt his characteristically “ironic tone” and “disingenuousness” (Guignery 49).

The purpose of this discussion of Geoffrey Braithwaite’s attitude towards Gustave Flaubert is to textualize the whole biographical history of Gustave Flaubert. And the textuality is just the acknowledgement of inaccessible past. Louise Montrose characterizes such poststructuralist orientation to history as a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of histories:

By the Historicity of texts, I mean to suggest the historical specificity, the social and material embedding of all modes of reading. By textuality of histories, I mean to suggest, in the first place, that we can have no access to a full and authentic past, to a material existence that is unmediated by the textual traces of the society in question. (410)

One of the key issues raised by *Flaubert’s Parrot* is the possibility or otherwise of discovering the truth about the past. The novel repeatedly poses the question: “How do we seize the past?” (5, 100, 113). At an early stage of his quest, Geoffrey Braithwaite compares the pursuit of the past to a game of chasing a piglet smeared with grease; “It squirmed between legs, evaded capture, squealed a lot. People fell over trying to grasp it, and were made to look ridiculous in the process. The past often seems to behave like that piglet” (5). But why is the past beyond our grasp? Is it because there is no such thing as truth about the past? Does that mean that the past did not take place? Barnes’s novel does not seem to go that far. What precludes the ultimate success of the search for truth is the lack of a reliable means to conduct it. There is no objective access to the past – memory is fallible (12); what remain are texts and various discourses, which are contingent, unreliable and partial. Braithwaite realises this and declares that “all that remains of Flaubert is paper” (2).

The impossibility of fathoming the truth on the basis of existing discourses is very effectively encapsulated in the chapter entitled “Chronology.” The reader is presented here with three alternative accounts of the life of Gustave Flaubert. The first one is composed of entries which add up to a very optimistic overall picture of his biography and describe a life abounding in numerous successes and culminating in artistic fulfilment and social recognition. The second account is quite the opposite. It creates an image of a life of growing bitterness, disillusionment and deteriorating health, a life in the shadow of deaths of beloved friends, pervaded by the painful misunderstanding and underestimation of his work. The last version, in turn, provides the reader with a set of chronologically ordered quotations by Flaubert about himself. The point that the novel makes here is that many different stories can be woven around the same facts. The power of the argument lies in the fact that none of the three biographical notes has recourse to manipulation – the facts are all true yet the way of linking them into a coherent structure and the totalising narrative that is imposed on them account for the striking differences in the overall tone. The answer to the question about which of the three versions is the closest to the truth is beyond our grasp.

The notion of the tragic insufficiency and inadequacy of language that underlies the whole novel is brilliantly encapsulated by Flaubert’s thrice-quoted sad definition of language as “a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, while all the time we long to move the stars to pity” (11). Towards the end of *Flaubert’s Parrot* Braithwaite complains about the “foolish inadequacy” of the language of bereavement. The choice of expressions is limited and unsatisfying (“I loved her; we were happy; I miss her. She didn’t love me; we were unhappy; I miss

her”)(92). Worse still, they all sound untrue and artificial – as descriptions of other people’s grief. Braithwaite sadly concludes, “The right words don’t exist” (191).

Postmodern awareness of language’s incapability of guaranteeing stable meanings creates a sense of confusion and the feeling of being lost in the daunting chaos of empty signifiers. “Lost, disordered, fearful, we follow what signs there remain; we read the street names, but cannot be confident where we are,” reflects the narrator of *Flaubert’s Parrot* (62).

James Scott argues that the novel implies that there is no way out of the linguistic maze into certitude; it is illustrated by its culmination with the discovery that “the two parrots in the museums were, in fact, arbitrarily chosen from fifty possible parrots, just as words have been arbitrarily derived from a system of differences and endowed, through convention, with meaning” (68). Here again *Flaubert’s Parrot* finds itself in the thick of postmodern thought; it problematises the unreliability and insufficiency of language, questioning its referential capacity and its ability to generate stable meanings.

As a founder of realism Flaubert remained an unquestioned great being in literary history since his time. No matter, he was a great personality in the field of literature due to his highly talented ability to give a new mode in expression of thought into creation, but living in postmodern era nothing can be taken for granted to the historical narratives. Since we have got the ability to revisit and question on the fictionalities and misinterpretations of traditional history to lead the new generation towards the more truth and more reality. Barnes has become one of the best intellectual leader bearing the modern mind with the ability to question and reinterpret to the misleading history.

Barnes mixes biographical and historical information, which is supposed to be fully objective, with subjective and writer's personal stories in order to counter the official biography of Gustave Flaubert. For this, he has presented the novel in a complex form that it includes not only the objective and subjective facts about Flaubert, but also includes the several least related disciplines like dictionary, exam papers, letters, and pure story of the writer himself. In this sense, Barnes seems to be mocking the so called fixed truth in biography and history and seems making his own best effort to give an alternative way to approach the truth.

#### Barnes's Flaubert's Parrot as an Alternative History/ Biography

The explicit purpose of Barnes to this novel lies in the breaking and blurring of the boundary between what is fact and what is fiction. Wesseling thinks it to be a postmodernist tendency of rewriting history as:

Both self-reflexivity and counterfactual conjecture relativize the distinction between fact and fiction, but they do so from different perspectives. Modernist writing demonstrates how diverging meanings can be attributed to the same fact, thereby bringing out the poly-interpretability of the *historical record*. Postmodernist counterfactual conjecture, quite differently, speculates about ways in which events might have taken an entirely different course, which foregrounds the *malleability* of the *historical reality*. (113)

Barnes's ways of writing can be put under this Wesseling's claim that postmodernist counterfactual writings foreground the *malleability* of the *historical reality*, while modernist writings show the diverging meaning with the poly-interpretability in the historical record. It means, they counter the fact narrated in the history and tend to display the malleability of the historical reality. Likewise, Barnes's text, remaining

within the same frame, counters the historical facts with the addition of fictionality in it. In other words, Flaubert's biography is intertwined with fictional elements like writer's self-reflexive stories and different genres. Barnes's protagonist of the novel, by showing the link between him and Flaubert, portrays his self-reflection to explore both Flaubert as well as himself. And in the latter part of the story, Flaubert's life has been presented as a metaphor to understand the narrator, which gives a new direction to this novel from mere a historical record.

Taking the help of Wesseling's terminology, Barnes's novel can be read as a counterfactual fiction that it differs from modernist self-reflexivity which retrieves the past and forms a subject of explicit reflection, rather it 'speculates about ways in which events might have taken an entirely different course':

Postmodernist counterfactual parody is far more implicit in this respect. Rather than explicitly reflecting upon historiographical constraints, it makes it metahistorical point by parodically inverting and exaggerating the rhetoric of historical representation. This parody is far more irreverent toward historiography than modernist self-reflexivity. While modernist writers still search for a valid representation of the past within the constraints of subjectivity.(211)

This extract explains how a postmodernist counterfactual parody differs from modernist representation of history. A counterfactual parody is far more disrespectful toward historiography than modernist writings. It goes beyond the general understanding of history and parodically invert and exaggerate the rhetoric of historical representation.

In the interview with Vanessa Guignery, Barnes says some things that can be helpful in assessing the chapter's counterfactuality. In the previously quoted excerpt from the interview, Barnes states:

I suppose the point at which “Parenthesis” comes is the point at which I’ve given a series of *alternative narrations*, dislocated in time and place, and it seems to me as a writer, at that point, that it is time to say something on my own part, on my own behalf. (Guignery 65)

It means that Barnes makes counterfactual conjecture to give an alternative history to the factual history. The term “alternative narration” indicates that there is something alternative about narratives in a history. His story is not mere adaptation of historical events or people. The story is an alternative, in one way or another, to canonised history. The story is obviously *parallel* to the historical event, but on the other hand it differs from it in a number of ways which makes it seem quite remote from the historical event.

Julian Barnes thematizes history and love in his most novels such as *Parenthesis*, *A History*, *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, and *Flaubert’s Parrot*. In *Parenthesis* he tries to dismantle the credibility of traditional history; in the next novel, *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, he addresses the political implications of historical research and narration with self-reflexivity. *Flaubert’s Parrot* eventually alters canonized history with the use of counterfactual elements. It seems useful to quote few lines from his another novel, *Parenthesis* in order to have a clear view of Barnes’s opinion about history:

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. First it was kings and archbishops [...], then it was the march of ideas and the movements of masses, then little local events which mean something

bigger, but all the time it's connections, progress, meaning, this led to this, this happened because of this. And we, the readers of history, the sufferers from history, we scan the pattern for hopeful conclusions, for the way ahead. And we cling to history as a series of salon pictures, conversation pieces whose participants we can easily reimagine back into life, when all the time it's more like a multi-media collage, with paint applied by decorator's roller rather than camel-hair brush.(242)

This passage is about historiography. What people regard as "history," it seems to say, is not the same as what really happened, it is what "historians tell us". This specifically touches upon narrativity, which is one of the concerns of "historiography in the making." Thus, the above quote seems to confirm the conclusion that the novel is concerned with self-reflexivity.

*Flaubert's Parrot* is no way far from the theme of history. It too narrates the alternative story and tries to present an alternative historical record. Countering the traditional way of narrating history, Barnes poses his own version of history which is free from any power politics and biasedness or one sided perspective. Unlike the history, this is not just mere the records of historical events in the fixed dates, but it's a subjective, self-reflexive way of approaching the reality both factual and psychological.

History itself is a traditional term today, because it has most often wronged the present. The narratives have been proved full of biased details through new historical study. New historicism upturns the notion of history which especially praises the center and overlooks the margin. The power remains in the foreground and those powerless but who played a great role in creating the history remained in the background. Questioning and countering such narratives, new historicism came as the

voice of those forgotten and avoided. The historical trend of creating heroism by hiding all the dark sides, is the major concern for Julian Barnes. Thus he gives a different and multidimensional history in this novel.

*Flaubert's Parrot* is in the form of new historicism in full contrasts to the old historicism. New historicism appears as an alternative history to the old history for its inability to capture the truth. So this theoretical idea is best applied for the interpretation of Barnes's text. Barnes has given a different path for accessing history with this new historical perspective. The path has been created in realistic mode with the inclusion of multiplicity, diversity and subjective issues at a time which were aloof from the history. Barnes says in an interview with Patrick McGrath, "*Flaubert's Parrot* was a book that went off in all directions, and incidents, and stories, which, as the book continues, take on more depth and significance. At first, they are just odd stories, but by the end they become metaphors" (23). The books seem not merely a history; he deals with the issue of history in quite different way with personal views and that he finally concludes as 'the desire to reach conclusions is a sign of human stupidity' (67). He means to say history is not an ultimate truth as it is impossible to imagine all records of every events. And it is always doubtful for its historiography and narrativity. One can hardly believe in such narrative which presents only good things having all the bad and subjective sides into darkness. Ultimately, there is least belief in the historical records. Therefore, in the beginning of the novel, Barnes says ironically "Flaubert's statue stares out over the city he despised, and which in turn has largely ignored him" (1). Despite the historical flattery over Flaubert, he seems to be hardly remembered by the city where he lived. Thus, Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* is an alternative history which contains more realistic subjective facts rather than the dry objectivity of old history.

This novel is based on historical facts about Flaubert in relation to his own work, his characters, relations and his interests (in animals). It is a plunge into the writer's personal undergoing. Barnes finds the parrot "a preserved routine yet mysterious fashion"(6) which makes him feel that he has known the writer already. He tries to capture the nature of Flaubert through his own characters. Barnes feels:

We can submit the bird to additional interpretation. For instance, there are submerged parallels between the life of the prematurely aged novelist and maturely aged Felicite, critics have sent in Ferrets. Both of them were solitary, both of them had lives stained with loss, both of them, though full of grief, were preserving.(7)

The animals like bear, camel, and sheep are other animals related to Flaubert, which Barnes includes in this novel for his psychological representations. He poses possible intentionality of Flaubert in keeping the animals in his mind. This type of extra approach makes this novel counters for the general history and establishes of a separate history.

*Flaubert's Parrot* is a record of personal historical state of affairs; In the form it is a history, a biography and a fiction. Unlike the traditional concept of old history, it captures the objective and psychic reality of a person. Old history is meant to be written in single perspective by a certain group in power. This kind of historicism narrates the events in linear order and gives a definite conclusion. On the other hand, new historicism tries to reinterpret the history and counters the facts claimed to be true. *Flaubert's Parrot* is a new historical or counterfactual text that goes beyond the general understanding of Flaubert's life and brings out the facts that were deliberately omitted from the history. Simultaneously, this text functions as an alternative access

to the historical information through its diverse, intense and autonomous analysis of the facts.

The opening of the novel describes the statue of great French novelist Gustave Flaubert. The writer who at one time earned such a fame that nobody dared to find out reality behind the face. The statue was once stolen by the Germans and again was erected by a Mayor of Rouen which Barnes describes as “the one above, the permanent, unstylish one, the one crying cupreous tears, the floppy-tied, square-waistcoated, baggy-trousered, straggle-moustached, wary, aloof bequeathed image of the man”(1). This second statue was thought to be long lasting built with “93 percent copper and 7 percent tin”(1). But at Trouville Flaubert’s upper thigh had had to be patched, and bits of his moustache had fallen off; structural wires were poking out like twigs from a concrete stub on his upper lip. Barnes notes this second image-impression to have its permanency and he hardly believes in Flaubert’s existence among the minds of people of Rouen. “He died little more than a hundred years ago, and all that remains of him is paper. Paper, ideas, phrases, metaphors, structured prose which turns into sound”(1).

The statue is Barnes’s project to have an alternative truth about him as there had been existed both the followers of Flaubert, like Rouen’s Mayor and oppositions like Sartre. And what Barnes does in this novel is the exploration by dwelling at such truths which neither followers nor the anti-Flauberts could get to it.

Montrose proves that there are the traces of the professor’s values, beliefs and experiences – his or her socially constructed subjectivity. Texts are therefore incapable of offering any description or explanation that is disinterested. So the history created out of text is unreliable. The truth in the history is full of doubts. They are discourses of particular socio-political power politics. Likewise, in Julian Barnes’s

text, the truth established out of discourses is made unstable by offering several possibilities of reality. The task of finding the authentic parrot is the most difficult job he ever had. The truth appears to be guided by the subjective judgments of individuals:

I mentioned the question of authenticity to the gardienne. She was, understandably, on the side of her own parrot, and confidently discounted the claims of the Hôtel-Dieu. I wondered if somebody knew the answer. I wondered if it mattered to anyone except me, who had rashly invested significance in the first parrot. The writer's voice—what makes you think it can be located that easily? Such was the rebuke offered by the second parrot. As I stood looking at the possibly inauthentic Loulou, the sun lit up that corner of the room and turned his plumage more sharply yellow. I replaced the bird and thought: I am now older than Flaubert ever was. It seemed a presumptuous thing to be; sad and unmerited.(9)

Here, truth is a matter of personal subjective judgment. The writer thinks, except him, no one is interested in authenticity of a parrot but claiming themselves their own belief and satisfied with what they are having in the mind. The other characters seem to be living in a fake world of subjective belief, despite being known with the fact of existence of multiple subjective opinion for the single truth.

Truth and discourse are very interrelated terms. Here, the term “discourse” especially comes from theoretical concept of Michel Foucault. Alec McHoul and Wendy Grace make clear about Foucault’s concept of discourse as:

Foucault thinks of discourse in terms of bodies of knowledge. His use of the concept moves it away from something to do with language ( in the sense of linguistic system and grammar) and closer towards the concept of discipline. We use the word discipline here in two senses: as referring to scholarly disciplines such as science, medicine psychiatry, sociology and so on: and as referring to disciplinary institutions of social control such as the prison the school, hospital, the confessional and so on. Fundamentally, then, Foucault's idea of discourse shows the historically specific relations between disciplines (defined as bodies of knowledge) and disciplinary practices (forms of social control and social possibility).(26)

In Foucault's view, truth is generated out of discourses. Discourse is regarded as the bodies of knowledge which easily gets circulated through disciplinary institutions: the prison, science, the school, hospital and so on.

Julian Barnes gives an analogy of net to make clear about biography and the truth. He says that net can be defined in two ways, normally it "is a meshed instrument designed to catch fish"(17), but if we reverse and define it, it is "a jocular lexicographer once Flaubert did"(17) Barnes says he had called it a collection of holes tied together with string:

You can do the same with a biography. The trawling net fills, then the biographer hauls it in, sorts, throws back, stores, fillets and sells. Yet consider what he doesn't catch: there is always far more of that. The biography stands, fat and worthy—burgherish on the shelf, boastful and sedate: a shilling life will give you all the facts, a ten-pound one all the hypotheses as well. But think of everything that got away, that fled

with the last deathbed exhalation of the biographee. What chance would the craftiest biographer stand against the subject who saw him coming and decided to amuse himself?(17).

The discourses are created leaving out many important facts. In other words, collecting the holes and tying it with string. Thus biography appears only outline infrastructure of personal information.

Barnes explores one important hole in Flaubert's biography, i.e. the relation between Juliet Herbert and Flaubert. She was a governess to Flaubert's niece Caroline at some time in the mid-1850s at Croisset and then she returned to London few years later: "Juliet Herbert is a great hole tied together with string"(19) . She was not given much importance by the biographers:

Flaubert wrote to her, and she to him; they visited one another every so often. Beyond this, we know nothing. Not a single letter to or from her has survived. We know almost nothing about her family. We do not even know what she looked like. No description of her survives, and none of Flaubert's friends thought to mention her after his death, when most other women of importance in his life were being memorialized (19).

The discourse created by biographers about her was "that she was of small significance in Flaubert's life" (20). But at the same time others "conclude from this absence precisely the opposite, and assert that the tantalising governess was certainly one of the writer's mistresses, possibly the Great Unknown Passion of his life, and perhaps even his fiancée" (19). This is possible as Barnes quotes a reference to Juliet Herbert from Flaubert's letter to Bouilhet:

Since I saw you excited by the governess, I too have become excited. At table, my eyes willingly followed the gentle slope of her breast. I believe she notices this for, five or six times per meal, she looks as if she had caught the sun. What a pretty comparison one could make between the slope of the breast and the glacis of a fortress. The cupids tumble about on it, as they storm the citadel. (To be said in our Sheikh's voice) 'Well, I certainly know what piece of artillery I'd be pointing in that direction.'(19)

It was the boasting, nudging stuff Flaubert was always writing to his male friends. Likewise, Barnes goes on disclosing the truth and reality of Flaubert's life, in contrast to the previous biographical narrative. He questions on the visits and his impression of the English people. According to him, during the nineteenth century: "French writers didn't cross the Channel to discuss aesthetics with their English counterparts; they were either running from prosecution or looking for a job" (19). He asks about his subsequent visits, when he becomes the author of the notorious *Madame Bovary*: "Did he search out English writers? Did he search out English brothels? Did he cosily stay at home with Juliet, staring at her over dinner and then storming her fortress?"(20).

It means that Barnes really finds some doubtful and extra truth about his life journey that was totally missed in his written history/ biography. On such holes of his biography, the truth lies in somewhere between possibilities and impossibilities. That is why Barnes attempts to create another net with great effort to make smaller hole in it.

## Patriarchal Values and Blind Spots in Gustave Flaubert

Many critics describe Flaubert as the hermit of Croisset who sacrificed living to his unending quest for style, the father of modernism who wished most of all to write "a book about nothing"(22). But behind the austere image Barnes explores him as the man with rich inner life. His doctrine of "impersonality" in art also gets shackled as his work is disclosed as having writer's own experience and truth of the life. It means art is endowed with authorial own life experience and to some extent the socio-cultural reality. In order to go through the exact meaning of a text, study of author plays a significance role. *Flaubert's Parrot* points out the facts and the loopholes over such unquestioned image of Flaubert's greatness in literary history. It claims that art cannot escape the authorial reality but represents the whole scenario of other's time and gives a clear panorama of the particular society and its idealism. One of the major objectives of Barnes's novel is to show the problem in Flaubert's concept of an author and his failure to fulfill the duty in a society as an author.

Julian Barnes, in the very beginning of the novel, raises few questions regarding the authorial significance in an interpretation of a literary text:

"Why does the writing make us chase the writer? Why can't we leave well alone? Why aren't the books enough? Flaubert wanted them to be: few writers believed more in the objectivity of the written text and the insignificance of the writer's personality; yet still we disobediently pursue. ...Don't we believe the words enough? Do we think the leavings of a life contain some ancillary truth?" (*Flaubert's Parrot*.12)

This is the question on the modern trend of dealing a text as a separate being having no connection with author and socio-cultural realities. The new critical insight viewed

text in terms of disinterestness; literary text as autonomous or complete in itself which has least role with society but with pleasure principle. Julian Barnes attempts to disregard it by interrogating on the purpose of our pursuit of truth by chasing a writer. And he aims to prove that writer is the sole source of the truth in most narrativity.

Julian Barnes's study on Flaubert's biography explores the failure of history in true representation of reality. He questions on the validity of Flaubert as an author on the basis of the concept of 'author function' of Michel Foucault. Gustave Flaubert's belief in impersonality in art is revealed to be mere an escapist tendency from the reality.

As Foucault writes in "What Is an Author?", in literary criticism:

The author provides the basis for explaining not only the presence of certain events in a work, but also their transformations, distortions, and diverse modifications (through his biography, the determination of his individual perspective, the analysis of his social position, and the revelation of his basic design). The author is also the principle of a certain unity of writing—all differences having to be resolved, at least in part, by the principles of evolution, maturation, or influence.( 111)

This idea clearly forwards the truth in writer's inability to get away from his creation but participate in it, distort it, transform it, and modify whether by his own personal/individual perspective, his analysis of his social position or the revelation of his general plan for the change.

As an author Flaubert claimed and tried to prove himself to be an author distinct, untouched, and neutral to the society and tried to capture the reality without

participating in it, but Barnes shows his failure to do so as many of his stories clearly represent the characters of his own life story. And he himself is shown living his life like in his story. For an instance, *Un Coeur simple*, the story about Lolou and Felicite, resembles his lifestyle regarding loneliness. The story is also said to be taken from a news published in a newspaper. In *Madame Bovary* as well, according to Barnes, the character Emma is closely linked with Louise Colet who his own secret fiancée.

Whatever discourse is narrated without looking into the life with dialectic view point, is insufficient knowledge in the present context, as truth has already been in question. The blind worshipping depiction of a writer is put into question in Barnes novel. Unlike the historical representation through outline information, his study goes deep into the life of Flaubert and opens the root reality of Flaubert with vast contrast in what was believed yet.

Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* established him as a pioneer of realism. Realism stresses the presentation of life as it is, without embellishment or idealization. Although Flaubert's realism portrays the world as it is, he is charged by critics for his tendency to fashion his images with the pen of an artist; his writing is found to be careful, precise, objective, and emotionally restrained. He is even criticized for the ambivalent depiction of reality like many other nineteenth century realist writers. The contemporary realists tried to say one thing but unknowingly undercut the matters which they were trying to say. Flaubert, in *Madame Bovary*, seems to be giving voice to a female, seems that he is breaking the tradition of male protagonists in novels and trying to lead them to the mainstream of a society but eventually, the female is shown to be weak, degenerate, morally distorted, and romantic character, living beyond the reality and the objectivity.

Flaubert's claim of perfectionism and objective method is under criticism of Henry James that his *Madame Bovary* "fails to achieve objectivity because the characters and subject of a novel always reflect that author's choice, and in that sense they are arbitrary"(308). James even disapproves the nineteenth century realists' descriptive method:

M. Flaubert and his contemporaries have pushed so far the education of the senses and the cultivation of the grotesque in literature and the arts that it has left them morally stranded and helpless. In the perception of the materially curious, in fantastic refinement of taste and marked ingenuity of expression, they seem to us now to have reached the limits of the possible. Behind M. Flaubert stands a whole society of aesthetic *raffines*, demanding stronger and stronger spices in its intellectual diet. But we doubt whether he or any of his companions can permanently satisfy their public, for the simple reason that the human mind even in indifferent health, does after all need to be nourished, and thrives but scantily on a regimen of pigments and sauces.(13)

According to this description Flaubert is a decadent who has carried his sensuality to unbelievable extremes. James is particularly moralistic here because he seems to be attacking actual behavior.

Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* portrays both the blind spots and strong images of Flaubert's character. He was actually not that great image which history depicted him; behind the historiographical mask, he deserves more vices than the virtues. Barnes ironizes his personality by the help of various charges on him and by his own addition of 'Colet's version of story.' The charges to him were: "that he hated

humanity and democracy(73); that he didn't believe in progress; that he wasn't interested in politics; that he was against the commune; that he was unpatriotic(74); that he shot wild life in the desert; that he didn't involve himself in life; that he tried to live in an ivory tower(75); that he was a pessimist; that he teaches no positive virtues(76); that he was a sadist; that there are a lot of animals slaughtered in his books; that he was beastly to women(76); that he believed in beauty; that he was obsessed with style; and that he didn't believe art had a social purpose" (79). These charges are shown to be defended by a life-long admirer, Jeffrey Braithewaite, the old doctor who is obsessed with Flaubert. Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* reveals the death and adultery of narrator's own wife which provides motive for his obsession with Flaubert and, quite unexpectedly, this culminates in a truly moving moment of emotional empathy. To project all the negative sides of a famous writer with the help of a Flaubert's admirer, is Barnes politics to expose the reality about how actually he lived his life in most critics' eyes. Braithewaite hates the critics for their inability to digest minor things about a writer, means he blindly admires Flaubert because his life had experienced the same accidents as Flaubert narrates in *Madame Bovary*. Braithewaite's purpose to take Flaubert's favor seems his attempt to soothe his own guilt for the suicide of his own adulterous wife. By looking at the story, it can be concluded that Barnes is looking at Flaubert through both from the back and front or from the eyes of an admirer and from the eyes of critics to reach the truth and reality more closely.

Louise Colet's version of story, provides enough information of Flaubert's lust for woman and his treatment to them. Colet was a minor poetess and a wife of a philosopher. She was much older than Gustave Flaubert, though they were both in love to each other. But Colet's version of story explains all his ill treatment and

behavior towards women. Despite having close relation with her, he seems to be heartless man only boasting to himself. In the story Louise Colet expresses her feelings about Gustave as:

Gustave had a way of talking about the woman he had enjoyed. He would recall some prostitute he had frequented in the rue de la Cigogne: 'I fired five shots into her', he would boast to me. I found it coarse, but I did not mind: we were artist together, you see. However, I noted the metaphor. The more shots you fire into somebody, the more likely they are to be dead at the end of it. Is that what men want? Do they need a corpse as proof of their virility?(80)

The patriarchal arrogance can be felt by looking at this extract. Gustave's real biographical information shows that he was involved in prostitution and women, but in surface he always boasted himself as a person aloof from society and life; he thought he was not participating in life. In reality, he enjoyed his life to the extreme, he enjoyed women and despised them later. This can be inferred as his patriarchal values obtained from the then society and form which he failed to get out.

Barnes's portrayal of Flaubert in both negative and positive way, praising and ironizing, is an attempt to represent the postmodern mind of indeterminacy and undecidability, and more about the problem created due the inaccessible nature of past. In other words, it is to show the difficulty to know the past. The last section of the novel also clarifies Barnes's motive of making the stuffed parrot as the main issue to search about Flaubert that Braithwaite's search for the authentic parrot which turns in vain.

Julian Barnes employs himself in making his best effort to explore the truth and reality. *Flaubert's Parrot* is the ultimate form of Barnes lifelong research on Gustave Flaubert's life, where Barnes concludes Flaubert's biography as a doubtful representation or like a net with 'holes tied together'. He adds Flaubert's stubborn, proud to himself, lecherous, misanthropic and misogynist character in the biography.

Flaubert loved to boast himself. He compared himself with many animals so as to represent his nature. Specially, he was a bear "he is the Bear: a stubborn bear (1852), a bear thrust deeper into bearishness by the stupidity of his age (1853), a mangy bear (1854)(27). And he called himself a white bear. Unlike other brown, reddish and dark bears, the white bear was thought to be the strongest and wild. He thought:

The brown, the black, the reddish bear are not that far from man, from man's cities, man's friendship even. The coloured bears can mostly be tamed. But the white, the polar bear? It doesn't dance for man's pleasure; it doesn't eat berries; it can't be trapped by a weakness for honey.(28)

He thought himself a strong man like a bear and aloof of all the men in society. He was after all a self-centered animal. He had a kind of monstrosity in his nature. He never preferred to participate in life. He wrote his mother: "If you participate in life, you don't see it clearly: you suffer from it too much or enjoy it too much." (*Flaubert's Parrot*,pg25) It depicts his austere image, but like most realists, there is ambivalence on what they claim and what they do in reality. Barnes questions his austere image by the research on his personal life. Despite the image of a Hermit, he was found visiting England repeatedly either to visit brothels or his woman Louise Coulet. And his

intention to destroy all the communication with her makes his personality more doubtful.

Barnes mentions a story, similar to Flaubert's life, published in a newspaper at his time; In the story, a man living near Arlon in Geuroville owns a magnificent parrot. He gives his sole love to the parrot and becomes misanthropic. He teaches the parrot to pronounce the name of his lost love and enjoys hundred times a day. He thinks it something mysterious superhuman and holiness in the bird. He handles it with deep respects and spends long contemplation on the bird. He becomes more gloomier. But as the bird dies, he lives completely alone wrapped up in himself. Gradually he begins to think that he himself has turned into parrot and begins to squawk, walk and perch like a bird. Looking at the madness his family decides to send him to the maison santé at Gheel. But he escapes from it in the night and next morning he is found perching in a tree.

Barnes believes this story probably had taken a place in his mind for the brief plan for a future work. And finally, the story of Loulou and Fe'licite' came to be written. He just wrote the story with slight change and earned huge fame for artistic sentimental representation. But it was not his genuine creation. And this truth was also not recorded in the history. Then a question arises –How can he acclaim himself writer of “impersonal” art? If we separate the art from writer, then what about the reality behind it?

Barnes doubts on Flaubert's authenticity to be a great unquestioned impersonal writer. He makes Flaubert's parody for being such a great image despite his moral failure displaying the contradiction on what he claimed and people thought about him. Flaubert said:

The artist, to my way of thinking, is a monstrosity, something outside nature. All the misfortunes Providence inflicts on him come from his stubbornness in denying that maxim...So (and this is my conclusion) I am resigned to living as I have lived: alone, with my throng of great men as my only cronies—a bear, with my bear-rug for company.(25-26)

His throng of cronies were not the people but ‘companions picked from his library selves’.(26) He appears to be a misanthropic in his nature. He denied to participate in life overtly which mislead people’s thinking towards him but enjoyed his time with foreign women secretly. By looking at his way of life and representation of life in his stories, here questions arise – As a realist writer; did Flaubert have that quality which a writer is basically supposed to be? Was he himself qualified to depict the social reality of the then bourgeoisie society when he was himself living far away from the society? Did he really fulfill the concept of authorship or some basic roles of a writer in a society? Certainly, he was not. In this way, Barnes’s study shows Flaubert’s authorial failure as well.

To sum up, *Flaubert’s parrot* makes a criticism on Gustave Flaubert’s literary biography which was unquestioned for a long time. This book unveils several blind spots of Flaubert’s biography that he is shown to be misanthropic, boastful to himself, patriarchal and so on. He doesn’t like human society and remains far from it and sexually exploits women remaining beyond the understanding of the then society. What Flaubert claimed to have the nobility in style is problematized by questioning the authenticity of his writing. Flaubert’s authorial failure has been shown with the help of Michel Foucault’s concept of author that a writer cannot be impersonal in his writing ; the work of art is outcome of the author’s own individual perspective, the

analysis of his social position and the revelation of his basic design. Another major issue discussed on this chapter is countering of the historical facts. The claim of history to carry out the historical facts and truth is minimized into just narratives manipulated certain groups in power. Thus, history and the truth about it remains doubtful and inaccessible.

### **III. Conclusion**

Throughout this research paper the present researcher examines the notion of rewriting of the literary biography of Flaubert in Julian Barnes's novel *Flaubert's Parrot* and analyzes his own thesis on the past that truth about past/ history is impossible to approach through objectivity. In the novel, history has been narrated in a complex structure with blurring of boundary between fact and fiction, and with the presentation of amalgamation among several distinct genres. With the blending of newest style and portrayal of layer of stories at a time, *Flaubert's Parrot* encompasses most of the postmodernist features. Indeterminacy of meaning, metahistory, metafiction, intertextuality, fictionality, and so on, are some of the major features that it clearly deals with.

The foregrounding of postmodern artistry problematizes the belief in traditional history and the historians claim on the realistic representation. Barnes

attacks the nineteenth century realist mode of writing as well as the historiography, and tries to establish historical novels as far more better than historiography.

*Flaubert's Parrot* itself proves as a fine example of a historical fiction. Traditionally, history and fiction are two entirely different terms which hold their own distinct features, but Barnes novel includes the both terms in a single notion of historical fiction. History records the actions and state of affairs that takes place in past. The truth is taken as ultimate and absolute truth which is actually happened and real. On the other hand, fiction includes the subjective creations and depends on the author's personal intention and opinion. Fictions contain the stories that might have happened in the past and may happened in future but not really happened. In this sense, history and fiction are two different issues of study but, since the new historical perspective sees the fictionality in so called real history due to the involvement of power in the creation of truth, the generic boundary between fact and fiction or history and fiction has been blurred to mark such inability to project reality through only history. Fiction suggests the subjective aspects of human life and reality is formed out of subjective background. Thus, Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* is an example of such novel that tends to access the truth through the both ways objectivity of history and subjectivity of fiction by fictionalization of Flaubert's biography.

*Flaubert's Parrot* is a metahistorical text as it looks beyond what was officially narrated about Flaubert. Barnes makes a blending of subjective and objective facts about Flaubert and even indirectly ironizes the reality about him in relation with his main character, Jeoffrey Braithwaite. Braithwaite, as life-long admirer of Flaubert, sets out to unveil the real parrot out of several stuffed parrots, but finally fails to do so.

Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* is a search for an absolute meaning or truth about Flaubert. It portrays a reality in which meaning is not out there to be discovered; meaning is not to be discovered but created. As Foucault believes truths are just the creations of human beings with the implication of discourses. Truths cannot be absolute as there will involve circulation of discourses in order to gain the power, and the due to the power, the discourse ultimately gets transformed into truth. Living in the postmodern era, such truth is hardly a matter of belief as absolute and authentic truth. Such monolithic and arbitrary truth has been discarded by new historical reading of the past today.

Barnes's novel, not only simply narrates Flaubert's biography and Braithwaite's for the real parrot, but also unveils all possible realities about him. Braithwaite's obsession of Flaubert's life makes it possible to involve in the deepest exploration of Flaubert both in his psychological as well as his biographical level. Braithwaite's revelation of the intention to justify his own life through this fictionalization of Flaubert's biography leads this novel to the postmodern historical fiction.

In *Flaubert's Parrot*, Julian Barnes reads against the grain, reading in a way that is not as the author intended or going against general belief and narratives. He declines to accept the historical truth about Flaubert and breaks the pre-established boundaries and hierarchies among different genres. He even deliberately dismantles the general form of writing a fiction and gives completely a new perspective in the understanding of fiction. Fiction tends to move towards history while history tends to move towards fiction. History is observed from outsider's perspective declining the grand narratives rather than participating in it.

Having all these multiple interpretabilities, *Flaubert's Parrot* exists as a postmodern text. Despite the possibility of multiple study on this text, this research undertakes 'history' as the major issue of interpretation. Julian Barnes's purpose to revisit Flaubert's biography has been given the prominence. The narrator's insertion of his own story is also viewed from the new historical eye. This research concludes that history is best approached through the record of events of everyday life and private life. The history which claims to be objective and factual, and which focuses only on selected events cannot hold the truth and meaning of past. Thus, the search for the truth and meaning ends in despair due to the postmodern crisis of meaning and impossibility of existence of absolute truth in history.