

I. The End of Subjects in Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending*

This project introduces Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* as an influential post modern metafiction, analyzes its key features in order to relate and see into post modern fictional happenings and pertains to justify the end of the subjects having immediate ramifications upon all major characters in the novel. Additionally, another key element in the discussion will be how post modern metafiction begets counter-productive effects that have landed all the major protagonists in difficult situations shedding light upon how small narrative techniques, denial of metanarratives, assertions of breaks and discontinuations and negations of totalization have contributed to the whole set up of Barnes' novel and have also helped its characters to get conferred with alternative perspectives about their life and happenings.

The plotline offers a very much disjunctive story streamline. The novel starts with unorganized presentations of series of images and these details a common theme of water, a drain, a river and bathwater. Further, the novel dissects itself into two parts, and is narrated by Tony Webster at his isolated retired age. The first part begins in the 1960s with four intellectually arrogant school friends, especially two: Tony, the narrator, and Adrian, the most precociously intelligent of the four. Towards the end of their school days another boy at the school hangs himself, apparently after getting a girl pregnant. Then, their life gets directions- Adrian goes to Cambridge University and Tony to Bristol University and acquires a girlfriend, Veronica, at whose family home he spends an awkward weekend.

The turning point, however, is that when Tony receives a letter from Adrian informing him that he is going out with Veronica. Some months later he is told that Adrian has committed suicide, leaving a note addressed to the Coroner saying that the free person has a philosophical duty to examine the nature of their life, and may then choose to renounce it. Tony admires the

reasoning. He briefly recounts the following uneventful forty years of his life until his sixties. At this point Tony's narration of the second part of the novel re-establishes contact with Veronica and after a number of meetings with her, to re-evaluate the story he has narrated in the first part. Tony emails Veronica to apologize, but receives a response that he has again misunderstood the situation. He returns to the pub where the man he believes to be Veronica's son spends his Friday nights and talks with his handler, who informs him that his name is Adrian, and that he is Veronica's brother. He infers from this that Adrian is indeed the father, but Sarah Ford is the mother, and his mental illness was caused by her advanced age at the time of the pregnancy. The variables of the mathematical formula also now make sense. He closes the story by stating that life is full of responsibility, but even more unrest.

The novel leaves a couple of thematic stresses like the unrest, malleability, contradictions, unpredictability and changes. Such themes are corroborated with disjunctive narratives and playful presentations of images. There are different accolades made to novel and how it has delineated characters and perceptions. Some have, like Michael Prodger, merited the novel's mechanism of the language "absolutely merited" the intricate mechanism of the novel and is "founded on precision as well as on the nuances of language". Prodger adds that the "the brevity, however, in no way compromises its intensity . . . a sense of the infinite complexity of the human heart but the damage the wrong permutations can cause when combined . . . the unknowable does not mean the implausible (13)". Similarly, Justine Jordan argues that the novel is all about ageing and memory, "with its patterns and repetitions, scrutinizing its own workings from every possible angle, the novella becomes a highly wrought meditation on ageing, memory and regret" (91). Likewise, Boyd Tonkin argues that *The Sense of an Ending* is "a slow burn, measured but suspenseful, this compact novel makes every slyly crafted sentence count "(21).

The idea of age has been emphasized, as Geordie Williamson, argues, the novel is a pleasure to read and explained as "a fierce and unforgiving lucidity about *The Sense of an Ending*, a mature reckoning with ageing that makes its competitors seem petulant and shrill" (34).

Now, bringing all these reviews onto notice, it can be concluded that there are ways the novel has been seen and mapped out. Writers and critics have interpreted the novel on their own way and encouraged readers to see the same. However, the research attempts to do something that departs from the tradition. It means to argue that this research rereads the novel as a postmodernist metafiction and encourages an alternative reading of the novel. As an attempt of arriving at alternative perspective unannounced, Julian Barnes has interrogated grandnarrative, negated totalization, introduced an intertextual parody as a tool to do the needful and critiqued history, gender and socio-cultural constructs that succumb subjects to death in order to wallow over these constructed notions. Simply, negating grandnarrative and asserting discontinuations always assume a strong skeptical lead to all prevailing discourses that have been created and recreated throughout the discourses of our history.

To begin with, postmodernism is often associated with, for Linda Hutcheon, "masterful denials of mastery, totalizing negations of totalization, continuous attesting of discontinuity" (1). Similarly, in the postmodern novel, the conventions of both fiction and historiography are simultaneously "used and abused, installed and subverted, asserted and denied". And the double nature of this intertextual parody is one of the major means by which this paradoxical (and defining) nature of postmodernism is textually inscribed. One of the prominent features of post modern fiction/ literature, as Linda Hutcheon argues, "an equally self-conscious dimension of history. My model here is postmodern architecture, that resolutely parodic recalling of the history of architectural forms and functions" (2). Now, ironically is, on the one hand the birth of

paranoid subject, and on the other hand, the end of an individual- the sense of ending and/or endless fear.

In fact, many things contribute to this sense of fear: history, socio-cultural realities and conditionings, prevailing discourses and paradigms of regulations and individuals' subject positioning. In other words, fear arises from subject positioning rendered, produced and reproduced by prevailing conditionings in society and culture. Individuals are subjected, positioned and represented, as Hutcheon again argues:

Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction. And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that effects both aims: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel (though not equal) status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the "world" and literature. (4)

Such discourses compel people to retrospection, suppression and repression; and render them to voiceslessness. Principally, to be paranoid is the result of repression and voicelessness. This leads voiceslessness to dwell upon history, memory, socio-cultural constructs and fractured or multiple narratives that reach nowhere. In fact, voiceslessness is the state of the sense of ending.

In addition to this, subject is decentred and a singular subject is replaced by multiple fictive selves and their fragmented narratives. This is very interesting point of parody: one of the major characteristics of postmodern metafiction. Hutcheon suggests that postmodernism works through parody to "both legitimize and subvert that which it parodies" (Politics, 101). And, "Through a double process of installing and ironizing, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both

continuity and difference" (Politics, 93). Thus, far from dehistoricizing the present or organizing history into an incoherent and detached pastiche, postmodernism can rethink history and shed light on new critical capacities. For Hutcheon post modern metafiction "asserts an interpretation of the past but in an intensely self-reflexive, i.e. critical of their own version of the truth as being partial, biased, incomplete way" (122-123).

So, historiographic metafiction, therefore, allows us to speak constructively about the past in a way that acknowledges the falsity and violence of the objective historian's past without leaving us in a totally bewildered and isolated present. Now the point is: dehistoricizing process has developed new capacities of subjects, which ironically, contributes to the sense of ending because it accepts critical engagement with the sense of ending through kind of paranoia. Taking this point as an important consideration, Richard Barnes, in his novel, shows how characters are situated and conditioned by their history and socio-cultural realities. They know what is happening and but cannot express because they are intrigued and put into the land of oblivion. Things go unpredicted. Characters are troubled. Their memory does not give them truths. Remembering contradicts with witnessing, and such contradiction creates paranoia. For example Adrian in one of the instances in the novel, says, "What you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed" (11). Such unforeseeable condition of life gives characters fear, as Adrian adds up, "This was another of our fears: that Life wouldn't turn out to be like Literature" (21). The same happen with almost all the characters in the novel. They realize that all their life and realities are historically situated and history is a construct. This realization makes them quite. The novel reads:

We live with such easy assumptions, don't we? For instance, that memory equals events plus time. But it's all much odder than this. Who was it said that memory is what we thought we'd forgotten? And it ought to be obvious to us that time doesn't act as a fixative, rather as a solvent. But it's not convenient – it's not useful – to believe this; it doesn't help us get on with our lives; so we ignore it.

(1)

As they consistently face life's oddities and do not know what happens next, they accept ignorance. They express but their expressions seem repetitive and situated- produced on the land of oblivion. Such oblivionness of life makes them repressed and voiceless.

Another key element to discuss would be the narration from a retrospective perspective. Theoretically, retrospection is a mode of rendering subjects voiceless. Memory and past incidents do not have voices because these are already voiced and completed. In Barnes's *The Sense of Ending*, the narrator's identity is veiled under history and memory. Such an extensive narrative past structured into a reported speech has resulted to an intense anonymity. Another blatant voicelessness could be seen when the narrator intentionally omits incidents in his narration through repetition and broken series. These omissions allow the narrator to remain unidentifiable and his eloquent rhetoric to work without perceiving the narrator as a distinct individual who may have something at stake in telling this narrative.

Likewise, the contradiction surfaces due to the voicelessness state that is the repressed voice at the same time. The repressed is deposited in the unconscious because certain signifiers deny entering the consciousness and, as it can be mute or eradicated; it pops out in many ways.

The voicelessness gets posited in the repressed state of personality and his/her manifestations. In other words, there is high possibility that the repressed gets returned and this returning back is always through tropes, metaphors and metonymies.

Moreover, the very idea of history is also questioned through the novels. In other words, Richard Barnes suspends history and introduces historiography instead. For him, history is confined, falsely narrated and written from winners' perspectives. For example, Tony Webster, another major character in the novel, reminds us that history consists not only of "the lies of the victors," but also of "the self-delusions of the defeated" (32). History is false and half reality. It always connotes to defeats and self-delusions. The other side is never written and narrated. So, all histories are history, and like all histories, it is, as Tony argues, a "certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation" (32). Theoretically, memory is rooted upon history, and history is either a half reality or a deluded picture of reality. Therefore, Tony's memory proves to be more imperfect than most, and the reader must assume that Tony's version of events is not to be trusted as these are disconnected and unpredictable. This unpredictability is seen evidently at the end of the novel when Tony digs up the shocking conclusion about Adrian, Veronica and her mother, Sarah. But what is very much interesting is the way or the narration through which Tony reaches such conclusions. His narration is unreliable, unpredictable and rooted to history. Such effects have created paranoia among characters rendered them to salience in metaphorical way.

Another idea, while critiquing history, could be to consider Foucault and how he defines history. For him, history is a construct through power-truth nexus. Power creates history and history creates subject position. In fact, Foucault's theories have been useful to in dealing with the challenges to paradigms of body, gender and sexuality, where he asked

basic questions and problematizes gender prejudices presented and represented in history throughout. He critiques the classical ways of thinking about the subject as a rational, unified being with a fixed core or essence, arguing that: “Nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men” (87-8). There is no ‘natural’ body or pre-discursive, essential human subject who is “amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and bodies” (217). In fact, Foucault’s commentary of how subjectivity is produced calls to mind a critical ideas to assess how subjects are subjugated to the bits and pieces of historical formation. Therefore, treating the subject position ‘as one’ is not viable; and; “a primary apparatus of scientific biopower that constructs the body as an intelligible object” (Foucault 22). In his, *Discipline and Punish*, he extensively deals with the idea of subject position and explains how these bodies are made to be panoptic. Foucault’s concern is that the idea of history and historically constructed subject positions is problematic precisely because we live in a society that is vexed with power- truth nexus. For example in his analysis of gender issue, he calls all gender related issues constructs and constantly seeks to reiterate the polarization of the sexes through these techniques of gender.

Therefore, characters’ positions in contradiction, voiceslessness and unpredictability, questioning and suspending history, multiple interpretation and unreliability of memory as a narrative have in fact enriched Barnes’s novel. Additionally, it has also scrutinized reasons behind such contradiction. Hence, in order to meet this purpose, chapter two streamlines a methodology through an amalgamation of historiography and socio-cultural and analyzes significant cases and incidents of the contradictions of the major characters in the novel.

II. Reading Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* as Historiographic Metafiction

This part of the research inquires into the methodological framework to see and analyze Barnes' novel as a postmodern metafiction at the shed of all major characters. As part of reading subjects through the critical engagement with differences, alternatives and discontinuations, a considerable engagement with interrogative approaches to all the major features that influence/contribute to postmodern metafiction are theoretically dealt in and operated into the relevant examples from the novel.

Linda Hutcheon is a key figure in this context to deal with postmodern metafiction and its basic arguments. Her understanding of metafiction in *Historiographic Metafiction* *Parody and the Intertextuality of History* is:

What we tend to call postmodernism in literature today is usually characterized by intense self-reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality. In fiction this means that it is usually metafiction that is equated with the postmodern. Given the scarcity of precise definitions of this problematic period designation, such an equation is often accepted without question. What I would like to argue is that, in the interests of precision and consistency, we must add something else to this definition: an equally self-conscious dimension of history. (1)

As Hutcheon argues, intense self reflexivity and overtly parodic intertextuality is the key argument of post modern metafiction.

In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon refutes the argument that postmodernist novels offer no serious engagement with historical reality in suggesting that both fiction and history are essentially equally narrative and that meaning does not lie in historical fact, but rather in the way in which historical events have been represented. This effectively opens up a dialogue

between the past and the present, in that the past cannot be accessed directly or objectively since it can only be understood through the narrative strategies and ideologies of the writer. Novels written in the present can therefore only conceive of the past in an indirect, subjective and discursive manner which involves interaction between the questions asked and answers given by previous historians in order to construct new historical understanding and interpretation based on this dialogue. The discourse renders the event meaningful and therefore history can only examine discourse, since there is no inherent meaning within the event itself.

However, despite functioning exclusively on a textual level, this form of the postmodernist historical novel Hutcheon terms “historiographic metafiction” embodies ideological, moral and political relevance through its ability to be both “intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (2). By situating itself in its discursive context, historiographic metafiction forces acknowledgement of social practices, the historical conditions of meaning and the positions from which novels are both produced and received. In this sense, each period within the literary tradition is capable of imagining and narrating not only its own history, but other histories as well.

Similarly, Hutcheon again argues of relationship between postmodern metafiction and historiography. For her, the relationship is intricate and important. She adds:

The postmodern relationship between fiction and history is an even more complex one of interaction and mutual implication. Historiographic metafiction works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction. And it is a kind of seriously ironic parody that effects both aims: the intertexts of history and fiction take on parallel (though not equal) status in the parodic reworking of the textual past of both the "world" and literature. (3)

Hence, postmodern fiction shares a complex relationship with history and all historical dimensions. At the same time, it also dehistoricizes and ironizes history and all historically constructed phenomena. Additionally, such complex relations, in Vincent B. Leitch's terms, “posits both an uncentered historical enclosure and an abysmal decentered foundation for language and textuality; in so doing, it exposes all contextualizations as limited and limiting, arbitrary and confining, self-serving and authoritarian, theological and political. However paradoxically formulated, intertextuality offers a liberating determinism” (162).

Hence, historiographic metafiction appears willing to draw upon any signifying practices it can find operative in a society. It wants to challenge those discourses and yet to milk them for all they are worth. And it can be presented in any forms, as Waugh argues, "documentation, obsession systems, the languages of popular culture, of advertising: hundreds of systems compete with each other, resisting assimilation to anyone received paradigm" (39).

Considering the arguments drawn above, we can claim that one of the major features of postmodern metafiction is the historiography, which is related with digging the ground, querying and investigating. In other words, it suspects the authority of the ground and manages even to go against the grain. The point is here is that such attempts are made to, what David Lodge would like to argue, “short-circuits the gap between text and world” (239-40) . Short- circuiting gaps between text and the world, as Hutcheon again argues, “manages to satisfy such a desire for "worldly" grounding while at the same time querying the very basis of the authority of that grounding” (5).

Similarly, Linda Hutcheon refers to Patricia Waugh who asserts metafiction as writing history is a fictional act, in which language is an instrumental to form a world-model, but “that history itself is invested, like fiction, with interrelating plots

which appear to interact independently of human design" (48-49). Historiographic metafiction is therefore a double task of inscribing both historical and literary intertexts. This in fact familiarizes the unfamiliar, as Linda Hutcheon argues:

forms and contents of history writing work to familiarize the unfamiliar through (very familiar) narrative structures (as Hayden White has argued ["The Historical Text," 49-50]), but its metafictional selfreflexivity works to render problematic any such familiarization. And the reason for the sameness is that both real and imagined worlds come to us through their accounts of them, that is, through their traces, their texts. The ontological line between historical past and literature is not effaced, but underlined. (10)

So, narrative structures allow readers to be familiar of something which is unfamiliar. It can even surpass time as we can read the past, but through its texts only. In other way, it also confirms the connection. However, as the history is an illusion and the collection of past events, it has lost its power and privilege and surfaced a kind of self awareness- a critical engagement with the self and self awareness. Additionally, historiography as a feature of postmodern metafiction, therefore, critiques the traditional notion of self as fully conscious being, a historical bearer and socially and culturally privileged existence. Furthering this argument, postmodern metafiction sees into extremely complex human reality either symbolically or subjectively.

Similarlry, historiographical reading of the self clearly presents how the self is constructed and discursivized. For example, the biological accident of having been born with certain anatomical organs does not automatically determine one's destiny.

Furthermore, a person's biological-anatomical makeup in no way in and of itself suggests or indicates that he or she must perform certain duties in life and act or think a certain way. Society writes the script and disseminates the fiction of femininity and masculinity. However, it is sometimes demonstrated that the line of demarcation between the categories of male and female, i.e. femininity and masculinity, is not as stable as or natural as it seems.

Another strong and relevant example of how constructed self is naturalized in the real world scenario is to look at the arguments proposed by Judith Butler. Butler argues that our understanding that womanhood as well as manhood is in essence a performance that takes direction from social scripts. Women's self presentation is inescapably informed by their relation to men, if not by their signification of men. Luce Irigaray views the existence of woman as "an occasion for meditation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself" (140). Her theory echoes Levi-Strauss's anthropological finding and conclusion of a woman's operative position in society. According to him, a woman's existence, marked by her indoctrination into marriage, passes her from her father's house to her husband's house as an occasion of transaction between men. Men have been writing about women longer than women have been writing about themselves. As a result of men's authorship and dominance in the print culture, a cultural narrative about women established in print which presents and disseminates the ideal image of women as the secondary human.

On the ground of these positioning, it is clear that the self is regulated at the social control, which subjects bodies. Our culture is that we are born males or

females but learn to masculine and feminine. Especially, femininity has always been affected by the social control. Societies produce various kinds of modalities for female bodies by making them inferiorized and dependent. Males are always essential for the survival of/and signification of female identities. Our societies and cultures are made in such ways that they also appear oppressive and dominating to female bodies. We have many instances where such subjection are created and recreated. The bodies are established through markings that seek to establish specific codes of cultural coherence. Any discourse that establishes boundaries of the body serves the instating and naturalizing, as Butler argues:

Ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, but a semblance of order is created. (374)

This is an example of how societies and cultures create markings and make bodies its victim.

Another point is that postmodern metafiction denies the idea of binary opposition that silences people. Basically, the idea is one has been made essential and indispensable to mean the other. Technically speaking, discourse of eurocentrism, inevitability of white skin, white skin as the measuring rod to discuss other, specifically black and patriarchy to see women are made strategically essential. Moreover, the idea of men and women as opposites is supported by

polarized categories such as mind/body, culture/nature, spirit/matter that have been inflected with gender ideology. Not only this, other factors like medical science, law, psychology and discoveries have always functioned as regulatory discourses that have perpetually streamlined gender and bodies. Consequently, the female body has been subjected to the scrutinizing gaze of the human sciences far more than the male. Catherine Kohler Riessman argues that since the mid nineteenth century there has been an increasing medicalization of women's lives which has seen more and more female conditions identified in ways "that connote deviation from some ideal biological standard" (132). The nineteenth century woman was diagnosed as frigid, hysterical or neurasthenic with mental disorders put down to disturbances in the womb.

Linda Hutcheon, while talking about self and reflectivity, discusses on discourses and subjugations these discourses have generated. These regimes have always stereotyped selves and developed prejudices. At times, Hutcheon echoes Foucault whose theories have been much useful to read and analyze postmodern metafiction and historiography. His idea of power truth nexus explains how the idea of self (even gender or sexuality) is presented and represented in history throughout. He critiques the classical ways of thinking about the subject as a rational, unified being with a fixed core or essence, arguing that: "Nothing in man - not even his body - is sufficiently stable to serve as a basis for self-recognition or for understanding other men" (87-8). There is no 'natural' body or pre-discursive, essential human subject who is "amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it, according to a whole technique of forces and

bodies” (217). In fact, Foucault’s commentary of how subjectivity is produced calls to mind.

Again, standing upon Foucault, Hutcheon argues that apparent self neutrality is problematic precisely because we live in a society that is far from anything neutral and in fact constantly seeks to reiterate the polarization of the selves through these techniques of discourses. For example, failing to be specific about just what kinds of bodies (discursively constructed or not), he is discussing, implies that gender has no impact. His analysis sidesteps how woman has been discursively identified with the body and downplays the objectification that feminists argue these results in order to argue for the subjectifying power of discourse. Therefore, treating the body ‘as one’ is not viable; his concept of power cries out for gender specific analysis and in that analysis gender needs to be acknowledged as a technology of the body in its own right; “a primary apparatus of scientific biopower that constructs the body as an intelligible object” (Foucault 22). Many feminists have read his gender-neutrality as androcentrism; he doesn’t make gender distinctions, particularly in *Discipline and Punish*, because he is not really treating the body as one but as male and no distinction is necessary when dealing with the genderless body of man - the essential human subject. He seems to fall into the very modes of thought he sought to challenge.

Similarly, resounding Foucault, Hutcheon also takes reference of Lois McNay’s idea of the self and how discourses have explained selves so far historically. In this regard, McNay argues that: “If, as Foucault claims, there is no such thing as a ‘natural’ body and it is, therefore, impossible to posit a pre-given

natural sex difference, then he needs to elaborate on how the systematic effect of sexual division is perpetuated by the techniques of gender that are applied to the body” (33). Now, these remarks also show that woman body is not natural body. It is made to suit a particular purpose vexed upon a particular group of people.

The differences that do exist are, as McNay points out, “overdetermined in order to produce a systematic effect of sexual division” (22). Though many people may experience gender as a natural expression of their biological sex, it is important to recognize that, in Benhabib and Cornell’s words, “it is the way that anatomy is socially invested that defines gender identity and not the body itself” (14). Male and female should not be conflated with masculinity and femininity. They are discursively produced identities that invest the body, producing certain characteristics that are taken as evidence of a male and female essence and an ineluctable difference between them. The naturalness of gender is constantly invoked, but masculinity and femininity are disciplines of the body that require work. For Judith Butler gender is a performance, “an active style of living one’s body in the world” (131). For McNay it is an “imaginary signification of sex” (22). Femininity in particular has been variously referred to as a myth, a mystique, a masque, an artifice, an achievement. Paradoxically, while femininity is regarded as the most ‘natural’ of the genders (as women are biologically overdetermined) it also requires the most artifice to be considered successful, whilst those that are unsuccessful or refuse to take part in it are regarded as unnatural.

Now, considering Julian Barnes’ *The Sense of an Ending* as postmodern metafiction, we can clearly see how above mentioned issues are on the play. The novel offers a very much

disjunctive story streamline that starts with unorganized presentations of series of images and these details a common theme of water, a drain, a river and bathwater. Further, the novel dissects itself into two parts, and is narrated by Tony Webster at his isolated retired age. The first part begins in the 1960s with four intellectually arrogant school friends, especially two: Tony, the narrator, and Adrian, the most precociously intelligent of the four. Towards the end of their school days another boy at the school hangs himself, apparently after getting a girl pregnant. Then, their life gets directions- Adrian goes to Cambridge University whereas Tony goes to Bristol University. Tony acquires a girlfriend, Veronica, at whose family home he spends an awkward weekend.

Tony receives a letter from Adrian informing him that he is going out with Veronica. This is an unexpected twist in the plotline. The twist is doubled when he is told that Adrian has committed suicide. The note that has been left says that the free person has a philosophical duty to examine the nature of their life, and may then choose to renounce it. Tony admires the reasoning and briefly recounts the following uneventful forty years of his life until his sixties.

At this point, the narration of the second part commences. It re-establishes Tony's contact with Veronica and after a number of meetings with her, to re-evaluate the story he has narrated in the first part. Tony emails Veronica to apologize, but receives a response that he has again misunderstood the situation. He returns to the pub where the man he believes to be Veronica's son spends his Friday nights and talks with his handler, who informs him that his name is Adrian, and that he is Veronica's brother. He infers from this that Adrian is indeed the father, but Sarah Ford is the mother, and his mental illness was caused by her advanced age at the time of the pregnancy. The variables of the mathematical formula also now make sense. He closes the story by stating that life is full of responsibility, but even more unrest.

The plotline narrated above shows that the novel has dwelled upon multiple postmodern metafiction themes that include the themes of unrest, malleability, contradictions, unpredictability and changes. Not only these themes have loomed over but also have been corroborated with disjunctive narratives and playful presentations of images. There are different accolades made to novel and how it has delineated characters and perceptions. Some have, like Michael Prodger, merited the novel's mechanism of the language "absolutely merited" the intricate mechanism of the novel and is "founded on precision as well as on the nuances of language". Prodger adds that the "the brevity, however, in no way compromises its intensity . . . a sense of the infinite complexity of the human heart but the damage the wrong permutations can cause when combined . . . the unknowable does not mean the implausible (13)". Similarly, Justine Jordan argues that the novel is all about ageing and memory, "with its patterns and repetitions, scrutinizing its own workings from every possible angle, the novella becomes a highly wrought meditation on ageing, memory and regret" (91). Likewise, Boyd Tonkin argues that *The Sense of an Ending* is "a slow burn, measured but suspenseful, this compact novel makes every slyly crafted sentence count "(21). The idea of age has been emphasized, as Geordie Williamson, argues, the novel is a pleasure to read and explained as "a fierce and unforgiving lucidity about *The Sense of an Ending*, a mature reckoning with ageing that makes its competitors seem petulant and shrill" (34).

Now, bringing all these reviews onto notice, it can be concluded that there are ways the novel has been seen and mapped out. Writers and critics have interpreted the novel on their own way and encouraged readers to see the same. However, the research attempts to do something that departs from the tradition. It means to argue that this research rereads the novel as a postmodernist metafiction and encourages an alternative reading of the novel.

The novel begins with a scene from Tony's grammar school education. It ends with him knowing things he didn't know before about himself and about the past he shares with his friends. Tony uses his memories, regardless of how clear or unclear they may be, as the source of a puzzle. The very act of solving the puzzle, of playing the detective, is a heuristic process that helps the mind to grow and remain sharp as the passage of time wears at the edges of thought and memory. Tony envisions his daughter Susie thinking, "he's retired now, still fossicking around with those mysterious 'projects' of his, doubt he'll ever finish anything, but at least it keeps the brain active" (67-8). Even if Tony's storytelling project has no true external purpose for example, obtaining the diary, or convincing someone else that everything happened the way Tony perceives it—he benefits from keeping his brain engaged. It doesn't matter whether or not he finishes the project. The act of doing itself is the reason and the reward. Tony's process of piecing together the past involves looking for valuable information that may have been ignored by others who make up a part of the story.

In *The Sense of an Ending*, Julian Barnes explores the tension between narrative conventions that people use when they try to tell stories. His protagonist Tony Webster struggles to reconstruct the narrative that leads up to his childhood friend Adrian's suicide and Tony's eventual role as the legal inheritor of Adrian's diary. The novel is a case study of the unreliable narrator, whose self-awareness leads him to announce the limitations of his own credibility. Tony isn't naïve enough to believe in perfect memory: near the midpoint of the book he reflects, "We live with such easy assumptions, don't we? For instance, that memory equals events plus time. But it's all much odder than this. Who was it said that memory is what we thought we'd forgotten?" (69). Recognizing the oddities of the past and abandoning faith in pure memory, Tony uses three constructs to provide a frame in which he can reconstitute the story of him and

his childhood friend Adrian. The most prominent of these structures is the law. Tony's interest in framing the past legally leads him to seek what he calls corroboration from the statements of others who were involved in the story, as well as from various forms of correspondence—notes, letters, and emails. Tony sees the process of decoding the past as a sort of legal case, but he also sees it in terms of historical and literary narratives. Collectively, these constructs give Tony access to pre-established strategies for making what he hopes to be a truthful narrative.

Similarly, the narrative in Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* remains uncertain. The stories lack definitive endpoints propose one or more possible outcomes in the future. In the novel, Tony Webster is caught in the tension between these two different narrative modes: he tries to establish specific incidents in his life as matters of fact, a storytelling mode that is concerned more with plot than argument. However, he also wants to make a structural argument about generalized themes in life which might also structure the stories of others. For White, these two storytelling modes achieve two different effects, namely to answer two questions. Plot-based diachronic storytelling answers the question "what happened," while structure-oriented synchronic storytelling answers the question "what's the point?" (115). Tony strives to answer both questions, as is made clear near the end of the novel when Veronica accuses him of missing the point: "You just don't get it, do you? You never did, and you never will." (138). "What's the point?" is less concerned with a finished story because the "point" can be extracted from the underlying structure: Veronica doesn't accuse Tony of missing the point only this one time. The failure to "get it" is an underlying structural aspect of Tony Webster's whole life.

In addition to this, the opening page of *The Sense of an Ending* displays this type of tendency: Tony "remembers, in no particular order" a group of images from his past (3). It is an impressionistic list of visual data, ironically "ordered" by the bulleted list format presented in the

book. Tony's emphasis, though, is that he does not recall these images diachronically. The first stage of his narrative process is impressionistic: he recalls a swirl of memories that have been disconnected from the original linear sequence. Before launching into the narrative, Tony states "if I can't be sure of the actual events anymore, I can at least be true to the impressions those facts left" (4). He is quite aware that many of his memories are more like an echo or a residue than a permanent record. Since there are some things Tony can't remember, he tries to arrange what he *can* remember diachronically, so he can fill in the blanks. This sequencing helps answer the "what happened?" question that White claims is the driving force behind a closed plot. As we see throughout the novel, Tony can't help but extrapolate general patterns and structures from his experience—feelings and sensations that might be experienced by anyone at some point in time. Tony, himself, uses all three narrative modes described by Hayden White, and each has its own goal. What must be determined is what effect or purpose each narrative mode has on the reader. Tony's desire to string images and incidents into a linear plot represents the processional, or diachronic mode of constructing narrative. When he finds a memory that he can trust, he anchors it as a defined plot point in the story's sequence. At the beginning of the novel, Tony thinks, I'm not very interested in my schooldays, and I don't feel any nostalgia for them. But school is where it all began, so I need to return briefly to a few incidents that have turned into anecdotes, to some approximate memories which time has deformed into certainty.

This is Tony's announcement that the narrative is about to begin. Up to this point, the reader has seen only a bullet list of six remembered images, followed by Tony's statement that time "holds us and moulds us," but no narration of actual events (3). The terms "hold" and "mould" suggest a container or a closed, diachronic procession. Although time goes on, it holds the individual's life within a defined set of temporal parameters. On the other hand, the metaphor

of the “mould” suggests a structural pattern for how time affects everyone. With this paradox, the reader can use the entire novel to explore of the tensions between White’s processional, structural, and impressionistic narrative theories.

Similarly, Tony likes to make thematic generalizations about youth, old age, and women, among other topics. Barnes often offsets these in paragraphs separated by an extra line break, making these aphoristic nuggets stand out visually on the page. For example, “... it strikes me that this may be one of the differences between youth and age: when we are young, we invent different futures for ourselves; when we are old, we invent different pasts for others” (88). The novel contains several of these short paragraphs that interrupt the narrative flow to offer what have come to be axioms for Tony. Certainly, not every youth invents futures for himself, nor does every adult invent new pasts for others. Nevertheless, Tony takes small observations about what has happened to him personally and converts them into general theories about humanity. He takes moments from the procession of his personal narrative and places them into an underlying structure that would be recognizable to nearly anyone.

Another example of the tension between diachronic and synchronic appears in one of Tony’s classroom memories. Old Joe Hunt’s history class discusses the “origin” of the First World War, creating a diachronic story that has a defined beginning by virtue of the term “origin” (11). The class talks about the typically accepted origin point of the war, the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, arriving at the idea of a “chain of individual responsibilities” that followed this historical moment (11, 13). As, *On Literary Fictions*, Kermode claims “Fictions are for finding things out, and they change as the needs of sense-making change. Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change. Myths call for absolute, fictions for conditional assent” (39). Rather than seeing literature as fiction, Tony fits it into the category of

myth. Tony's belief in a "real literature" limits what literature can and can't be, thereby turning it into stable myth rather than changing fiction. Even his insistence upon a "character developed over time" is a myth that absolutely denies the possibility of a character that fails to change over time. Tony provides a list of appropriate topics for literature, all of which he classifies as "real, true, important things" (16). His thoughts are colored by a narrow view of what is possible in literature. Tony sees novels as objects constructed according to a set of formulae that guarantee their status as "real literature." This is supported by Kermode's claim that "Myth operates within the diagrams of ritual, which presupposes total and adequate explanations of things as they are and were" (39). The construction of literature is ritualistic for Tony. Additionally, he is more interested in topics like "love, sex, morality, friendship, happiness, suffering, betrayal, adultery, good and evil, heroes and villains, guilt and innocence, ambition, power, justice, revolution, war, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, the individual against society, success and failure, murder, suicide, death, God. And barn owls" (16).

So, Tony's reality is messy, uncertain, and filled with gaps and missing pieces. The freedom to choose how to go about making sense of things can be a source of endless anxiety as one chooses which evidence to accept, whose account to listen to, and how to put the pieces of a life story together into a meaningful whole. Since Tony tends to view literature as stable and mythological, the feeling of leading a novelistic life would entail a strangely comforting limitation on personal choices.

Similarly, as In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes proposes that one of the main functions of myth is to "transform history into Nature" and Barthes claims that in doing so, we allow ourselves to "rationalize" what has happened, This is part of Tony Webster's project (117). When one considers Tony's interest in living a literary life alongside Barthes' assertion that

“Literature is a mythical system,” it becomes evident that Tony hopes to mythologize his past—that is to say, take his own personal history and make it seem naturally and unavoidably literary (Barthes 122).

According to Barthes, one quality of literature is that it is “at the very start mythified (therefore made innocent) by its being fiction” (133). This partially explains the youthful interest of Tony and his friends in leading literary lives (or at least Tony remembering himself thinking that way): youth is associated with innocence. *The Sense of an Ending* could be a coming-of-age story after all, one whose protagonist reflects on the period of his life when innocence is lost on many fronts. By mythologizing his personal history, Tony makes the events appear natural while preserving their innocence at the same time. Despite the filter of innocence, however, Tony’s narrative project carries with it substantial risk if we continue to view it in Barthian terms. Barthes warns that “the mythologist is condemned to live in a theoretical sociality” and that “his connection with the world is of the order of sarcasm” (147). By turning history into literature and subsequently into myth, Tony builds a layer between himself and reality.

Additionally, Tony relies on “corroboration” heavily throughout *The Sense of an Ending*. At the beginning of part Two, Tony notes that “as the witnesses to your life diminish, there is less corroboration, and therefore less certainty, as to what you are or have been” (65). His sense of identity destabilizes as the supporting cast of his life begins to disappear. Corroboration is essential for positively defining the self and the past against a backdrop of uncertainty. Adding to this unease, Tony claims that “Even if you have assiduously kept records—in words, sounds, pictures—you may find that you have attended to the wrong kind of record-keeping” (65). Despite our confidence in apparently objective forms of documentation, we must recognize that

to document is to make choices about what should and shouldn't be recorded. The choice of what to document and how to do results from a subjective state of mind.

Before meeting with adult Veronica for the second time in the retirement phase of the novel, Tony sees a girl on the train moving her head to music inaudible to everyone else (124). It triggers a memory of young Veronica dancing to a 45 in Tony's room. He tells Veronica about the memory, and to Tony's surprise, she says "I wonder why you remembered that" (126). Tony understands this as a "moment of corroboration" which gives him a "return of confidence" (126). The fact that Veronica also apparently remembers this event brings the event closer to something witnessed in Tony's mind. While he may lack full confidence in his own memory, the idea that somebody else remembers it too gives Tony an increased feeling that it really happened. In the line following Tony's return to confidence, he notes that "she was more smartly dressed this time; her hair was under control and seemed less grey" (126). It appears Veronica's credibility has increased in Tony's eyes due to her mode of dress. He is more inclined to believe her because she is dressed better this time, perhaps like someone making an appearance in court. Her hair looks closer to how it did during their youth, supporting Tony's feeling that she is the same person who was there to experience the event in the past.

Despite Tony's surge in confidence, one must consider Veronica's statement in light of the coy and evasive manner in which she usually interacts with him. After Veronica meets with Tony and claims to have burned Adrian's diary, she hands him an envelope. This envelope contains a photocopy of a malicious letter Tony wrote to Veronica and Adrian after being told about their relationship (106). Decades later, Tony is a bit disgusted by the vitriol he expressed during his youth, thinking "All I could plead was that I had been its author then, but was not its author now. Indeed, I didn't recognize that part of myself from which the letter came. But

perhaps this was simply further self-deception” (107). The deliberate choice of the word “plead” shows Tony once again putting himself on trial. The insistence on authorship and how an author changes over time adds the literary dimension to Tony’s statement. Also, the phrase “recognizing that part of myself” places Tony outside of his own actions, as if he is evaluating himself as a character in the story that he crafts.

So, both of the episodes involving a burnt document involve Tony “pleading” something, as if before a court of law. In fact, Tony predictably frames everything that Veronica does to the diary as a crime: “First theft, then arson, I thought, with a spurt of anger. But I told myself to keep treating her like an insurance company” (101). The deliberate choice of the terms “theft” and “arson” indicate the increasing impossibility of Tony seeing any type of documentation or correspondence outside of a legal framework. He also can’t help but “treat her like an insurance company,” keeping their discourse in a cool, bureaucratic, and ultimately legal mode. Once he returns home from their meeting, Tony reasons, “I thought her quite capable of arson to punish me for ancient wrongs and failings” (103). Not only does he define Veronica’s action using a legal term (one that is somewhat hyperbolic for the actual deed itself), but he also views her crime as a “punishment” doled out to him for his own crime. They are now legal opponents rather than simply former lovers.

Similarly, whether in the form of diary, note, letter, or e-mail, writing is a constant theme in Barnes’s novel. There is an epistolary dimension to the literary life about which Tony fantasizes. Also, the examples of correspondence in the novel help to blur the lines between legal, historical, and literary narratives. As a source of proof or documentation, correspondence fits into Tony’s legal-historical point of view. Tony’s focus on tone and vocabulary places his correspondence in a literary context. The lingering uncertainty over whether any piece of

correspondence is simply something that happened or something meaningful blurs the distinction between diachronic and synchronic narratives. The first mention of a character's personal writing occurs after Robson's suicide. Tony claims that "As for his suicide note, which according to rumor (Brown again) had read 'Sorry, mum,' we felt that it had missed a powerful educative opportunity" (15). Although Tony and his friends lack the hard proof of holding the physical document, they proceed to analyze it as a text. Tony finds its contents lacking and seems to think Robson could have been a bit more opportunistic since his suicide would lend gravity to his final words. Tony thinks "His action had been unphilosophical, self-indulgent, and inartistic: in other words, wrong" (15). He thinks a suicide note should have some of the same artistic qualities that he would hope to see in a good piece of literature. For Tony it is a piece of evidence, but it should also be philosophical and artistic. This demonstrates the tendency to merge the literary and the legal. Robson's supposed final statement, "Sorry, mum," can be taken as both an apology and a confession of guilt and responsibility. Thinking of the note in terms of guilt, responsibility, and evidence helps to position it within the landscape of legality that dominates so much of the novel. This early episode sets the tone for the way that Tony will view other pieces of correspondence from a legal perspective.

Hence, Tony's struggles can relate to on some essential level, regardless of age or nationality. Everyone wants to get it and few people can say they take a legitimate joy in being confused or deceived. The inevitable failings of memory and shakiness of supposedly objective forms of documentation will impact every human being at some time or another. What we seek in a world that is often bewildering and confusing is something to hold on to, something on which to anchor our experience and legitimize what we live through. Everyone might not use the same structures that Tony does to help make sense of the human condition. Tony uses law,

literature, and history as filters through which to understand his experience; others might turn to religion, visual art, music, education, or any number of other constructs. All Tony wants is a story that makes his experience make sense to him, which is a desire he shares with the rest of humankind.

III. Conclusion: Disjuncture of History and Memory

Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* hence dwells upon two major postmodern realities of history and memory. The history he presents is de-historicized and interrogated at the same time. And, presentation of memories are very much crisscross in nature. Both key ideas explained that the novel get entangled within the irreducibility and uncertainty of the senses. In other words, it is hard for readers to make a proper sense of *The Sense of Ending*.

History, as narrator Tony Webster reminds us, consists not only of the lies of the victors, but also of the self-delusions of the defeated. Tony is one of the defeated, and *The Sense of an Ending* is a record of his self-delusions. It is a personal history, and like all histories, it is a certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation. Tony's memory proves to be more imperfect than most, and the reader must assume that Tony's version of events is not to be trusted.

We learn, especially in Part 2 of the novel, new memories begin to emerge in Tony's mind of other episodes with Veronica that he has forgotten for decades. One of these memories is of Veronica, who never danced, appearing in his room and dancing with him to 45s played on his record player. He also revisits a memory he described earlier of witnessing the reversal of the Thames with a group of friends in the middle of the night. He suddenly recalls that Veronica was there as well, and that when the rest of the group ran off with torches (flashlights) to watch the reversal, he stayed behind on a blanket with Veronica. And finally, he recalls new details of his weekend visit with the Ford family.

Each of these memories remains partially repressed the details hazy and confused. It's apparent to the reader that Tony recalls each of these incidents as involving Veronica because he cannot bear to believe the monstrous truth that he had an ongoing sexual relationship with Veronica's mother. But an affair between Tony and Sarah is the only plausible explanation for Sarah's leaving 500 pounds and two documents (one of them Adrian's diary) to Tony in her will. Without the affair, Tony was simply a daughter's ex-boyfriend who visited for a weekend forty years ago. Hardly a relationship that would be remembered in one's last will and testament.

At the book's ending, Tony reaches the shocking conclusion that Adrian, the disabled man that he meets at the pub, is the son of Adrian, Tony's suicidal friend of forty years earlier, and Veronica's mother, Sarah. But as Veronica reminds us many times, in relation to Adrian, Tony just doesn't get it, and he never will. Keeping this and Tony's general unreliability as a narrator in mind, the reader must reject Tony's conclusion. Tony's sense of the ending is false. Rather, the reader must reach the even more shocking conclusion that Tony himself is Adrian's father.

Hence, the novel is a classic of Barnes's postmodern ventures, especially on absolute truth and memory, he loves to show how questionable any individual's interpretation of even major events and relationships can be, and shock the reader by getting you drawn into accepting their version, and then showing you another. He showed both sides directly in the text. Here we get the key to another way of interpreting events at the end, and realize along with Tony that the tale we have been told, and which he has come to tell himself, involves some serious and shocking misconceptions. Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* fits into the category of postmodern metafiction in terms of the

presentations of the characters, issues raised/dealt and the methodologies that are used to frame these issues. The novel deploys key characteristics of postmodern metafiction like irony, paranoia, disjunctive narratives, historiography, intertextuality, multiple endings, plurality and parody and all. The novel is presented in such a way that it reveals the spirit of the age- difficult to make the sense of *The Sense of an Ending*.

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