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This thesis was submitted by its author to the School of English and American Studies, Eötvös Loránd University, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts. It was found to be among the best theses submitted in 2014, therefore it was decorated with the School's Outstanding Thesis Award. As such it is published in the form it was submitted in **overSEAS 2014** (http://seas3.elte.hu/overseas/2014.html)

DIPLOMAMUNKA

MA THESIS

Vecsernyés Dóra

Anglisztika MA

angol irodalom szakirány

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DIPLOMAMUNKA
MA THESIS

Homo narrans:
Az emlékezés mechanizmusai Julian Barnes regényeiben

"We're a narrative animal, aren't we?":
Remembrance in the Fiction of Julian Barnes

Témavezető:
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Készítette:
Vecsernyés Dóra
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2014

Abstract

The oeuvre of the contemporary English novelist and leading figure of postmodernism, Julian Barnes (1946-) is known for having been in a prolific interaction with postmodernist concerns such as the inaccessibility of the past, the imperfection of memory, and the subjectivity of history writing. His novels *England, England* (1998) and *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989) provide a critique of the traditional grand narratives of culture and history. On the other hand, his interest in individual life stories and personal testimonies is manifested in his two fictional autobiographies *Metroland* (1980) and *The Sense of an Ending* (2011). Relying on the essentially narrative nature of human perception and remembering, my thesis offers a narrative psychological analysis of Julian Barnes's novels *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending*. After introducing Barnes's position with respect to postmodernist theory, I discuss the development of the narrators', Christopher Lloyd and Tony Webster's, narrative selves. Next, I explore the Barnesian representation of memory and its implications with respect to the life-narratives in focus, highlighting metafiction and self-reflexivity, the narrators' unreliability, and their need for corroboration. Finally, I discuss key aspects of narrative remembering such as the discrepancy between the narrating and the narrated self; idealisation and self-deception; and the psychological background to non-linearity and fragmentation. Based on the analysis outline above, I demonstrate that it is postmodernist fiction that can provide the authentic representation of human narrativity and remembering, and suggest that the general attitude to the reliability of postmodernist fiction be reconsidered.

Contents

Introduction

"We're a narrative animal, aren't we?" suggests contemporary English novelist Julian Barnes (1946-) in an interview, claiming that people "tell stories all the time," constantly turning their lives into narratives (qtd. in Wachtel). Indeed, alone on planet Earth, the human being is essentially a storyteller, as well as a story hearer, i.e., 'homo narrans', with these two faculties lying at the very basis of human intelligence and identity formation (Niles 65). As narrative psychology has shown, narratives provide the indispensable medium of human perception, cognition, understanding, knowledge, and memory: while observing the world – even if unconsciously – people establish cause-and-effect relationships and evaluate, re-evaluate and interpret experiences based on what they have encountered before, creating stories out of the surrounding world, other people, events, and themselves (László 7). In addition, storytelling plays a central role not only in the mind of the individual but also in the collective thinking of humanity. According to Roland Barthes, "under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative . . . narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself" (Barthes 79). Thus, the current belief is that both personal and social identities are created in a narrative manner.

As an emblematic figure of postmodernism, Julian Barnes often engages in self-reflexive discussions of narrativity. In the "Preface" to his collection of essays *Through the Window* (2012), Barnes argues "We are, in our deepest selves, narrative animals; also, seekers of answers. The best fiction rarely provides answers, but it does formulate the questions exceptionally well" (*n. pag.*). In accordance with this statement, in his novels, he reflects on the large-scale narratives of culture and history as forms of collective storytelling, while

asking unsettling questions about the reliability of these narratives, their role in collective memory, and their applicability in humanity's search for truth. Barnes's version of narrativity is permeated with issues typical of postmodern discourse like the subjectivity of observation, the imperfections of memory, the concepts of culture and cultural memory, the inaccessibility of the past and truth, and the subjectivity of history writing. In addition to collective narratives, Barnes often experiments with narratives of personal remembering, individual life stories, and personal testimonies as well. The characteristically Barnesian, self-reflexive view of life-writing occurs the most notably in Barnes's two fictional autobiographies, *Metroland* (1980) and *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), which introduce the highly unreliable self-narratives of distinctively Barnesian male characters – the former that of the thirty-something Christopher Lloyd, the latter that of Tony Webster, a retired man in his sixties. These novels raise the dual problem of presenting an idealised, often self-deceptive, version of one's life, while resenting the unreliability of memory and striving for objectivity and corroboration. At the same time, due to the application of subjective viewpoints, unreliable narrators, and irony, as well as the author's control over the amount of information provided, these novels lead the reader on according to various underlying purposes, while creating a sense of suspense, distrust, and unease. Consequently, it is up to the reader what s/he believes – as the novel proceeds, however, s/he is constantly forced to reconsider these beliefs.

Through analysing the multiple phenomena of remembering in Julian Barnes's self-narratives *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending*, this thesis attempts to gain an understanding of the motivations and psychological states of Barnesian self-narrators, and to offer an analysis of the particular narrative structures underlying their life stories. First, I will illustrate how Barnes's oeuvre is in interaction with postmodernist theory and the typically postmodern concerns mentioned above, primarily focusing on the current significance of life-writing as opposed to grand narratives of culture and history. Applying concepts provided by

narrative psychology, the second chapter will deal with the narrators Christopher Lloyd and Tony Webster as developing their narrative selves and individual narrative modes. As both of Barnes's fictional autobiographies dwell on the process of identity formation and growing up, and share a number of features in terms of youthful expectations and strategies for creating an autonomous identity, they will be analysed side by side. Memory being a vital component of life-writing, the third chapter will provide an insight into the concept and operation of memory as depicted by Julian Barnes in various works of his, while highlighting the essentially narrative aspect of memory occurring in Barnes's fictional autobiographies. The fourth chapter will be devoted to discussing how the Barnesian version of narrative remembering incorporates postmodern issues like the unreliability of memory and the inaccessibility of the past with the psychologically-induced phenomena of self-narratives. As will be shown, *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending* feature such key aspects of autobiographical writing as the subjectivity of observation and remembering; self-editing, idealisation and self-evaluation; the hierarchy of memories and of the various versions of the self presented; and the confronting, as well as corroborating role of the outside world in individual life-stories – aspects which have a crucial influence on the temporal and narrative structure of the novels in focus.

It is with the help of narrative psychology that the psychological processes and motivations underlying life-writings can be the best grasped – not only when it comes to flesh-and-blood individuals or novelists, but also in the case of fictional characters, especially narrators. Based on the analysis outlined above, this thesis is aimed at providing a detailed understanding and a coherent reading of Julian Barnes's fragmentary and often misleading narratives *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending*, claiming that their seemingly impenetrable narrative structures can, in fact, be comprehended when one bears in mind the psychological motivations of life-writing.

1 Homo Narrans: Grand Narratives and Writing the Self

It is particularly revealing to discuss Barnesian narrativity in the light of the postmodern attitude to storytelling, "seizing" the past, and the narratives affecting individual and collective identity formation (Barnes, *Flaubert's* 7). As will be demonstrated in this section, Barnes's attitude to collective and individual narratives is in line with postmodernist thinking, while it has its own peculiarities as well.

However significant a role grand narratives might play in establishing social, historical, and cultural truths that serve as the basis for individual and collective identity formation, it is important to note that some of these defining narratives have been questioned and often even overwritten, primarily due to scientific and technological development resulting in a changed view of the position of humanity. While the Enlightenment promoted the utmost primacy of reason, claiming that both the universe and the human being within it can be known and understood through the rational approach of science, modernist and postmodernist thinking in particular seem to have lost faith in the existence of ordered, reliable objectivity and hence in the rational knowability of the world (Stott 21-22; 24-25). Thereby, the eternal and definite truths produced by science have been destabilised, evoking a sense of disorder. These issues are treated not only by theorists of postmodernism, but also by fiction writers: while their narrators and/or characters are in search of truth, they reflect on the inaccessibility of objective and reliable truth, thereby being the embodiments of these postmodern authors' self-reflexivity, indicating their preoccupation with these problems and their representation in fiction. Illustrating the postmodern view of stories in relation to reality, Jeanette Winterson, Barnes's fellow leading postmodernist, creates a narrator in her novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) who considers storytelling to be "a way of explaining the universe while leaving the universe unexplained . . . The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots [sic]. It's all there but hard to find the beginning

and impossible to fathom the end. The best you can do is admire the cat's cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more" (93). That is, stories are now seen as insufficient means of creating valid accounts of the universe. What is more, the accessibility of truth itself is denied famously in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* (1989) by Julian Barnes: "We all know objective truth is not obtainable," only "a multiplicity of subjective truths which we assess and then fabulate into history" (45).

When it comes to investigating truth, knowledge, and memories, a method frequently applied by postmodern authors of fiction is the categorisation and systematisation of facts, often presented in the form of lists or mathematical formulas, reflecting the urge to find some degree of objectivity in human perception, or at least a way of simulating it. Accordingly, contemporary Czech novelist Milan Kundera writes "Memory cannot be understood, either, without a mathematical approach. The fundamental given is the ratio between the amount of time in the lived life and the amount of time from that life that is stored in memory . . . without much risk of error I could assume that the memory retains no more than . . . an utterly infinitesimal bit of the lived life. That fact too is part of the essence of man" (122). As can be seen, the imperfection of memory is considered to be essentially human; nonetheless, an attempt is made to define how reliably memory is applicable. Similarly, Adrian Finn in Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* asks "To what extent might human relationships be expressed in a mathematical or logical formula?" (Barnes, *SE* 85)[1] With the help of "$a^2 + v + a^1$ x $s = b$" he hopes to gain insight into the operation of chains of responsibility and to see whether accumulation, multiplication, and division might characterise human relationships; nevertheless, the solution eventually provided by the narrator Tony Webster can be applied only to a particular situation, not universally (85).

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[1] *SE* will be used as short for Barnes, Julian. *The Sense of an Ending*. 2011. London: Vintage Books, 2012. Print.

The lack of proper facts is further manifested in Barnes's *Staring at the Sun*, which presents the "General Purposes Computer," a database of all human knowledge, along with "The Absolute Truth," a later development with limited accessibility for the general public (144; 146). However, the answers generated by these machines turn out to be modified, or even produced entirely by human operators based on their impressions of the inquirer, so that "the way to get the best answers out of GPC was to lie with your questions" (146). Therefore, these supposedly objective, factual, and reliable sources of information are in actual fact subjectively manipulated, controlling, and deceptive, creating the impression that there is, in reality, no objective human knowledge, not even a scientifically generated one.

Despite the repeated failure of such endeavours, Barnes – rather characteristically – encourages search for truth by claiming that "we must still believe that objective truth is obtainable; or we must believe that it is 99 per cent obtainable; or if we can't believe this we must believe that 43 per cent objective truth is better than 41 per cent" (Barnes, *A History* 245-246). According to literary theorist and critic Linda Hutcheon, modernists are aware of the lack of objective truths, lament it and are frustrated by it, whereas postmodernism "no longer attempts to mirror reality or tell any truth about it" (40). In this respect, then, Barnes is at variance with the general postmodern attitude: though aware of the inaccessibility of the past and universal truths, he keeps embarking on quests for the unreachable: Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) would go to any length to identify the authentic parrot that used to be held on Flaubert's desk; Tony Webster in *The Sense of an Ending* spends months investigating the truth about the past of his fellow characters. While the postmodern notion of truth is that "there are only *truths* in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness *per se*, just others' truths," Barnes and, by extension, his characters are in search of a singular objective truth, even if attainable only in part, in 43 or 41 per cent (Hutcheon 109). This Barnesian urge to find definite and objective knowledge of the

truth and the past will be of central importance in the forthcoming analysis of *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending*.

Note should be made of the fact, however, that it is not only Barnes whose characters strive to reach the truth; it is, in fact, characteristic of a number of postmodernist novels, especially those depicting life stories and remembering. Both Margaret Atwood's *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001) offer one essential piece of truth that needs to be discovered. Similarly to Geoffrey Braithwaite in Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, Max Morden in John Banville's *The Sea* (2005) embarks on a journey into his past, reluctantly facing the truth. Interestingly, even if the pieces of truth in focus are not traumatic *per se*, they are treated the way traumas are: these memories take considerable difficulty to retrieve, yet they need to be processed to ensure that the characters are able to move on with their lives. At the same time, it is precisely the uncontrollable, hardly reachable nature of these pieces of truth that makes them objective with respect to the characters affected by them. Hence, instead of accepting and cherishing the multiplicity of truths, it is in effect a single objective truth that these postmodern characters are in search of, making it necessary to rethink Hutcheon's view of the relationship between truth(s) and postmodernism.

Although the attitude to truth outlined by theorists of postmodernism is not entirely in line with Julian Barnes's version, Barnes does accommodate the essential self-reflexivity of postmodernism that, according to postmodernist thinkers, induces the acute questioning of the reliability and truth value of human narratives: as observed by Linda Hutcheon, postmodern self-reflexivity is aimed not only at the "investigation of the nature, the limits, and the possibilities of the discourse of art," but also at describing a "parodic relation to the art of the past" (22). That is, confrontations with history, politics, culture, and the external world in general are fuelled by parody, as it offers an ironic view not only of the past, but also of the present through a perspective "which allows an artist to speak to a discourse from within it,

but without being totally recuperated by it" (Hutcheon 41; 35). Clearly, it is not only the assessment of the contemporary that is problematic with respect to objectivity, but also the artistic representation of the contemporary, bringing forth the need for some kind of distance that can aid observation. Somewhat similarly, novelist, literary critic, and philosopher Umberto Eco argues that however fragmented and uncertain the past may be, it should not be ignored; instead, it needs to be viewed with a degree of irony and discussed with an ironic distance (Stott 32). Thus, by adopting a quasi-outside point of view and being aware of this distance, postmodernist fiction and Julian Barnes in particular examine and challenge not only the formal and thematic features and boundaries of fiction, but also those of human culture and consciousness.

In line with the above, Julian Barnes tends to experiment with the definition and redefinition of Englishness from the inside, as a representative of English culture, but taking a step back to create the distance needed for observation and evaluation, occupying a quasi-outside perspective. In this manner, Barnes often defines Englishness in relation to French culture, for instance, in his journalistic output entitled *Letters from London* (1995), in a collection of short stories *Cross Channel* (1998*),* and to some extent in *Flaubert's Parrot* and *Metroland* (1980) as well. It is in *England, England* (1998) that Barnes famously deconstructs English culture into a simplified, highly subjective list of national symbols and stereotypes, and creates a miniature replica of England on the Isle of Wight, thereby providing a critique of contemporary, often stereotypical, ways of presenting and interpreting culture. Description and interpretation of English culture and Englishness occur both in the context of collective, as well as individual identity formation in Barnes's fiction. Hence, the linguistic and self-defining roles of culture-based identity will occur as a significant aspect of the Barnesian fictional autobiographies in focus.

In addition to narrating culture, Barnes also investigates the narrative nature of history, which also has an impact on collective and individual identity. Based on the perception that facts are destabilised, history writing and the traditional concept of one true history have been undermined as well in postmodernism. Hayden White in his ubiquitous piece "The Burden of History" introduces the idea that historians "treat their 'facts' as though they were 'given'" without recognising that "they are not so much 'found' as 'constructed'" based on the questions and approaches used by them as researchers (127). Moreover, White argues that historians use the same narrative techniques as writers do; eventually, history itself is no more than a narrative with heroes, villains, and conflicts (127). As a result, history is seen as subjective and unreliable, lacking proper facts, distant both in space and in time, often criticised by postmodern authors, including Julian Barnes. However, though uncertain, hardly reachable, and subjectively created, the past needs to be known and processed, as it provides the basis of collective identity formation. Consequently, postmodernism is presented with the task of finding new ways to explore the past in order to provide narratives that can be incorporated into collective identity. One such approach is offered by Linda Hutcheon, who argues that "History is not made obsolete: it is, however, being rethought—as a human construct . . . entirely conditioned by textuality, while 'historiographic metaficiton' provides the medium of "rethinking and reworking of the forms and contents of the past" (16; 5). That is, the textual (or narrative) nature of history-making is seen as essential – in fact, the creation of the fictional is described as "another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality" (Hutcheon 40). Hence, fiction might provide the coherent narratives needed for collective and individual human thinking.

In line with the general postmodern view, the narrator Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot* claims that "history is merely another literary genre-, the past is autobiographical fiction pretending to be a parliamentary report," that is, a narrative created

from a subjective, individual viewpoint (137). Furthermore, in *The Sense of an Ending* history is defined in the following terms: "History is the lies of the victors" and "the self-delusions of the defeated;" "History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation" (16-17). As can be seen, history is considered to be subjective, as well as bearing the marks of the insufficiency of human memory and recordkeeping. Likewise, in *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* Barnes provides a critique of traditional history by claiming that "History isn't what happened. History is just what historians tell us" (242). With this in mind, he creates alternative versions, such as a woodworm's account of the story of Noah's Ark, according to which "Your species [i.e., humanity] has its much repeated version, which still charms even sceptics," but "You aren't too good with the truth . . . You keep . . . ignoring the bad things," and so the traditional human presentation of history is rather self-deceptive (Barnes, *A History* 4; 29). As can be seen, Julian Barnes, along with other postmodernist thinkers, introduces a critical and ironic view of the past, history, and general truths, while highlighting the interplay between fact and fiction.

When it comes to analysing *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending,* it will become apparent that Barnes subverts not only the supposedly factual, reality-based narratives of the past, but also the purely fictional accounts provided by his narrators and characters, applying the postmodern ironic distance in a unique way, targeted at his own fictional creation. Nevertheless, it is important to note the generic difference between collective and personal narratives, whether factual or fictional. Amidst the fragmentation and destabilisation of the concepts of history and culture, a solution suggested by Lyotard in lieu of grand, universally accepted narratives is the turn towards mini-narratives, or "the little narrative [*petit récit*]," which "remains the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science" (60). Such mini-narratives are "situational, provisional, contingent, and temporary, making no

claim to universality, truth, reason, or stability," being in line with the postmodern distrust of universal truth claims (Stott 25). Therefore, instead of grand narratives of nations and societies, it is individual life stories that are seen as representative of culture and history, because they not only depict "a person's life with special emphasis on their mental and spiritual development, their abilities and achievements, and the impact they had on the world they inhabited," but they also "show how an individual relates to his or her world, whether the customs of the time were a help or a hindrance, what opinions he or she formed of the world and its people, and particularly in the case of an artist, how these opinions were expressed," that is, they present the individual in his/her social, historic, and cultural context (Stott 25; 49-50).

At the same time, the postmodern upsurge of interest in (auto-)biographies and (auto-)biographical fiction has been substantially motivated by the current atmosphere, in which scientific research on identity has induced debates whether the self is only "an illusory by-product of brain activity" (Stott 10). As Dan P. McAdams psychologist and advocate of narrative identity argues, when people in modern societies begin to define their identity in adolescence or young adulthood, they "reconstruct the personal past, perceive the present, and anticipate the future in terms of . . . an integrative narrative self that provides modern life with some modicum of psychosocial unity and purpose" (187). Accordingly, identity exists in the form of a dynamic, ever-evolving life story created based on autobiographical facts through a process of selecting details and aspects in order to "vivify and integrate life and make it more or less meaningful" (McAdams 187). Therefore, especially when it takes the form of a coherent narrative put into writing, biography or 'life writing'[2] can be seen as a reassuring manifestation of tangible selfhood.

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[2] Originates in the Greek βίο- 'life' and γράφειν 'to write' ("Biography.") *The Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*. 1993. Print.)

Then again, like everything deemed postmodern, postmodern biographies, too, require readers to play an active, interpreting role. Instead of being simply presented with a chronological account of events, they often encounter fragmentary segments of life stories lacking a temporal order – notably so in the case of Julian Barnes's life-narratives. Furthermore, traditional boundaries of genres are blurred; thereby the distinctions between fictional and factual biographies and autobiographies, biographical, autobiographical, and fictional novels are made difficult, especially in the case of Barnes's works, which often resist straightforward categorisation. Probably the most well-known example is Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, a quasi-biography of the 19th-century French author Gustave Flaubert, famous for completely subverting traditional biography writing. It presents three versions of Flaubert's chronology and experiments with the fact–fiction dichotomy by repeatedly depicting fiction as fact, while presenting itself to be well-researched and meticulously detailed. At the same time, it raises the question "How do we seize the past? Can we ever do so?" (Barnes, *Flaubert's* 7) Hence, *Flaubert's Parrot* is an embodiment of the postmodern attitude to fact and history. In fact, it can be seen as an illustration of Linda Hutcheon's definition of historiographic metafiction, as it asks – both implicitly and explicitly – such questions as "How do we know the past (or the present)? What is the ontological status of that past? Of its documents? Of our narratives?" (Hutcheon 50)

Still, however fragmented and unsettling these life stories may be, there is one feature shared by all of them: they are all created by human minds in the narrative mode inherent in human thinking and perception. It is thus a question remaining to be answered whether the interpretation of postmodern texts is aided by the inalienable narrativity always necessarily lying at the basis of such texts, or if the essentially narrative mode of human understanding acts as a burden on comprehending fragmented, seemingly incoherent texts. Undoubtedly, it is with the help of narrative psychology that the underlying psychological phenomena, as well

as the structure and motivations of remembrance can be the best understood. Therefore, the following chapters will provide a narratological and narrative psychological analysis of Barnes's novels *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending*, aiming at an understanding of their fragmented structures and unreliable narratives.

2   Barnesian Life-Narratives

As can be seen above, Julian Barnes's oeuvre presents a wealth of approaches to grand narratives of history and culture (*A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* and *England, England*). On the other hand, Barnes has written narratives of individual lives as well, demonstrating an interest in personal identity formation and little narratives. According to Merritt Moseley, the first book in a novelist's oeuvre is highly likely to be autobiographical, especially when it is a coming-of-age story (18). Julian Barnes's début novel *Metroland* is in line with this pattern: the first part of the book depicting the adolescent Christopher Lloyd living in suburban 'Metroland' echoes much of Barnes's youth, although, as the author often points out, fact is intertwined with fiction in it. "The difficulty with the first part was that the spirit of it was autobiographical, and the topography was autobiographical, but the actual incidents were invented, and attached to a much more adventurous character than I was at sixteen," said Barnes in an interview, adding that being aware of the autobiographical elements, while wondering if such a book could attract any readership, was what made writing it extremely slow (Hayman 3). Later in his career, as an acknowledged novelist, Barnes claimed "I think my attitude towards using myself and bits of my life in my books is that I'm willing to, if I can get the right distance from it . . . I don't think I have any desire to be confessional, but I think I'm quite willing to use my own life as an example of something" (Guignery and Ryan 165). Therefore, he claims to have chosen the autobiographical mode for his memoir or essay on life, death, and religion entitled *Nothing to be Frightened of* (2008) in

order to illustrate his discussion of universal topics with the examples of his own life story (Guignery and Ryan 165). Indeed, it is the fragments of Barnes's life presented that launch each section of meditation on issues like fear of death and humanity's relationship to God. Similarly, Barnes's autobiographical piece revolving around the stages of life entitled *Levels of Life* (2013) consists of essay-like segments on neutral topics like ballooning and photography set against the third part dealing with grief, inspired by his own sense of loss following the death of his wife, literary agent Pat Kavanagh. As can be seen, Barnes indeed uses his own experiences not as the primary data of his works but interwoven in the fabric of his fiction, especially in his first-person narratives.

The problem of the intermingling of fact and fiction, of course, might be seen as irrelevant in the case of novels openly labelled fictional, but the accessibility of truth is a central issue in such life stories as well. In Barnes's oeuvre, it is *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending* that, read as fictional autobiographies, illustrate the Barnesian view of memory, truth, and the past in relation to identity formation and life-writing, illustrating Lyotard's concept of the postmodern little narrative. *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending* will be discussed in the following sections as instances of highly subjective personal remembering and self-narration, while elaborating on the formation of the narrative self amidst the postmodern perception of the human condition, as well as on the resulting temporal and thematic structures accommodated by the two novels.

2.1   **Fictional Autobiographies: *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending***

To begin with, the first-person narrative of *Metroland* is written from the perspective of Christopher Lloyd, predominantly in the form of reminiscence, presenting the 30-year-old Christopher's view of his past and present in a tripartite structure. Part One, "Metroland (1963)" depicts Christopher at the age of 16, living along the Metropolitan Line in the suburban area called Metroland, commuting to his school in London day by day. Claiming to

be members of the "Anger generation," Christopher and his best friend Toni Barbarowski demonstrate a typical adolescent strife for identities unaffected by their roots and surroundings (Barnes, *M* 40)[3]. Their conversations are filled with comments despising the suburban bourgeoisie, while their theories about art, life, adulthood, love, marriage, and the mysteries of sexuality and the female body are permeated with French language and culture, their life-belt against uniformity and mediocrity – all embedded in descriptions of everyday experiences such as school, family dinners, and visits to Uncle Arthur. In Part Two, "Paris (1968)", Christopher's dominant preoccupation as a 21-year-old young adult is his virginity. Consequently, when he spends a few months in Paris on occasion of a grant for his thesis, instead of witnessing the students' revolution, his attention is entirely taken up by Annick, a French girl, to whom he loses his virginity. Moreover, while spending his days in museums, cinemas, cafés, and the Bibliothèque Nationale, reading, writing, drawing, and contemplating life and art, he encounters a group of English youngsters, Dave, Micky, and Marion. By Part Three, "Metroland II (1977)", and the age of 30, Christopher is settled with his wife Marion and daughter Amy back in Metroland, no longer demonstrating his initial disdain on suburban life. As he encounters such issues of married life as temptation and faithfulness, he is repeatedly confronted and criticised by Toni, who is a manifestation of their youthful plans, a struggling writer showing passionate interest in politics. Finally, the novel ends on a rather ambiguous note regarding Christopher's feelings about the contrast between his juvenile plans and eventual actions and achievements.

The Sense of an Ending is narrated by Tony Webster, a retired man in his sixties. Part One provides an overview of Tony's past, emphasising the formative importance of his schoolboy years spent with his friends, Colin, Alex, and Adrian. Induced by History classes with Old Joe Hunt and English classes with Phil Dixon, as well as by their interest in

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[3] *M* will be used as short for Barnes, Julian. *Metroland*. 1980. London: Picador, 1995. Print.

philosophy, they engage in discussions of time, history, literature, and death. Part of Tony's growing up is his first relationship with Veronica described in detail, including issues like meeting Veronica's family; virginity and sexuality; and a break-up followed by an affair between Veronica and Tony's friend Adrian. After a description of some time spent in the USA and an affair with Annie, Tony is faced with Adrian's suicide. Part One ends with a brief overview of Tony's adult life involving jobs; marriage; becoming a father; divorce; and retirement. By Part Two, the narrative reaches the present: embedded in further meditations on time, history, and life, Tony's present life unfolds. A letter received after the death of Veronica's mother results in the unsettling of Tony's life story presented so far – in fact, it forces Tony to face his past mistakes. His re-evaluation takes the form of revisiting and rewriting memories described in the first section. Along the way, Tony arranges a couple of meetings with his ex-wife Margaret, as well as with Veronica. Eventually, his search for the truth about the connections between Veronica, Adrian, and Veronica's mother succeeds, leaving Tony in a state of distress and hopelessness.

2.2   Barnesian Self-Narrators

Both Christopher Lloyd and Tony Webster can be seen as typically Barnesian male characters, resembling Geoffrey Braithwaite in *Flaubert's Parrot* and Gregory in *Staring at the Sun*. They are characterised by a considerable degree of passivity, meditating about life instead of living it, and failing to be in proper control of their lives. A curious and uniquely Barnesian contrast is generated by the fact that despite their average, rather mediocre lives and personalities, these characters theorise about highly philosophical matters such as art versus life; history versus reality; time, memory, and remembering; the general progress of human life; death and suicide; and religion – that is, preoccupations which permeate Barnes's entire oeuvre. Conspicuously, these male figures function as Barnes's mouthpieces, providing the author with the means of articulating his concerns, experimenting with them, and asking

questions about them. At the same time, these Barnesian characters are fundamentally self-reflexive; they continuously contemplate their past and their achievements, but they are also prone to self-deception – a phenomenon to be discussed later on with respect to narrative remembering.

As for the choice of genre, Caroline Stott points out that the bildungsroman mode is applied in *Metroland* in a special manner: while the traditional bildungsroman involves a character going through a process of maturation and turning into a rounded and finished personality, Christopher Lloyd from a "teenager who thought himself special turns into an average adult" (Stott 107). Moreover, he fails to come up with accomplishments or extraordinary events that could serve as the regular motivations for writing an autobiography (Stott 107). *The Sense of an Ending* is a similar case, as Tony Webster settles for mediocrity instead of taking risks, demonstrating no noteworthy achievements. According to Stott, such a use of the bildungsroman mode is in line with the postmodernist scepticism regarding "stable and coherent subjects," and so instead of focusing on character development, Barnes uses this "deceptively simple form to introduce readers to complex issues and to pose questions about them" (107). However, it is important to note that despite the lack of a spectacular and tangible progress, Christopher and Tony's narrative selves that do undergo a maturing process. Through a series of events and formative confrontations paving the way to adulthood, they learn about the problems of narration, such as the imperfection of memory and the harmful nature of self-deception.

Naturally, identity formation and becoming an autonomous narrative self are the results of a learning process. Though Christopher and Tony are fictional characters, their progress can be analysed based on the general pattern characterising the development of all human beings. As described by Dan P. McAdams, it is in adolescence or young adulthood that people first truly reflect on their identities and face the phenomenon of growing up (188).

It is indeed as adolescents that Christopher and his friend Toni Barbarowski begin to theorise growing up and adulthood. They imagine "marriage, and sex eight times a night, and bringing up your children . . . having a bank account and going to strip clubs and owning cufflinks, collar studs and monogrammed handkerchiefs" – a selection of status symbols they associate with being a grown-up man (Barnes, *M* 69). They project an idealised version of adulthood as "vague and marvellous as the Empyrean . . . capital-L Life" and believe that being "Out There Living" means one is not condemned to do things one does not want to; instead, "your Deeds Book would read like your Fantasy Book did now" (64; 54). Hence, on one occasion Toni proposes the idea of becoming "artists-in-residence at a nudist colony" (79). Rather similarly, Tony Webster and his friends imagine (here, too, capital-L) Life to be intense and eventful like Literature, featuring "love, sex, morality, friendship, happiness, suffering, betrayal, adultery" and also "good and evil, heroes and villains" (Barnes, *SE* 15). Until then, they feel like they are "being kept in a holding pen, waiting to be released into our lives," looking forward to adult life as free, autonomous, and filled with action, just like Christopher and Toni (9). During their seemingly uneventful, non-changing teenage lives it is such gestures as being "sirred" when buying his "first pair of longs," or occasionally getting the chance to walk in the street carrying an umbrella that make Christopher feel less of a child (Barnes, *M* 14). The same phenomenon can be found in Tony's case as well: being addressed as "Gentlemen" by their English master provides a sense of not being locked up in childhood forever (Barnes, *SE* 6).

It is also in adolescence that a crucial stage in identity formation takes place, namely, being faced with choices reflecting one's own identity: in what is termed the "identity versus role confusion," adolescents experiment with occupational and ideological options, social roles, life plans and projects, so that, eventually, there emerges a unified configuration of thoughts, ideas, roles, and activities – identity itself (McAdams 188). Meanwhile, one leaves

behind one's childhood and early adolescent self, which is described by Christopher as follows: "Some [objects] I chose, some were chosen for me, some I consented to . . . What else are you at that age but a creature part willing, part consenting, part being chosen?" and learns to make self-defining decisions autonomously (Barnes, *M* 82). Here, objects are not seen as belonging to the surroundings, but as projections of Christopher's then current state of identity formation. Later on, the objects he leaves behind in Paris and the vegetable patch he owns back in Metroland illustrate the change in his personality.

It is of crucial importance to find an integrated configuration of the self in the aforementioned process: integrated both in a synchronic sense (as in accommodating a number of differing roles and relationships) and in a diachronic sense (as in combining elements of the self separated in time) (McAdams 188-189). Christopher in *Metroland* is aware of the various roles he is required to perform: "School, home, university, friends – all in their different ways offered a consensus of values, ambitions, approved styles of failure" (96-97). Evidently, different contexts call for different roles and self-presentations. Illustrating the synchronic integration of various roles, in Christopher's case, it is the everyday journey to school that is seen as "An hour and a quarter each way, a time of twice-daily metamorphosis" (Barnes, *M* 64). This journey provides "a point of balance in the oscillation between home and school," between the "clean, tidy, hardworking, conservative, responsibly questioning" self presented at home and the "lazy yet smirkingly confident, obsequious and deceitful, contemptuous of authority, mad about art" version of himself performed at school (64). Though described in less detail, the same phenomenon of transformation is referred to in *The Sense of an Ending*: "The school was in central London, and each day we travelled up to it . . . passing from one system of control to another" (7).

In adulthood, this process of unification of the self can be aided by 'imagoes', i.e., "possible selves" or idealised personifications of the self, embodying a great variety of self-

characters with different voices and functions in the narrative, yet enhancing the inclusion of different versions of the self in the same narrative (McAdams 193). Such versions of himself are presented by Christopher when he is concerned with the impression he is trying to make. When preparing for his first date with Annick, in an attempt to present an ideal version of himself, Christopher carefully designs his appearance, including his clothing, his hair, and the book he wishes to be seen reading, bearing in mind possible expectations. He comments on the process thus: "All this may sound cynical and calculating . . . It was . . . more the result of a sensitive desire to please" (Barnes, *M* 104). Interestingly, Christopher's range of imagoes is affected by his interest in French culture. As teenagers, Toni and Christopher adopt a stereotypical version of French behaviour, hoping to be unique and sophisticated and provide a contrast with their suburban surroundings, imitating even the French attitude to Belgians: "Bet he was syphilisé. Pity he wasn't Belgian," comments Christopher on a man he encounters on the metro (Barnes, *M* 33). When in Paris surrounded by French people, Christopher gets immersed in French culture so deeply that he takes up French gestures: "I brushed the side of my jaw with the backs of my fingers to indicate boredom. I learned to shrug up my shoulders while turning down my mouth" (123). Though he first enjoys this game, he soon turns out to be disturbed by this new self he presents, making him feel "a kind of internal stirring . . . it wasn't home sickness, it was something to do with being English . . . as if one part of me was being faintly disloyal to another part" (124). At this point, due to his culturally unsettling and unfamiliar surroundings, Christopher's French and English versions of himself fail to be unified. Yet, this transitional state of culture-based identity formation is over when he returns to England.

Finally, when a unified sense of identity is formed out of one's various roles and imagoes, after some experimentation with content and form – such as the alternative narratives created by Christopher for Uncle Arthur and the ones produced by Tony and his

friends concerning Robson's suicide – one's own narrative mode is found (McAdams 190). Interestingly, creating one's own language for a narrative mode of one's own plays a significant role in both novels. In *Metroland*, as mentioned above, Christopher and Toni's speech is permeated with French expressions in order to demonstrate their unwillingness to conform to the suburbs: "The mottoes we deemed appropriate to our cause were *écraser l'infâme* and *épater la bourgeoisie*" (9). Similarly, in *The Sense of an Ending*, Tony and his friends sprinkle their conversations with German expressions learnt from their readings in philosophy: "We used terms like '*Weltanschauung*' and '*Sturm und Drang*'" (10). Quite unsurprisingly, these juvenile modes of expression are left behind by the time they reach adulthood. While his adolescent narrative is filled with comparing himself to various French authors and claiming to observe the world through Baudelaire's concept of colours, the adult Christopher in Part Two, when referring to Louis XVI, says "if you'll forgive the comparison," already aware of its disproportionate nature (Barnes, *M* 86). On the other hand, Tony Webster comments on their use of German philosophical expressions as "of course we were pretentious" (Barnes, *SE* 10). Thus, while English is initially depicted as everyday and mediocre, by adulthood both Christopher and Tony refine their concept of uniqueness, assigning a new position to Englishness in their narrative selves.

It is important to note that parallel to individual identity formation, memories and life stories are created collectively, with the participation of the family, friends, and any surrounding social group (McAdams 200). In fact, as one's life story is embedded in culture, it necessarily follows some cultural models about selfhood and a coherent life story (Bruner 210). Thus, the need for being autonomous creatures with freedom of choice, while at the same time conforming to cultural norms and social groups, turns self-making narratives into a "balancing act" between autonomy and commitment (Bruner 218). With respect to the question of autonomy and influence, it is worth examining the surroundings of Christopher

and Tony in terms of their fellow characters. As expressed by Paul Bailey in his review, there is "a curious lack of people" in Metroland, criticising the absence of rounded characters besides Christopher (qtd. in Moseley 21). According to Merritt Moseley, this phenomenon is due to the fact that most of Christopher's fellow characters are "fools or stooges or ridiculous bourgeois," while Christopher is a "self-absorbed adolescent," making the lack of well-defined characters reasonable and authentic (21). Bearing in mind the genre, however, it should also be pointed out that autobiographies present their characters in relation to the autobiographer, based on their significance. Accordingly, in *Metroland* Toni Barbarowski is the only noteworthy character besides the narrator; he is present as a formative influence in Christopher's adolescent years depicted in Part One, whereas Part Two and Three are more self-centred, resulting in the scarce mentioning of Christopher's wife and daughter. Similarly, in *The Sense of an Ending* it is Adrian, the teenage role-model, and Veronica, the enigmatic ex-girlfriend Tony fails to comprehend, are the characters described in detail. Margaret, Tony's wife is significant only insofar as she is Tony's sole proper human contact in the present. Curiously, both Christopher and Tony have a friend whose influence reaches them even when they are not in contact, as if constantly present in the form of an underlying narrative: Toni's presence is felt even when Christopher is away in Paris, while Tony Webster looks upon Adrian as his role-model even decades after Adrian's suicide. According to Stott, this phenomenon signifies Christopher's lack of autonomy; thus, the writing of his autobiography can be seen as an act of taking control over his life (117). This reading can clearly be applied to *The Sense of an Ending* as well, although one should bear in mind that this act is by no means proactive; detachment occurs due to the changed perception of the previously admired figures.

In addition to the influence of others, the expectations of society, too, affect not only what one presents to the outside world, but also what one tells oneself: people "conform to a

tacit *pacte autobiographique*" even when they are telling themselves about themselves (Bruner 211). In addition, one relies heavily on other people's (supposed) versions of oneself. Tony Webster is aware of this phenomenon and reflects on it thus: "How often do we tell our own life story? How often do we adjust, embellish, make sly cuts? And the longer life goes on, the fewer are those around to challenge our account, to remind us that our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about our life. Told to others, but – mainly – to ourselves" (Barnes, *SE* 95). Apparently, he sees self-narration as an extremely subjective activity, involving a considerable amount of self-editing. However, he also expresses the need for confrontation through witnesses and a need for corroboration supporting his own version. He discovers that "as the witnesses to your life diminish, there is less corroboration, and therefore less certainty, as to what you are or have been" (Barnes, *SE* 59). Thus, in order to define one's identity without self-deception, the methods of documentation presented earlier are not sufficient; witnesses are needed, too, such as Tony's fellow characters or, in another sense, the reader.

3   Barnesian Memory

Reading and writing a life – both literally and figuratively – requires memory, as no narrative can be produced or understood without remembering. It is not only cause-and-effect relationships and repetitive patterns that necessitate recollection, but even mere language use, as it relies on sounds, words, and gestures being remembered. Therefore, as an indispensable element of narrativity, memory is one of the key concerns of postmodern literature, being an object of self-reflexion and detailed scrutiny. It is notably so in the case of Julian Barnes, whose oeuvre is permeated with definitions and discussions of memory, and attempts at grasping the nature and exploring the boundaries of recollection.

One can find a general distrust towards memory, as well as an awareness of its subjective and artificially created nature as peculiar of a wide range of Barnesian characters. Martha in *England, England* is suspicious of a supposedly true memory of hers, as "it was true, but it wasn't unprocessed" (6). That is, even if retrieved exactly with respect to fixed data, recollection can never be the same as experiencing. As Frank Kermode puts it, "the experience as remembered is not, affectively, of the same quality as the experience itself" or "the experience as remembered is not the same as the experience remembered" ("Memory" 292). In fact, subsequent events and the distance between past and present may cause re-evaluation and changed impressions of certain memories: a "pain recalled is recognised as a pain, yet it may be recalled with pleasure; a past joy may be recalled with intense sadness" (Kermode, "Memory" 292). Often in Barnes's novels, it is due to nostalgia or remorse that past experiences are come to be seen in a different light. The role of remorse in *The Sense of an Ending* will be discussed later on, in relation to the problem of responsibility and self-deception.

Conspicuously, however vivid one recollection may be, it may never provide the exact same experience as it did originally. Bearing this in mind, it is of no surprise that in *Nothing to be Frightened of*, Barnes himself claims "My brother distrusts the essential truth of memories; I distrust the way we colour them in" (29). Interestingly, in spite of his frequent criticism of memory, Barnes does not deny that there is some truth value to memories, even if coloured and somewhat altered. The coloured nature of reminiscence is also pointed out by a character named Oliver in *Love, etc*: "The story of our life is never an autobiography, always a novel . . . Our memories are just another artifice" (Barnes, *Love, etc* 13). With respect to self-presentation in life-narratives, then, the gap between recollection and experience is artificially created. In addition, he argues elsewhere that "Memory is an act of will, and so is forgetting," therefore, "My way with memory is to entrust it only with things it will take some

pride in looking after" (Barnes, *Talking* 14; 9-10). Hence, memories are modified – consciously or unconsciously – along subjective lines, and so life-narratives or autobiographies are tailored to provide comfort and suit the needs of the individual.

Evidently, biographical and autobiographical writings are genres of remembering, as they are predominantly compiled of memories. When it comes to fictional biographies and autobiographies, too, memory is one of the central aspects to be taken into consideration, though this time with respect to fictional characters. Christopher Lloyd and Tony Webster are typically self-reflexive narrators of postmodern fiction in that they both contemplate the question of memory and its impact on life-stories in the form of metafictional remarks. First of all, Christopher faces the quick fading of his memories of Annick after their first encounter: "I'd thought about Annick so much that I couldn't remember what she looked like. It was like putting layer after layer of *papier mâché* over an object and gradually seeing the original shape disappear" (Barnes, *M* 103). That is, the process of recollection might result in the original memory being distorted, or completely overwritten, echoing Martha's problem in *England, England* concerning memories being processed.

The limits and errors of memory and the role of recollection in storytelling are the subject of detailed discussion in *The Sense of an Ending* as well. The simplest and most straightforward definition of memory presented in the novel is the following: "memory equals events plus time" (Barnes, *SE* 63). However, as pointed out by Tony, the results of recollection are rather unpredictable, because "what you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed" (Barnes, *SE* 3). Furthermore, as time "doesn't act as a fixative, rather as a solvent," memories become blurred with time, or might even get entirely lost. As a result, memory can be defined as "what we thought we'd forgotten" (Barnes, *SE* 63). In addition, while youngsters have no trouble remembering their short lives, older people's memory "becomes a thing of shreds and patches," so the capacity of one's memory

is apt to change, again, in an unpredictable manner (Barnes, *SE* 105). Apparently, in spite of Tony's repeated attempts at defining and systematising memory, its operation cannot be understood exactly in its entirety. At the same time, his narration is permeated with typically postmodern, self-reflexive expressions of his imperfect and uncertain memories, for instance "At least that's how I remember it now. Though if you were to put me in a court of law, I doubt I'd stand up to cross-examination very well" (119).

Such self-reflexive comments on behalf of Barnesian and other postmodern narrators inevitably evoke a sense of distrust and suspense in the reader. As a result, those in question are seen as unreliable narrators, there being discrepancies between their storytelling and the reality of the novel, their interpretation of events being highly questionable ("Narrator"). This is even more so in the case of autobiographical pieces, as they are means of self-presentation. As we shall see in the next chapter, Barnesian self-narrators correspond to such openly unreliable narrators manipulating the presentation of their actions and memories.

It is important to note, however, that Christopher and Tony themselves produce and consult various forms of documentation in order to create proofs and find corroboration: Christopher Lloyd engages in "practicing my memory exercises, which I had lately begun to ignore," primarily in the form of writing prose poems and drawing for the purpose of documentation (Barnes, *M* 150). Furthermore, he writes a diary, sends personalised accounts of his time in Paris to Toni and his parents, and consults theatre programmes and tickets to recall and reflect on his past dates: "bundled up chronologically . . . Look, it all happened, they said . . . See how you reacted here, and here . . . And Christ, look at this, now if you don't feel ashamed about this, I give up on you . . . OK, now you can look at this one – you didn't do at all badly here" (Barnes, *M* 156). Similarly, Tony Webster keeps returning to a significant document of his relationship with Veronica, namely, a photo depicting the girl surrounded by Tony's friends. In addition, Tony often relies on letters and regrets when they

are not available any longer: "I wish I'd kept that letter, because it would have been proof, corroboration. Instead, the only evidence comes from my memory" (Barnes, *SE* 39). These attempts at finding corroboration are unequivocally aimed at a single true and valid version of the past, illustrating the presence of the need for one objective truth in postmodernist fiction, also refuting Hutheon's theory of truth in postmodernism described at the beginning.

A peculiar counterpoint to the self-narratives discussed here is *Staring at the Sun,* a third-person narrative that presents a story encapsulating the 90-year lifespan of Jean Serjeant. Naturally, the problem of overarching such a temporal distance through memory is raised: "people assumed it must be a strain, looking back over ninety years. Tunnel vision, they guessed" (Barnes, *Staring* 5). Jean's attitude, in turn, is displayed as follows: "It wasn't like that. Sometimes the past was shot with a hand-held camera; sometimes it reared monumentally inside a proscenium arch with moulded plaster swags and floppy curtains; sometimes it eased along, a love story from the silent era, pleasing, out of focus and wholly implausible. And sometimes there was only a succession of stills to be borrowed from the memory" (Barnes, *Staring* 5). Her account provided in free indirect speech takes a visual perspective of recollection, applying metaphors of film, theatre, and photography to illustrate how detailed and vivid certain memories are. Thus, what is the most thoroughly remembered appears as a movie scene; slightly blurred memories are seen on stage, i.e. in a less developed format in terms of technology; and what has left behind the fewest details lacks the benefit of sound and can only be retrieved as a photograph. It is important to note, however, that this technological, cinematic-photographic representation of remembering draws attention to the deficiencies of memory. Namely, not only is one left with imperfect versions of the past, but the highest quality – in terms of sound and resolution, but more importantly, information – that can be reached is that of a hand-held camera, 'hand-held' probably standing for a shaky image.

As can be seen, *Staring at the Sun* relies on visual memory, in accordance with the framework of a third-person narrator showing glimpses of Jean Serjeant's thoughts, many of which might not even be verbalised, being linguistically undefined, quasi-pictorial entities. In contrast, the openly unreliable first-person narrators of *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending* are preoccupied with the truth value of their narratives. While collecting proof to support their stories, they lament the imperfection of their memories; hence, they are concerned with the verbal aspect of memory and the narrative nature of remembering. This concern will be reflected in the structure of their narration as well, to be discussed in the following chapter.

4   The Phenomena of Narrative Remembering in Barnes

Life-writing, due to its involvement with highly subjective psychological processes and rather unreliable memories, presents a number of typical phenomena affecting the quality of the narrative in terms of style, structure, and reliability. These key aspects are the discrepancy between the narrating self and the narrated self; the idealisation and self-deception induced by self-evaluation; the subjective presentation of memories in relation to the present or the future; the presentation of memories in the form of re-experiencing, confrontation with other people's versions; and a need for corroboration and documentation.

4.1   'I' versus 'me'

First of all, since the self is nothing like a static, fixed essence to be known only, but an entity being in constant change, one can find a number of revising, self-editing processes characterising the creation of self-narratives. To begin with, as Crites points out, "there is always some hiatus between the 'I' who recollects and the self who appears as a character," that is, between the narrating self and the narrated self (159). In Frank Kermode's terms, "all autobiographers take on the properties of doubles" through some kind of "personal ambiguity" ("Memory" 291). In postmodernist fiction, notably in Julian Barnes's novels,

there is a certain degree of interaction between the two versions of the self. Christopher and Tony are typically such narrators, as their remembering is first and foremost an inward-looking and essentially self-reflexive process. As will be shown, their successes are described in a way that they identify with their past selves, whereas negative experiences and past mistakes induce detachment on behalf of their present, narrating selves.

A theoretical framework has been created for this issue by narrative psychologist János László and his colleagues: they have developed a system based on the narrative perspective and the temporal position of the narrator. Accordingly, there might be "an *observer*, when the narrator is located in the 'here and now' and the narrated event is located in the 'there and then';" a "*re-experiencing perspective*" in which "both the narrator and the narrated event are located in the 'there and then';" an "*experiencing narrative perspective*" in which "both the narrating person and the narrative event are located in the 'here and now';" and a fourth case in which the "narrator is located in the 'there and then' and the narrated event is in the 'here and now'" (László 67). Moreover, Tibor Pólya and his colleagues have outlined three identity states corresponding to the aforementioned narrative perspectives (the fourth perspective is not dealt with due to its scarce incidence). The *observer*, being distanced from the narrated events, is in a "coherent and settled" state of identity, "well adjusted" (Pólya, László, and Forgas 788). On the other hand, both the *re-experiencer*, a participant of the events, the *experiencer*, reporting the events, are in a more intense identity state, the *re-experiencer* being the most problematic viewpoint "burdened by unresolved identity-conflicts" (788).

The distinction between the two versions of the self is considerably clear-cut when it comes to self-reflexive comments like "At school I would have called myself serious . . . but I was probably only attaching an inordinate, legitimating importance to unreflecting pleasure. Nowadays I'm serious about different things; and I don't fear my seriousness will collapse

beneath me" (Barnes, *M* 177). Here, the past and the present selves of Christopher are entirely separated; the narrating self takes the observer position. Similarly, a sense of a self differing from the narrated self emerges from such ironic comments as "As you can see, we worried about large things [such as bureaucrats controlling colours] in those days . . . When else can you get to worry about them?" (Barnes, *M* 8) Here, the younger self is looked upon with a forbearing smile, again, from the observer perspective. In these cases, Christopher's identity state is settled and coherent, indicated by his awareness of change and the clear distinction between his mature and sincere current self and his adolescent self. However, the distinction is not so straightforward in the case of certain explanatory notes and comments. For instance, upon asking his parents about "what's an oonuch?" (17), Christopher reflects on the situation while it is being described, in a commentary fashion:

> 'Oh, I'm not quite sure, dear, really,' she answered in a level voice. (It could just be true that she wasn't.) 'Let's ask your father. Jack, Christopher wants to know what a eunuch is . . .' (Good play that, correcting pronunciation but disguising knowledge.) My father looked up from his accountancy magazine (didn't he get enough of that stuff at work?) (17)

This is an ambiguous case, as the one commenting might be either the narrating self, or the recalled version of the characteristically rather critical adolescent self. That is, one can find some overlap between the past and present self. Even more so in the case of purely re-experiencing accounts, in which the borderline between the two versions of the self is almost entirely blurred. For example, when recounting his date with Annick, Christopher reflects on it as "I'd kissed her! Hey, I'd kissed a French girl! She liked me!" (Barnes, *M* 107) Similarly, when finding out that even Robson, the rather mediocre boy who committed suicide, used to have a girlfriend, Tony Webster reacts as follows: "Fucking bastard! Why him and not us? Why had none of us even had the experience of *failing* to get a girlfriend?" (Barnes, *SE* 14)

As can be seen, in these cases the narrating self becomes so deeply absorbed by the narrated event of the past that he entirely identifies with the recalled version of his past self, demonstrating a more intense identity state. Finally, the gap between the narrating self and the narrated self is the most conspicuous, and yet the most problematic, when one is accused of a past mistake. Typically, one's unwillingness to accept one's past self and identify with it results in distorting the past and blocking it with the aim of producing a satisfying narrative and an idealised version of the self (Crites 160). This problem is manifested in *The Sense of an Ending*: when recounting his reaction to the affair between his ex-girlfriend Veronica and his best friend Adrian, Tony Webster blocks the memory of his past actions and fails to face them. He claims to have sent a short note saying "everything is jolly fine by me, old bean," meaning he is not hurt by the affair (Barnes, *SE* 42). However, in Part Two, when faced with a version of the past he used to have no knowledge of, Veronica sends him the letter he himself wrote decades earlier to Adrian and Veronica, cursing them, their relationship, and their prospective child. Having read the letter, Tony claims "My younger self had come back to shock my older self" (97-98). As can be seen, when the problem is encountered in the present from the experiencing perspective, an unresolved identity-conflict comes to light, bringing with it an immense sense of remorse. Although Tony "could scarcely deny authorship" of the letter, he wonders about the question of responsibility: "All I could plead was that I had been its author then, but was not this author now . . . But perhaps this was simply a further self-deception" (97). Naturally, claiming to have changed is by no means an acceptable argument in denying responsibility. In fact, according to Jean Starobinski, it is precisely the constant presence of the personal pronoun 'I' that obliges for "permanent responsibility," while the changing self is characterised with the help of "*verbal* and *attributive* elements" (qtd. in Kermode, "Memory" 291). Consequently, Tony Webster must take responsibility for his past actions and cease to live in self-deception – even more so

because, as expressed by Barnes in an interview, there is no moving on without overcoming self-deception (Wachtel).

4.2   Self-Evaluation

Based on the above, autobiographical texts tend to be created in a way that is pleasing for the person reviewing his/her own life, primarily in the form of idealisation and the presentation of achievements, but also in a heavily edited form that often serves the justification of past actions. Remembering, then, is coloured by the urge to look upon one's life as meaningful and successful – hence, evaluation is integral to life-narratives. As for the types of evaluation inherent in life-narratives, Craig R. Barclay has created a system for the analysis of coherent biographical narratives. As described by Barclay, there are *progressive*, *regressive*, and *stable narratives*: a *progressive narrative* begins with a negative emotion or evaluation and arrives at a positive emotion or evaluation; a *regressive narrative* starts with positive evaluation and ends in a negative tone; and evidently, a *stable narrative* presents no change in evaluation (Barclay 102). In the case of Barnesian self-narrators, as it will be demonstrated, there is no simple progressive narration, as their self-evaluation is frequently unsettled by conflicts with the versions of fellow characters.

First of all, life-narratives are often evaluated and re-evaluated so that various versions come into being. In this manner, Christopher Lloyd produces lists of his achievements such as the following one:

> If you came and inventoried me, I'd have ticks in all the appropriate boxes. I'm surprised how well camouflaged I seem. Age: Thirty / Married: Yes / Children: One / Job: One / House: Yes / With mortgage: Yes / (Rock solid so far) / Car: Arguable / Jury Service: Once, finding accused not guilty after long discussion of 'reasonable doubt' / Pets: No, because they mess up / Foreign holidays: Yes / Prospects: Bloody better be / Happiness: Oh, yes; and if not now, then never. (Barnes, *M* 159)

As can be seen, Christopher reasserts the indicators of adulthood they were looking forward to as teenagers, highlighting material possessions, financial stability and considerable independence. In this respect, his narrative can be seen as a progressive one, because having reached these goals evokes a sense of pride in Christopher. However, the presentation of settling down with a wife and children in his own house as something to be proud of indicates a shift in his way of thinking: by now, suburban permanence is seen as favourable instead of mediocre and boring. While this list is produced with an inventory in mind, different moods call for other categories. For instance, lying in bed next to his wife evokes "Healthy, white, British, recently made love, not poor, not deformed, not starving, not hounded by religion, not more paranoid by nerves or emotions" (159). Here, as Christopher himself points out, "the list slopes off into negatives," resulting in an evaluation focusing on abstract issues, along with attributes based on luck or education, rather than an enumeration of concrete achievements he has worked for, in accordance with the more emotional mindset (159).

Another "comforting list" made by Christopher deals with the reasons why he married Marion – in this case, however, the primary aim of the list is to provide reassurance about a past decision. After listing a few obvious reasons such as "Because I loved her" and "Because she was (is) sensible, intelligent, pretty," he concludes "Because I have said that I love her, and there is no turning back. No cynicism is intended . . . Marriage moves you further away from the examination of truth, not nearer to it. No cynicism is intended there either" (Barnes, *M* 169-170). As making such a list in itself can be seen as cynical towards marriage and sceptical about the certainty needed for the vow, Christopher's comments on cynicism cannot be taken seriously. It is especially with hindsight that the reader realises Christopher's need for proving himself right in his decision: he is subsequently confronted by Toni regarding his faithfulness and his dedication to make do with one woman for the rest of his life. In addition, he encounters rather explicit temptation on behalf of a twenty-something woman and turns her

down, yet cannot help but discuss the issue with his wife. Manifestly, the previously undisturbed progressive narrative is now unsettled and reinforcement is needed.

In addition to Christopher's lists, all three parts of *Metroland* are ended with a chapter entitled "Object Relations", offering reflections on and evaluation of the preceding section of Christopher's life. At the end of the first part, Christopher presents his most vivid memory of his adolescence: he recalls sitting in his old room surrounded by his possessions. Though he demonstrates a considerable degree of nostalgia regarding little details he still remembers, he also claims "The whole room is full of things I don't have" and "It is all to come," recalling his adolescent thirst for growing up and capital-L Life (81). This way, Part One can be seen as a stable narrative, presenting a consistent image of adolescent waiting. Part Two ends with and evaluation of the time Christopher spent in Paris: "worked on my thesis . . . fell in love, had my heart chipped; improved my French . . . met my wife" (153). As Christopher deems his stay to be a successful period of time, this is a progressive narrative. However, he adds "If I'd read that before leaving England, I'd have been . . . Scared, impressed, yet also, perhaps, a little disappointed . . . maybe I'd set off with even grander expectations," illustrating that once one becomes aware of having the ability to reach something, it begins to seem less distant and less of a challenge (153). Whether he still considers these achievements to be noteworthy is left in suspense, consequently, this segment of his narrative is not purely progressive. Finally, though Part Three begins with Christopher's list of achievements mentioned above, the evaluation at the end of the section is launched by Toni's condemnation upon seeing the vegetable patch in Christopher's garden: "So this is it?" (211) Christopher reacts thus: "why let someone else cut in on your self-reproaches?" and "Saturday afternoons, as I track the lawnmower carefully . . . don't think I can't still quote Mallarmé" (211). The fact that this question induces anger and defensiveness in Christopher indicates his awareness of the discrepancy between their shared youthful plans and what his life eventually turned out to be

like. As a result, his positive evaluation is unsettled and he feels the need again to justify his decisions by claiming "I'd call myself a happy man" (Barnes, *M* 212) – according to Merritt Moseley, this happiness arises partly from Christopher's "willingness to settle" (Moseley 30). Yet, despite having a job and a home of his own and being surrounded by his family, some degree of disillusionment can be found in his final remarks: while his youth is described as "everything seemed more open to analogy, to metaphor, than it does now. There were more meanings, more interpretations, a greater variety of available truths. There was more symbolism. Things contained more," his present attitude is that "there's no point in trying to thrust false significances onto things," that is, no point in searching for hidden meanings (13; 214). Apparently, this is a somewhat regressive narrative, especially regarding the ending: "The lamp snaps off, and I am left with a lozenge-shaped blue-green after-image. I continue to stare; it diminishes, and then, in its turn, and in its quieter way, snaps of" (214). This can be read as symbolic of the loss of a youthful, imaginative self, the continued staring indicating a degree of passivity, questioning the possibility of change in the future. Having Christopher's future thus laid out in front of him is suggested already by the title: *Metroland* is where the story begins, as well as where it ends, there is no way out.

As for *The Sense of an Ending*, in contrast with Christopher's youthful determination to be satisfied and optimistic, Tony Webster produces more of an ironic, detached evaluation of his life. In Part One, not forced yet to rewrite his version, Tony enumerates his achievements: his jobs, his marriage with Margaret (though ended by a divorce), their daughter Susie, their grandchildren, and his retired life spent in his flat with his possessions, still having "drinking pals" and "women friends – platonic, of course," being member of "the local history society," and running the library at the hospital (Barnes, *SE* 55-56). Then he adds "at least I shall know my way around the hospital when my turn comes" and "And that's a life, isn't it? Some achievements and some disappointments . . . I survived" (56). Though

seemingly keeping an ironic distance from his life-narrative, Tony, as any other autobiographer, is preoccupied with creating a coherent, pleasing narrative, as it has already been demonstrated. Therefore, it is of no surprise that upon meeting Veronica for the first time after decades, he tells him the story of his life in "The version I tell myself, the account that stands up" (116). By manipulating his narratives, Tony does not only deceive himself as mentioned above, but he also deceives other people. For example, "when I first met Margaret . . . I wrote Veronica out of my life story" and when he eventually admits that part of his life to Margaret, he makes himself "sound more of a dupe and Veronica more unstable than she'd been" (69; 74-75).

It is in Part Two, when confronted with other people's narratives, that Tony repeatedly has to modify his view of the past and re-evaluate his life and actions. As elaborated above, the past presented from Veronica's perspective forces Tony to face what he has been repressing. When finding out about the truth, many of his previous accounts are changed. The memories described in Part One are dealt with again and again in Part Two and are presented in various versions based on each new piece of information revealed by Veronica. Hence, his initially critical presentation of his relationship with Veronica and the visit to her parents' house is transformed into a more positive presentation accompanied by the acknowledgement of his own mistakes, no longer blaming Veronica exclusively. Similarly, while he at first imagines Adrian's suicide as an idealised and idolised act based on philosophical considerations, induced by "mental and philosophical courage," to take command of his own life, he later comes to realise that Adrian's suicide resembles that of their fellow student Robson, motivated by getting his girlfriend pregnant an being "unable to face the consequences" (Barnes, *SE* 88; 140). Conspicuously, these are considerable changes to his previously upheld life-narrative.

While confronting the truth about the past and himself, Tony's self-evaluation is completely undermined, resulting in a dramatically regressive narrative. By the end, Tony Webster concludes "there is unrest. There is great unrest" (Barnes, *SE* 150). Unrest in terms of the definition of his identity, as well as a lack of a coherent life-narrative, and a daunting lack of a chance for change in the future, accompanied by an unsettling ending to the novel. As expressed by Peter Brooks, all plots are aimed at reaching an ending, as "The desire of the text (the desire of reading)" is "desire for the end" (qtd. in Kermode, "Forgetting" 309). It is the discrepancy between this desire and the lack of a proper – if not comforting than at least finite and well-defined – ending that results in considerable unrest on behalf of Tony himself, as well as the reader. In this respect, it is important to note the dual meaning of the title *The Sense of an Ending*. On the one hand, 'sense' means a sensation, and so the title can be read referring to a feeling of an approaching ending, in accordance with Tony being an elderly man, looking back on his life, seeming to have lost any chance for improvement. On the other hand, when 'sense' is understood as a synonym of point, meaning, or reason, one is left with the question of what sense an ending could have with respect to Tony's life or the novel itself – based on the above, any proper ending would ease the unrest of the finishing note. However, the gloomy ending is not necessarily the result of the characteristically postmodern phenomena of the reluctance to offer a comforting ending, or the character's passivity and pessimism that; instead, it is precisely Tony's collapsed life-narrative and his lack of a coherent view of himself that cannot provide sufficient foundation for a future perspective.

4.3   Past, Present, and Future

In addition to the self-evaluative motive, the subjective treatment of memories occurs for other reasons as well. As life stories are oriented towards future plans and goals, the past is always viewed from the present in relation to the future, so that memories are retrieved in a way that the self currently working towards the future may make use of them (McAdams

194). As we have just seen, the future can be seen as problematic in *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending* – the former presents an all too predictable future, whereas the latter shows the absence of the future. Instead of using the future as a reference point, in these cases, it is with respect to the unfolding story that certain memories are chosen and are presented in particular ways. This can be discussed in the context of the four types of coherence identified by Habermas and Bluck as characterising conventional storytelling and life-narratives, namely, *temporal*, *biographical*, *causal*, and *thematic coherence* (McAdams 192). The need for a *biographical coherence* is presented both by Christopher and Tony, as they attempt to provide a coherent account of their lives, while *thematic coherence* can be observed in their choice of images and themes to be included in their narratives. Tony Webster occasionally dismisses elements of his past as irrelevant with respect to the aspects of his life discussed in the novel: "Annie was part of my story, but not of this story" and his current female acquaintances are "not part of the story either" (Barnes, *SE* 46; 55). Eventually, it is with hindsight, in relation to Part Two, that the significance of the memories presented in Part One becomes conspicuous. Similarly, the repetition of central themes and images demonstrate how carefully constructed *Metroland* is, too. Both novels are permeated with recurring images and overarching themes, thereby conforming to Frank Kermode's definition of autobiographical writing. Accordingly, writers of autobiographies wish to "achieve some measure or simulacrum of closure, and thus a substitute timelessness" – however, based on Nabokov's "artful autobiography" carefully constructed along the lines of repetition, "the true purpose of autobiography" should be the finding of such thematic repetitions in one's life story, in line with Habermas and Bluck's concept of thematic coherence (Kermode, "Memory" 296-297).

It is during a process of subjective selection, interpretation, and attributing significance that the particular themes and memories to be used are chosen by Tony and Christopher. As a result, certain memories are highlighted as self-defining memories, whereas

others are labelled as insignificant, or get completely forgotten (McAdams 196). Self-defining memories are described by Singer and Salovey as "vivid, affectively charged, repetitive, linked to one another memories . . . related to and important unresolved theme or enduring concern" (qtd. in McAdams 195). Interestingly, the hierarchical system of memories based on importance is in constant alteration, too: what previously seemed significant might become irrelevant, and vice versa, induced by retroactive experiencing (i.e., when a thing sensed, but not experienced or attended to, subsequently comes to light) (Crites 161). It is such self-defining memories that make up the backbone of *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending*, with the fluctuation of the hierarchy of memories characterising primarily the latter.

Christopher's self-defining memories include his conversations with Toni Barbarowski, the first occasion he was sirred, typical schoolday memories, family dinners, his first time to live as an adult in Paris, losing his virginity, and the like. He presents parts of the past considered irrelevant with respect to his identity formation as follows: the civil unrest in Paris, 1968 is described as "I can't, to be honest, remember even a smudge of smoke in the sky . . . Neither can I remember the newspaper headlines of the time; I suppose the papers went on as usual – I might have remembered if they'd stopped" (Barnes, *M* 86). On the other hand, Tony recalls experiences such as history and English classes, his relationship with Veronica and his formative friendship with Adrian. However, as also observed by Caroline Stott, no description is given in *Metroland* of such rather fundamental events as Christopher's wedding and becoming a father (Stott 118). Similarly, Tony in *The Sense of an Ending* provides no detailed account of his marriage to Margaret or the growing up of their daughter Susie. According to Stott, Barnes thus "deconstructs conventional biographical elements and thus questions their value," a technique also applied in *Flaubert's Parrot* (118). Alternatively, the unique construction of these fictional autobiographies can be seen as supporting he

particular segments of Christopher and Tony's life that are presented, and serving thematic coherence as discussed above.

In accordance with the vivid nature of self-defining memories, both novels provide extremely detailed accounts of past events, including conversations, then current moods, and the recreation of circumstances and impressions of the time. Both Christopher and Tony's self-defining memories are presented in the form of distinct scenes with slide-like changes between them, illustrating the haziness of unimportant parts, with meditative parts on time, death, life, history, and love, as well as metafictional reflections on narration and remembering inserted among them. The thus fragmented narrative is roughly linear in the case of *Metroland*, with the occasional comments coming from the current self indicating in interplay between past and present. However, *The Sense of and Ending* offers a non-linear narrative with frequent jumps in time, flashbacks and flashforwards. Or, to use Gérard Genette's terms related to *order*, they are *analepses*, i.e., instances of "evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" and *prolepses*, i.e., instances of "narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later" (Genette 40). Part One in *The Sense of an Ending* covers Tony's past with comments of the current self (similarly to *Metroland*), while Part Two focuses on his present constantly broken by flashbacks, returns to memories already narrated in Part One, as well as new ones. Moreover, at the very beginning of the novel, six images are listed, which – though they belong to Tony's past – are prolepses from the perspective of the actual narrative and from the point of view of the reader as well. These images frequently reoccur throughout the novel and by appearing at the very end as well, this time as analepses, they provide the story with a framework. As it is predominantly through narratives that human beings comprehend and measure time, it is of great importance to examine narratives as embedded in time, especially when they depict a process of remembering. In addition to the temporally disrupted

structure of the narratives described above, it is revealing to observe the special time-experience that accommodates self-defining memories: these detailed accounts are embedded in a special, subjectively constructed timeframe coloured by personal perception, described by Tony as follows: in contrast with "everyday time, which clocks and watches assure us passes regularly" there exist another kind of time, "some emotions speed it up, others slow it down" and "occasionally, it seems to go missing" (Barnes, *SE* 3). This distinction between subjective and objective time is known to have been first proposed by Henri Bergson. In his terms, 'pure duration', or subjective time, is related to one's inner life; it is "uninterrupted transition, multiplicity without divisibility and succession without separation" (Bergson 205). This inner, unfolding time is not measurable, as opposed to unfolded time, which is measurable "through the intermediary of motion" and space (209). It is in such a temporal setting that self-defining memories are presented, whereas objective time is applied in the narration of everyday events of the present.

Though both narratives are regressive in terms of evaluation, only Tony Webster's recollection is characterised by the repetition and revision of self-defining memories, which are, however, not typical of *Metroland*, due to the differing narrators. As described by McAdams, it is in midlife years that a concern with the end of one's life story emerges, accompanied by 'generativity' – an urge to provide for the subsequent generation, to give back to society, and to leave something behind – and hope for a satisfying and good ending (194). Interestingly, when faced with this approaching ending, people show a tendency to reconsider and revise their life stories with respect to the ending (McAdams 194). Tony Webster's recollection is highly motivated by such reasons: he wishes his relationship with his daughter Susie was more fruitful and looks back on his life searching for meaning and coherence. Christopher Lloyd, being thirty years old, naturally does not present such preoccupations yet. However, he displays an immense fear of death as a youngster – an

extraordinary feature at that age, not matching the rite of passage described by McAdams. Nevertheless, as Christopher has a somewhat more definite sense of himself and he is confessedly happy and successful for the time being, he does not feel the need to keep revising his life. In contrast, Tony is an elderly man typically in the age of re-evaluating and revising one's life in the face of an approaching ending. Additionally, as discussed above, he has just lost the coherent narrative of his life and most of his human connections, including Margaret's support when she says "Tony, you're on your own now" (Barnes, *SE* 106). Clearly, then, the temporally more disrupted and fragmented, often revised narrative of Tony Webster is an authentic representation of this character's position in life and his view of his own situation.

Conclusion

As can be seen the oeuvre of the contemporary English novelist and leading figure of postmodernism, Julian Barnes has been in a prolific interaction with postmodernist concerns such as the inaccessibility of the past, the imperfection of memory, and the subjectivity of history writing. His novels *England, England* and *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* provide a critique of the traditional grand narratives of culture and history, whereas his interest in individual life stories and personal testimonies is manifested in his two fictional autobiographies Metroland and The Sense of an Ending.

Illustrating the postmodern turn towards little narratives, Julian Barnes's novels *Metroland* and *The Sense of and Ending* each present the narrative identity formation and the self-narrative of a fictional autobiographer with respect to parallel and contrasting versions provided by other characters. Both narratives are permeated with characteristically postmodern phenomena related to the deficiencies of memory, the subjective nature of remembering, and the interplay between self-narratives and the outside world. Amidst the

postmodern questioning of the accessibility of truth and the past, it is through a narrative reading of the narrative minds of postmodern narrators that such narratives can be truly comprehended. Thus, it is using the concepts of narrative psychology that the unreliable and unsettling Barnesian narratives of *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending* can be coherently interpreted, relying on the mimetic circle described by Jerome Bruner as "Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative" (qtd. in László 3), along with the assumption that as long as we are all narrative animals – the author, the narrator, all the characters, as well as all the readers – and belong to the species 'homo narrans', there is always a degree of narrativity facilitating comprehension.

As demonstrated in the present thesis, the narrative processes of remembering presented in Julian Barnes's *Metroland* and *The Sense of an Ending* reflect a number of psychological phenomena, legitimising an analysis based on narrative psychology. Accordingly, one can find in these novels a number of key aspects typical to narrative remembering, including ways of coping with the imperfection of memory, facing the gap between the narrating and the narrated self, overcoming self-deception, and searching for corroboration in the form of witnesses and pieces of documentation. These phenomena of psychological nature inevitably affect the structure of the narratives in focus: non-linearity and the frequent jumps in time are motivated by the autobiographers' need for revision and self-evaluation; fragmentedness and the insertion of meditative sections illustrate the true nature of remembering, the highlighting of self-defining memories and the haze in between. Finally, bearing in mind the particular aims of the narrators Christopher Llyod and Tony Webster, a coherent, less unsettling reading of these postmodern novels can be reached, so that despite the fragmentary nature of remembering and in time, there emerges a thematic coherence in these Barnesian self-narratives built on images and themes overarching them in their entirety.

Relying on narrative psychological analysis as a fruitful approach to postmodernist fiction, it is apparent that certain general attitudes to postmodernism need to be reconsidered. As discussed at the beginning, Linda Hutcheon's idea that postmodernism celebrates the multiplicity of truths is refuted not only by Julian Barnes, but also by other leading contemporary novelists such as Margaret Atwood, Ian McEwan, and John Banville – authors whose aim is still to find objective, singular truth. Moreover, as ubiquitously advocated by cognitivist researchers of forgetting, the natural state of the human mind is to forget and anything remembered is seen as extraordinary. Hence, the imperfections of memory might not need to be so harshly criticised. Last but not least, based on the above analysis, it becomes clear that the fragmentation and unreliability postmodernism is often accused of is in actual fact built on psychological phenomena that shape human narrativity. Therefore, as opposed to earlier, strictly linear, straightforwardly structured, and seemingly reliable life-narratives, it is undoubtedly postmodernist fiction that is capable of providing an authentic representation of human narrativity and remembering, inviting a reconsideration of the by now traditional distrust towards postmodernist fiction.

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