Memory and History in Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending: A Postmodern Perspective*

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Abstract

Studies in literary criticism that interpret Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending*, raise questions about validity and formation of memory, history and individual identity. The study shows how Barnes exploits present-day writing styles such as the unreliable narrator, non-linear storytelling and meta-fiction to raise a question about the reliability of the memory. Through exploring the protagonist Tony Webster's inner quest and his agony of recalling the past, researchers disclose a hidden message that the novel conveys the idea. The results disclose Barens' project on this common characteristic of postmodern fiction where reality is constructed, the fracture of the self and the failure of the great traditions. This research suggests that *The Sense of an Ending* reflects our postmodern conduction, the human inclination to uncertainty through (are history and memory genres?).

Keywords: Julian Barnes, *The Sense of an Ending*, Postmodern literature، Memory, History, Unreliable narrator

الذاكرة والتاريخ في "الإحساس بالنهاية" لجوليان بارنز: منظور ما بعد الحداثة

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المستخلص :

تثير الدراسات النقدية لرواية "الإحساس بالنهاية" لجوليان بارنز، وهي رواية بارزة في أدب ما بعد الحداثة، تساؤلات حول صحة وتكوين الذاكرة والتاريخ والهوية الفردية. باستخدام دراسة شاملة لخطة السرد المحددة والعناصر الموضوعية، توضح الدراسة كيف يستغل بارنز أساليب الكتابة الحالية مثل الراوي غير الموثوق به، والسرد متعدد الخطوط، والخيال الوصفي لإثارة سؤال حول موثوقية الذاكرة وقدرة الموضوع على الفهم التاريخي. من خلال استكشاف السعي الداخلي لبطل الرواية توني ويبستر ومعاناته في تذكر الماضي، يكشف الباحثون عن رسالة مخفية مفادها أن الرواية تنقل فكرة كون الإنسان إنسانًا من خلال التغيير في هوية الفرد وتأثير الماضي على إدراك المرء الحالي لذاته. تكشف النتائج عن مشروع بارنز حول هذه الخاصية المشتركة لرواية ما بعد الحداثة حيث يتم بناء الواقع، وكسر الذات، وفشل التقاليد العظيمة. تشير هذه الدراسة إلى أن "الإحساس بالنهاية" يعكس حالتنا ما بعد الحداثة، مع التركيز على ميل الإنسان إلى عدم اليقين من خلال أنواع التاريخ والذاكرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جوليان بارنز، "الإحساس بالنهاية"، أدب ما بعد الحداثة، الذاكرة، التاريخ، الهوية الشخصية، البنية السردية، الراوي غير الموثوق

1. Introduction

In Julian Barnes' critically praised novel, *The Sense of an Ending*, a reader is offered an opportunity to take a journey into a world of deep thinking interwoven with issues about memory, history, and the building identity through the Lens of postmodernism. This novel, which made Barnes win the Man Booker Prize in 2011 and become part of the postmodern literary heritage, is a questionable approach to the authenticity of memory, subjectivity of historical events, and the nature of the truth itself. The story's narration is done through the protagonist, Tony Webster, while Barnes alternates between different modes and styles, exposing the unreliable nature of the narrator. It is a story about the events, and it equally compels the reader to think about the unwitting narrator.

The Sense of an Ending narrates the story with a non-linear plot, a typical feature of postmodern literature; dismantling the linear nature of the storytelling system intends to reflect human memory and consciousness in their fractured states. However, the narrator skillfully uses this trick to make the readers party to the club and encourage them to debate the veracity of Tony's memories and, by extension, how history is created. The investigation of these subjects comprises the novel, which is also furthered by the unreliable narrator, thus making it more challenging to discover the truth and reflect the subjectivity of story writing.

Historical relativism is the topic that Adrian Finn's character reminds us of in the novel. He kindly refers to history as a specific narrative operated by objective "grand narratives." Thus, we have history, whether objective or subjective, fictional or non-fictional. He manages to incorporate the essential elements of postmodernism theory into the very tissue of the novel, so not only does the novel become a deeper in terms of its inner theme, but it also places it within the field of postmodernism.

In addition, Barnes' narration of metafictional elements when the novel cogitates on its status as a work of fiction also testifies to the postmodern inclination to differentiate between the incoherent world of fiction and the substantial reality. By taking Tony through self-discovery, the novel encourages the readers to reflect deeply on the importance of narratives and storytelling, as they are pivotal in refining our perceptions of self and others and sharpening the collective memory of our past.

2. Theoretical Framework
2.1 Characteristic of Postmodern Literature
2.1.1 Overview of Postmodernism

In the middle of the 20th century, this literary movement was born. During

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the postmodern period in literature, a radical shift took place; it resembles the concept of modernism and presents multilayer narration with a paradoxical understanding of identity. It provided an outlook for a world increasingly applauding the "grand ideas" and vague ideals that had been the structure of art and society before. While postmodern literature is differentiated by complex mode of expression, it comprises a diversity of traits, especially a reasonable disbelief in universal, straightforward narratives, fragmentation, intertextuality, irony, and interactive playing with genres and styles. Those features accomplish not only the role of a standpoint on the modernity of authorship, which is related to originality and coherence, but also convey the idea of complexity, which is the feature of present life (Malpas, 2004).

In addition to the applicability of skepticism, postmodern literature includes another distinctive characteristic expressed through its critique of so-called grand narratives, which are supposed to be those big stories or plotlines that show reflect historical events and cultural phenomena. The skeptics are presented in the works of Jean-François Lyotard's "The Postmodern Condition," where he argues that the "grand narrative" age comes to an end and is replaced by the small and energized "language games." Literature can be viewed as a reflection of this through the stories that do not allow a single interpretation but tell multiple truths from different perspectives. The novel by Julian Barnes, is one of the prime examples and of such nature where the memory becomes the central theme of the story and the subjective nature is another thing that is central to the theme of the novel, and both of them challenge the desire to have a single and cohesive story (Woods, 1999).

The other feature of postmodernism that has to be measured is the aspect of fragmentation; it may be in the structure that a narrative holds or in the manner in which characters are portrayed. Novels such as *Gravity's Rainbow*, written by Thomas Pynchon, and *Infinite Jest*, penned by David Foster Wallace, are typical examples of works using broken chronologies, disjointed perspectives, and a mosaic of final poetry and other genres. This fragmentation reflects the postmodern view of identity and reality as inherently complex, multifaceted, and resistant to simplification (Fokkema, 1991).

Intertextuality is the relationship between texts and how texts reference and interact with each other—This is also central to postmodern literature. It underscores the belief that all cultural expressions are interconnected and that meaning is generated through the interaction of texts rather than existing independently. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* exemplifies intertextuality through its allusions to Islamic texts, mixed with elements of magical realism, thereby creating a narrative that exists in dialogue with

multiple traditions and discourses (Kundu, 2008).

Moreover, postmodern works often incorporate pastiche and parody, blending high and low cultural references to challenge traditional distinctions between genres. Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* combines elements of science fiction with historical fiction and autobiography, creating a novel that defies easy categorization. This multifarious approach reflects postmodern logic, which cannot be reduced to the idea of art purity and claims that at its place, the blend is a new creative process (Hutcheon, 2019).

2.1.2 Characteristics of Postmodern literature: Narrative techniques, Scepticism, and Metafiction

Various essential structural techniques and an overwhelming mistrust of the traditional notion of a story and beliefs characterize postmodern writing. It often uses metafiction to pose questions concerning the readers' role. Whether using unreliable narrators or multiple perspectives, these qualities of a psychological thriller surpass the readers' expectations and force them to contemplate the existence of the truth along with the ideas behind the narrative itself, as presented by Southward (2018).

Postmodern literature stories often involve non-linear plot twists, scattered narratives and a multiplicity of perspectives; these all aim to depict reality's complex and multi-dimensional nature. For example, Julian Barnes creates in *The Sense of an Ending* a narrative where the structure is around the memory that Tony Webster's character has but is unreliable. While this approach causes disruptions to the conventional sequence of storytelling, it invests at the same time in one of the main themes of that piece: this is the nonlinearity of memory and history and how individuals interpret it. The detached nature of the narrative, with the rising and falling between the past and the present again, is similar to the pattern of Tony's life and his efforts to sort it out, thus postmodern skepticism towards the one and complete truth (Turim, 2013).

Postmodern literature is stunningly skeptical about major narratives and taken-for-granted accounts, outright challenging the notion that the sole truth of the world can be successfully fathomed. *The Sense of an Ending* exemplifies this by exploring how personal histories are constructed. Tony's realization that his memory of events is not as accurate or objective as he once believed serves as a critique of the reliability of personal and historical narratives. This skepticism extends to storytelling, suggesting that narratives are inherently subjective and shaped by the narrator's perceptions and biases (Norris, 2000).

Metafiction, a narrative technique that self-consciously addresses the nature of storytelling and the artifice of fiction, is a hallmark of postmodern literature. In Barnes' novel, the reflective and introspective narrative brings attention to remembering and writing as constructs, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. Acknowledging its status as a work of fiction, *The Sense of an Ending* invites readers to consider how stories shape our understanding of the world and ourselves.

2.1.3 Memory, Subjectivity, and Narrative Identity: Theoretical Perspectives on Memory and Its Unreliability.

Memory, subjectivity, and narrative identity are central themes in Barnes' "The Sense of an Ending," exploring the intricate ways in which personal histories are constructed and reconstructed over time. The novel explores the theoretical aspects relating to memory and how it can be unreliable, showing that our memories are built on the interpretation of past events that can give either solid or poor memories and this in turn contributes to the way we see ourselves and the way we understand the world (Ghimire, 2018).

The main character's quest for the objective truth of memory is emblematic of Barnes' protagonist, Tony Webster, who reflects the postmodern doubt of absolute truths. First, Tony considers his past; he embraces that his remembrance is not an exact copy but a reconstitution affected by his current feelings, dreams, and time. This principle ties together the theory that recollection can be obliterated and maltreated, thus confirming that individual personal narrative identity is subjective. The way Tony tries to understand why he fell for Adrian, and his consequent blown-up relationship with Veronica, reminds us that in a matter of life, we are the ones who are writing the final book of our lives through our minds (Dóra, 2014).

Interestingly, the novel expresses the point of having a narrative identity via Tony's looking into events that significantly impact his life. The enactment of memory, for Tony, is the enactment of history's rewriting, which includes a ceaseless process of the life story's coherence negotiation. Here, the reflections represent the debate in the theoretical context on narrative identity, which accentuates the part of storytelling in creating and reforming the self-concept. Memories are recollections based on past events and the specific stories we build to give sense and coherence to our lives (McAdams, 2003).

In the novel, Barnes uses Tony's progression to represent the blurred memory and how this differs from the sum of things in reality influences the comprehension of the past. Tony's past deconstruction is catalysed by his youth letter reveal, and the impact it has on others, inflects his understanding

of himself in this wave of change. This incident likewise reveals that recollections are not solely about the past but also concerning what is going on before and what is happening next.

In the current novel, Barnes urges his readers to look into the trustworthiness of memory, an evolution of our sense of identity, and how our distorted perceptions of the past could prove overwhelming. Memory in *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is highly explored from the different theoretical perspectives on memory, showing how one's own recollections are closely intertwined with the conceptualization of identity via narrative construction.

2.1.4 Narrative identity: The Self-construct in Postmodern literature.

The narrative identity of postmodern writing is a concept that puzzles out the scope in which it-selves are constructed and perceived through the stories. This theme will be touched on in the *Myself* novel by Julian Barnes, where Tony Webster embarks on a soul-searching investigation of his past as he unravels his life through incomprehensible and fading memories. In the case of Barnes' novel, we see that postmodern fiction analyses the construction of the self, bringing to the table the older idea of having a stable and precise identity (Bencheikh, 2020).

The author in the story establishes that identity is not constant but an ongoing process of creation within an individual's lifetime, as Tony mentions his friends, love relationships, and growing age. This parallels the postmodernist reiteration that ourselves is a narrative accomplishment constructed from the storylines we talk about our lives. For him, recollecting is also retelling the story; the past is told with variations of every new understanding and point of view. The novel accentuates that we will never truly understand ourselves because our understanding is constantly in flux, affected by which stories we choose to tell ourselves.

Just as in the case of an unreliable narrator, Barnes utilizes the motif to strengthen the story's narrative identity. By Tony being aware that he has recounted the past events with a kind of inaccuracy and omission, subjectivity and fallibility of memory get highlighted. In this respect, postmodernism portrays identity development as a fragmented process that is neither a unitary, natural or a given state. In Tony's case, the result of a letter he wrote as a teenager clarifying the situation makes him doubt his previous events on how he created his own identity through memory narrative and interpretation (Maftei, 2013).

"The Ending of Sense" thus shows the characteristic of postmodern literature, where the self is presented as a narrative construct; hence, the story continually rewrites what we tell about our lives. By portraying Tony Webster's internal journey of self-discovery, Barnes welcomes the readers to think about the abstract qualities of narrative identity, hence performing

another reminder of storytelling as an everlasting act of contacting ourselves. "The novel shows that to comprehend ourselves, we can no longer simply look to the surface and the exacting of others as we must accept that every story is a highly subjective piece of work.

2.1.5 The Unreliable Narrator and Fragmented Self Analysis of the Unreliable narrator as a Postmodern Device

The untrustworthy narrator is one of the main methods of postmodernism as it represents the doubts about the existence of truth and determinacy in the process of narration. This method is lucidly expressed in *The Sense of an Ending,* where Tony Webster architecturally presents the unreliable narrator who pilots readers through the story, which is about an erroneous memory as much as the acts themselves. With the help of Tony's narration, Barnes depicts the shattered self in postmodernism, which is the central idea in postmodern literature as it reflects the complex nature of individual identity, contradictions, and conflicts.

Through Tony Webster's narration of his youth, his associations with his schoolmates, and his friendship with Adrian Finn, we encounter his story's lack of reliability from the beginning. Heads up, readers: Good memory is not a straight line but is composed of pieces of subjective pictures, which immediately knocks down its reliability. Postmodern literature is utterly concerned with the story limits and the subjective character of reality. As Tony tries to regain the lost parts of his memory, the impression of being a person with a fragmented self is revealed, mainly because it is the combination of fragmented parts that can be altered and self-interpreted (Holmes, 2015).

The novel's structure likewise reflects the subject of a broken self since it moves in time and gets overshadowed by the past that occurs through Tony's unstable recollection. That is where the deconstruction results in complexity, which is a postmodern strategy where a life story is woven together. Barnes utilizes Tony as an unreliable narrator to get deep into philosophical inquiries on how one gets meaning from one's life experiences and how these memories will inevitably be a distorted zeitgeist of the past (Bencheikh, 2011).

Furthermore, the revelation of Adrian's diary's contents and the truth about his relationship with Veronica and her family challenges Tony's understanding of his own history. This demonstrates the profound impact of the unreliable narrator not only on the story's events but also on the reader's perception of those events. This revelation forces Tony, and consequently, the reader, to reconsider the narrative until this point, showcasing the postmodern critique of objective truth and the reliability of narratives.

Barnes' use of the unreliable narrator in *The Sense of an Ending* is a powerful exploration of the fragmented self, offering a narrative that is as much about the storytelling process as it is about the story itself. Through Tony's flawed recollections and the narrative's structure, the novel engages with postmodern themes of ambiguity, subjectivity, and the construction of identity, inviting readers to question the very nature of truth and the reliability of the narratives we construct to make sense of our lives (Yili, 2022).

2.1.6 Fragmentation of Identity in Postmodern Characters

The main topic of modern literature is identity deconstruction and doubt about the postmodernist era having a single profound and indivisible soul. A case in point is Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending*, which is based on Tony Webster as the main character, and his experience that imbues us with an understanding of the complex nature of identity as a multidimensional reality. By having Tony express his convictions about his past and revealing specific memories gradually, the author aims to depict the splintery and composed notions of individualities, which suggests the probability that people may not have a static and unchangeable sense of identity (Han, 2019).

Tony's anguishing over the conflict between his present self-concept and Svetlana's memory puzzles out the disintegration of his identity. Trying to make out his family connections and choices, Tony is forced to conjure up envisioning of inconsistent holes in his life. It only shows that his identity is not a solid being but a mosaic of his misunderstandings, passing shots, and past views. However, the development was more pronounced in his fluctuating sentiments towards Adrian Finn and Veronica Ford. As he connects the dots of the key figures in his life, his understanding changes him as it further shows the shapeshifter of his self-perception and the impact memory plays on the construction of us as individuals (Wilson, 2005).

The novel also shows the theme of identity fragmentation via the unreliable narrator motif. Tony's narration is characterized by patchiness, personal prejudices, and frequent revisions of the past, a thread that shows that identity is a story that we invent and keep changing. Consequently, the story does not necessarily have to follow any chronological order; instead, it emphasizes the fragmented nature of the narrative with the help of memory snapshots and subjects' interpretations.

Barnes introduces the style of the novel as one of the ways of bringing the message of disunity to life. The story does not follow a linear timeline but moves between different phases of Tony's life. Just as in real life, memories and a sense of identity are tasked by the non-linear sequence of events. The structural choice often brings out through the ideas that, in the postmodern

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view, ' identity' is 'the reshaped product of our experiences and memories' (George, 2015).

3. Comparative studies of *The Sense of an Ending* with Other Works Featuring Unreliable Narrators

Julian Barnes' highly acclaimed novel *The Sense of an Ending* features a complex theme of the imperfect memory and the fallibility of narrators. Many other pieces of art allude to this idea in unique ways. By Tony Webster's retelling through his spectacles that are often rethinking his experience, Barnes brings forward a story with the nuances of human memory to establish his history. In this analysis, the author finds this exploration applies to other bestsellers beyond Moralistic pansophy, such as "Lolita" by Vladimir Nabokov and "Fight Club" by Chuck Palahniuk, where this unreliable narration serves as a pivotal element in the storytelling process (Zane, 2010).

In "Lolita," Nabokov reveals the story of Humbert, a narrator whose story of his obsession with a young Dolores Haze and his excuses and unusual words troubles the reader. According to Tony Webster's experiences, Hubert's narrative is a composite of misshapen memories and distorted desire. However, his narrative often attempts to garner some empathy; even worse, it justifies the meaning of his actions. The narrators exhibit the errors in recalling the memory and how one may be able to easily slant it to align with their personal biases or interests. In contrast to that, however, where Tony's conclusions raise questions about his childhood and the imprecision in memory, Humbert mostly remains beyond reproach, the bleak potential of narrative unreliability being so indicative of the deliberate pursuit of concealing the truth and playing with one's perception (Williamson, 2021).

The "Fight Club" idea is presented from a different angle through the character of the Anonymous Narrator, who becomes the subject of an ambiguous mental state, forming another self-called Tyler Durden. Much like how Tony flashes back to the realities of his history, Tony's identity development is also founded on his erroneous and inadequate understanding of the past. Thus, not only Barnes or Palahniuk resort to the deliberate untrustworthiness of the narrator to plumb the depths of the universal issues of self-awareness, imperfect memory, and truthfulness. Nevertheless, the "Fight Club" goes beyond of limit in this notion. (Woolridge, 2019).

Referring to *The Sense of an Ending* in conjunction with these novels underlines the broad palette of the unreliable narrator as a novelistic tool. Both here, narrators' unreliability is widely used to discover the crux of the matter: the memory, identity, and the role the truth plays in it. Barnes, Nabokov, and Palahniuk twist stories with dark swerves that not only amuse

the readers but also dilemma the readers too, which makes it hard to trust the narrators, and maybe they never understood themselves. Through these comparative studies, it is clear that the unreliable narrator becomes a perfect tool for writers to depict the shredded or even made-up nature of a person's experience in the modern era.

3.1 History and Its Representation in Postmodern Fiction The role of History in Postmodern literature: Then a fictional scene and after a real one

Postmodern literature, in the same way, allows characters to inhabit multiple timelines where once was the past, now turns to be the present, and tomorrow can be the past too. This reflects the skepticism toward the classical, objective view of the past. This technique is undeniably portrayed in Julian Barnes' The *Sense of an Ending*, where the novel begs the question of how dependable reminiscence and absolute historical truth can be. The author comes out with the essential character, Tony Webster, who is used to elaborate that personal history is built and shattered. He asserts that the past is not concrete and depends on facts (Doležel, 2010).

Through the novel, the author demonstrated that history was unstable in its source and depended mainly on the subjective viewpoints of individuals from differing perspectives with imperfect memories. Finn, a learned person from Tony's environment whom Tony looks up to, sets the tone for a critical history analysis by questioning the accepted historical perspective at the beginning of the narrative. According to him, history is just a certainty at the spot where memories are likely to fail due to the insufficiency of official documentation. This viewpoint is crucial to the novel's depiction of history. It signifies that factual history that everybody regards as true is anything but valid, as it is frequently a construct shaped by the faults and limitations of individuals' subjectivity (Zimmerman, 1996).

Even more, Barnes diffuses the category of historical reality by tracking the plot as Tony continually reconsiders the past, adjusting to the new facts. On seeing the novel's protagonist, Tony discovering his parents' diaries and letters decades after the events these writings refer to, the reader is shown how Tony reevaluates his comprehension of critical events in his life. Through doing this it brings alive the understanding that history is dynamic, that the perspectives elicit a continual re-write of the story. What the novel depicts is precisely what postmodernism means: instead of history as the linear objective record of events, there are gaps, contradictions, and different reinterpretations.

The Sense of an Ending throws into the postmodern dogma of history, as it considers the past as a disputed field where fact and fiction intersect. This individualized perspective becomes central to the reader when they go through how the past is written, ultimately animating the distinction between

historical fact and narrative fiction. The postmodern motif of history found in the novel concurs with a broader postmodern congest regarding the slipping nature of truth and the constructive nature of the narration, whether fictional or historical, which further indicates the complexity of the relationship between history and its representation in postmodern fiction.

3.2 Julian Barnes' Approach to history in *The Sense of an Ending*

Through Julian Barnes' artful prose, he manages to fully dissect the notion of history, combining the personal with the philosophical toward the fact-value dichotomy and subjective character of historical accounting. Barnes explores history with a fine, witty distaste, bringing forth a new definition dimension into how memory and archetypes are created, personal and communal.

At the core of this assessment by Barnes lies the protagonist, Tony Webster, ventures whose tour de force transformation grows to be a vehicle for investigating the slippery nature of historical realities. Tony's recollections of his early years, including his affections for school friends and his first love, as a short metaphor for a more general history, talking about how it can be recorded and later reminded. The novel subtly suggests that history, much like memory, is susceptible to biases, misinterpretations, and revisions, challenging the notion of an objective historical record (Howard, 2007).

Barnes cleverly uses the character of Adrian Finn to articulate a sophisticated view of history. Adrian, perceived by Tony and their peers as intellectually superior, offers a critical perspective on history, arguing that it is a narrative shaped by the victors and coloured by the biases of those who write it. This reflects a postmodern scepticism towards grand narratives and the possibility of accessing an unmediated past. Adrian's tragic end and the mysterious circumstances surrounding it further complicate the narrative, weaving a personal history that is fraught with ambiguity and unresolved questions (Woods, 1999).

The discovery of a letter Tony wrote in his youth and the revelation of its consequences years later epitomizes Barnes' approach to history as something that is never fully knowable or fixed. The letter, a documentary evidence, forces Tony to revaluate his understanding of past events, highlighting the gap between the historical record and the subjective interpretation of that record. This moment underscores the postmodern assertion that history is a construct influenced by the present as much as it attempts to represent the past (Guignery, 2006).

The Sense of an Ending also engages with the theme of historical

responsibility, questioning to what extent individuals are shaped by their histories and to what extent they can shape those histories in return. Through Tony's introspective journey, Barnes suggests that personal history is a narrative we continuously write and rewrite, influenced by our current knowledge, emotions, and biases(Bencheikh,2020).

3.3 Julian Barnes and Postmodern Literary Tradition Julian Barnes within the context of postmodern literature.

Through his novel *The Sense of an Ending*, Julian Barnes positions himself as a quintessential postmodern author, weaving together themes, narrative techniques, and philosophical inquiries characteristic of postmodern literature. His exploration of memory, history, and the unreliability of narrative aligns with the postmodern literary tradition, which often focuses on the subjective nature of reality and the limitations of language to capture truth fully (van Rens, 2020).

The Sense of an Ending exemplifies postmodern narrative techniques through its structure and storytelling approach. Barnes uses the non-linearity of the plot, a distinctive feature of postmodernism. The main character of the story – Tony Webster – opens his mind to the past by doing it in his reflections. This method disturbs the standard sequence of tale-telling, thus shifting the focus from the chronological progression to the memory and identity as a fragmented and constructed notion. This method of narration, along with Tony's flawed memory, illustrates the postmodern essence of impalpable truths and, thus, forces the reader to question the singular truth itself (Ho, 2021).

Similarly, Barnes' novel focuses mainly on themes of history and how it can be represented – a topic that is pivotal to postmodernism. The aspect of presenting history not as a list of neutral facts but instead as an interpretation is subject to debate is re-echoed in the scholar's postmodern view of the meta-narratives and grand narratives, which is found in the works of theorists such as Jean-François Lyotard. The role of Adrian Finn in conveying these thoughts, raising the debate about historical truth and the historian's point of view as the presenter, is highly significant. This doubt is throughout the story, as Tony realizes that history is more flexible and less specific than he had realized. It is made up of a multitude of interpretations of events (Young, 2011).

The author's use of metafictional techniques, such as those depicted in "The Sense of the End," reaffirms him as among the masters of the postmodern genre. The novel is reflective of its own storytelling process. It highlights the recursiveness of narration building. This introspection of the author urges readers to think through the endowment powers of the author and the

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reader as narrative actors, a focal point in postmodern fiction (Chihaya, 2013).

Finally, the author's investigation of concepts such as identity formation, truth as an elusive entity, and the temporal dimension's flexibility is built into the central tenets of postmodernism philosophy. As an exploration of how people write their life stories and how memory influences those narratives, this postmodern theme of the novel especially relates to postmodern theories on the identity and the world of reality.

3.4 Thematic and stylistic comparisons of Barnes' work with other postmodern authors

The common themes and aesthetic features shared by Julian Barnes' work *The Sense of An Ending* and other postmodern authors make this tale a story that is suitable for comparative analysis. Through this analysis of Barnes in the context of writers such as Thomas Pynchon, David Foster Wallace, and Margaret Atwood, we can generate a more comprehensive understanding of the stylistic details of postmodern literature and its themes like untrustworthiness of narration, fragmentation of individuality, and subjective perspectives of truth and history (Wintersgill, 2020).

Whether it be the postmodern framework of Thomas Pynchon's novel "The Crying of Lot 49" which reveals the preoccupation of postmodernism with the search for meaning in the complex and chaotic reality of the world teeming with the paranoid conspiracies, or whatever it is, the notion of postmodernism itself, there is a need for newer literary and theoretical bases. Such as in Pynchon's style, Barnes used fragmented tales with the premise of attaining objective knowledge but interpreted it in the context of paranoia and multiplicity of representations. Both storytellers use their narratives to rebut the tenability of the conclusiveness of the truth. However, Pynchon's story clearly dives into the mistakes and achievements of this quest, focusing on the other elements of societal involvement (Senior, 2017).

David Foster Wallace's "Infinite Jest" shares a deep concern with personal history and the subjective nature of experience with Barnes' novel. Wallace's sprawling narrative and extensive footnotes reflect a stylistic experimentation that parallels Barnes' more restrained but equally effective use of the unreliable narrator. Both authors delve into the complexities of human relationships and the search for authenticity. However, Wallace's work is marked by a hyperawareness of the media-saturated culture of late capitalism,

adding a layer of critique that is less pronounced in Barnes' more introspective narrative (Russell, 2019; Senior,2017).

Margaret Atwood, particularly in "The Blind Assassin," also explores themes of memory and narrative unreliability, using stories within stories to complicate the reader's understanding of truth. Like Barnes, Atwood is interested in how narratives are constructed and intersect with personal and historical realities. However, Atwood's work often emphasizes the gendered dimensions of storytelling and power, providing a critical lens through which to view the construction of narrative that is less central in Barnes' exploration of these themes.

Stylistically, Barnes' "The Sense of an Ending" is distinguished by its concise, reflective prose and its focus on the protagonist's internal life. This contrasts with the more expansive, digressive styles of Pynchon and Wallace, who use their narratives to map a broader societal landscape. However, like Atwood, Barnes employs a more focused narrative lens, delving deeply into the psychology of his characters and the intricacies of their personal histories.

Table (1)

In-depth Analysis of Memory and History in the novel

Theme/Aspect	Description	Example from the Novel
Memory's Subjectivity and Unreliability	The novel highlights how personal memories are influenced by the individual's current emotions and subsequent experiences, underscoring the unreliability of memory.	Tony reflects on his past and recognizes his memories, especially of relationships with Adrian Finn and Veronica, might not be as accurate as he once thought.
Reconstruction of the Past	Explores how individuals often reshape their memories to fit their current understanding, showing the past as a narrative constructed by the present.	The revelation about Adrian's diary and its contents forces Tony to reassess his past actions and their motivations, leading to a changed understanding of events.
History's Fluidity and	Challenges the notion of	Adrian's views on history,

Interpretation	history as a fixed narrative, presenting it as fluid and subject to interpretation, thereby questioning historical objectivity.	arguing it is the certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation, exemplify this theme.
Impact of Memory and History on Identity	The narrative suggests that individual identity is shaped through the stories we tell about our past, highlighting the role of memory and history in constructing our sense of self.	As Tony confronts the truths of his past, he undergoes a revaluation of his identity, acknowledging how his remembered history has shaped who he is.

Stylistic Element	**Description**	**Example from the Novel**
Narrative Structure	Utilizes a non-linear narrative to reflect the themes of memory and history, mirroring the fragmented and non-chronological nature of memory.	The shifting timelines in Tony's recounting of his life story, moving between past and present, convey the disjointed and revisited nature of memory.
Use of the Unreliable Narrator	Tony's narrative demonstrates the use of the unreliable narrator, a technique that emphasizes the subjective nature of memory and history.	Tony's admission of memory's fallibility and the subsequent questioning of his own narrative reliability serve to engage readers in a dialogue about truth and perception.

Table (2)

The quest for objective truth versus subjective interpretation in the narrative

Theme	**Description**	**Example from Novel**
Quest for Objective Truth	The pursuit of an unchanging, factual understanding of past events.	Tony's initial belief in a singular, objective version of his past, particularly regarding his relationships with Adrian and Veronica.

Subjective Interpretation	The realization that personal perspectives and emotions color our understanding of truth.	Tony's acknowledgment that his memory of events is influenced by his current feelings and incomplete information.
Memory's Role	Examining how memory contributes to the subjective interpretation of truth.	The revelation of the diary and letter reshapes Tony's understanding of Adrian's actions and motivations, illustrating how new information can challenge our perceived truths.
History's Construction	The narrative's exploration of history as a narrative constructed by individuals.	Adrian's philosophical insights on history, arguing that it is the certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation.
Identity and Narrative	How the quest for truth impacts the protagonist's sense of self.	Tony's journey through the novel, which leads him to question and reassess his past and identity, showing how our narrative constructions of truth shape who we are.
Ambiguity and Uncertainty	The acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty in understanding the past.	The novel's conclusion, which leaves readers with more questions than answers, exemplifying the postmodern acceptance of ambiguity and the limitations of knowing objective truth.

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This organized analysis highlights the main question that deals with the search for the objective truth and the indispensable subjectivity in *The Sense of an Ending*. Barnes' novel addresses this theme sinking into it, using the protagonist's reflective journey in order to illustrate the complexities of memory, history, and personal narration construction.

Table (3)

Theme of memory and history in the novel

Example	Theme	Explanation
Tony's realization that his memory is fallible	Subjectivity of Memory	Demonstrates how personal history is influenced by current perceptions, underscoring memory's unreliability and subjectivity.
The non-linear narrative structure	Fragmentation	Reflects the fragmented nature of memory and identity, challenging traditional linear storytelling.
Adrian Finn's philosophical views on history	Scepticism Towards Grand Narratives	Showcases scepticism towards universal truths, emphasizing history's subjective interpretation.
The revelation about Adrian's relationship with Veronica	Unreliable Narration	Highlights the unreliable narrator theme, questioning the truthfulness of Tony's narrative and his understanding of past events.
The letter Tony writes in his youth	Ambiguity	Illustrates the theme of ambiguity, as the letter's consequences are not fully understood until much later, challenging the notion of clear-cut truths.

The role of the diary in uncovering the past	Metafiction	Uses a narrative device within the story to explore the act of storytelling itself, revealing the constructed nature of narratives.
Tony's changing perceptions of his friends	Constructed Identities	Shows how identities are narrative constructions, subject to change as new information comes to light.
The dispute over the interpretation of historical events	Relativity of Truth	Examines how different characters have varied interpretations of the same events, highlighting the relativity of truth.
The fragmented presentation of Tony's life story	Non-Linear Narrative	Demonstrates postmodern narrative techniques, disrupting the chronological flow to mimic the disjointed nature of memory.
Tony's reflection on his own biases	Self-Referentiality	Acknowledges the narrative's own construct, inviting readers to reflect on the storytelling process.
The impact of new information on Tony's understanding of his past	Revision of History	Shows how new information can lead to a revaluation of the past, a common postmodern theme of history's malleability.
The emphasis on how narratives are constructed	Metafictional Commentary	The novel comments on its own storytelling, exploring the boundaries between fiction and reality.

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Adrian's suicide and its multiple interpretations	Ambiguity and Multiplicity of Meaning	Reflects postmodernism's embrace of ambiguity and the idea that events can have multiple meanings.
The novel's open-ended conclusion	Indeterminacy	Leaves readers with questions rather than answers, exemplifying postmodern literature's resistance to closure.
Tony's acknowledgment of his narrative's fallibility	Reflexivity	Tony's awareness of his own unreliability as a narrator encourages readers to question the nature of narrative truth.

4. Discussion

Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* encompasses all the features of postmodern literature, putting his point of view as a theme of memory, history, and subjectivity of the human experience in detail. This novel helps to achieve its objective of transforming the reader to a postmodern belief through its skepticism of the veracity of claims for a single, presupposed truth by using an unreliable narrator, Tony Webster. In our research, we cover how Barnes shows the slippery character of memory, thereby affecting the person's recognition and perception of wars. These ideas are shown like how these topics influence exploring postmodernism in literature.

The promptness of his narrative form, symbolized by non-chronological storytelling and broken narrative, supports the postmodern thematic concern that interprets the opposite pole of history and questions the reliability of historical accounts. Tony Webster's journey of auto-analysis and a re-examination of his past, incited by getting a diary, signifies a post-modernist understanding of reality that history is not a world that exists by itself but the opinions of individuals. The match points to the main result of our research, which insists that it is about memory, which is influenced by the construction process; therefore, truth and reality are not seen as separate.

Besides that, how the book puts a shoulder to long-term memory as a selective and constructive trait reveals its subjectivity basis as well. As Tony has concluded that his memories are biased and reasonably incomplete, this situation serves as the covered criticism of modernism for the ideals of Reason and objective knowledge rooted in Enlightenment. The primary

tools for Barnes's philosophical exploration in this novel are the "truth," "memory," and the self. For instance, the narrator has insights that are understandable to contemporary readers about the complexity of such concepts.

The comparative analysis within our research also underscores the novel's contribution to postmodern literature's broader themes, such as the interrogation of meta-narratives and the blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality. By embedding a story within a story and acknowledging the act of storytelling, *The Sense of an Ending* exemplifies the metafictional technique often employed in postmodern works, further complicating the reader's quest for truth.

5. Conclusion

Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending* is a masterful exploration of the complexities of memory, the nature of history, and the construction of identity through the postmodern lens. The novel's intricate narrative structure, characterized by non-linear storytelling and the use of an unreliable narrator, serves not only as a reflection of the fragmented nature of human memory but also as a commentary on the fluidity and subjectivity inherent in recounting history. Tony Webster's character development is an instrument Barnes provides in order to take readers through a minefield of present and past, fact and perception intricately. The author twists the story until readers doubt what they know. The multi-faceted treatment of the dream-like opacity of truth, the fallibility of memory, and the revision of personal history in the novel are proof of the agelessness of stream-of-consciousness themes and the role of introspection in literature today.

Whereas *The Sense of an Ending* will be the most important witness of Julian Barnes's capacity in mixing innovative narration with high level philosophical instigations. The book enlarges the postmodern literary corpus and provides an insightful analysis of human nature, a subject worth considering as we regard the influences our memories and histories can exercise in our lives. The constructed nature of the story and the inherently unstable memory Barnes draws extensively from, make it possible for us to gain more profound insights into the subjective, evolving ways of our intersections with life. So, the book shows that literature entails an immense power – the power to make us understand the complexity of personal experience. In this way, the book beautifully illustrates the story to discuss how our existential life makes sense to us.

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