

The Sense of an Ending: A Postmodern Challenge of Truth

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Received: October 24, 2022

Accepted: November 24, 2022

Online Published: November 24, 2022

doi:10.5430/wjel.v13n1p62

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v13n1p62>

Abstract

Throughout the history, one of the interests of humankind has always been to search for what reality/truth is, how they are formed, and how they can be tested, and has thus become a matter of debate among scholars from different fields of study such as sociology, psychology, history and literature. As this is the case, the very latest approach put forward and encapsulated by postmodernists as a claim, which is also supported by new historicists, that reality/truth is formed through or feeds on memory and can never be limited to one unchangeable fact is treated as the core of this research and study to shed light on the essence of reality/truth from a literary point of view (Bradley, 2011, p. 387). The essence of this claim lies in the fact that it is quite personal and versatile and is formed through myriad ways of interpretation from different aspects that are liable to change on different contexts (Lansdown, 2017, p.38). In this regard, Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), written in the form of 'vollendungsroman', meets his readers as a direct response to postmodernists' and the new historicists' claim about the reliability and accessibility of the reality/truth that there's no pure truth. Drawing his character Tony Webster in such a realist way who is trapped in his present due to his unreliable memories from his past, Barnes enables his readers to test the reliability and attainability of the reality/truth based on memory and to come to a striking realisation that there can never be objective reality/truth based on memories. To crown it all, reality/truth based on memories can even have potential for misguiding one in his/her present or future deeds in the wrong way just like the protagonist Tony Webster.

Keywords: postmodernism, reality, unreliability, history, memory

1. Introduction

First seen the lights of the day in Leicester, England on January 19, 1946 in a family of teachers of French, Julian Barnes, in full Julian Patrick Barnes, - sometimes under pseudonyms Edward Pygge and Dan Kavanagh, holds his own as one of the most celebrated contemporary postmodern English novelists and essayists. Holding the idea that "In order to write, you have to convince yourself that it's a new departure for you and not only a new departure for you but for the entire history of the novel" (Stout, 1992, p. 68), Barnes wrote many experimental novels, for which he was thought that he would fail but he proved otherwise (Holmes, 2009, p. 12), such as *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *Staring at the Sun* (1986), *The Porcupine* (1992), *England, England* (1998), *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), *The Noise of Time* (2016) and his latest novel *The Only Story* (2018). The literary success of Barnes is evidenced by several awards he received such as 'Somerset Maugham Award' in 1981, 'Gutenberg Prize' in 1987. He was also shortlisted for the 'Man Booker Prize' three times before he finally succeeded with his 2011 novel *The Sense of an Ending*, which was later followed by *The Noise of Time* (2016) and *The Only Story* (2018) (Ousby, 2003, p. 65).

The Sense of an Ending is presented in two parts that are entitled as 'One' and 'Two' through the narration of Tony Webster, whose belief is revealed as "an instinct for self-preservation" as a retired lonely old man, embracing four significant events throughout the novel: (1) The visit of Tony paid Veronica's family, (2) Tony's breakup with Veronica, (3) Veronica's consequent involvement with Adrian, and (4) Adrian's act of committing suicide (Barnes, 2011, p. 42, p. 64, p. 131). The first part depicts the atmosphere of the 60s with an insight into Tony Webster's viewpoint regarding the world at the time of his adolescence. It starts with a series of recollections of the narrator Tony Webster's high school days. Tony Webster introduces the reader Adrian Finn as his new friend together with his other two friends Alex and Colin. Of his friends, the more interesting one is revealed as Adrian Finn, who takes attention of the class as a very bright, well-read, and highly sophisticated student. It is especially after Adrian's discussion with Professor Hunt that attracts the boys, and they decide to include him in their "book-hungry, sex-hungry, meritocratic, anarchistic" group (Barnes, 2011, p. 10). One of the shocking experience Tony cannot forget in his life is, no doubt, the death of one of his friends Robson, who is thought to have committed suicide simply because his girlfriend became pregnant. Within flow of his memories, Tony also remembers his girlfriend Veronica Ford, - a short girl who hated Webster's taste in music but admired his taste in books, and his meeting with her family. However, this relationship lasts quite short and they eventually break up. In his final year at university Tony learns that Adrian has a relationship with Veronica. After some time, Tony also learns that Adrian has committed suicide. The second part of the novel is about Tony Webster's present life when he is in his mid-sixties. He meets the reader with his deep thoughts about his memoirs as in the first part. In this part, he reveals that he divorced from his second wife Margaret, has a daughter Susie and a grandson - the son of Sussie. It starts with a letter from Mrs. Sarah Ford that informs Tony that Veronica's mother has bequeathed him £500 and two documents, one of which is still with Veronica and the

latter one is from Adrian's diary. Wondering how Veronica's mother had it, Tony decides to get in contact with Veronica to get the whole diary. He sends Veronica many e-mails to give him the diary, but Veronica decides to send Tony only a single page of it that reads all about the musing habits of Adrian on life. One day, they meet again, and Veronica gives Tony the letter that he himself sent to Adrian in his youth. Reading the letter, Tony wonders how he wrote such an unkind and cruel letter, which eventually shocks him to the core. Again, one day Tony persuades Veronica to meet with a hope to get the complete diary from Veronica. When they meet, Tony happens to see some mentally handicapped men escorted by their caretakers. Trapped in the full grip of interest, Tony revisits the same pub to have a chance to see one of the handicapped men. The minute he sees him, Tony suddenly remembers Adrian upon noticing the similarity of the man's face with Adrian's. He e-mails Veronica soon after to apologise for his mistake that he didn't realise that she and Adrian had a son. Veronica only responds with the reply "You just don't get it, do you? But then you never did." (Barnes, 2011, p. 100). After his revisiting the pub where he sees the man, Tony learns that Adrian is the father and Sarah Ford, Veronica's mother, is the mother of this mentally ill child. Once he regains most of his memories, he starts to consider his need to come to terms with his past and their consequences: "There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest" (Barnes, 2011, p. 150).

2. Method

Characterised by scepticism, subjectivism and based on the general suspicion of truth by showing an increased sensitivity to the role of ideology in its asserting and maintaining economic and political power, the term 'postmodernism' developed after the Second World War and still holds its own. It was especially after the world witnessed the "effects on western morale of the First World War which were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of the total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of overpopulation" that it today came to be questioning life and reality/truth in a distinctive way (Abrams & Harpham, 2012, p. 227). As an "amorphous" term, postmodernism today is associated with such disciplines as literature, social sciences, art, music, architecture, philosophy and technology by putting a strong emphasis on the breakaway from the traditionally accepted entities, for which the cause is uttered by Hutcheon's that "it seems reasonable to say that the postmodern's initial concern is to de-naturalize some of the dominant features of our way of life; to point out that those entities that we unthinkingly experience as 'natural' (they might even include capitalism, patriarchy, liberal humanism) are in fact 'cultural'; made by us, not given to us" (Hutcheon, 2007, p. 12-13).

As this was the case within the socio-cultural context, literature has also undergone a dramatic change in terms of form and content. As postmodernism is referred to as a "movement within contemporary literature and criticism which calls into the claims of literature and art to truth and human value" by Bradbury (1990, p. 219), it is the postmodern literary text that enables the reader to test the validity of truth/reality that has been formed by either tradition or culture before. In this regard, postmodernists reject the very idea that literature is a reliable source of universal truths believing that there are neither universal truths nor a constant, measurable reality, but realities concerning the fact that "truth is rather created than discovered" (Rorty, 2009, p. 53). This has simply resulted from the idea that the world human beings live in is nothing than chaos, and this chaos cannot be defined by any single formula (Fuchs, 1992, p. 106). In such contexts, writers have also started to evaluate and define what history, memory and the truth are. As this is the case, to show their challenge of reality/truth and the relationship between history and memory, they use several different ways of questioning both validity of truth and reality by questioning the "traditional methods of representation, narrative construction, verisimilitude and historical truth" through certain use of literary techniques, such as "unreliable narrators, multiple frames for the narrative, stylistic transformations, mixtures of magical and realistic events, and parodies of earlier literary and historical works" (Malpas, 2010, p. 101). This is where the postmodern challenge of reality/truth lies and makes its reader enjoy the text by solving the knot(s) as Bran Nicol (2009) states:

Postmodern fiction presents its readers with a challenge: instead of enjoying it passively, they have to work to understand it, to question their own responses, and to examine their views about what fiction and reality are. Yet accepting this challenge is what makes postmodern writing so pleasurable to read and rewarding to study. (p. 1)

Likewise, in an interview with Jeffrey Brown about *Sense of an Ending*, titled as "Conversation: Julian Barnes, Winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize," Barnes expounds what the motive behind him to have him pen this novel was, as follows:

I wanted to write a book about time and memory, about what time does to memory, how it changes it, and what memory does to time. It's also a book about discovering at a certain point in your life that some key things that you've always believed were wrong. This is something that I started thinking about a few years ago, and it's probably one of the preoccupations that you have as you age. You have your own memories of life, you've got the story that you tell mainly to yourself about what your life has been. Something happens, someone reports something from 20 or 30 years ago, and you realize that what you'd believed is not the case. So, I wanted to write about that. (PBS News Hour, 2011)

Beyond being a postmodern text dealing with the postmodern challenge of the truth based on the interrelationship between memory and history, *The Sense of an Ending* also responds to the literary gerontology with its concern for the experiences of an ageing man – Tony Webster, of which the main benefit traced by academic, and some professional communities is clarified best by Ruth and Kenyon (1996), as follows:

The way people perceive their lives is of vital importance, not only as a means of exploring the aging process, but also as a guideline for social policy and the delivery of care in an aging society. ... an understanding of the phenomenon of growing older can only be fully shaped through an investigation of personal meanings of aging, which are expressed in metaphors,

images, and life stories.” (p. 2).

With a new insight into experiences of humanity, some contemporary writers have felt duty bound to delve into the lives and experiences of elderly people, which are the subjects of gerontological studies, thus paving way for the need for new literary genres, such as midlife bildung or ‘midlife progress novel’ (Gullette, 1988, p. xii), ‘reifungsroman’(Waxman, 1990, p. 183), and ‘vollendungsroman’ or ‘the novel of completion or winding up’, which was suggested by Constance Rooke to limit the scope into “the first phase of the life cycle (childhood and youth) as a preparation for life in society,” thus bringing one’s experiences in his/her last phase to the foreground (1992, p. 245). When all these are evaluated, *The Sense of an Ending* reveals itself as a pure example of vollendungsroman in view of an old man deeply concerned with his later life based on his memories.

Written in a realist tradition, Julian Barnes’s *Sense of an Ending* is a novel that reflects the distorted memories of the first-person narrator Tony Webster who is stressed in the novel as an old man who tries hard to come to terms with his past. By basing his novel on the first-person narrator that is equal to unreliable narrator, Barnes, in a way, takes attention to his attempt that is to test the reliability of truth/reality memories offer through his narrator’s quest for his personal history through his memories. As is also the case with Julian Barnes that is clear throughout his novel, memory takes a crucial role for one to write his/her personal history in the way he/she wants by either adding some imaginary events that has never been witnessed or eliminating those that sound quite tragic. This is the point that the accuracy and the reliability of memory are considered a matter of debate for psychologists, historians, and literary scholars that cannot be concluded. Therefore, the narrative becomes ambiguous, and distrustful, as the reliability is blurred (Balkaya, 2019, p. 134). In its narrowest meaning, memory is what enable one to recollect experiences, past events or places. In this sense, Fleming defines it as “the faculty of the mind by which information is encoded, stored and retrieved” (2019, p. 91) while Bradley puts forwards the idea that it is a kind of story telling based on different contexts as he clarifies further that “[m]emory can be active storytelling, individual reflection, or shared silence surrounding mutual encounters. Memory allows our current state to be contextualized, and it provides a launching place for new experiences” (2012, p.21). Although it serves as a recollection of past events that are recorded in literary narratives in the form of diaries, documents, autobiographies and novels, memory cannot be regarded as a simple recording of the past, present reality or the history but “a deliberate piercing-together of retrieved information and other relevant information in an effort to make sense of the past” (Gallo, 2006, p. 13). It should be considered that memories are not reliable accounts of an event simply because they are produced by individual(s) consciously and unconsciously that can more possibly undergo significant change through “transience, absent-mindedness, blocking, misattribution, suggestibility, bias and persistence” all of which are called as ‘the seven sins of memory’ by Daniel L. Schacter (2011, p. 4). Furthermore, it should not be disregarded that memory also includes a series of events that are constructed, and this is where its relationship with history starts, as Oakes and Hyman stresses: “What people remember will be constructed from remaining materials and from general schematic knowledge structures....The fact that memory is constructed also means that history is constructed” (2000, p. 62). As is clear, it can be suggested that either individual history or the traditional history turns out to be unreliable accounts of events that feed on the fallible nature of memory (Balkaya, 2020, pp. 61-62).

In memory-telling or writing, one significant and concrete fact is the quality of the narrator as an unreliable one, who narrates his/her personal history from his/her point of view and reveals that what they tell is nothing rather than “a mixture of knowledge, lies, self-deception, delusion and plain error” (Currie, 2010, p. 67). For an unreliable narrator, what Holman et al. suggest is quite noteworthy with his suggestion of him/her as “a narrator or viewpoint character who may be in error in his or her understanding or report of things and who thus leaves readers without the guides essential for making judgments about the character and the actions with any confidence that their conclusions are those intended by the author” (2010, p. 182). Except for centring on the issue of unreliable narrator, *The Sense of an Ending* has also much to do with ‘self-deception’, which is for Marcus “an unstable mental phenomenon” that results from a desire to both reveal and conceal the truth at the very same time (Marcus, 2016, p. 129). That’s why a self-deceptive narrator oftentimes relates their stories in an enigmatic and inconsistent way, which is the very case with Tony Webster throughout the novel as a character who forms a narrative identity by first acknowledging the past actions then disavowing all to the past self and coming then to the very present, thus reflecting a process of narrating which leads to changes in self-knowledge and self-image (Vaughan, 2007, pp. 399-400). Armed with all these, it can well be put that an unreliable narrator is certainly equal to what a self-deceptive narrator is. This is because both converge on the fact that they do not clearly reveal the truth but offer a present recollection of past as a distorted story “as internally consistent and natural as possible, and as closely confirming as possible to the evident facts” (Fingarette, 1969, p. 49). As the postmodernist authors emphasise the fictionality and plurality of truth, an unreliable narrator meets them as a prerequisite for them as an appropriate tool in their attempt to make the truth in its own right a story that the narrator and the reader are both made to believe.

In the light cast by these profound and precise summation, this paper aims to depict the postmodern challenge of truth and the concept of reality based on the memory in Julian Barnes’s novel *Sense of an Ending* through the ageing first-person narrator’s quest for the truth in his personal history with a claim that there is no single unchangeable truth but many that are liable to change, as is reflected in the fictional character Tony Webster’s life.

3. Discussion

Beginning his narration by listing several events that he came across during his sixty years, Tony tries to discover the truth which is lost in his past without any concrete proof. Right from the very first line in the first part of the novel, he begins his narration by saying that “I remember, in no particular order:” and goes on to describe such images like “a shiny inner wrist, a river, a steam rising from a wet sink ...” that he remembers and ends the paragraph by saying: “This last isn’t something I actually saw, but what you end up remembering isn’t

always the same as what you have witnessed” (Barnes, 2011, p. 3). This is quite non-traditional beginning of a novel when compared to a traditional novel – a point that qualifies the text as a postmodern in this regard. He returns to his adolescence and youth and underlines that he cannot remember either any incident or any emotion related to the events in the past. He thinks about time and the emotions that he could not understand clearly at all: “Some emotions speed it up, others slow it down; occasionally, it seems to go missing – until the eventual point when it really does go missing, never to return” (Barnes, 2011, p. 3). It is after these several musings that he decides to begin his narration with a disclaimer: “I need to return briefly to a few incidents that have grown into anecdotes, to some approximate memories which time has deformed into certainty. If I can’t be sure of the actual events anymore, I can at least be true to the impressions those facts left. That’s the best I can manage” (Barnes, 2011, p. 4). As is clear, Tony reminds his difficulty in narrating his personal past through his present memories from the beginning that will last to the very end. He always wants his reader to be aware of the unreliability of his narration based on his distorted memory as he stresses once again in the second part of the novel while musing on his past: “What had begun as a determination to obtain property bequeathed to me had morphed into something much larger, something which bore on the whole of my life, on time and memory” (Barnes, 2011, p. 130). This is also where he reveals himself as a sincere one who wants to share his memories with the reader.

Barnes also shows his reader the unreliability of memory and the truth through his narrator/character Tony. At first, he believes that Adrian committed suicide as a direct result of Veronica's pregnancy, but it is later revealed through the end of the novel that it has been simply one of his wrong recollections. Tony discovers that there is a baby who is now a middle-aged disabled man living in a nursing home, and that baby was named Adrian after his late friend. However, Adrian - the disabled man, turns out to be the son of Mrs. Sarah Ford - Veronica's mother, and Adrian - Tony's friend. Tony considers him their son depending on the assumption that he is the fruit of their relationship and keeps it in his memory up until he learns the reality. This fallible nature of Tony's memories is also seen in the scene where Veronica gives Tony the letter he wrote to Adrian in his youth: “I reread this letter several times. I could scarcely deny its authorship or its ugliness. All I could plead was that I had been its author then but was not its author now. Indeed, I didn't recognise that part of myself from which the letter came. But perhaps this was simply further self-deception” (Barnes, 2011, p. 97). He completely forgets his letter to show his hatred against the relationship between Veronica and Adrian. He later on understands to what extent it is an unpleasant letter, full of curses that he can't even believe he himself wrote it the minute he reads it: “Dear Adrian – or rather, Dear Adrian and Veronica (hello, Bitch, and welcome to this letter), Well you certainly deserve one another and I wish you much joy. I hope you get so involved that the mutual damage will be permanent. I hope you regret the day I introduced you” (Barnes, 2011, p. 95). When he rereads it several more times, he desperately feels remorse for what he did, as is clear in his utterance: “Imagine the strength of the bite when I reread my words. They seemed like some ancient curse I had forgotten even uttering” (Barnes, 2011, p. 138). This letter seems to be one of the crucial symbols throughout the novel with its reference to his lost memories. The reader can never read or learn anything about this letter till it is revealed by Veronica. Then, the minute it's been revealed, every truth Tony believes in his life shatters and changes the course of his quest for the truth in his personal history. This is clearly stressed by Barnes when Tony muses over life and memory versus reality in such difficult time of him: “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, 2011, p. 95).

In connection with his concern for unreliability and subjectivity of memories, Julian Barnes also touches upon the unattainability of historical truths in his novel in full parallel with the credibility of truth as is questioned by postmodern thinkers, as is clear in Popkewitz's stress that “Postmodernism as represented by Foucault and Derrida, but by also Roland Barthes, raises the possibility that there's no truth at all ... What remains then for them is a text, and the text can be interpreted in many ways” (2001, p. 33). That's why the rejection of historical realism serves as one of the significant themes on which postmodernism feeds itself (Zagorin, 1999, p. 15). As if it were a response to all these, Tony Webster reveals himself as one who questions history throughout the novel that starts at the very beginning of the novel in the scene where the students discuss “the origins of the First World War: specifically, the responsibility of Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassin for starting the whole thing off” (Barnes, 2011, p. 10). Being in the midst of such a discussion, Tony can't find the right answer but focuses on the nature of history and historiography. While he thinks the possibility that the Serbian gunman, whose “name is long gone from my [his] memory”, is the one who started the war, he also thinks other possible historical forces which “had placed the antagonistic nations on an inevitable collision course”:

Others preferred the one hundred percent responsibility of historical forces, which had placed the antagonistic nations on an inevitable collision course: “Europe was a powder keg waiting to blow”, and so on. The more anarchic, like Colin, argued that everything was down to chance, that the world existed in a state of perpetual chaos, and only some primitive storytelling instinct, itself doubtless a hangover from religion, retrospectively imposed meaning on what might or might not have happened. (Barnes, 2011, p. 11)

Through Tony, Barnes put strong emphasis on the fact that history is the pure product of historiography, and therefore it is made open to different interpretations on different contexts. This, in the final analyses, leads to one reality that there is no single truth in the universe. In the same manner, another answer regarding the nature of history rather than this specific event in the history comes from Adrian Finn. For him, what lies in the heart of history is its subjectivity that arises directly from the historiography - the study of the writing of history and of written histories:

It seems to me that there is – was – a chain of individual responsibilities, all of which were necessary, but not so long a chain

that everybody can simply blame everyone else. But of course, my desire to ascribe responsibility might be more a reflection of my own cast of mind than a fair analysis of what happened. That's one of the central problems of history, isn't it, sir? The question of subjective versus objective interpretation, the fact that we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us. (Barnes, 2011, p. 11)

Barnes also underlines the close relationship between documentation and memory in making up the history, which is best put by Adrian Finn: "History is the certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation" (Barnes, 2011, p. 17). Julian Barnes seems to suggest that the 'imperfections' of both memory and history reveal themselves as the transformation of unreliable narratives as he also reflects this fact throughout the novel. He also shows the unreliability and subjectivity of textual documents through his narrator/character Tony Webster. By depicting him as a character who tries to get rid of the documents connected with Veronica, Barnes, in a way, seems to suggest that the existence of any kind of historical documents which the history depend on are utterly null and void as they are liable to be destroyed or manipulated in any possible ways. It is also clearly depicted in the novel that historical truths are unattainable. This is emphasised by Tony's attempts to receive Adrian's diary in the sense that the document serves as a historical document that is about his past truths. Although it is revealed in the novel that this document is inherited to him, he cannot receive it the moment he wants. This diary in the novel serves as a historical document that is about his past truths, but he cannot receive the historical truth regarding him and gives it up at last. Beyond all these, Barnes once more emphasises that any historical document is liable to be interpreted from different aspects through different viewpoints that always change. This is again best depicted in the scene where Tony could not understand anything in the excerpt Veronica gives him when they meet. Although it answers some questions regarding his curiosities about Adrian, Tony cannot exactly understand what it is about up until care worker tells him that Veronica is the sister of Adrian (the disabled one), but not the mother, and Adrian Finn is the father, as is noticed clearly in barman's clarification when Tony wants to learn about the history of Adrian:

Oh – Veronica – yes, I'm sorry. I remember he – Adrian – called her Mary. I suppose that's what she calls herself with him. It's her second name. But I knew her – know her – as Veronica.' Over his shoulder I could see the five of them standing anxiously, still not drinking, watching us. I felt ashamed that my presence bothered them.' If you were a friend of his father's –' 'And his mother's.' 'Then I think you don't understand.' At least he put it differently from others. 'I don't?' 'Mary isn't his mother. Mary's his sister. Adrian's mother died about six months ago. He took it very badly. That's why he's been ... having problems lately.'

However, he cannot learn why Adrian committed suicide and it is never possible to learn it forever. As is all clear, it is clearly noticed that documents are not enough to discover and unearth the past truth within one's personal history, because they are subjective and unreliable.

Throughout the novel, Barnes's use of realist language quite strikes the reader while testing the validity of reality/truth through unreliable narrator, which is one of the concerns of postmodern literature. Although novel centres on various realities and truths that are liable to change in accordance with several incidents taking place, he depicts the characters and incidents through a realistic language. This is especially noticeable in the scene where Tony describes his ex-girlfriend Veronica's physical appearance and his present situation:

My girlfriend was called Veronica Mary Elizabeth Ford, information (by which I mean her middle names) it took me two months to extract. She was reading Spanish, she liked poetry, and her father was a civil servant. About five foot two with rounded, muscular calves, mid-brown hair to her shoulders, blue-grey eyes behind blue-framed spectacles, and a quick yet withholding smile. I thought she was nice.

I'm retired now. I have my flat with my possessions. I keep up with a few drinking pals, and have some women friends – platonic, of course. (And they're not part of the story either.) I'm a member of the local history society, though less excited than some about what metal detectors unearth. A while ago, I volunteered to run the library at the local hospital; I go round the wards delivering, collecting, recommending. (Barnes, 2011, p. 55)

As can be noticed, especially in the second quotation, Barnes's use of language is quite sincere and realist. When compared with Charles Dickens's realist depiction of his character Pip in his novel *Great Expectations* which is narrated in the same way by first person narration, there seems to be no difference between two writers' use of realistic technique in their narration:

I give Pirrip as my father's family name, on the authority of his tombstone and my sister - Mrs. Joe Gargery, who married the blacksmith. As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. (Dickens, 2002, p. 3)

This is one of the characteristics that distinguish Barnes from other postmodern writers. While reading the novel, one can put himself/herself in the shoes of the narrator Tony Webster easily and come to a verdict that he/she may feel the similar incident in his/her life span. After all, everyone has his/her memories and feels their influence all along his/her life. However, there is a striking difference between Julian Barnes's use of realism when it is compared with 19th century use of realism. It can be asserted that the realistic technique in 19th century novels, especially in the depiction of a character, is so clear that it gives the reader the real picture of the character as he/she is, but Julian Barnes's use of realistic technique in his depiction of characters is not the same. He does not give the reader any clear information about the characters except for the narrator/character, which is also debatable. This purely lies in his use of realistic technique differently from the 19th century realist novelists in that he aims to draw a character that goes parallel with his aim of testing the truth by

depicting the subjective/personal understanding or interpretation of what the reality/truth can turn out to be.

Last but not least, Barnes's choice of his title as '*The Sense of an Ending*' has much to do with Frank Kermode's *The Sense of an Ending* (1967) in full respect of both its plot and its message in two distinct ways as can be approached by centring on (1) "the ways we try to make sense of our lives" (Kermode, 2000, p. 3) and "what is true about fiction is also true in real life" as McAdams interprets and adds that "the sense of an ending functions to shape how stories unfold and how characters' lives develop in good fiction":

Similar processes may prevail in real human lives as an expression of the art of personality development. Outside the pages of literary fiction, real people imagine how their lives will end up, and those projections for the future feedback to colour the way people see the present and understand the past. For everyday autobiographical authors like you and me, who I am in the present and who I was in the past are shaped in my own mind by how I believe things will end for me in the future. (2018, p. 304)

This is best depicted in one of the final scenes where Tony Webster comes to full epiphany when he analyses his life and present time that fluctuates somewhere between subjective or imaginary and real:

You get towards the end of life – no, not life itself, but of something else: the end of any likelihood of change in that life. You are allowed a long moment of pause, time enough to ask the question: what else have I done wrong? I thought of a bunch of kids in Trafalgar Square. I thought of a young woman dancing, for once in her life. I thought of what I couldn't know or understand now, of all that couldn't ever be known or understood. I thought of Adrian's definition of history. I thought of his son cramming his face into a shelf of quilted toilet tissue in order to avoid me. I thought of a woman frying eggs in a carefree, slapdash way, untroubled when one of them broke in the pan; then the same woman, later, making a secret, horizontal gesture beneath a sunlit wisteria. And I thought of a cresting wave of water, lit by a moon, rushing past and vanishing upstream, pursued by a band of yelping students whose torchbeams criss-crossed in the dark. There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest. (Barnes, 2011, p. 142)

Both approaches are clearly evidenced by the revelation of Barnes's that the notions of past events are also what make an individual complete, and this is exactly what is put into effect in the character Tony Webster in that his repressed traumatic memories turns out to be mirror that reflect his actual present self. Within the frame of the plot, the title turns out to be signalling both the death of Adrian Finn and one of the friends of the boys, Robson. Moreover, it can also be interpreted that it seems to refer to the imminent death of old Tony Webster who is nostalgically after his personal history. However, in a more general sense, the most significant meaning within the title seems to be hidden in its postmodern sense which stresses on fact that there's no one truth or reality in this chaotic world but many.

4. Conclusion

All in all, Julian Barnes as a prominent and leading figure of postmodern English literature clearly depicts significant concepts of reality/truth in close relationship with memory and history in his 'vollendungsroman' *The Sense of an Ending* within the postmodern understanding of reality, history, and memory. With an old and retired character who is put in dilemma between past and present centred on the review of his life, Barnes both takes attention to complexities when one can face at an old age, and enables the reader to realise not only the distorted reality stored in the memory and its effects on an individual but also how one's reconsideration of past experiences can give new meanings to his/her present life. He proves both the unreliability and unattainability of truth based on memories to the core through his protagonist Tony Webster. He first puts these concepts into question, then tests to make his reader discuss if memory and history reflect the past as it was so that he can come to a striking conclusion in the very end that there is no single truth or reality but many each of which feeds on elusive pieces of memory and subjective accumulation of history received through myriad interpretations that are always liable to change based on different contexts of the narrator. The concern of both approaches - those of postmodernism and new historicism - suggest regarding the reliability of reality/truth that are gained through recollections stored in memory are also evidenced by the revelation of Barnes. While it can well be considered that the recollections of past events are what make an individual complete, it is also these recollections that can bring one to epiphany, as is exactly what the case is with the protagonist Tony Webster whose repressed traumatic memories turn out to be a mirror that reflects his actual present self and the delusion he has had up until the moment he learnt the gospel truth. Within the frame of the plot, the title turns out to be signalling both the death of Adrian Finn and one of the friends of the boys, Robson. Moreover, it can also be interpreted that it seems to refer to the imminent death of old Tony Webster who is nostalgically after his personal history. However, in a more general sense, the most significant meaning within the title seems to be hidden in its postmodern sense which clearly puts stress on the fact that there is not one tangible truth or reality in this chaotic world but many that can be inferred from different viewpoints on different contexts.

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