Moving Through Time: Exploring Memory in Select Fiction of Julian Barnes

Thesis submitted to University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English Language and Literature

by

SEEMA K.V

under the supervision of

Dr. DIVYA N.

Assistant Professor and Research Guide

Post Graduate and Research Department of English

Sree Kerala Varma College Thrissur

Affiliated to the University of Calicut

2025

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled **Moving Through Time: Exploring Memory in Select Fiction of Julian Barnes** submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Language and Literature, is a *bona fide* research work carried out by **Seema K.V**, under my guidance and supervision. Neither the dissertation nor any part of it has been submitted for the award of any degree, diploma or title before.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the work presented in the thesis entitled **Moving Through Time: Exploring Memory in Select Fiction of Julian Barnes** is based on the original work done by me under the guidance of **Dr. Divya N.,** Assistant Professor, PG Department of English and Research Centre of English, Sree Kerala Varma College Thrissur and has not been included in any other thesis submitted previously for the award of any degree. The contents of the thesis have undergone plagiarism check using iThenticate software at C.H.M.K. Library, University of Calicut, and the similarity index found within the permissible limit. I also declare that the thesis is free from AI generated contents.

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This is to certify that the contents of the printed version of the thesis and the electronic copy included in the compact disc are one and the same and that there are no discrepancies between the two copies. As the adjudicators of the thesis did not suggest any changes or corrections, I would like to place on record that no changes were made to the copy that was submitted for evaluation. Submitting here the hardcopy of the thesis. The content of the CD is the same as that of the hard copy.

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Synopsis

This study examines individual memory and its representations across Julian Barnes' five novels, highlighting a crucial yet underexplored aspect of his narrative craft. In these works, memory becomes the primary means through which characters construct, revise, and challenge their identities, while also providing the terrain on which issues of time, truth, and reliability are staged. It functions as a central narrative device that shapes both plot progression and character development. His protagonists pursue a stable sense of self while wrestling with fragmented and often distorted recollections. Across the selected novels, this spectrum of memory forms the structural backbone of the narrative design. The author's sustained interest in the relationship between time and memory is also analysed showing how memory both operates within time and transcends it through acts of reinterpretation. The novels reject linear chronology and uses fragmented and layered temporal structures where past, present, and future intermingle through retrospection and narrative reflection. I also study how different narrative positions affect the representation and reliability of memory. It is also observed that literary techniques like unreliable narration and multi-perspective storytelling foreground the subjective and unstable nature of memory. These narrative devices effectively dramatize and reveal the complex processes of remembering. The research draws upon psychological theories of autobiographical memory, particularly the work of psychologists Alan Baddeley, Anthony Conway and Robyn Fivush to establish a theoretical lens for understanding how Barnes' characters utilize autobiographical memory to develop their sense of identity. This interdisciplinary approach bridges literary analysis with cognitive psychology to provide deeper insights into the mechanisms of memory representation in fiction. Central to this investigation is the exploration of narrative unreliability through the lens of Marie-Laure Ryan's literary possible worlds theory,

a theoretical model that adapts concepts from philosophy to literary analysis. It argues that narrators, shaped by distorted personal memory, construct embedded narrative worlds that deviate from the story's textual actual world. These memory-generated worlds function as parallel or alternative realities, revealing the complex interplay between subjective recollection and perceived truth. Ryan's adaptation of this philosophical model provides the theoretical basis to understand how fictional narratives establish and sustain their own frameworks of truth and credibility, especially in instances where narrators offer contradictory or dubious accounts of events.

<u>സംഗ്രഹം</u>

ഈ പഠനം **ജൂലിയൻ ബാർൻസ്** എഴുതിയ അഞ്ചു നോവലുകളിൽ വ്യക്തികളുടെ സ്മരണയും അതിന്റെ വ്യത്യസ്ത പ്രതിനിധാനങ്ങളും എങ്ങനെ രൂപപ്പെടുന്നു എന്നതിനെക്കുറിച്ചാണ് ശ്രദ്ധ കേന്ദ്രീകരിക്കുന്നത്. അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ കൃതികളിൽ സ്മരണ ഒരു സാധാരണ വിഷയംമാത്രമല്ല; കഥാപാത്രങ്ങൾ അവരുടെ തിരിച്ചറിവ് നിർമ്മിക്കാനും തിരുത്താനും ചോദ്യം ചെയ്യാനും ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്ന പ്രധാന ഉപാധിയാണ്. സമയം, സത്യം, വിശ്വാസ്യത എന്നീ ചോദ്യങ്ങൾ ഉയരുന്ന വേദിയും സ്മരണ തന്നെ ആയി മാറുന്നു.ഈ നോവലുകളിൽ സ്മരണം കഥയുടെ നീക്കം മുതൽ കഥാപാത്രങ്ങളുടെ വളർച്ച വരെയുള്ള എല്ലാ ഘടകങ്ങളെയും സ്വാധീനിക്കുന്ന ഒരു മുഖ്യ ഉപകരണമാകുന്നു. കഥാപാത്രങ്ങൾ പലപ്പോഴും തകർന്നതും വക്രമായതുമായ ഓർമ്മകളിൽ നിന്ന് ഒരു സ്ഥിരതയുള്ള സ്വബോധം കണ്ടെത്താൻ ശ്രമിക്കുന്നു. ഈ വ്യത്യസ്ത തരത്തിലുള്ള സ്മരണാനുഭവങ്ങൾ തന്നെയാണ് നോവലുകളുടെ ശില്പത്തെ ആധികാരികമായി നിർണ്ണയിക്കുന്നത്. സമയം കടന്നുപോകുമ്പോൾ സ്മരണം എങ്ങനെ മാറുന്നു, ആളുകൾ അതിനെ എങ്ങനെ വീണ്ടും വ്യാഖ്യാനിക്കുന്നു, ചിലപ്പോൾ സ്മരണം സമയത്തേക്കാൾ മേൽക്കോയ്മ നേടുന്നു — ഇതെല്ലാം അദ്ദേഹത്തിന്റെ രചനകളിൽ ശക്തമായി കാണാം. നേരിട്ടുള്ള ക്രമപരമായ കഥ പറയലിന് പകരം ഭിന്നിച്ചിട്ടുള്ള സമയപാളികൾ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്ന ഘടനയാണ് കൂടുതലും കാണുന്നത്, അവിടെ യഥാർത്ഥം–ഭാവി പാളികൾ പരസ്പരം കലരുന്നു. വിവിധ നരേറ്റർ സ്ഥാനങ്ങൾ സ്മരണയെ എങ്ങനെ സ്വാധീനിക്കുന്നു എന്നും ഈ പഠനം പരിശോധിക്കുന്നു. വിശ്വാസ്യതയില്ലാത്ത നരേറ്ററുകളും പല കാഴ്ചപ്പാടുകളും ഉപയോഗിക്കുന്ന **കഥന രചനാശൈലി** സ്മരണയുടെ സ്വകാര്യതയും അനിശ്ചിതത്വവും മുന്നോട്ടെടുക്കുന്നു. ഇതിലൂടെ ഓർമ്മ നിർമ്മാണത്തിന്റെ സങ്കീർണ്ണതയും തെറ്റിദ്ധാരണയും വ്യക്തമായി തുറന്നുകാട്ടപ്പെടുന്നു. ഈ പഠനം മനശ്ശാസ്ത്രപരമായ ആത്മകഥാ–സ്മരണാ സിദ്ധാന്തങ്ങളെയും ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്നു. പ്രത്യേകിച്ച് ആലൻ ബാഡ്‌ലി, ആന്റണി കോൺവേ, റോബിൻ ഫിവുഷ് എന്നിവരുടെ ആശയങ്ങൾ ഉപയോഗിച്ച് ബാർൻസ് സൃഷ്ടിച്ച കഥാപാത്രങ്ങൾ എങ്ങനെ സ്മരണയെ ആശ്രയിച്ച് വ്യക്തിത്വം രൂപപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു എന്നത് വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. സാഹിത്യ വിശകലനത്തെയും ബൗദ്ധിക മനശ്ശാസ്ത്രത്തെയും കൂട്ടിച്ചേർക്കുന്ന ഈ സമീപനം സ്മരണയുടെ സാഹിത്യ പ്രതിനിധാനത്തെ കൂടുതൽ ആഴത്തിൽ മനസ്സിലാക്കാൻ സഹായിക്കുന്നു.

ഗവേഷണത്തിന്റെ മറ്റൊരു പ്രധാന ഭാഗം **മാരി-ലോർ റയാൻ** അവതരിപ്പിച്ച literary possible worlds theory ആണ്. ഈ സിദ്ധാന്തപ്രകാരം വ്യക്തിഗത സ്മരണകളാൽ സ്വാധീനിക്കപ്പെട്ട നരേറ്റർ യഥാർത്ഥ കഥാലോകത്തോട് പൊരുത്തപ്പെടാത്ത, താൻ സൃഷ്ടിച്ച 'സ്മരണാ–ലോകങ്ങൾ' അവതരിപ്പിക്കുന്നു. ഈ സമാന്തരമോ വ്യത്യസ്തമോ ആയ ലോകങ്ങൾ സത്യം, ഓർമ്മ, കാഴ്ചപ്പാട് എന്നിവ തമ്മിലുള്ള സങ്കീർണ്ണബന്ധം വെളിപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു. റയന്റെ ആശയങ്ങൾ ഉപയോഗിച്ച് ഈ പഠനം ബാർൻസ് നോവലുകളിൽ ഈ സ്മരണാ–ലോകങ്ങൾ കഥയുടെ വിശ്വാസ്യതയും സത്യത്തിന്റെ സാധ്യതകളും എങ്ങനെ രൂപപ്പെടുത്തുന്നു എന്നതിനെ വിശദീകരിക്കുന്നു.

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Abbreviations Used

BSMM	*Before She Met Me*
TO	*Talking It Over*
LE	*Love Etc.*
SE	*The Sense of an Ending*
OS	*The Only Story*
TAW	Textual Actual World

A Note on Documentation

For documentation, the ninth edition of MLA Handbook is used.

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Geetha miss, my gratitude transcends words. You have been there for me. Always. In knowing that you have my back, I found the courage to move forward.

My family is my source of life and strength. No words of gratitude are enough to thank my parents, whose boundless love and prayers have carried me through every trial. I am who I am because of you. To my sister Simmi**,** my steadfast companion. Thank you for always being there. My little nephew Fatih Zayn deserves special thanks for filling even the most exhausting days of writing with joy and happiness. I owe so much to my brother Deepu, who early on chose to serve in the Indian Air Force to support our family, an act of

selflessness that continues to inspire me. My sincere thanks to Dindi Chechi, my sister-in-law, who was generous enough to offer her home at different times, providing me with the peace and space I needed to write.

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To everyone who has walked this path with me, this work is our shared achievement. I am forever grateful.

Chapter One

Introduction

An important shift occurred in British literary fiction during the final decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. It was characterized by a movement towards postmodern experimentation. Julian Barnes' voice was among the most distinctive voice that emerged during this period. The author's work depicts the transition from traditional narrative forms to more complex modes of storytelling. Barnes is representative of a generation of British writers who through his innovative narrative techniques sought to question the nature of truth, memory and identity. His literary career reflects the major cultural shifts of late twentieth-century Britain. This was the time when established certainties about history and personal narrative became a subject of scrutiny.

Barnes is a lesser-known writer among his contemporaries such as Ian McEwan, Martin Amis, and Salman Rushdie. He was part of a generation of writers who, through their postmodern techniques and experimentation in form, renewed the British novel. He has produced a diverse body of work that range from novels to short stories, essays and literary criticism. His craft is renowned for the versatility in style and intellectual depth, as he continuously experiments with themes and forms, which distinguishes him as one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary British literature. Mira Stout has called Barnes, "the chameleon of British letters" because she examined that he constantly keeps reinventing in each of his works. Barnes has a long standing and deep personal affinity with France as both his parents were French teachers. He is a fluent French speaker and has translated French literature. His characters are often found using French words and phrases. He has also written essays on French culture and French writers from Flaubert to Daudet to Michel Houellebecq find a place in both his fiction and non-fiction. France, in

turn, has embraced Barnes enthusiastically as he is, “one of the best loved English writers in France” (Paris Review). The author was awarded the title of Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres by the French government in 2004 and his works are well received in France.

From detective novels to food writing, Barnes has produced a remarkably varied body of works which is characterized by its diversity in terms of genre, style, and narrative techniques. Richard Brown observes, “this prolific writer’s most successful experiments in literary form can be most closely compared to [those of] his Italian, French, and South American contemporaries” (68). *Letters from London: 1990-95* (1995), which contains his contributions to The New Yorker, marks his debut in non-fiction. It comprises letter-style essays which examine various topics like chess, London’s transportation and the absurdity of politics among other things. Historical fiction is combined with literary criticism in *Flaubert’s Parrot (1984)* to probe the elusive nature of biographical truth. Whereas, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989), is a novel which comprises ten and a half chapters written in the form of thirteen short stories and linked through common characters. He probes the nature of historical truth through the technique called historiographic metafiction in *A History of the World in 10 ½.* There was much debate by critics after the publication of these two novels as to whether they fit into the definition of a novel because both these novels were highly experimental in their form. The British writer Alain de Botton has rightly described him as “an innovator in the form of the novel” (qtd. in Poole 10). However, not all of his readers and critics share this opinion, Michael Levenson doesn’t seem quite impressed when he says, “He has refused to repeat himself, pressing on to innovation, straining to find new ideas for novels. But that’s just the problem, his problem and ours: the chronic restlessness, the itchy need to wear a new look, to speak a new rhythm, to buy new software to adorn the new software (42).

Barnes has been classified as a postmodernist because of his experimentation with narrative techniques and styles. Vanessa Guignery identifies three specific ways in which Barnes's fiction can be classified as postmodernist: 'he both resorts to and subverts realistic strategies; his writing is essentially self-reflexive; and he celebrates the literary past but also considers it with irony' (Fiction 1). Beneath the experimental postmodern surface of Barnes's novels lie ethical and existential concerns. Subjects which are central to humanity like love and its elusiveness, or the search for meaning is a theme in most of his works.

A central motif and theme, in spite of the author's varied approach, consistently thread through his novels and short stories. The search for truth, particularly concerning events of the past, is an area he keeps exploring in his novels. This emphasis with uncovering the truth, even if rarely achieved is a defining feature of Barnes's oeuvre, and, as Peter Childs points out, he is "sometimes considered a postmodernist writer because his fiction rarely either conforms to the model of the realist novel or concerns itself with a scrutiny of consciousness in the manner of modernist writing" (34). His novels employ techniques which include parody, metafictional elements, intrusive narrators and also real people. Barnes however, views each of his works as a distinct new endeavor and rejects the notion of consistent themes linking his novels into a cohesive body of work. He once said in an interview, "I'm deliberately unaware of literary theory. Novels come out of life, not out of theories about life or literature" (Guignery and Roberts 52). The writer's works are distinguished by a critical questioning of truth, history and reality. Very often, the author also engages with the slippery nature of both historical and personal truth. His narratives explore how the past incessantly evades our attempts to fix its meaning definitively. It rather shifts and escapes explanation precisely when we believe we have captured its essence. This defining concern with the inability to understand memory and history finds

clear expression in *Flaubert's Parrot*, where Barnes has his narrator Geoffrey Braithwaite recollect:

> "When I was a medical student some pranksters at an end-of-term dance released into the hall a piglet, which had been smeared with grease. It squirmed between legs, evaded capture, squealed a lot. People fell over trying to grasp it, and were made to look ridiculous in the process. The past often seems to behave like that piglet." (14)

This recollection by Geoffrey Braithwaite encapsulates Barnes' major preoccupation in all his works. The act of trying to comprehend the past through memories creates more distortions and reinterpretations which complicate all hopes of achieving definitive understanding. In attempting to recount the past, Barnes' fiction explores historical knowledge by employing literary devices such as parody and irony. In *Arthur & George* (2005), the historical figure Arthur Conan Doyle examines memory's unreliability. The novel set in the past contrasts documented historical facts with imagined experiences of his characters using the historical setting to explore his central preoccupation with how memory distorts our understanding of events. The novel highlights that subjective memory and historical record is influenced by psychological and emotional reasons.

In *Levels of Life* (2013), Barnes writes about the immense grief that he experienced after his wife Pat Kavanagh's death. However, he does not give too much information about his wife or their marriage. The writer intentionally avoids giving away too much while writing about the themes of love, loss and memory which the book explores. By choosing to maintain restraint he posits that even memoirs are reconstructed by the selectivity of memory and shaped by the writer's emotional needs. The self-editing and subjective characteristics of memory reveal that authentic truth cannot be found in the

stories one creates about oneself. The search for truth, whether it is a universal truth as in *Staring at the Sun (1986)* or personal truth as seen in *Metroland* (1980) or national truth as in *England England* (1996) remains a central concern of his works. This quest may or may not lead to fulfillment because Barnes consistently demonstrates that the search for truth is rather endless and rarely successful as he outlines that truth is always an illusion.

The endings of his novels may not be satisfying and the reader may not find characters who are coherent because the past never is. The line between reality and fiction is also like a shadow line. His characters grapple with the elusiveness of the past. Each of his characters attempt to discover some truth. In doing so they confront the limitations of their inherent ambiguity about their past. Owing to memory's subjective nature to be able to arrive at a definitive understanding of the past is difficult. His writings therefore examine how personal memories and historical accounts are both constructed accounts and not objective truths.

Memory is what defines an individual. It is an integral component of a person's existence. From ancient epics to contemporary works memory has been a central theme. Literature and memory exist in constant dialogue each entirely shaping the other. Birgit Neumann observes, "Such texts highlight that our memories are highly selective, and that the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer's present his or her desire and denial, than about the actual past events" (333). Neumann's observation provides insight into the process by which literature examines how past experiences, whether real or imagined, shape present selves. It demonstrates the mediated nature of memory. Memory has been a major topic of interest for writers across centuries. Representation of memory in fiction is found in Proust's middle- aged narrator's involuntary recollections of a happy childhood in *In Search of Lost Time* (1913). Proust's

narrator recounts his memories as they come to his mind and one memory leads to many more memories. Proust's novel is about memory which is one of the defining features of personal identity. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) is the fragmented memories of his characters and demonstrates the complex process involved in the act of remembering. Representation of memory in literary works challenge linear temporality and also highlight the ever-evolving nature of individual identity. Ann Rigney and Astrid Erll examine that literary texts represent the very process through which memories are formed and recalled. Literature mirrors the process of memory by employing narrative techniques like flashbacks, unreliable narration and nonlinear presentation of time. This mimetic quality of literature exposes the workings of memory at both the individual and collective level (113). In her book *Memory in Culture* (2011), Erll positions literature as an important medium of memory thereby anchoring memory studies within broader interdisciplinary concerns. Through concepts like "cultural texts," "collective texts," and "literary afterlives," she creates more fertile ground for meaningful interdisciplinary negotiations between literature and memory studies (2).

Mnemosyne, in ancient Greece was the mother of nine muses and the goddess of memory who inspired all arts and sciences. Memory in Greek education was great emphasis. Learning required students to memorize poetry, philosophical texts and rhetorical speeches. Their capacity for recall was also tested through intensive training techniques. Memory was considered essential for wisdom and also eloquence. In a society which had a predominantly oral tradition, the ability to remember correctly and also recite accurately was seen as a mark of intellectual superiority. For Plato however, memory was like perceptions that were imprinted on a block of wax which would lose clarity as new imprints were made over time. Terdiman observes that in traditional societies, "objects and people could be said to carry their pasts and their meanings openly" (6). They preserved

and transmitted memories through oral traditions. Memory was about maintaining continuity and preserving their heritage. But this was disrupted by the pace of modern life which led to an increasing concern about society's ability to maintain its connection to the past.

During the twentieth century, the thoughts on memory underwent a change. The unprecedented scale and horror of the catastrophic world wars created anxiety about the potential loss of cultural continuity. The enormous loss of lives and extreme atrocities necessitated the need for preservation and commemoration. It became important that memory bear witness through collective remembering to the atrocities, to prevent such horrors from happening again. So, memory became more than just a cultural concern, it was a moral obligation. This shift is reflected in the emergence of Holocaust studies, Trauma studies, Memorial Culture and memory studies. Memory studies is a comparatively young discipline that has gained immense momentum in recent decades. It is an interdisciplinary field of research that seeks to understand how individuals and societies remember the past and how these memories are understood and shared and even altered. Memory studies encompass both individual memory and collective memory.

This suggests our increasing preoccupation with the question of how the past is preserved or erased or even reimagined. In this regard, individual acts of remembering and forgetting merge to form collective memories which in turn define how communities understand themselves to be. Significant research in various disciplines have tried to illuminate how memory is stored and retrieved and literature investigates and contributes in a major way to our understanding of the workings of memory.

According to Edward S. Casey there are four main forms of human memory. He categorizes them as Individual Memory, Social Memory, Collective Memory and Public

Memory. Individual Memory focuses on the person remembering, who remembers in different ways and about multiple things. One also remembers by way of being reminded or by recognizing something. He defines social memory as "shared by those who are already related to each other" (21). And third type, collective memory is when people who may not know each other are united by memory of a particular thing and "All that matters is commonality of content" (23). And all the three above mentioned form an important part of the last type which is public memory. There are even more such classifications on types of memory which differ from each other only slightly. Jan Assmann for instance classifies memory as personal and collective memory (122). The various classifications and categorizations illustrate that memory is flexible and also complex. In the writings of Julian Barnes, memory is basically unreliable. His characters remember, but not to uncover any historical truth or objective truth, they reminisce to fulfill their emotional needs. Memory, for Barnes characters, serves as their primary tool and also their primary obstacle in the construction of their identity.

The texts I have chosen for this study are as follows: *Before She Met Me* (1982), *Talking It Over* (1991), *Love etc.* (2000), *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) and *The Only Story* (2018). *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) is considered to be one of his groundbreaking works. The writer has experimented with form again by blending biography, mystery and the essay form into the narrative. The novel explores the relationship between reality and representation. However, Barnes' fiction repeatedly explores the instability of remembering. *SE* and *OS* chronicle the fragmented recollections of old men, *BSMM* is the story of an obsessively jealous husband who is a historian and *TO* and *LE* are recollections of various characters about the complex nature of their romantic entanglements. Barnes' fiction is marked by a relentless attempt to explore the complex negotiations of remembering and forgetting His characters attempt to articulate a coherent narrative of

selfhood, and to do that they probe the delicate nature of memory. In the process of creating their selfhood, their stories are constructed and reconstructed over time.

Merritt Moseley's *Understanding Julian Barnes* (1997) is one of the earliest critical studies of Barnes. It provides an in-depth analysis of Barnes's writing and traces his growth as a writer. The novels analyzed extend from his first novel *Metroland* (1980) through the works he had published by the late 1990s. Moseley focuses on Barnes distinctive style, themes and also examines that it is difficult to categorize him because of his continuous experimentation with form. The study notes that scholars read Barnes through the framework of historiographic metafiction as his writing repeatedly analyses how history is written and how constructed the stories of past can be.

The Rise of Post-Postmodernism in the Novels of Julian Barnes: Fabulation of Metarratives in Metroland, Flaubert's Parrot, A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters, England, England (2012) by Volha Korbut Salman argues that Julian Barnes is often labelled as a postmodern writer, but this understanding is incomplete. His writings, the study finds, do exhibit postmodern characteristics such as multiple interpretations, ambiguity or ubiquitous pessimism. But in his works some kind of truth does exist as his characters seek for meaningful guiding narratives. The study also argues that Barnes's works call for a return of metanarratives in order to create a sense of coherence in a post-postmodern context. Frederick M. Holmes's book *Julian Barnes* (2009) is a clear and well written guide to Barnes. It provides a structured overview situating Barnes within a historical background showing when major events in his career happened. It also analyses in detail ten of his novels with particular focus on narrative techniques and his use of history and metafiction. Holmes also portrays Barnes as a postmodern writer.

Vanessa Guignery is a prominent scholar and an acclaimed authority on the author. Some of her books on Barnes are *Julian Barnes from the Margins* (2020), *The Fiction of Julian Barnes* (2006), and *Conversations with Julian Barnes* (2009) co-edited with Ryan Roberts. Guignery examines how Barnes experiments with form and uses narrative techniques like multiple narrators, pastiche and metafiction. She also investigates how history, art, philosophy and questions about death shape his work. Her work also offers insights into the writer's archives like drafts, notes and manuscripts available at the Harry Ransom Centre. She attempts to trace the evolution of Barnes' novels from inception to publication. False starts, discarded passages and numerous revisions made by the author are paid particular attention by Guignery who examines Barnes' constant improvisation in form and content. She focuses on eight of his novels to analyze how Barnes' literary voice evolved across decades. *Conversations with Julian Barnes* in collaboration with Ryan Roberts is a collection of eighteen interviews with Barnes. Through these conversations' readers get an insight into his views about writing, his contributions to contemporary literature and the literary world around him.

The thesis *Julian Barnes and the Postmodern Problem of Truth* (2008) by Abigail G. Dalton studies how Barnes' in his writings explores one of the central concerns of postmodernism - the difficulty of knowing the absolute truth. Dalton suggests that use of fragmented narratives, shifting perspective in his writings probe the concepts of love and truth. The study concludes with the findings that Barnes' narratives do not offer a definitive and conclusive truth. Wojciech Drag's thesis studies how Barnes' novels operate within the framework of postmodernism. It also examines the themes of religion, art and love as explored in Barnes's novels. The PhD thesis *The Vanishing Metanarrative: A Study of Julian Barnes's Fictional World* (2017) by Solmaz Nourzadeh Torkdeh yet again studies Barnes's novels through the lens of postmodernism. The thesis investigates how the writer

challenges traditional storytelling techniques and explores the collapse of overarching truth or metanarratives. James E. Martin studies how Barnes blends literary storytelling and historical writing by using narrative techniques of fiction to engage with historical events. The study uses concepts from Hayden White and Dominic Lacapra who question the separation between history and literature. Martin's study however notes that the author does not collapse the two categories completely.

Existing studies on the author's works primarily focus on studying Barnes as a postmodern writer. Though some scholars have examined memory in specific novels, like *The Sense of an Ending* and *England, England* the attention given to understand how Barnes uses memory in his writings, has received insufficient attention. This oversight in scholarship is surprising considering how consistently Barnes explores memory in his writings. This gap represents a significant opportunity to explore memory in the author's writing. An examination of memory in his works can help understand that memory recurs as a narrative mechanism which controls point of view and dismantles linear time. Such an investigation will also illuminate the role of memory to construct an identity through narrative.

Before She Met Me is about Graham Hendrick who is a historian and lives a dull life. Graham remarries and initially believes that finally he has an interesting wife and life. He is very satisfied, rather proud about it. Soon however, the realization that Ann had a sexual past becomes intolerable to him and his affection gives way to obsessive jealousy which ultimately destroys him. As a historian Graham interprets the past with a kind of neutrality and he also starts analyzing Ann's previous relationships as a personal archive. His descent is intensified by Jack Lupton who is a novelist and also a mutual friend. Graham reads Lupton's semi-autobiographical novels as evidence of Lupton's relationship

with Ann. He convinces himself that in every love scene Ann is the hidden model. And he makes a dossier of imagined betrayals turning his suspicion into reality. The narrative traces the absurdity and the dangers of rewriting Ann's past. The novel explores the relation between memory, time and desire highlighting how the past can be a pathological presence. It is a study of how memory even though fiction can destabilize identity.

In *Talking It Over*, Barnes again furthers his preoccupation with memory and the instability of truth. It is about the love triangle between Gillian, Stuart and Oliver. Stuart and Gilian fall in love and get married and shortly thereafter Oliver falls in love with his best friend's wife Gilian. Gilian leaves Stuart and marries Oliver. The way events are narrated is more significant than the plot in itself. There is an absence of a single narrative voice instead each character speaks directly to the reader recollecting their past. Barnes highlights the subjectivity of memory. The narratives of Oliver, Stuart and Gilian do not form a single truth. Instead, they are presented as all possible versions of truth. The reader's role becomes that of an arbiter whose sympathies keep shifting as each narrative reshapes the past. The reader is not provided any certainty. Barnes retrospective technique of storytelling explores how memory is filtered through emotions or insecurity or even through the need to protect one's sense of self. So, there is no single meaning to be discerned, only different possible meanings. Barnes' use of humour enhances the effect. It does not disguise the truth rather leaves the reader confused as to whose narrative is sincere. Through multiple first-person voices Barnes reveals how memory is reconstructed and so is identity.

In *Love Etc* (2000) Barnes revisits his characters from *Talking It Over* after ten years. Oliver, Gilian and Stuart have become older and also a little damaged through experiences. Here again each character addresses the readers in first person but their voices

now carry the weight of time and often some amount of regret. Stuart has become a successful person but his sense of humiliation is still alive, still nursing his wounds after losing Gilian to Oliver. Gilian it is understood is mostly exhausted and emotionally torn between affection and resentment. She seems disappointed at times, at how life has turned out for her. Oliver is as earlier, financially unstable and also insecure. His signature wit seems like a mask behind which he cannot hide anymore. The author explores how memory shifts and distorts through time through his characters who reshape their past to justify their present needs. Barnes does offer a closure rather depicts the manner in which time complicates memory making it difficult to attain a final truth.

Barnes' Booker Prize winning novel *The Sense of an Ending* follows Tony Webster who is enjoying retired life, when a mysterious inheritance from the mother of his college girlfriend suddenly takes him back in time to re-examine his past. The more he digs his past the more he realizes that he has either forgotten or hidden from the readers the darker truths of his life. Barnes demonstrates through Tony that what is remembered could be only one possible version of the past and that the real past could be one among many possible versions of the past.

The Only Story centers on Paul who at nineteen falls in love during a summer break, with Susan who is much older than him. In spite of their age difference, his passionate relationship with Susan becomes a defining experience of his life. Susan leaves her husband and she and Paul live together but their relationship gradually becomes difficult to sustain as Susan's alcoholism worsens. The story spans decades in which an older Paul narrates his story from his memory trying to understand how his only story shaped his life and view of love.

The representations of individual memory in Julian Barnes' novels, is an area that has been largely overlooked. My investigation attempts to address this significant gap that exists in the studies on the author's writing. I explore how Barnes engages with personal memory and uses it as a lens through which his characters construct and reconstruct their identities and question the nature and limits of personal or individual memory. I investigate how the author employs different narrative techniques which affect the representation and reliability of memory. In this context, I also analyze literary techniques like unreliable narration and multi-perspective storytelling foreground the subjective and changing quality of memory. These narrative devices effectively reveal the complex processes of remembering. My study is premised on the psychological theories of autobiographical memory. The theoretical notions of psychologists Alan Baddeley, Martin Anthony Conway and Robyn Fivush provide an appropriate dimension to understand how Barnes' characters develop their sense of identity through autobiographical memory. A thorough understanding of the representations of memory in fiction can be better understood by this interdisciplinary approach that bridges literary analysis with cognitive psychology. Marie-Laure Ryan's literary possible worlds theory, which is a model that adapts concepts from analytical philosophy to literary analysis, is the theoretical framework I will use to get a better understanding of narrative unreliability. Possible worlds theory has its origins in philosophy and it has been efficiently adapted to analyze fictional worlds. I found Marie - Laure Ryan most proper to understand how fictional narratives create their own systems of truth and reliability particularly in situations where conflicting or questionable versions of events are presented by narrators.

Including "Introduction" and "Conclusion" the study is divided into five chapters. Chapter Two is titled "Narrating the Past: The Self as Remembered" and explores how autobiographical memory functions in formation of identity and contributes to

understanding the self. Concepts from psychological theories of autobiographical memories, particularly the contributions of Baddeley, Fivush and Conway provide essential concepts for analyzing how Julian Barnes's selected novels utilize autobiographical memory to build identity. They also emphasize that memory is distorted and underscore the importance of narrative in shaping selfhood of his characters. The third chapter titled "Echoes Across Time: Memory and Temporality" investigates the relationship between time and memory. It studies how Barnes represents the relationship between time and memory through different narrative perspectives. Various narrator types, homodiegetic narrators in *Talking It Over, Love, Etc.*, *The Sense of an Ending,* and *The Only Story,* are contrasted with the heterodiegetic narrator in *Before She Met Me*, to create different temporal experiences. How these different narrative voices affect the temporal structures within the selected novels is also examined leading to an understanding of the way in which the past and the present intersects differently in each character's consciousness depending on their narrative position. Chapter four, "Memory's Multiverse: Unreliable Narrators in Barnes" examines Barnes's narrators through the twin lenses of unreliable narration and possible-worlds theory. Building on Wayne C. Booth's definition of the unreliable narrator and Marie-Laure Ryan's literary possible-worlds concept for fiction, I argue that Barnes's narrators are driven by the distortions of personal memory and they create their own embedded worlds of past events which diverge from the story's actual world. The final chapter concludes the thesis by summarizing the key findings. It will highlight the significance of the analysis and discussion demonstrates how the identified research gap has been addressed, and outlines potential directions for future research.

Chapter Two

Narrating the Past: The Self as Remembered

> The self may be constructed in a multitude of ways. It is futile to seek the one scaffold-like pattern on which the "true" self is established, because the basic architecture varies with the context in which it develops.
>
> -Joseph M. Fitzgerald, Autobiographical Memory

Memory is essentially understood through the lens of individual experience, characterized by its private and particular nature that forms the basis for personal identity. Jan Assmann contends that individuals do not possess a single, fixed identity but rather maintain multiple identities that shift and adapt depending on their immediate environment and social context (123). These varying identities correspond to equally diverse forms of memory, as different situations and contexts activate different aspects of a person's remembered experiences. Assmann observes: “Memory is knowledge with an identity-index, it is knowledge about oneself; that is, one's own diachronic identity, be it as an individual or as a member of a family, a generation, a community, a nation or a cultural and religious tradition” (123). This identity-indexed knowledge anchors both individuals and groups in a temporal continuum. It influences how personal recollection is not a unified system but as a complex array of interconnected yet distinct memory types that respond to different social demands.

In the process of recreating past events, both individual viewpoint and imagination inevitably play significant roles. Each of the novels examined in this chapter explores how individuals engage in the act of reconstructing history on a personal level. This remembered past serves as the foundation for shaping their identities. In a series of novels, Barnes explores how characters locate their identities through autobiographical memory.

Barnes' exploration of memory's deceptive nature draws deeply from his understanding of the complex cognitive processes that shape remembrance and forgetting. This informs his portrayal of memory as an unstable phenomenon, subject to the biological and psychological forces that govern how the mind stores and retrieves the past. The author makes this point clear in his reflections on memory, “We know that memory degrades. We have come to understand that every time we take that memory out of the locker and expose it to view, we make some tiny alteration to it. And so the stories we tell most often about our lives are likely to be the least reliable, because we will have subtly amended them in every retelling down the years” (Barnes, “We Remember”). Such alterations distort the past and also reshape the understanding of self, since personal identity is sustained through the very memories that are continually revised.

This chapter examines how Barnes's selected novels employ autobiographical memory as a means of constructing identity. The analysis focuses specifically on memory distortion, the subjective reconstruction of the past, and the role of memory in shaping selfhood. The relationship between memory and identity formation has long been recognized as a central concern in literary studies. While his novels have garnered critical acclaim, recent scholarly attention to his exploration of memory is very limited. This oversight is striking, given that questions of remembrance and forgetting lie at the heart of his works. This gap in contemporary criticism creates an opportunity to examine how Barnes engages with questions about remembrance, forgetting, and the stories we tell ourselves about our past. Birgit Neumann observes:

> Memory and the processes of remembering have always been an important, indeed a dominant, topic in literature. Numerous texts portray how individuals and groups remember their past and how they shape identities on the basis of the recollected memories. They are concerned with the mnemonic presence of the past in the

> present, and they illuminate the manifold functions that memories fulfill for the constitution of identity. Such texts highlight that our memories are highly selective, and that the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer‟s present – his or her desire and denial, than about the actual past events. (333)

Neumann here proposes that memory narratives often disclose more about the rememberer's current consciousness than the events themselves. This insight into memory's inherent instability provides the theoretical foundation for the narrative techniques Barnes develops in his novels. The characters' competing recollections sometimes reveal deliberate deception and also the inevitable distortions that arise through the very act of remembering. The stories his protagonists tell about themselves subtly reorganizes their memory to serve present needs, creating what Barnes recognizes as the basic paradox of autobiographical narrative.

Furthermore, this connection between memory and selfhood becomes particularly evident in Daniel Schacter's observation about how our most significant memories affect our personal narratives: "Extensively rehearsed and elaborated memories come to form the core of our life stories - narratives of self that help us define and understand our identity and our place in the world" (*Searching for Memory* 299). Memory serves as the bridge that connects present selves to past experiences. It is widely accepted that memory forms the bedrock of personal identity, as it forms an understanding of who one is and how one has been molded by life's journey. Consequently, anything that undermines or impairs memory can pose a significant threat to identity. When memory is compromised, it can lead to a destabilization of the self, as the continuity and coherence of one's life narrative becomes disrupted.

The relationship between narrative and identity has undergone a major transformation in modern consciousness, one that literary scholar Joseph M. Fitzgerald traces to specific historical developments. According to him

> the 19th and 20th century have been marked by the development of an autobiographical sensibility in which knowledge of the self is to be found in the stories we tell about ourselves. An extension of this trend has been the explosive growth of the novel as a form of literature. Whereas we use the autobiographical form for thinking about the self, the novel provides a means for knowing about others through stories. (101)

Cohler extends this insight by highlighting the literary origins of contemporary approach to life stories, noting that "particularly, since the introduction of the novel into literature in the eighteenth century, concern with the construction of a continuous and ordered account has become the basis of the manner in which persons understand both stories and lives" (207).

The narrative sensibility that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, as Fitzgerald and Cohler document, created not only new forms of storytelling but also new expectations for how memory itself should function. Ansgar Nünning maintains that memory operates as a defining component through which both personal and collective identity are constituted, with individuals and nations drawing upon their recollections to construct their identity (*New Directions* 4). This emergence of narrative as a primary mode of understanding both self and other represents an important shift in how human beings form meaning from experience.

Barnes seems to interrogate two interconnected aspects of memory: how his characters select and curate their recollections, and how they subsequently live with and through these memories, treating memory as more than a mere plot device. Through an

analysis of the selected novels, this study considers how Barnes mobilizes autobiographical memory as a constitutive element in narrative construction and characterization. Autobiographical memory refers to the recollection of events and experiences related to a person's life, which includes their unique experiences and the associated feelings or emotions tied to those events. Autobiographical memory according to Susan Engel

> is on the one hand a deeply personal, subjective, and vivid construction of the past, a construction that reveals, creates, and communicates a personal identity. But we constantly use these memories in public transactions. To that extent we expect reliability, accuracy and objectivity. What and how we remember has consequences for our own lives and the lives of those included in our memories. (21-22)

The implications of this duality, that our subjective reconstructions carry weight in the lived realities of others, become particularly significant in Barnes's narrative exploration of memory and identity. The scientific inquiry into autobiographical memory, particularly since the mid-1980s, marked a significant shift in the field of psychology. Prior to this, the emphasis was largely on understanding the mechanics of memory in a general sense, for instance, how information is stored, processed, and retrieved, often in experimental or artificial contexts. The focus on personal memory and life history introduced a new dimension to memory research, emphasizing the study of memory as it occurs naturally in everyday life. Autobiographical memories are now seen as created at the moment of recall rather than exact, fixed recordings of events. They are assembled in the form of stories filled with sensory details and emotions.

Autobiographical memories “concerned with the capacity of people to recollect their lives” are not stored and recalled as complete, fixed units but are instead actively constructed during the process of retrieval (Baddeley 26). Robyn Fivush characterizes autobiographical memory as "self-referenced memory of personal experiences in the

service of short-term and long-term goals that define identity and purpose" (561). According to Fivush, the primary reason for recollecting autobiographical memories is to develop a conception of self or personal identity. Fivush also declares, "autobiographical memory is a personal history that defines who one is across time and contexts" (574). She emphasizes that the act of remembering is a continuous and active process revised by present concerns and future aspirations. In this way, autobiographical memory becomes both a record of the past and a narrative tool that enables individuals to maintain coherence in their lives over time. Autobiographical memories as Conway defines them are "episodes recollected from an individual's life" (*Memory* 22). He emphasizes that the most crucial aspect of autobiographical memory is its connection to one's self-understanding. He argues that the memories we recall hold great personal meaning and serve as the foundation upon which our self-identity is built. Furthermore, Conway stresses the vital role our personal history plays in shaping who we are, as it forms a defining component of our individual identity (25). He argues that the 'defining feature of autobiographical memory was that they inherently represent personal meaning for a specific individual' (186).

In a related contribution, Conway and Pleydell-Pearce's seminal theoretical framework portrays autobiographical memory as primarily tied to processes of identity formation. They agree that memory operates within what they term the "self-memory system", a dynamic structure that organizes experiences in ways that preserve coherence and continuity of the self (*Construction* 262–263). This perspective highlights how remembering is not only about retrieving facts but also about creating narratives that sustain personal meaning and psychological stability (263–264). They argue that these memories operate within a system where "the primary aim [of autobiographical memories] is to ground the self", establishing the essential connection between personal recollection and self-concept (279). Autobiographical memory unfolds as a continuously developing

personal narrative through which individuals interpret their experiences and create their identities across changing contexts throughout their lives. This relationship reveals how memory and selfhood are mutually sustaining. Memory provides the structure for self-understanding, and the evolving self, in turn, determines how the past is recalled and organised within a personal narrative. Autobiographical memory, then, not only defines who a person is but also continuously redefines that identity over time.

In *Nothing to Be Frightened Of (2008),* Barnes writes “Memory is identity. I have believed this since – oh, since I can remember. You are what you have done; what you have done is in your memory; what you remember defines who you are; when you forget your life you cease to be, even before your death" (197). Barnes articulates the notion that one’s identity is both grounded in and defined by memory. The specific memories we have chosen to hold onto constitute the key building blocks of our self-perception and narrative of who we are in the present. Smorti and Fioretti, define autobiographical memories as, “a type of episodic as well as a semantic memory for specific life events related to the self in relation to others remembered from the present perspective” (298). Endel Tulving's concept of episodic autobiographical memory holds the most significance for this study. In defining episodic memories, Tulving explains that

> For a rememberer to remember something means that he or she is autonoetically aware of the past happening in which he or she has participated. For an experimenter or theorist to study episodic memory means to study autonoetic awareness of the past experiences separately from noetic retrieval of the semantic contents of the remembered episodes. (“Episodic Memory” 5)

Tulving proposed that episodic memory and autobiographical memory were essentially the same cognitive phenomenon, both referring to our ability to remember personally experienced events from our past. A key feature of episodic memory is the ability to

retrieve the spatial-temporal context of a memory, which means that individuals can recall specific details about what happened, where it occurred, and when it took place. Episodic memory forms an integral foundation of personal identity precisely because it consists of recollections anchored in first-person experience, or memories of events that happened specifically to the remembering self. This autobiographical dimension creates a temporal continuity that links past experiences to present consciousness, enabling individuals to build a unified narrative thread that sustains an individual's ongoing self-definition.

Tulving's conceptualization of episodic memory emphasizes its unique temporal dimension, arguing that it "makes possible mental time travel through subject time, from the present to the past, allowing one to re-experience, through autonoetic awareness, one's own previous experiences. Its operations require but to go beyond the semantic memory system" ("Episodic Memory" 5). This ability to mentally relive past experiences through autonoetic awareness contributes to the composition of ordered narratives about themselves. Episodic memory is thought to be the cornerstone of identity because by linking the present self to past experiences, it fashions a comprehensible narrative of who we are. This capacity to mentally project oneself into one's own past is in fact what Barnes's characters often do. In *SE*, Tony Webster frequently travels back in his mind to the 1960s, to evaluate his past choices and Paul in *OS* spends a lifetime reflecting on the summer of 1963. Such recollections are often always laden with the original emotions of the moment. Barnes provides the readers with many of the major and minor details of the novel in the form of episodic memory. Tulving's theory foregrounds episodic memory's dual nature. On one hand, it is a powerful mechanism for creating identity through self-knowing mental time travel while on the other, it is inherently susceptible to distortion, it is characterized by bias, omission, and error. Psychologist Robyn Fivush contends that episodic autobiographical memory establishes crucial connections between past

experiences, present identity, and future aspirations. This process of remembering sustains a continuity of identity within one's life narrative. Barnes's novels exemplify this phenomenon through characters who engage in remembering, revealing how the reconstruction of past selves becomes a means of comprehending present identity.

TO and *LE.* provide a multi-voiced illustration of how memory and identity are negotiated. This polyphonic approach enables Barnes to probe episodic memory within interpersonal relationships. Each character emphasizes particular details while neglecting or suppressing others. This illustrates how individual recollections of shared events diverge significantly, a selective mechanism that reveals the extent to which recollection is constructed through personal longings, emotional investments and one's evolving sense of self. In both *TO* and *LE* memory is a site of contestation—a discursive battle over narrative authority in which identity is at stake. As the title "*Talking It Over"* implies, the characters literally “talk over” their memories, and seek to convince both themselves and the reader of their version of the truth. The novel's structure, wherein Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian speak directly without an overseeing narrative consciousness, mimics the form of juxtaposed firsthand accounts. Each voice contributes to a composite yet fragmented whole. Every information about the characters is mediated through their episodic memory and individual interpretation. Consequently, the narrative events undergo multiple iterations, altered through a distinct subjective lens that foregrounds the constituted nature of recollection. Each memory is true to the rememberer, but none is objectively complete. For Oliver memory is selective and even aspirational, something that can be curated to flatter one’s identity. He derides others for cluttering their minds with trivial details, implying that he remembers only what bolsters his self-image. The love triangle has its own shared history, and each character tries to claim authority over that history.

In *TO* each of the participants of the love triangle declare their relationship to remembering with Stuart beginning the series of monologues with “My name is Stuart, and I remember everything” (*TO* 1). Oliver prides himself on only remembering what matters, “My way with memory is to entrust it only with things it will take some pride in looking after” (9-10), viewing memory as an act of selective will. “What I remember is my business,” says Gillian guardedly implying she’d rather not recall or at least not disclose certain things (8). These initial warnings carry into *LE* a decade later. The sequel opens tellingly with a chapter titled ‘I Remember You.’ Stuart greets the reader as if an old acquaintance: “Hello! We’ve met before…About ten years ago… I remember you. I remember you. I’d hardly forget, would I?” (*LE* 1). This metafictional nod not only refreshes the backstory but also establishes memory as the novel’s key motif. Stuart’s insistence that he would hardly forget, sets the stage for a narrative driven by recollection. Immediately, Oliver chimes in to mock Stuart’s nostalgic bent, “‘I remember you.’ How very Stuart,” Oliver quips, and goes off on a comic digression about an old song called “I Remember You” (2). Oliver’s intellectual exuberance and tendency to digress, entertain the reader with humor, reflecting the novel’s portrayal of memory as a subjective and meandering process. Gillian then introduces herself more hesitatingly: “Gillian. You may or may not remember me” (3). Barnes narrative design illustrates that Stuart’s identity rests on remembering everything, Oliver’s on reinventing everything with witty embellishment and Gillian’s on selectively curating her recollections. The novel's structure, with characters whispering their secrets and arguing for their version of the truth creates a patchwork of episodic memories. Each monologue is effectively a character's mind engaging in what Tulving conceptualizes as mental time travel, journeying back to shared past events to comprehend the present.

Stuart revisits his past to re-experience the betrayal of losing his wife Gillian to his best friend Oliver, with these episodic memories continuing to revise his identity. This temporal displacement becomes evident when Stuart vividly recalls the period of first suspecting the affair: "I was obsessed with whether or not they were fucking. I asked you to tell me: remember? I pleaded with you: they are fucking, aren't they? I remember asking. You never answered, and I'm grateful for that now" (*LE* 11). Stuart directly addresses the reader from the first novel while simultaneously recreating his own desperate questioning and the emotional turmoil he experienced. This constitutes a form of mental time travel through which he returns to that excruciating moment of uncertainty, reliving the desperation and the frantic need for confirmation. Such recollections align with Tulving's concept of autonoetic consciousness, reflecting the distinctly human capability to mentally transport oneself into previous temporal moments and retrieve not merely facts but the subjective experience of those moments. Stuart possesses acute awareness of his former self's psychological state while simultaneously integrating it with his current perspective, a vantage point that now includes gratitude for having been spared the brutal truth at that particularly vulnerable moment.

Stuart's memories often come with sensory and situational specifics, underscoring their importance to his identity. In one striking episode, Stuart recalls traveling to France to secretly observe Oliver and Gillian some years later. He recollects a fight in the middle of the village with Oliver hitting Gillian across the face. The fact that Stuart witnessed Oliver abusing Gillian emerges as a pivotal memory that informs his current sense of self. It complicates his inner life, merging the contradictory feelings of being proven right and being wounded. This also reinforces his perception of Oliver as the antagonist. This personal archive of injuries and observations forms the core of who Stuart is now. And he explicitly concludes from it that trust is futile: "...real betrayal occurs among those you

love. Friendship and love are meant to make people behave better, aren't they? But that's not been my experience. Trust leads to betrayal. You could even say that trust invites betrayal. That's what I saw, what I learnt, then. That's my story so far" (12). Stuart's identity as a betrayed husband and a cynic about relationships is built from these remembered episodic memories. In Tulving's terms, his autobiographical memory enables him to integrate those past events into a narrative of self, albeit a bitter one. Stuart's relationship with memory as a foundation for identity becomes evident in his refusal to simply move past his difficult experiences without proper examination. When confronted with Oliver's desire to resume their friendship, Stuart reveals an underlying difference in their approaches to the past: "Now Oliver just thought we could pick up from where we'd left off - no, from a point some way before we left off. Whereas I wanted to look and see" (57). Stuart's conception of self depends on carefully scrutinizing rather than bypassing painful memories.

Meanwhile, Oliver seeks to retreat to an earlier, presumably safer point in their relationship or simply resume where they left off. Stuart insists on the necessity of examination, his need to look and see, reflecting how his identity is negotiated through deliberate engagement with difficult truths. His episodic memory functions as an investigative process essential to preserving his sense of self, even when that self is built around painful experiences that others might prefer to forget or gloss over. Stuart's recollections are emotionally charged and also painstakingly detailed. Stuart doesn't just list past events, he feels them again and draws lessons from them that defines his sense of self. Stuart embodies both the constructive aspects of episodic memory in providing self-continuity and its potential drawbacks in becoming imprisoned by a painful and possibly distorted personal narrative. His recollections, though detailed, function as self-justifying reconstruction. He consistently positions himself as the innocent victim while casting

Oliver as entirely culpable, a viewpoint that other characters in the novel do not universally endorse. Nevertheless, for Stuart these episodic memories constitute absolute reality and serve as the foundation upon which his identity rests.

Oliver, therefore, approaches memory very differently. He is playful and performative and highly selective about what he remembers. He treats his past like an edited manuscript. Trivial or uncomfortable episodes are pruned away while memories that fit his self-image are spotlighted. He remembers events in a manner that reinforces the identity he wants, the witty, clever lover, always the protagonist of the anecdote. Oliver explicitly formulates a binary theory dividing existence into Love and etc. confidently positioning himself among those who prioritize love while relegating Stuart, according to his assessment, to the realm of the mundane remainder. This theory likely springs from Oliver's memory of his own grand romantic gesture of stealing Gillian, which he casts as the act of a true lover. That episode, as he understands it, defines him as a man who lives for passion.

Oliver valorizes narrative coherence over factual accuracy in his recollections. He consciously uses his episodic memories, arranging and even embellishing them to cast himself in a favorable light. Stuart recalls "Oliver stole her off me. He wanted my life so he took it. He made Gill fall in love with him" (*LE* 10) but Oliver remembers it as falling in love with Gillian and likely frames it as inevitable, "Stuart was doubtless entangled with a ballet class of fantasies and a wank mag of regrets at the time he met Gillian. And Gillian was unequivocally, indeed legally, entangled with the said Stuart at the time she and I met. You will say it is all a matter of degree, and I will reply: no, it is a matter of absolutes" (14). At times Oliver even refers to himself in the third person, a habit Stuart ridicules as egomaniac, as if narrating his own character from an external vantage point. This distinctive habit suggests that Oliver perceives himself as a protagonist within a narrative,

creating additional confusion between authentic memory and imaginative reconstruction. Oliver's episodic memories are often interwoven with songs, historical anecdotes, philosophical quotes that he uses to dramatize his experiences. When reflecting on the consequences of the love triangle he cites Zhou Enlai's renowned perspective on the French Revolution's long-term significance, insisting on seeing things in a broader perspective. Oliver, therefore, emotionally distances himself from certain painful memories by intellectualizing them or situating them within broader historical contexts. It's a strategy of self-protection because by reframing his personal history as a witty narrative, he avoids uncomfortable guilt or remorse.

Oliver rarely lingers on shame in his recollections, effectively editing such emotions from his narrative. Instead, he remembers himself as the clever hero or at worst, charming antihero of his own story. Yet Oliver's approach has its own blind spots and identity consequences. His penchant for embellishment and omission means we cannot fully trust the accuracy of his memories, he even advises us not to rush to judgment because he is shaping the tale for us. Oliver's self-curated memories sometimes ring false or evasive. There are moments when other characters' testimonies call Oliver's recollections into question. Oliver glosses over the one instance of violence in his marriage or his failures, while Gillian and Stuart remember it well. He constantly keeps revising his personal narrative thereby revising his identity in the process. Memory, here, functions as a process of creative reconstruction, connected to his self-perception. He wryly observes that identity itself constitutes a form of fiction that we perpetually revise and reframe.

Each character's monologue in *TO* and *LE* is an act of episodic memory, recalling specific events like the wedding, the affair, and the breakdown of relationships. The monologue form of TO and LE provides an ideal platform for Barnes to examine episodic memory as it unfolds. Through these monologues, the act of recollection transforms into a

narrative process wherein memory intertwines with self-justification and the ongoing negotiation of selfhood. The absence of a mediating narratorial voice creates competing versions of events which coexist without hierarchical resolution. Each protagonist essentially tells the story of their life to date and in doing so, reveals how they see themselves. This structural choice foregrounds the idea that when memory operates less as documentary evidence and more as an interpretive lens, narrative authority becomes destabilized, as each voice lays an equal claim to truth. Barnes's strategy of introducing his three protagonists through their mnemonic self-presentations establishes memory as a process through which identity is continuously authored. These recollections that are tinted with personal biases, align with Tulving's view that memory is a generative and reconstructive process. The alternating monologue structure of the novel formally replicates the phenomenon of mental time travel, as characters continually revisit and reinterpret their prior experiences. The protagonist's identity becomes inextricably bound to the processes of remembering and narrating their histories, thereby also substantiating Tulving's proposition that episodic memory entails autonoetic self-awareness. Across the selected works, the protagonists undertake what might be characterized as mnemonic quests, pursuits of identity and selfhood enacted through sustained engagement with their remembered pasts.

In *SE*, Tony Webster's narration embodies this time-traveling memory. The novel opens with a fragmented catalogue of memories that immediately establishes the non-linear nature of recollection. Tony recalls in no particular order:

– a shiny inner wrist;

– steam rising from a wet sink as a hot frying pan is laughingly tossed into it;

– gouts of sperm circling a plughole, before being sluiced down the full length of a tall house;

– a river rushing nonsensical upstream, its wave and wash lit by half a dozen chasing torchbeams;

– another river, broad and grey, the direction of its flow disguised by a stiff wind exciting the surface;

– bathwater long gone cold behind a locked door. (3)

The deliberate lack of chronological order in this opening passage of SE order mirrors the scattered nature of recollection. Memories do not emerge in orderly temporal sequences but rather manifest as discrete fragments that surface through apparently arbitrary associative processes. This fragmented presentation is what can be described as memory's reconstructive rather than reproductive nature where experiences are not replayed but reassembled from fragments. The imagery Barnes selects reveals memory's tendency to fixate on motion and transformation - steam rising, water flowing, sperm circling, as if the mind particularly retains moments of change or flux. The recurring motif of water in various states and directions perhaps reflects memory's own fluid, unpredictable currents that can reverse expected directions or become stagnant.

The protagonist recalls that as an older man, he vividly recalls his youth, recounting past events with rich sensory and emotional detail, as if reliving them. The narrative's self-examining quality, with the mature narrator analyzing his earlier self's recollections, highlights that memory is an act of perpetual revising. In Tulving's terms, Tony continually re-contextualizes his episodic memories, revealing the extent to which memory retrieval remains contingent upon one's evolving perspective. Barnes crafts the novel as Tony's episodic exploration of his personal history, with the narrative shifting fluidly between past and present, obscuring the boundaries within Tony's consciousness. This temporal discontinuity embodies the inherently episodic character of mnemonic experience. Tony is acutely aware that his mind might be deceiving him. It shows a mind

piecing together a personal past from shards of memory. So, the story emerges as memory fragments, reflections, and subsequent revisions. As Tony's search for understanding increases, his narrative becomes increasingly characterized by contradictions and amendments His recollection is guided by present necessities whereby past events undergo continuous reinterpretation in accordance with current emotional states and emergent understandings.

The novel's introspective style vividly illustrates Tulving's concept of autonoetic consciousness, the self-aware dimension of memory that enables us not only to recall an event but also to reflect on the process of remembering itself. The writer emphasizes that we don't store experiences in neat categories and retrieve them unchanged. Instead, we remember in pieces, sometimes vividly, sometimes vaguely, often mixing what actually happened with what we think happened or wish had happened. Tony's story captures this messiness. His identity undergoes constant reshaping through memory, as the narrative illustrates how his sense of self depends not on unchanging personal narratives but on the reciprocal relationship between his recollections of the past and his current lived experiences, each informing and transforming the other. Paul Connerton's observation can be considered alongside this view that an individual's identity is constructed through past events and the remembering of those past events (3).

Identity formation is a continuous process, as explored through the complex interplay of Tony's memory and temporal experience. Through first-person narration, shifting multiple viewpoints, and retrospective storytelling, the writer illustrates that remembering is an interpretive process by which his characters build a narrative of their lives. The narrative techniques Barnes uses reveal memory's fluid nature. It analyses how characters continually (re)define their identities through the process of remembering and forgetting. Their identities emerge as ongoing negotiations between accumulated

experiences and present consciousness. He portrays how the present is “clearly burdened with all our temporalities” (Neumann 333) emphasizing how memory acts as both an archive of the characters’ experiences and an ongoing dynamic continually reshaping their self-concept across time. His characters' identities, the novels suggest, emerge from this ongoing negotiation with the past, forged by how they choose to remember, interpret, and retell their personal histories. This is precisely what Neumann points out, when she says, “when interpreting our own experience, we constantly, and often unconsciously, draw on pre-existing narrative patterns as supplied by literature.” She further notes that by offering “new interpretations of the past and new models of identity, fictions of memory may also influence how we, as readers, narrate our pasts and ourselves into existence” (341).

Literature that engages with memory and its associated concerns, what Neumann terms 'fictions of memory' offers insight into the relationship between memory and narrative (334). Neumann considers how memory, narrative, and identity exist in mutual interdependence, with each element being defined by the others in an endless cycle. Narratives operate in ways that invite diverse interpretations, drawing on their ability to present events and characters from multiple perspectives. By anchoring these stories within temporal structures, writers infuse their narratives with context, significance, and meaning. These temporal structures act as stabilizing devices that allow narratives to communicate their emotional and historical depth. The structural patterns inherent in narratives operate as organizational systems through which both writers and readers can organize temporal experience. They allow individuals to piece together fragmented memories and experiences into a cohesive whole. The tension between what characters reveal and what they withhold creates a layered complexity that mirrors the actual experience of human memory and self-reflection. Characters present their stories as incomplete puzzles, offering scattered pieces, that readers must assemble while recognizing that some elements will

always remain missing or unclear. This fragmentary approach forces readers to become active participants in the narrative process, filling gaps and making connections just as the characters themselves struggle to understand their own experiences. Rather than providing straightforward biographical accounts, these narratives present memory as it truly operates, which is selective, contradictory, and full of omissions that may be intentional or unconscious. The reading experience becomes collaborative, as readers work alongside unreliable narrators to piece together meaning from partial evidence and ambiguous details. Readers piece together emotional truths from the incomplete testimony of characters who may not fully understand themselves or may be deliberately obscuring certain aspects of their stories.

Narratives fundamentally serve to communicate the narrator's memory through reconstructed past events, or, as Charlotte Linde puts it, they function as “a representation, or a construction, based on a sequence of events in the past, that communicates something from the memory of the narrator” (2). She adds that a narrative usually conveys episodic memory, presenting a story about a specific sequence of personal events in the past. Narratives transform personal memories into communicable forms, allowing individuals to organize and categorize their various life experiences in ways that create coherence and meaning. Linde argues that by analyzing how narratives represent the interconnections between remembering, storytelling, and selfhood, we gain deeper insight into the processes of formation of the self. Paul Ricoeur also suggests that narrative unites memory and identity, asserting that narrative serves as the crucial mediating function through which individual memories are actively incorporated into the ongoing construction and understanding of personal identity (*Memory History* 84-85).

Studies of memory in literature reveal how identity is formed through the continuous interaction between remembering and storytelling. Narratives provide the structure through which people interpret their past and present, and imagine their future. By organizing disconnected memories and experience into an orderly sequence, narrative enables individuals to generate a sense of diachronic continuity. It is the process through which experience becomes recollection and subsequently undergoes reconstruction is cyclical. Human beings cannot receive or store the events of the external world in their brains as direct and objective imprints. Rather, every experience is mediated through individual subjectivity, so that even the same event is first lived differently by each person and later revised each time it is recalled or revisited. What emerges, then, is less a stable record of the past than a shifting reconstruction (Sacks). Often, the only kind of truth available to us is narrative truth, or the evolving stories we tell about ourselves and to others, accounts that are repeatedly reorganized, reinterpreted, and adjusted across time.

Similarly, Barne's protagonists are engaged in constructing narratives that serve both as acts of recollection and identity formation reflecting the idea that "autobiographical memory and autobiographical narrative alike entail present constructions of the past", emphasizing that our recollections are reconstructions shaped by our current perspectives and requirements (Freeman 267). Rather than merely retrieving fixed memories, we continually reimagine and reinterpret our personal histories through the lens of our present circumstances. He thereby suggests that the past we remember is as much a creation of who we are now as it is a record of who we once were. In *SE* Tony Webster's account unfolds through his retrospective examination of past events. The narrative structure mirrors his fragmented and unreliable memory without following chronological order. The story emerges as Tony attempts to structure his younger self's actions, with revelations arriving not in sequence but as his understanding deepens and shifts. *OS* has a tripartite

structure that moves between different temporal perspectives of the same relationship, showing how Paul's understanding of his affair with Susan evolves across decades of reflection. The narrative shifts between first, second, and third person as Paul struggles to find the appropriate distance from his memories, illustrating how identity formation requires constant renegotiation with one's past. In *Love, etc.*, the characters' testimonies create competing versions of events, with each narrator's account serving as both memory work and self-justification, demonstrating how the stories we tell about ourselves become the foundation for who we believe ourselves to be. Past events take on new significance. It illustrates that the act of shaping narrative becomes essential for forming a unified identity out of the fragments of lived experience.

Their journeys involve navigating both conscious adherence to certain traditions and unconscious participation in social patterns that establish their behavior and worldview. The author’s characters grapple with internal contradictions and psychological struggles as they attempt to reconcile different aspects of their identity and resolve personal conflicts. This in fact creates a paradoxical situation where they simultaneously strive to establish their individual uniqueness while finding themselves inevitably shaped by and contributing to the very social structures they seek to transcend. For instance, Gillian's narratives are particularly complex. Her sections reveal the gap between emotional truth and self-awareness. When she speaks about her marriage to Stuart and subsequent relationship with Oliver, her accounts often contain contradictions she herself doesn't seem to notice. She curates a narrative where her choices were inevitable, driven by passion and self-discovery, but Barnes allows readers to see how this narrative conveniently absolves her of responsibility for the pain she caused.

Gilian's narrative struggle exposes the ongoing effort to assemble a usable identity out of the disparate moments and choices that define her life. Her recognition that storytelling cannot be neutral demonstrates her awareness that every attempt to grasp her past is unavoidably colored by her current perspective and psychological needs. Through her introspective moments, she grapples with the challenge of reconciling her past actions with her present understanding, constantly revising her personal narrative in search of internal consistency. Narratives serve to communicate the narrator's memory through reconstructed past events—or, as Charlotte Linde puts it, they function as "a representation, or a construction, based on a sequence of events in the past, that communicates something from the memory of the narrator" (2). The search for a self-definition frequently requires individuals to emphasize certain memories while downplaying others, and to rationalize past decisions in ways that preserve their preferred self-image. This internal conflict between honest self-examination and self-protection underscores the difficulty of achieving authentic self-knowledge. Gillian struggles to integrate her contradictory impulses and to form a unified understanding of who she is. Charlotte Linde's work on how people build their sense of self through stories sharpens this point. As she explains:

> Both narrative and memory are constructed. Memories of what is understood to be the same event change over time, as the person changes, and in response to the responses of audiences for the story. Both children and adults learn what is memorable as they learn what can be, or should be told as a story, and how it may and may not be told to particular audiences. This kind of learning is part of the process of identity construction. (1)

Viewing narrative formation as a learned process reveals the limits of relying solely on individual perspective for meaning-making. Individual experience serves as the primary source for creating personal narratives of his characters. And this process is influenced by their affective state and inner conflicts at the time of recollection. Without external perspectives to challenge or complicate understanding, Barnes's narrators rely on their viewpoints to evaluate the significance of their past choices. They weave these moments into narrative structures that support existing beliefs about themselves and the world. When they rely solely on their own perspective, they risk developing personal narratives that function like closed loops, where their stories about themselves go unchallenged. Their narrative processes select memories and interpretations that satisfy their current self-concept. This means that their identities are based on carefully selected evidence that supports the version of themselves which they prefer to believe in, while unconsciously excluding contradictory information that might lead to uncomfortable but necessary revisions of their personal narratives.

BSMM offers a darkly comic case of how personal identity can be destabilized by an obsession with another person's past. Graham's fixation on Ann's romantic history demonstrates the complex, interconnected nature of memory and identity formation. Mark Freeman observes that our sense of self is rarely built from purely individual recollections. Rather, memory is always interwoven with the perspectives of others: “Consider in this context the fact that much of what we remember about the personal past is suffused with others’ memories—which are themselves suffused with other others’ memories” (263). This layering of borrowed recollections extends far beyond our immediate social circles. Freeman further notes,

> Consider as well the fact that much of what we remember is also suffused with stories we have read and images we have seen, in books and movies and beyond. And, not least, consider the fact that all of this extraneous ‘‘secondhand’’ material will be folded into whatever ‘‘firsthand’’ material there may be through a process of narrativization, that is, a quite spontaneous process of transforming memory into narrative. (263)

Furthermore, he argues that the act of recalling one’s personal past is never an isolated or purely private endeavor. It is always mediated through language, culture, and history. Because these larger structures extend beyond the boundaries of the individual, what we regard as our own memory is infused by elements of otherness (274). This weaving of lived experience with cultural narratives indicates that the line between personal memory and absorbed collective stories becomes increasingly difficult to pin down as we form our identities. The self emerges as a synthesis where personal memories intersect with inherited family stories, fictional narratives, and visual media—all unconsciously woven into the story we tell about ourselves.

Graham's psychological unraveling exemplifies this phenomenon, as his identity becomes entangled not only with Ann's actual memories but also with the fictional narratives from her films, blurring the boundaries between lived experience, borrowed memory, and cinematic imagination. The narrative closely follows Graham’s consciousness, effectively making the novel a study of Graham’s obsession as he tries to interpret Ann’s life before she met him and in doing so, loses his own moorings. Graham’s identity. which initially is that of a reasonable, contented middle-aged man, warps under the influence of his jealous memories and imaginings, transforming him into someone almost unrecognizable to himself. These memories, significantly, are not Graham’s own

lived experiences; they belong to Ann or to others, yet Graham internalizes them. Brenda Yang, Samantha Deffler, and Elizabeth Marsh propose that memories of fictional events should be understood as a legitimate form of autobiographical memory. They argue that people consume, remember, and discuss not only memories of lived experiences, but also events from works of fiction such as books, movies, and television shows. This forms vivid, detailed memories of these experiences that can be just as emotionally resonant and personally meaningful as memories of actual lived events. These fictional memories become integrated into personal narrative and identity in ways that parallel how memories of real experiences are processed and stored. Like memories of lived experiences, fictional memories involve rich sensory details, emotional engagement, and personal significance that can influence future behavior and decision-making. The authors suggest that both types of memories undergo similar encoding, consolidation, and retrieval processes, and both contribute to the understanding of personal continuity and meaning-making (39-43)

The inciting incident of Graham's downward spiral is innocuous enough as he watches one of Ann's old films. Ann, a former actress, had a minor role in a cheap romance movie years before. The first time he sees Ann's cinematic love scene, the imagery sears itself into his mind. He cannot stop replaying the vision of Ann with another man which is an image originally captured on celluloid, now burned into Graham's memory. He begins re-watching all of Ann's films obsessively, sometimes even three times, effectively rehearsing and reinforcing these mental images. Because a movie can be paused, replayed, or re-examined, unlike a one-time real experience, Graham can relive these moments on demand. The result is that his recollections of Ann's fictional encounters remain fresh and detailed. Barnes suggests therefore that the ability to re-experience the film keeps the memory vivid despite time passing, a point in line with Yang et al.'s hypothesis that fiction memories may "weather time" better precisely because they can be

revisited (30). Graham's memory of the film scene does not fade, rather it only grows more obsessive with each viewing. When Graham and his young daughter watch this film, the daughter naively remarks that Ann was "such a tart" in the movie role (BSMM 30). This harsh judgement, delivered by a child who has not yet learned to separate an actress from the role she plays, disturbs Graham. He hastens to remind his daughter "She was only acting" emphasizing that what they saw on screen was just a performance, not the real Ann (31).

Ironically, Graham himself soon fails to maintain this very distinction. The scene is significant because it foreshadows Graham's growing inability to separate past images of Ann from the woman he knows in the present. A snippet of cinematic memory threatens to redefine Ann in her family's eyes. For Graham, it triggers a deeper curiosity and insecurity about Ann's life before him. Following this incident, Graham's curiosity about Ann's past turns into an all-consuming preoccupation. He begins to collect memories of Ann before she met him, watching all her film appearances, interrogating mutual friends for stories, even reading between the lines of her photo albums. This has a corrosive effect on his identity. Graham's perception of himself as the confident husband erodes as he dwells on vivid mental images of Ann with other men. The more he immerses himself in other people's memories of Ann, the more estranged he becomes from his current reality.

Throughout *BSMM* Graham's memories of Ann's past are depicted with striking vividity and visceral emotion. This aligns with Yang et al.'s research, which proposes that people's memories of fiction can be as emotionally intense as memories of their own lives. Graham exemplifies this psychological reality, experiencing fictional scenarios about Ann's romantic history with the same emotional weight as if he had witnessed them firsthand. The imagery and sensory detail of these memories are also intense. Graham is a

self-professed "words man" who has never cared for visual media, yet he admits that seeing Ann in action "triggered it off" the movies affect him more deeply than any verbal account (*BSMM* 118). He experiences jealousy at the sight of Ann's onscreen infidelity, "This jealousy, however, came in rushes, in sudden, intimate bursts that winded you; its source was trivial, its cure unknown" (115).

In fact, Graham's emotional reactions are often out of proportion with the real importance of the remembered event, and he himself reflects "Why should the past make you crazy with emotion?" (115). Graham cannot observe these memories neutrally, he is involuntarily transported into a state of emotional agitation by memories of things he never actually lived. Each time these scenarios strike, he relives the emotional hurt. The jealousy physically winds him, while emotions like anger, humiliation, and pain flood back in full force. He feels them with the same intensity as if they were his own lived experiences, illustrating how fictional memories can wield the same psychological power as real ones. The novel even compares the sudden onset of jealousy to an alarm: "like the ground warning system in an aircraft… inside Graham's skull" (121). This simile underscores the intrusive, uncontrollable quality of his memory experience. It is as if his mind issues urgent warnings whenever triggered by a thought of Ann's past, forcing him to relive the threat over and over.

Autobiographical memories, Conway observes, serve three broad functions: a self-function that helps to form and maintain one's identity, a directive function which guides future decisions or behavior and a social function that facilitates connection with others through shared reminiscence or storytelling (*Memory* 23). One of the most striking aspects of Graham's obsession is how it guides his decisions and behavior. The memories of Ann's ex-lovers literally dictate where the couple can or cannot travel for vacation. Graham

refuses to visit any country that might be tainted by association with a prior romance, effectively letting Ann's past dictate their present choices. Similarly, Graham's recollections of Ann's film scenes drive him to extreme actions: he seeks out all her old movies, he quizzes her relentlessly about each romantic encounter, and eventually he formulates a plan to eliminate the perceived sources of his humiliation. In one grimly comic scene, Graham even studies Jack's published novels for hidden references to Ann, ripping out pages that suggest a fictionalized version of their affair. Rather than learning positive lessons, Graham's memories lead him down a destructive path. Graham stabbing Jack to death is the final outcome of his memories functioning in a directive capacity. His selfhood and self-worth is shaken by the integration of Ann's past into his own memory bank

One striking passage shows Graham reflecting on his own mental state: "What if your brain became your enemy?" (*BSMM* 157). Here, Graham realizes with horror that his mind, which he always relied on as a rational ally, is now assaulting him with painful recollections. He had always thought of his brain "as something you used – put things into and got out answers. Now, suddenly, you felt as if it were using you" (157). Graham's memory and imagination, increasingly beyond his control, actively work against his peace and his grasp of identity. His own mind becomes an antagonist, warping reality. Graham's plight also exemplifies how emotions can distort memory and perception. Jealousy drives him to amplify and exaggerate the significance of Ann's past relationships. Minor incidents from years ago become, in his memory, intolerable betrayals in the present.

When Graham becomes obsessed with an old film featuring Ann and a former co-star, he creates a version of Ann, that of a wanton, unfaithful figure which bears little resemblance to the real woman who is devoted to him now. Unable to stop imagining their

on-screen intimacy as though it were real and current, he becomes trapped by images from a distant past. Witnessing his torment, Ann reflects on the peculiar power of memory: "How strange the ways in which the past caught up and tugged at the present" (87). The film, a mere artifact of her professional life, has somehow reached across time to poison their relationship, transforming her former performance into a weapon against their current happiness. Yet to Graham, this imagined past feels as vivid as any memory, and it poisons his present identity as Ann's husband. In Graham's case, dwelling on Ann's past directs him toward destructive behavior and shatters his self-image as a trusting, rational partner. He allows memories to forge his identity in damaging ways. The once sensible professor becomes paranoid, obsessive, and violent, essentially becoming a jealous husband.

Throughout the novel, Barnes uses Graham's academic background ironically. As a historian, Graham once believed in evidence and reason. But personal memory operates under different rules than scholarly history. Historical research might seek objective documentation, but Graham's jealous memory seeks emotional catharsis. In one scene, Graham lectures his students about the importance of context and not imposing present values on the past, even as he privately does exactly that with Ann's history. Ann recognizes this contradiction in Graham's treatment of her past, observing that "he was hostile to a past her, to a present situation, but not to a present her" (166). This insight reveals how Graham compartmentalizes his feelings by directing his anger not at Ann herself, but at the version of her that existed before their relationship. Such moments expose his inability to apply his own historical methodology to his personal life. Graham becomes miserably self-aware that he cannot handle the knowledge of Ann's life before him, yet he cannot stop seeking more details:

> On his afternoons alone at the house, Graham found himself more and more on the lookout for evidence. Sometimes he wasn't sure what constituted evidence; and sometimes, in the course of his forays, he wondered whether he didn't secretly enjoy finding that proof which he told himself he feared and hated. The effect of his driven searches was to re-acquaint himself with almost all of Ann's possessions; only now he saw them in a different, more tainted light. (*BSMM* 59)

Given this, his eventual breakdown, culminating in a violent confrontation Jack tragically underscores the idea that when memory or the inability to forget it overwhelms one's present, it can destroy one's identity. Graham literally becomes a different person, driven to lethal action, because he is haunted by memories that were never even his own. On one hand, memory is what connects Graham to Ann, as he wants to know her fully, including her past. On the other hand, the novel shows that complete recall can be as perilous as forgetting. Barnes gives relatively less narrative space to Graham's happy and healthy memories. Instead, the emphasis is on pathological memory, memory that is invasive and uncontrolled. This early Barnes novel powerfully establishes a theme that recurs in his later works, that of the past's stranglehold on the present. Graham's tragedy is that he cannot live in the present because he cannot reconcile himself with a past, he never inhabited. Graham's fate serves as a cautionary tale about memory's destructive potential. His story demonstrates how obsessive engagement with the past can ultimately unravel one's conception of self entirely. This exploration of memory's capacity to destroy identity establishes the foundation for Barnes's later, more sophisticated treatments of the subject, where characters take active control of their narratives. They shape and interpret their own histories with consequences that prove equally dramatic, if not always as catastrophic.

When Ann visits Jack to discuss Graham's obsession with her past, a past in which Jack himself briefly figured as her lover. Even though Graham remains unaware of this, she attempts to reconstruct their shared history. "Jack, I've come to get history straight," (*BSMM* 65) she declares, before making a startling proposal: "I've decided we never had an affair" (66). Recognizing the audacity of her request, she apologizes: "I'm sorry to rewrite your past for you" (67). Jack's response reveals his own unsettled relationship with memory and identity: "Don't bother, I'm always doing it myself. Every time I tell a story it's different. Can't remember how most of them started off any more. Don't know what's true. Don't know where I came from" (67).

Both characters manipulate memory to make more palatable identities. Ann's deliberate erasure of their affair represents a strategic rewriting of the past to preserve her present relationship, while Jack's admission exposes the deeper instability of identity itself when memory becomes unreliable. His fragmented identity, unable to distinguish truth from fiction in his own life story, suggests that without a clear account of the past, leaves one's sense of self just as unsettled. Jack's observation that his past might be restored to him only when Graham learns the truth exposes also the paradox of memory. It reveals that our personal histories depend less on objective facts than on the stories we are permitted to tell and the audiences who validate them. Rather than being anchored in fixed truths, our autobiographical narratives are shaped by which version of our story we choose to share and which communities grant us the authority to speak our experiences into existence.

When Graham persistently questions Ann about her past relationship with actor Larry Pitter, despite her having already answered him before. Ann's exasperated response is "Look, either I didn't or I did. If I didn't, then it doesn't matter; if I did and you've forgotten, then that's the same as me not having done so in the first place, isn't it? If you

don't remember, it doesn't matter, so let's say I didn't" (96-97). Ann's reply suggests a crucial insight about how she and Graham fashion their life narratives. If experiences exist only insofar as Graham remembers and acknowledges them, then forgotten events effectively cease to exist within their relationship. Her proposition, that Graham's failure to retain her previous answer essentially negates the original event, suggests that Ann's identity within their marriage is not built on objective truth but on Graham's selective retention and interpretation of what she tells him. In this view, the story of who Ann is becomes contingent not only on what actually happened in her past, but on what Graham chooses to remember, creating a version of herself that is constantly subject to his revision and erasure. By the novel's end, Graham's integration of Ann's fictional and real past events has utterly consumed him, demonstrating how memory can both define and deform the self. In a twisted fulfillment of memory's self-grounding function, these fabricated recollections provide Graham with a new, albeit horrifying, identity, that of a man driven to madness by jealousy. The memories, regardless of their fictional nature, succeed in anchoring his identity, though in a destructive rather than constructive manner.

The relationship between memory and identity can also be examined through the opposing forces of remembering and forgetting. “Forgetting, in most general terms, meant to lose or fail to retain something essential to human life; it meant an absence, emptiness or loss precisely where a memory, a positive content, should be” (Brockmeier 16). Forgetting has long been viewed as a primary threat to memory's reliability and the very foundation of personal identity. It undermines the core of identity, which relies heavily on maintaining a continuous narrative of experiences, relationships, and formative moments.

When memory fails, it disrupts far more than the recall of facts, it destabilizes the structured self-formed through engagement with the remembered past. The involuntary

nature of forgetting creates a certain unsettling vulnerability in identity formation. No control exists over which memories will fade or vanish entirely. This means that crucial elements of our personal narratives—the formative experiences that form our values, the relationships that defined our understanding of love and loss, or the moments of triumph and failure that revealed the essence of our identity—may slip beyond our conscious reach. This involuntary erosion of memory implies that the foundation of identity remains unstable, contextualized by processes of forgetting that unfold beyond our awareness or intention. This unpredictability transforms forgetting from a mere cognitive limitation into a threat to the continuity of selfhood.

Schacter explains how memory operates as both a selective and reconstructive process. His research highlights how memory is never fixed, showing that our minds constantly remake past events by viewing them through current understanding and perception, a phenomenon he examines that, “We tend to think of memories as snapshots from family albums that, if stored properly, could be retrieved in precisely the same condition in which they were put away. But we now know … [o]ur memories work differently” (*Seven Sins* 9). The true process is far more generative as Schacter continues to explain that

> We extract key elements from our experiences and store them. We then recreate or reconstruct our experiences rather than retrieve copies of them. Sometimes, in the process of reconstructing we add on feelings, beliefs or even knowledge we obtained after the experience. In other words, we bias our memories of the past by attributing to them emotions or knowledge that we acquired after the event". (*Seven Sins* 9)

The reconstructive nature of memory, combined with the natural process of forgetting, raises questions about the stability of personal identity. As pieces of remembered experience slip into oblivion, the disconcerting possibility arises those aspects of identity may rest on an increasingly incomplete and unreliable foundation. The person one believes to be today may differ greatly from the person formed by the actual past, affected as much by forgotten memories as by those recalled. This insight deepens uncertainty about personal history, the authentic self, and its role in the wider human experience.

Paul Ricoeur, brings forgetting to the forefront by prominently featuring it in the title of his book. As he explores the concept of forgetting in a dedicated chapter, Ricoeur initially characterizes it as a persistent and troubling menace that looms in the background of both the phenomenology of memory and the epistemology of history. This framing highlights the unsettling nature of forgetting, suggesting that it constantly threatens to undermine the reliability and integrity of both personal recollections and historical accounts. Ricoeur's emphasis on forgetting as a disturbing threat underscores the traditional view of forgetting as an antagonistic force that erodes the foundation of memory and knowledge. By placing forgetting in such a central position within his philosophical inquiry, Ricoeur sets the stage for an examination of its complex relationship with memory and its impact on our understanding of the past. Ricoeur's subsequent exploration of forgetting aims to unravel its multifaceted nature and its substantial implications for the way we create and interpret our individual and collective histories (*Memory, History* 412).

He also distinguishes between definitive forgetting, where memories are permanently lost and cannot be recovered, and reversible forgetting, where memories remain intact but temporarily inaccessible and can potentially be retrieved. Definitive forgetting, suggests that once something is forgotten, it is permanently lost and cannot be

retrieved. This interpretation aligns with the traditional view of forgetting as an irreversible process that erases memories and experiences from an individual's mind. Under this view, forgetting is seen as a destructive force that undermines the integrity of memory and the ability to accurately recall the past. Reversible forgetting suggests that forgetting is not always a permanent state and that memories can potentially be recovered or recollected given the right circumstances or triggers. The notion of reversible forgetting reveals that the boundary between memory and forgetting is more unstable and shifting than previously thought (417).

Jens Brockmeier challenges our assumptions about memory by arguing that forgetting is actually central to autobiographical recall. As he puts it, autobiographical memory "is about forgetting: forgetting about most of what happened in one's life-time" (23). This perspective reframes forgetting not as a failure of memory, but as its essential function. The impossibility of total recall becomes evident when we consider what Brockmeier describes as "the temporal dimension of a complete autobiographical memory, a memory without gaps and omissions, without any forgotten detail" (23). Such comprehensive retention would create an overwhelming burden of information that would paralyze rather than inform our present experience. The practical necessity of this selective remembering becomes clear when Brockmeier further considers the alternative scenario. He observes that "completely recalling one's life would take at least as long as one's life itself. It would be like drawing a map of the world in the ratio of one to one" (23). This analogy illustrates how total recall would be not only impossible but ultimately useless, because a one-to-one correspondence between experience and recall would prevent us from actually living our lives. Barnes's novel most explicitly confronts the mechanics of forgetting, this tension between memory and erasure appears throughout the works selected for this study. Brockmeier conceives of remembering and forgetting as "two sides of one

process, a process in which we give shape to our experience, thought and imagination in terms of past, present and future" (21).

The relationship between remembering and forgetting becomes particularly significant when considering how age affects memory reliability. Barnes often exploits this uncertainty about memory's stability to create narrative complexity. The elderly narrator Tony exemplifies this memory instability, as his advanced age renders his recollections suspect even in the absence of clinical memory disorders, creating a narrative where readers must constantly question the authenticity of his accounts. Tony himself reflects on this universal experience of aging and memory loss: "When you start forgetting things – I don't mean Alzheimer's, just the predictable consequence of aging – there are different ways to react. You can sit there and try to force your memory into giving up the name of that acquaintance, flower, train station, astronaut …" (*SE* 105). This acknowledgment of his own memory limitations paradoxically both undermines and authenticates his narrative voice. Tony's contemplation reveals the various strategies people employ when confronting the inevitable gaps in memory. He continues to outline these coping mechanisms, "Or you admit failure and take practical steps with reference books and the internet. Or you can just let it go – forget about remembering – and then sometimes you find that the mislaid fact surfaces an hour or a day later, often in those long waking nights that age imposes. Well, we all learn this, those of us who forget things (105).

Tony creates a paradox for his readers by steadfastly maintaining that his memory preserves accurate accounts of past events, despite the contradictory evidence that emerges throughout his narration. He reinforces this confidence in his recollections by describing his memory in mechanical terms: "But my memory has increasingly become a mechanism which reiterates apparently truthful data with little variation. I stared into the past, I waited,

I tried to trick my memory into a different course. But it was no good" (60). And then again, he contradicts himself admitting he can't rely on his memory. And then again, he contradicts himself admitting he can't rely on his memory. Tony's self-doubt becomes evident when he reflects: "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). His uncertainty deepens as he imagines the legal scrutiny his memories would face, envisioning a hypothetical cross-examination that exposes the fragility of his recollections. He anticipates the lawyer's relentless questioning:

> "'And yet you claim this memory was suppressed for forty years?' 'Yes.' 'And only surfaced just recently?' 'Yes.' 'Are you able to account for why it surfaced?' 'Not really.' 'Then let me put it to you, Mr. Webster, that this supposed incident is an entire figment of your imagination, constructed to justify some romantic attachment which you appear to have been nurturing towards my client, a presumption which, the court should know, my client finds it utterly repugnant'". (113)

The imagined interrogation reveals Tony's own awareness of his memory's potential unreliability, even as he continues to present his version of events as truth. However, Tony's acknowledgment of memory's fallibility does not extend to a willingness to question the accuracy of his narrative. The lack of corroboration to support his accusations against others, or to clarify his own culpability in his treatment of Adrian and Veronica, undermines his entire account in significant ways. In turn, Tony's selective memories operate as a narrative deliberately created to safeguard his self-image, emphasizing how his recollections serve personal preservation rather than factual honesty. His convenient reconstructions protect him from confronting uncomfortable truths about his character, demonstrating how identity can become built upon a foundation of self-serving forgetting.

Without external validation, Tony's understanding of himself relies entirely on his ability to manipulate his own past, creating an identity that exists in constant tension with the reality he refuses to acknowledge.

In this context Adrian Finn's observation during History lesson that “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" (15) applies equally to personal memory and identity formation. Just as historical accounts are inevitably shaped by the historian's circumstances and perspective, memories of one’s own life are altered by current emotional and psychological state, calling into question the stability of identity itself. Following his separation from Veronica, Tony recalls receiving a supportive letter from her mother expressing confidence that he would find a more compatible partner. He laments, "I wish I'd kept that letter, because it would have been proof, corroboration. Instead, the only evidence comes from my memory – of a carefree, rather dashing woman who broke an egg, cooked me another, and told me not to take any shit from her daughter" (39). This missing correspondence represents yet another gap in the record that might have validated his version of events.

Tony's account of Adrian's letter reveals the tenuous nature of his recollections. He initially states that "Adrian said he was writing to ask my permission to go out with Veronica," but immediately contradicts himself: "Actually to be true to my own memory, as far as that's ever possible (and I didn't keep that letter either), what he said was that he and Veronica were already going out together…” (41). His self-awareness about these inconsistencies surfaces when he admits, "Again, I must stress that this is my reading now of what happened then. Or rather, my memory now of my reading then of what was happening at the time" (41). These self-corrections illuminate Tony's process of identity

formation through the continuous recreation of memory. Each revision represents an attempt to craft a more palatable version of himself, while simultaneously reshaping his understanding of who he is and was.

His constant adjustments to his narrative establish that his experiences of selfhood depend not on accurate recall, but on his ability to continually rearrange his past into a story he can live with, making his identity as fluid as his memory. This pattern of identity construction through memory manipulation aligns with scholarly understanding of the workings of autobiographical memory. Barclay & Decooke emphasize that autobiographical memory "is a constructive and reconstructive process used to condense everyday memories of events and activities" (92). The active shaping of memory contradicts any notion of passive, objective recall. The purpose of this construction becomes clear in their observation that memory works by "extracting those features that embrace and maintain meaning in one's self-knowledge system"(92). Memory's role here is not archival but existential—it keeps one's identity intact. The transformative power of this process is evident in how "seemingly unconnected episodic recollections become allegorical in that particular events can be remembered and used as instances of generalized life experiences to convey one's sense of self to an audience" (92). Individual memories become representative symbols of larger patterns in our self-understanding.

His characters desperately seek truth in their lives, but they simultaneously find multiple ways to dismantle their own access to it, precisely because truth itself can be too painful to bear. This tension between the longing for genuine self-understanding and the human inclination toward self-deception becomes central to grasping the ways in which memory simultaneously builds identity and alters it through distortion, emphasizing how remembering involves an ongoing negotiation and not a straightforward recovery of truth.

Tony observes in *SE*, "the longer life goes on, the fewer are those around to challenge our account… our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about our life" (120). In *LE* however, the unique scenario is that the primary narrators are around to challenge each other's accounts. Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian serve as one another's living memory checks, each one's version of past events is immediately countered by another's version. This creates a kind of contested memory, in which personal identity becomes a site of ongoing mediation instead of a fixed product of personal construction.

Identity emerges from memory as both its grounding source and its site of struggle. When Tony Webster reflects on the erosion of witnesses to his life story, he acknowledges how individual memory allows for comfortable self-deception as we become the unchallenged authors of our own narratives. But Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian cannot retreat into such solitary revision. Their identities must withstand constant interrogation, as each character's understanding of who they are depends partly on events that the others remember differently. The result is identity as a collaborative yet conflicted process, where the self emerges not from internal reflection alone but from the varying versions of shared experience.

Each character discovers that their identity is built on particular interpretations of past choices and relationships which face perpetual challenges from those who were present but saw differently. In this contested space, identity becomes less a fixed narrative and more an ongoing negotiation, formed as much by what others remember as by what they choose to remember themselves. Their drive for self-knowledge influences how they handle autobiographical memory. In order to make meaning of their lives and negotiate a personal biography, they interpret and organize their experiences to form a meaningful story. This process often involves reworking unusual events, highlighting those that seem

more typical, and adjusting details so that the past appears smoother and more understandable.

While *SE* examines the disruptive power of newly uncovered memories, *OS* focuses on the endurance of a single formative memory over the course of a lifetime. Narrated by Paul in a mix of first, second, and third person Barnes stylistic choice mirrors the progression of time and the shifting relationship between the remembering self and the remembered self. Through Paul's story, Barnes explores how a single, pivotal memory can come to define an entire existence. Paul's one narrative becomes so central to his identity that it overshadows all other experiences and influences every subsequent understanding of who he is. This memory moves beyond shaping his self-understanding and becomes the very lens through which he interprets his entire life, rising from one moment among many to the central pattern of his personal history. *OS* serves as Paul's attempt, in old age, to recount and make sense of that defining experience, with the very act of narration underscoring memory's central role in shaping identity. By writing the memoir of his love affair, Paul reaffirms that this one relationship has become the lens through which he views his entire existence. This aligns with the theoretical perspectives on autobiographical memory, which highlight how memories that are especially emotionally intense or meaningful tend to become self-defining memories.

Paul's memoir exemplifies this process of selective recall, where a single relationship becomes the organizing principle that gives coherence and meaning to his entire life narrative. From the very beginning, Paul is open about the subjectivity of his memories. He even suggests a self-serving bias in recall: "memory prioritizes whatever is most useful to help keep the bearer of those memories going… there is a self-interest in bringing happier memories to the surface first (19). Paul's acknowledgment that memory

privileges happier recollections indicates that personal narrative operates as a mechanism for preserving identity. His mind, perhaps unconsciously, foregrounds uplifting moments as a way to interpret and withstand the painful experiences that followed. Such selective recall demonstrates how memory curates experience, privileging positive moments to preserve both psychological equilibrium and narrative coherence. By articulating this principle, Paul demonstrates remarkable self-awareness about how the formation of identity relies on memory's protective mechanisms, that of the mind's tendency to scaffold the self through strategically ordered remembering. This metacognitive insight also establishes Paul's implicit contract with his reader, signaling that his narrative will mirror memory's natural architecture. Paul's memories amount to more than isolated events or experiences, they constitute a narrative that informs his understanding of who he is and how he fits into the world around him.

The story he tells himself about his past, about his relationship with Susan along with the lessons he draws from these experiences and the ways he integrates them into his self-conception, all contribute to the formation and maintenance of his personal identity. Through his retrospective narration, Paul's memories function as both the raw material and the organizing principle of selfhood. Memory is essential for establishing Paul's sense of continuity and coherence throughout his life narrative. His memories connect his experiences to his present circumstances as an older man reflecting on his past, it helps Paul construct a narrative marked by unity and purpose. It allows him to see himself as having evolved and grown over time, while also grappling with whether a core sense of self has endured across the different contexts and challenges, he has faced, or whether, as he suggests, we only have "one story" that defines us completely.

Paul indicates that his story will follow an emotional trajectory beginning with the sustaining memories that have long protected his perception of self before gradually descending into the more painful truths that memory typically keeps at bay. What Paul uncovers is the reciprocal relationship between personal narrative and identity—each shaping the other. Also, the stories people craft about themselves are informed not only by actual events, but also by what the psyche chooses to hold on to so that a stable sense of self can endure. Paul grapples with an intense internal battle to form an order and control over his past experiences. He seeks to uncover significant motivations and explanations that justify his present circumstances, desperately trying to convince himself that the choices he made were not misguided. This struggle reflects his deep-seated need to find purpose and meaning in his life's trajectory, as well as to alleviate the lingering doubts and uncertainties surrounding the decisions that have defined his current identity.

Throughout the novel, Paul's process of remembering is portrayed as integral to his identity (re)construction. He repeatedly grapples with why things happened as they did and what those events mean for who he has become. In recounting his first love, he seeks to understand the significance of his existence as molded by that formative youthful experience. By narrating his memories, Paul attempts to heal or justify himself, to reconcile his present self with the choices and mistakes of his younger self. Paul's tone is confessional and introspective, he does not exonerate himself completely, but he does seek a narrative he can live with, one that acknowledges both the passion and the pain of his "only story."

Stephanie Frink's observation that "As a constitutive part of identity, emotions take center stage not only in our daily actions and interactions, but also in the narratives we tell about ourselves" (133) bridges the gap between lived experience and remembered

experience, establishing that emotions serve as both the raw material of our daily lives and the organizing principle through which we make sense of our past (133). According to Frink, stories are inherently influenced by emotional arcs because our brains naturally organize experiences through affective patterns. We remember and interpret events based on how they made us feel rather than through purely chronological sequences. The narratives we create about ourselves are rarely neutral recounting of events; they are emotionally charged stories that give meaning to our experiences and help establish continuity between past and present selves.

The emotional dimension of self-narration becomes especially significant when analyzing the relationship between memory and identity, because it underscores how recollection operates on more than a purely cognitive level. It shows that memories function as deeply affective experiences that participate actively in shaping the evolving sense of identity, allowing emotion to influence the very ways identities are interpreted and inhabited. Paul's episodic memory is not a neutral reconstruction of past events but one saturated with the emotional intensity of his first love. From the outset, he admits that he prioritizes the happier memories and builds his story around the exhilaration of loving Susan, despite its eventual decay. His narrative is organized less by factual accuracy and more by the emotional weight each memory carries, a pattern consistent with Frink's argument that emotions are foundational to how we narrate identity. The love, shame, regret, and longing that mark Paul's recollections serve as organizing principles for his life story. In moments of pain or confusion, he switches narrative perspective from first to second or even third person, suggesting a distancing mechanism to cope with traumatic emotional residues.

The fragmentation of narrative voice mirrors the fragmentation of self that occurs when memories are too emotionally charged to confront directly. What defines Paul's identity, therefore, is not simply the memories themselves, but his willingness to feel them fully and reimagine their significance. The emotional currents that run through his storytelling highlight Frink's notion that emotion is not simply an accompaniment to memory, rather it is constitutive of it. Paul's 'only story' becomes an evolving emotional map, charting how love, guilt, and grief have defined his internal world. The act of narrating becomes both cathartic and identity-affirming, showing that emotions are tightly bound to the stories we tell about ourselves. Paul's memory exemplifies Frink's claim that the self is not remembered in isolation, but through the emotional resonances that give narrative and identity its context.

In *TO* and *LE* also, Barnes demonstrates how each character unconsciously assembles their recollections to align with their current self-perception. Stuart sees himself as the wronged friend. Oliver positions himself as the misunderstood intellectual. Gillian forges her own understanding of her role within their shared history. Memory emerges as an ongoing process of self-authorship rather than mere recall. The construction of self-serving narratives through selective remembering becomes, in Barnes's work, a mechanism of identity formation—one that inevitably marginalizes or rewrites the stories of others to protect the integrity of one's own self-conception. Each character maintains sincere conviction in their version of events, yet the reader recognizes that any definitive truth remains fragmentary and elusive, existing only within the murky intersection where all three perspectives converge. Through this technique, Barnes reveals memory's capacity not to shape it in service of present psychological needs, creating conflicting realities that feel authentic to their respective narrators while collectively exposing the impossibility of recovering an unmediated historical truth

Gillian in *TO* does not explicitly chronicle events in the same verbose way Stuart and Oliver do, instead, her monologues often focus on feelings and interpretations rather than detailed flashbacks. She says, “Look, I just don't particularly think it’s anyone’s business. I really don't. I’m an ordinary, private person. I haven’t got anything to say. Wherever you turn nowadays there are people who insist on spilling out their lives at you” (7-8). Ten years on in *LE* Gillian’s attitude remains cautious; “Look, I actually haven’t the time. Sophie’s got music today” (*LE* 3) and quickly turns to analyzing Stuart and Oliver’s personalities rather than reminiscing at length. Gillian’s identity is less anchored in specific past episodes than the others’, and more in how she has emotionally processed those episodes. She often acts as a referee between the two men’s conflicting memories, acknowledging that truth lies somewhere in between.

When Gillian does recall specific scenes, they carry a tone of conflicted emotions, regret, uncertainty and defensiveness. She carries memories from both of her marriages—memories that have shaped who she has become. As she reflects, "It's just that if there are two people in the world I understand, they're Stuart and Oliver. After all, I have been married to both of them" (*LE* 5). These memories form the foundation of her current identity as a wife, mother, and a woman who has navigated difficult decisions and made painful choices throughout her life. Gillian remembers her first marriage to Stuart with a mix of guilt and nostalgia. At times she defensively justifies her past decision and she describes Stuart and Oliver as opposite poles of maturity and suggests she understood them deeply. Gillian’s identity is formed by comparing these two sets of memories. Notably, she doesn’t reminisce about romantic moments or fights unless prompted, instead, she comments on changes she sees.

Gillian's episodic memories often come through most poignantly in her reactions to the others. When Stuart resurfaces in their lives after ten years, Gillian's recollection of how badly Stuart was hurt and her lingering guilt can be sensed as she admits she has always feared that Oliver's fickleness or Stuart's resentment could surface: "I've watched people take against Oliver and fall under his spell almost at the same time…be warned" (3). It also hints at her own mixed memories of Oliver, love and exasperation intertwined, which informs her current wariness. Likewise, she may remember Stuart's flaws in their marriage in order to excuse her leaving him, yet also remember Stuart's kindness and reliability in ways that complicate her present emotions. The tension in Gillian's memory, between what is retained and what is discarded, is integral to her character. It demonstrates the selective ways episodic memory can be used to safeguard an individual's self-understanding.

Gilian's preference for maintaining civil relationships over indulging in the recitation of old wounds demonstrates memory as a constitutive element of identity. For Ricoeur, forgetting does not represent memory's absence alone. Instead, it serves as an integral part of how individuals create meaningful narratives about themselves. Forgetting allows them to move beyond potentially destructive recollections that might otherwise define them. Gilian's deliberate choice not to dwell on past hurts represents the strategic release of certain memories which enables the preservation of relationships and the maintenance of a self-concept oriented toward reconciliation rather than resentment. In this light, her identity is revised not by what she chooses to remember about past conflicts, but by her act of forgetting as a means of sustaining harmony and personal peace. Gillian's identity by the end of the novel is arguably the most fluid, precisely because she is pulled between two sets of memories and two selves as Stuart's wife and as Oliver's wife.

Also, the starkly different portrayals of Gillian, as a gentle victim in Stuart's recollections versus a quietly manipulative figure in Oliver's account, arise directly from the selective nature of memory itself, with each narrator privileging different aspects of their shared experiences with her. Stuart's characterization draws from memories that emphasize Gillian's vulnerability and Oliver's irresponsibility, while Oliver's perspective is formed by recollections that highlight moments of perceived calculation or subtle control on Gillian's part. Because these representations stand in sharp contrast to one another, they demonstrate that memory works through subjective acts of selection and emphasis. As a result, the same person can emerge in completely different ways depending on which experiences are pushed to the foreground and which are allowed to recede into the background. Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian each engage in acts of mental time travel – revisiting pivotal moments of their shared past – and in doing so, each reaffirms a particular self-image shaped by those memories. Stuart's recollections anchor an identity of the aggrieved but morally steady ex-husband. Oliver's artful and self-editing memories bolster an identity as a witty romantic. Gillian's cautious, emotionally shaped memories support an identity torn between remorse and hope

Personal narrative emerges as a creative, interpretive act in which each narrator pieces together life stories from shared, selective fragments, shaping them not according to objective truth but according to an evolving sense of who they are and who they hope to become. Barnes also exposes the fragility of episodic memory. He shows memory to be malleable, closer to storytelling than an archive, as Oliver explicitly acknowledges, memory is an *'*artifice', something shaped by imagination and bias. This creative and sometimes faulty nature of memory means that personal identity for the author's protagonists is not solid ground but rather a story continuously under revision. Barnes's narrative also suggests that truth in human relationships is always provisional. In the

absence of an objective truth, we are left with episodic truths, intimate, subjective recollections that each character clings to as the foundation of self. Each of them, he implies, is forever balancing what they remember, what they forget, and who they become as a result. The interplay of these memories creates a rich tapestry of multiple realities, challenging the reader to consider how our own memories function in the stories we tell about ourselves. By the novel's end, Barnes makes poignantly clear that memory is identity, but it is a volatile identity, as unreliable as memory itself.

The narratives of all the characters do not follow a linear path, instead it mirrors the workings of human memory. Their stories are organized through associative connections just as memory operates through unexpected links and sudden shifts, where one recollection triggers another seemingly unrelated event or experience. The narratives reflect this haphazard quality by splicing together fragments from their lives. His characters find themselves prisoners of their own histories, their paths subtly carved or sometimes forcibly hewn by the ghosts they carry within. Episodic memories may supply the raw material for personal narratives and identity, yet they are continually revised instead of being retrieved with full accuracy. This cognitive reality is illustrated throughout Barnes' novels, where characters present accounts that frequently conflict with one another.

Chapter 3

Echoes Across Time: Memory and Temporality

What matters in life is not what happens to you, but what you remember and how you remember it.

-Gabriel García Márquez

In *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger argues that *Dasein*, the term he uses to refer to human existence, is grounded in time. Time, according to Heidegger, is "the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of being" (1). Temporality, he says, is a notion of time that extends beyond the linear progression of past, present, and future. It is temporality that serves as the existential horizon through which individuals grasp the meaning of their being-in-the-world. Human existence is defined by this awareness of mortality and the passage of time which shapes ones' understanding of self. Temporality therefore is the ontological foundation for human existence. The relationship between time and memory has consistently been a subject of fascination for Barnes. Barnes suggests this relationship serves a dual purpose: it defines identity while also illuminating the selective, personal nature of memory. Memory exists within time but transcends mere chronology, engaging in a continual act of reinterpretation that molds our perception of selfhood. Paul Ricoeur observes: "In order to answer the age-old question, 'Who am I?' we more often than not look to our past and fashion a narrative for our lives. By comparing our present selves with the selves, we remember, we experience ourselves as being in time – an experience which is crucial for our sense of self" (*Time* 8). He examines personal identity within the broader philosophical problem of time

The author achieves this end, he uses time and temporality as key mechanisms to enhance his characters and themes. Through compelling narrative techniques his novels explore deeply into human experience, memory, and identity. By weaving together

fragmented recollections and subjective perspectives, Barnes creates a textual space where the instability of memory becomes central to the reader's understanding of character and meaning. Because of the complex and intricate way in which the past and present converge, his work operates with multiple, co-existing time perspectives. The multi-temporal structure of these novels goes beyond simply arranging events in a chronological order along the timeline. Instead, it creates a complex reference frame in which each event is connected to others in a both forward and backward direction. Every event, carrying the weight of the past, is influenced by the preceding ones, while simultaneously shaping expectations and hopes for what lies ahead. By blending the past and the present, Barnes underscores how time distorts personal narratives. It allows him to explore themes of regret, self-deception and the difficulty of understanding one's own life. His stylistic choices, such as shifting tenses and employing metafictional elements, challenge conventional storytelling.

Barnes's experimental approach to storytelling through innovative narrative strategies has earned him recognition for challenging traditional literary conventions. The way the author engages with time and temporality become central to understanding character growth, offering insight into the subtle complexities of human experience. The compelling storytelling techniques the author uses, reveals the substantial impact Barnes has made on contemporary literature and also demonstrates how the author's work deepens our understanding of human experience. Through rich sensory detail, from the disorienting pull of memory's distortions to the lingering presence of weathered, familiar surfaces, the author builds narratives which confront uncomfortable truths about the interconnectedness of time and memory. Barnes presents readers with narrative complexities that transcend conventional storytelling boundaries.

In his fiction that focuses on memories, past events are recollected by a narrator or a character at a later point in the present. This temporal fluidity in his writings reflects the essence of human experience, in which history is perpetually recast by present perspectives. Identity formation in Barnes' work emerges through temporal techniques that reveal the development of character as a non-linear process which is dependent on how memory recreates experience. The evolution of Barnes' characters becomes inseparable from the temporal techniques that structure their narratives. One's sense of self is constituted through the perpetual reinterpretation and reorganization of personal memories, where characters' understanding of themselves undergoes changes based on how they organize and interpret their temporal experience. It also presents identity as an ongoing negotiation between different temporal moments.

This chapter is a critical exploration of the author's narrative engagement with temporality and memory across selected novels. It examines how these elements come together to form a non-linear conception of time and identity. The study highlights how Barnes rejects chronological linearity in favor of a fragmented, multi-layered temporal structure where past, present, and future merge through memory and retrospection. The chapter also argues that Barnes employs techniques such as narrative recursion, intertextuality, and unreliable narration to destabilize fixed notions of time. Barnes presents time as a subjective experience shaped by individual and collective recollection. Therefore, memory in this context, is often a fallible process that continually reshapes the self-wherein the characters' identities emerge through dialogic interplay between lived moments and reconstructed pasts. The novels selected for this study each foreground themes of loss, nostalgia, or existential uncertainty. And also demonstrate how Barnes situates the self as a work-in-progress perpetually reconstituted through the tension between temporal flux and the human desire for coherence. This chapter argues that

Barnes, foregrounding the instability of memory and the fragility of temporal boundaries, brings the existential condition of being in time to the forefront. Remembering, therefore, operates as a creative act and a destabilizing force and influences how meaning is formed and continually revised.

Annette Kuhn states that memory is characterized, “by the fragmentary non-linear quality of moments recalled out of time” (232). It also is about varied “connections between memory and the past, memory and time, memory and place, memory and experience, memory and images, memory and the unconscious” (233). Barnes achieves the goal of expressing time through a temporal structure by employing narrative experimentation that complement the interruptions, gaps, and multiple parallel narratives that don't always connect cohesively. Also featuring prominently are questions of personal ethic and accountability as characters wrestle with the choices they made and their consequences throughout their lives. The plurality of memory not only produces multiple storylines, but also suggests a malleability of the narratives themselves, wherein, the retelling of past events often shifts depending on the context of the narration and the audience addressed. Critics have often credited Barnes with the ability to present time’s passage and the inevitable erosions and transformations that shape lived reality. Together, these factors shape both his characters and wider narrative concerns. Memory accordingly, is like a draft that is revised and reinterpreted differently based on present circumstances and the social context of remembering.

The primary way memory shapes narrative structure is through the interplay of past and present which reflects memory's fluid nature and suggests that the present is "clearly burdened with all our temporalities" (Dodgshon 300). According to Ricoeur self-recognition is bound up with the perception of continuity wherein individuals perceive themselves as the same across time. This recognition is connected to the temporal structure

of consciousness which extends across the individual's entire past. This retrospective dimension which is an inherent feature of consciousness, opens the way to Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity, where the self-reconfigures its continuity through the telling and retelling of its story (*Oneself* 125- 126). Ricoeur posits that through the narratives they construct about their lives, human beings form their identity (*Time* 8). Central to Ricoeur's philosophy is the idea that the primary means of understanding temporality is through storytelling. He rejects the reduction of time as a linear sequence of events, instead proposes it as a layered experience which is mediated through narrative and which shapes human experience of temporality into meaningful patterns. White highlights why narrative is inseparable from historical understanding. As he explains, "History has meaning because human actions produce meanings. These meanings are continuous over the generations of human time. This continuity, in turn, is felt in the human experience of time organized as future, past, and present rather than as mere serial consecution" (179). His point underscores that history is a lived structure of meaning shaped by how humans experience time itself. This framing makes historical interpretation inherently creative.

Ricoeur's particularly significant contribution is his theory that narrative serves as a bridge between two seemingly incompatible dimensions of time namely, the subjective, lived experience of time and the objective, measured time of the physical world. Through narrative, the otherwise fragmented and chaotic events are organized as meaningful casual sequences. It allows individuals to reinterpret their past, present, and future, creating a more coherent understanding of their lives. Narrative identity, as Ricoeur proposes, is the idea that selfhood takes shape through the stories we tell about our lives. This process relies on how we experience and grasp time. Whether in history or fiction, narrative becomes the means by which humans navigate and comprehend their existence by connecting different moments across time. But Ricoeur also observes that, "narrative

identity is not a stable and seamless identity. Just as it is possible to compose several plots on the subject of the same incidents so it is always possible to weave different, even opposed, plots about our lives" (*Time* 377).

Barnes' narrative techniques reveal a complex engagement with time and memory, treating them as the central shaping element of his works. His novels employ various temporal strategies ranging from non-linear chronology to fragmented memory sequences, which create narratives that challenge established and conventional temporal boundaries. They challenge readers to navigate complex relationships between past and present. The writer's narrative choices transform reading into an active and participatory process of uncovering temporal structures, where the reader has to piece together fragmented moments to understand the complete narrative. Barnes's approach to temporality prompts readers to reconsider the established norms of narrative reliability and authorial presence. According to Ricoeur, narrative time cannot be reduced to a simple chain of events. but it comes into being through the very act of storytelling. (*Time* 19)

Barnes portrays memory as a narrative process, one in which characters return to earlier experiences and derive evolving conceptions of identity through continual reinterpretation. The author's non-linear storytelling reveals how memory operates in loops and cycles by constantly bringing past experiences into dialogue with present moments. This approach captures the way human life tends to repeat certain patterns, with individuals often confronting similar feelings or emotions across different periods in their lives. This repetition is emphasized by Barnes to underscore that temporal experience is marked by return to the past that moulds identity across time.

In order to create a tapestry of temporal experience, where each viewpoint contributes to a fuller understanding of how time affects human consciousness, Barnes also weaves together multiple character perspectives. Each point of view enriches our

awareness of how time affects human awareness. These distinct subjectivities demonstrate that time is not experienced in a uniform manner. Rather it varies dramatically based on individual histories, personal circumstances and emotional states. The way each character engages with time illustrates how subjective factors influence their understanding of duration thereby reflecting their unique psychological makeup and life experiences. The interplay of these diverse temporal experiences also connects personal time to larger social and historical forces. This reveals how individual life is ingrained within broader contexts that in turn influence how time is experienced and understood.

Barnes's own reflections show how the passage of time affects our relationship with memory itself. He observes that, "Various things change you as a person and a writer as you age. You think more about time and memory; about what time does to memory, and memory does to time. You also mistrust memory more than when you were younger: you realize that it resembles an act of the imagination rather than a matter of simple mental recuperation" ("Julian Barnes on *The Sense of an Ending*") The selected texts portray temporality as fluid and stratified experience illustrating how recollection and temporal perception together redefine the self across one's life. The texts articulate a conception of selfhood that resists linear progression and fixed temporal order.

Barnes employs techniques such as narrative recursion, intertextuality, and unreliable narration to destabilize fixed notions of time. Instead, time is presented as a mutable and subjective experience shaped by individual and collective recollection. The works selected for the study demonstrate how Barnes situates the self as an ongoing work-in-progress which is forever reshaped through the tension between flux of temporality and the human desire for coherence. Barnes foregrounds the instability of memory and the permeability of temporal boundaries, and uses this lens to explore the existential condition of being in time. Within this perspective, the act of remembering becomes a creative force

as coherence and meaning is constructed. And, it is also a destabilizing force because recollections destabilize fixed narratives and identities.

The narrator is arguably the most pivotal concept in narratology. Narratology, according to Mieke Bal, “is the theory of narratives, narrative texts, images, spectacles, events; cultural artefacts that ‘tell a story’. Such a theory helps to understand, analyze, and evaluate narratives” (5). Every narrative, whether literary text or story, must be conveyed through a narrator. Consequently, narratology treats the figure of the narrator as a key through which voice, authority and also perspective is explored. The study of the narrator in a narrative text is a recent academic phenomenon though its conceptual roots lie deep in ancient philosophical thought. The distinctions concerning narrative modes can be traced back to ancient Greece with Plato differentiating between direct representation, or *mimesis*, as seen in drama, and *diegesis* or indirect representation characteristic of narrative. Plato, in making this distinction acknowledged the mediating role that lies at the center of all storytelling. Aristotle's *Poetics* similarly laid early theoretical groundwork for understanding narrative structures.

As this study's scope does not extend to a greatly detailed narratological analysis, a brief historical overview of narrator studies is presented. Hence, discussions of narrators' stylistic and linguistic characteristics, in spite of their contributions to the field are significantly excluded.

Henry James played a pivotal role in the academic study of novels, particularly with regard to the role of the narrator. James drew a clear distinction between “telling" and "showing" and foregrounded the significance of "point of view" as a shaping force in narrative. He urged novelists to let the audience perceive events from the point of view of the characters of the story novelists and to move beyond the overt authorial interventions

that was prevalent in Victorian literature (180). He sought to endow characters with a richer portrayal of their internal states by giving more importance to internal consciousness over external narration and states. His work marked a crucial turning point in the history of novels. The emphasis shifted from mere recounting of external occurrences to the exploration of how these events are processed and reimagined within the minds of characters. This change was not only stylistic but theoretical as well. It shifted the critical attention from the author as a biographical presence to narrator as a textual function. This, move was one of the defining features of narratology's pursuit to establish itself as a systematic form of analysis Focusing on the narrator's textual role deepens the understanding of how narrative realism and psychological depth emerge through specific textual choices, instead of functioning as straightforward reflections of an author's personal vision. This progression clarifies how the concept of 'realism' in literature advanced, shifting from explicit authorial commentary to cultivating the illusion of unaltered experience as perceived through a character's consciousness.

The modern foundations of narratology are firmly rooted in linguistics and structuralism, intellectual movements that gained prominence in Europe during the early 20th century. Influential figures include the Russian Formalists, notably Vladimir Propp whose 1928 work *Morphology of the Folk Tale* introduced key analytical concepts such as fabula and syuzhet. This theoretical trajectory culminated with French structuralists like Claude Lévi-Strauss and Tzvetan Todorov, the latter of whom coined the term "narratology" in 1969.

Gerard Genette's *Discours du récit: Essai de méthode* (1972) first published in French and later translated in English in 1983 as *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, is widely recognized as a cornerstone of modern literary theory and discourse

analysis. It provided a comprehensive and systematic theory of narrative, marking a significant milestone in the field. A central tenet of Genette's work is his argument that all narrative is essentially *diegesis* or telling, and that *mimesis* or showing is, in essence, an illusion. Genette contends that, unlike dramatic representation, "no narrative can ‘show’ or ‘imitate’ the story itself. All it can do is tell it in a manner which is detailed, precise, ‘alive,’ and that may give more or less the illusion of mimesis [because] narration... is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating" (164). He concludes that "mimesis in words can only be mimesis of words. Other than that, all we have and can have is degrees of diegesis" (164). Genette’s structuralist approach, which posits that all narrative is inherently diegetic and that mimesis is an illusion crafted through language, provides a critical foundation for understanding narrative as a linguistic construct. If mimesis is an illusion, then narrative realism is a carefully constructed linguistic artifice. This understanding compels literary analysis to shift its focus from *what* is presented to *how* the illusion of presentation is achieved. It emphasizes that narrative reality is always mediated by language and the narrator's choices. Genette’s contributions provide a rigorous typology for analyzing narrative processes, reshaping the understanding of how stories are told. This perspective, rooted in the analysis of narrative as a textual system, sets the stage for cognitive narratology’s exploration of how readers process and interpret these linguistic structures.

While Genette focuses on the mechanics of narrative discourse, psychonarratology, as advanced by certain scholars, shifts attention to the reader’s cognitive engagement, suggesting that readers approach narratives as they would ordinary communication, assuming the presence of a fictional communicator encoded in the text—namely, the narrator—who is responsible for conveying the narrative’s content. This assumption aligns with a mimetic perspective, where readers treat the narrator as a human-like entity with

intentions, perspectives, and agency, much like a real person communicating. This mirrors how we infer intentions and meaning in face-to-face interactions, making the narrator a central anchor for understanding the story. This mimetic assumption, which echoes Genette's notion of mimesis as an effect of language, is further scrutinized by cognitively-oriented narratologists who argue that the narrator is a reader-generated entity shaped by cognitive processes and experiential frames. Consequently, cognitive narratology builds on Genette's insights by moving beyond the text to investigate how readers assemble narrative meaning, redefining the narrator's role in cognitive terms (Margolin, par. 4).

Narrators can be classified as either participants within the story's events or as external observers who remain outside the fictional world while recounting it from an authorial standpoint. When narratives feature a conspicuous narrator presence, the text mimics the interaction of an oral storytelling scenario where a speaker directly addresses an audience (Genette 215–23). To Chatman, the narrator "is a reporter, not an 'observer' of the story world in the sense of literally witnessing it. It makes no sense to say that a story is told 'through' the narrator's perception since he/she/it is precisely narrating, which is not an act of perception but of presentation or representation" (*Coming* 153). Based on the degree to which a narrator's presence is made evident or detectable within the text, one can distinguish between overt and covert narrators.

The distinction between overt and covert narrators is based on the specific criterion of how clearly the narrator's presence is signaled or marked within the text itself. An overt narrator is a highly visible storytelling presence who actively draws attention to their role as the person telling the story. These narrators frequently use first-person pronouns like "I" or "we," directly address their readers, and maintain a distinctive, recognizable voice throughout the narrative. They don't hesitate to interrupt the story flow to offer their own

opinions about characters and events, provide helpful exposition, or share philosophical and moral commentary. Overt narrators explicitly reveal themselves through direct addresses to readers, personal commentary, or self-referential statements that make their role as storytellers unmistakable.

Covert narrators, maintain complete invisibility by exhibiting none of the intrusive features that characterize overtness. These narrators employ a neutral, nondistinctive voice without self-reference or direct address to readers, remaining nameless and sexually indeterminate while avoiding exposition even when it might be necessary (Chatman, *Story* 196 -262). They refrain from intruding into or interfering with the story's presentation, instead allowing events to unfold naturally at their own pace, following what has been described as letting "the story tell itself" (Lubbock, qtd. in Genette 45). This covert narration is most effectively achieved by channeling story events through the perspective of a reflector character, whose mindset conditions how events are perceived and presented to readers.

The temporal relationship between the narrator and the events being narrated is a core aspect of all storytelling that determines when the act of narration occurs relative to the story's action. Subsequent narration, which is the most common form, occurs when the narrator recounts events that have already happened, creating a retrospective account where the narrator looks back on completed actions from a position in time after they occurred. Simultaneous narration happens when the narrator describes events as they unfold in real-time providing an account of what they are currently witnessing. Prior narration, the least common form, takes place when the narrator speaks about events before they happen, as seen in prophetic texts, dreams that foretell the future, or any narrative that

anticipates actions yet to come, creating a forward-looking temporal structure where the telling precedes the actual occurrence of the events.

Genette's analysis of temporality in narrative focuses on the complex relationships between story events and their presentation in discourse. Genette introduces order, duration, and frequency as key concepts to analyze the temporal relationship between "story time" or the sequence of events and "narrative time" or how those events are presented. These categories provide a basis for analyzing how narratives manipulate time to create meaning. Each aspect reveals different aspects of how time functions in storytelling. The concept of order, one of Genette's central distinctions, specifically concerns the relationship between the actual chronological sequence of story events and how they are arranged in the narrative discourse. Focusing on order, Genette examines the alignment between the chronological sequence of events in the story and their arrangement in the narrative. Narratives establish a baseline temporal reference point from which the present moment unfolds. When narrative presentation mirrors the chronological flow of events, both timelines move in harmony. However, when there is a difference in order it creates "narrative anachronies" like prolepsis which involves anticipating events that occur later in the story and analepsis which refers to recalling events that happened earlier (35). Genette argues that these departures from chronological sequence reveal "narrative's capacity for *temporal autonomy*"—the power of narrative to fashion its own temporal logic that exists separately from both the sequential order of story events and the chronological structure of actual experience (92).

The concept of duration examines the relationship between the time events supposedly take within the story and the narrative space devoted to recounting them. While Genette acknowledges that stories have no "actual" duration, he argues that narratives

create their own temporal rhythm through selective pacing. The choices in narrative tempo reveal how storytelling manipulates time to create emphasis, meaning, and emotional effect. The third temporal component, frequency, concerns how narratives manage the repetition and consolidation of events. This approach enables texts to return to individual moments repeatedly through varying viewpoints or to merge multiple similar incidents into a single narrative representation. These three forms of temporal distortion, namely the disruption of sequential order, the manipulation of narrative pace, and the patterns of repetition and compression—together form what Genette describes as the intricate "game with time" that characterizes narrative fiction (157). Collectively, these techniques reveal storytelling's movement beyond chronological documentation. They generate complex temporal systems that influence how readers interpret and experience the text.

Genette also critiques the traditional classification of narrative voices based on grammatical person, first person and third person as insufficient for capturing the nuanced relationship between a narrator and the story's events. The core problem Genette identifies is that virtually all narrators, regardless of their traditional classification, can and often do use the first-person pronoun "I" when referring to themselves as storytellers. Even so-called "third-person" narrators frequently use "I" when making commentary, addressing readers, or acknowledging their role in the narrative process. This grammatical overlap demonstrates that the traditional system conflates two different aspects of narration: the grammatical forms used and the narrator's actual relationship to the story world. Instead, Genette proposes a more precise method based on the narrator's relationship to the diegetic level—the primary plane of the story's events within its fictional world. This shift from grammatical person to diegetic positioning introduces two key categories: homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators, which better account for the narrator's involvement or detachment from the story world and enhance the analysis of narrative structure. The terms

homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators, refines the traditional contrast between first- and third-person narration by focusing on the narrator's involvement in the story's world.

A homodiegetic narrator is a character within the story, participating in its events, often using a first-person perspective to recount their experiences, thereby creating a sense of immersion and subjectivity. In contrast, a heterodiegetic narrator exists outside the story's universe, typically employing a third-person perspective to describe events without personal involvement, offering a more detached and objective viewpoint. This diegetic-based system more accurately captures the relationship between narrator and story world, focusing on the narrator's ontological position rather than their grammatical choices (212-220).

Dorothee Birke and Michael Basseler argue that narrative texts employ two key structural principles to mirror memory's functioning. A narrative must situate memory within a subjective consciousness—a perceptual and interpretive lens through which recollections are selectively retrieved, emotionally warped, and then narratively reconstructed. The narrative can show memory through the eyes of a narrator looking back at what happened. This might be a first-person voice sorting through complicated or disputed memories of the past. Alternatively, the story can show characters directly confronting and thinking about their own personal histories. By anchoring memory to a defined subjective vantage point, whether overtly self-aware or unconsciously biased, the narrative reflects remembrance as an interpretive, meaning-driven process rather than simply retrieving facts. Such an approach foregrounds the interplay of distortion and temporal elasticity inherent in memory. In doing so, the narrative replicates the fragmented, iterative nature of how selves assimilate and narrativize experience over time. Secondly, the narrative, they argue, must also structure itself across two interconnected

time frames: the present moment of recollection and the past events being recalled. The movement between these frames, mirrors memory's nature. Memory operates through such temporal oscillations—the shifting between frames reveals not linear progression but a reciprocal process wherein past and present perpetually reconstruct one another. (217-218). For example, a story might shift abruptly from a character's current reflections to a vivid flashback, mirroring the sudden, unbidden resurgence of a memory. Techniques such as flashbacks, reflections, fragmented timelines, or introspective pauses allow the narrative to replicate the way memory oscillates between the now of remembering and the then of the remembered. When a story shows memory through a specific character's viewpoint, it highlights how feelings and beliefs color the memories. This approach reflects how memory actually works in our minds and shows how our memories help create who we are. It reveals that our past isn't unchangeable—we constantly reinterpret it based on who we are now.

These two foundational techniques, anchoring memory to a subjective lens and interweaving past and present timelines, allow narratives to authentically replicate the dynamic, non-linear workings of human recollection. By structuring his stories around these principles, Barnes delves into memory's layered complexity, tracing how fragmented past experiences resurface in the present and in the process inform identity. The result is a nuanced exploration of memory that feels emotionally resonant and true to the messiness of how his characters navigate their lives through time.

In a 2011 interview, Barnes reflected on the central themes that drive his literary work, particularly addressing the role of memory as both subject matter and narrative device in his fiction. When questioned about the significance of memory in his novels, Barnes responded:

> 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. And every so often these certainties are not. (“Conversations”)

Likewise, in the novels taken for study Barnes foregrounds memory to interrogate the fluidity of time and the elusive relationship between past and present. Barnes presents memory as a restless, shaping power, one that weaves together distant moments, and leaves a clear imprint on how individuals understand who they are. His characters, often reflecting from a later vantage point, grapple with the tension between their younger selves, who navigated life’s immediacies, and their older selves, who sift through fragmented recollections to assemble meaning. The author’s characters navigate temporal experience through memory, which constitutes the interpretive model by which they reinterpret meaning from and situate themselves within temporality. Each protagonist across the five novels studied grapples with present dilemmas by continually revisiting and reinterpreting their personal histories. Their memories actively edit and restructure temporal experience, reshaping past events. They repeatedly return to this dilemma of being bound by time while lacking certainty about the past that shaped them. Memories are reinterpreted in the light of new events highlighting the idea that memory and temporal experience are entangled in a feedback loop rather than a simple linear progression. Barnes’s characters experience time as shifting and multi-layered. Also, the ongoing interplay between temporal perception and memory exerts a continuous force on the ways

they interpret themselves, allowing their self-understanding to shift and reform across the entire trajectory of their lives.

'It is to memory that the sense of orientation in the passage of time is linked', writes Ricoeur, '… from the past to the future… following the arrow of the time of change, but also from the future toward the past … across the living present' (*Time* 97). Tony Webster in *SE* articulates a similar problem: "We live in time, it bounds us and defines us…" (60) and Tony immediately acknowledges the conundrum that drives the novel, "But if we can't understand time, can't grasp its mysteries of pace and progress, what chance do we have with history – even our own small, personal, largely undocumented piece of it?" (60). This question captures the central thematic concern of the five novels taken for the study, the difficulty, perhaps the impossibility of truly understanding one's personal history when both time and memory are mysteriously unreliable. Though admitting his inability to truly grasp the nature of time – "I've never felt I understood it very well" (3), and constantly reflecting on the imperfections of his memory, Tony Webster embarks on a journey of recounting his personal history, to retrace his life, shaping his recollections into an autobiography that makes sense to him. As will be demonstrated, Barnes' characters repeatedly return to this human dilemma of being bound by time while lacking certainty about the past that shaped them.

SE is Barnes' most overt meditation on memory and the passage of time and it earned him the Man Booker Prize for its insightful portrayal of an ageing man coming to terms with his past. The novel is structured as the memoir-like reflections of Tony Webster, a man in his sixties looking back on events from his teens and early twenties and then re-evaluating those events in light of startling new information received in the present. Through Tony's retrospective narration, Barnes intricately layers time, using non-linear

storytelling and self-reflexive commentary to illustrate time's malleability. While his characters live in time they also live with their memories of time and these memories reconfigure themselves constantly like autumn leaves scattered and rearranged by shifting winds. Structurally, *SE* is divided into two parts, which correspond to two temporal orientations. Part One is Tony's recollection of his school days, university years and early adulthood in the 1960s -1970s. It is a relatively cohesive autobiography of his youth in which Tony introduces the readers to his close school friends Colin, Alex and the intellectually gifted Adrian Finn. Tony recalls their philosophical discussions about life and history and also narrates his first significant romantic relationship with Veronica Ford. Some major recollections of Tony are a weekend he spent at Veronica's home, their eventual break up and the subsequent shocking development that Adrian and veronica became involved with each other, followed by Adrian's suicide not long thereafter. The first section concludes with a rapid progression through Tony's adult life, including his career trajectory, marriage, fatherhood, divorce, and eventual retirement.

In Part Two, Tony's carefully reimagined version of his past is disrupted when he receives a letter following the death of Veronica's mother, forcing him to confront his "store of memories" and also learn "the new emotions that time brings" (*SE* 59, 88). The process of re-examining his life involves revisiting and reconsidering the events he recounted in Part One, revealing discrepancies and new perspectives. The memories described in Part One gain significance with the benefit of hindsight, considered in relation to the events of Part Two, inviting the reader to play an active role in remembering. In particular, the suicide incident of Tony's fellow student Robson is necessary to provide a point of reference for Adrian's later suicide. During this journey of self-discovery, Tony seeks guidance through conversations with his ex-wife Margaret and attempts to reconnect

with Veronica. His quest for truth eventually yields some answers, though these revelations leave him deeply distressed and hopeless rather than providing closure.

In part two, Tony is forced to revisit his memories when Veronica's mother, Mrs. Ford unexpectedly leaves him Adrian's diary and some money in her will. Tony realises, "My younger self had come back to shock my older self with what that self had been, or was, or was sometimes capable of being" (98). For decades, Tony had formed a comforting fiction about his past. He had carefully crafted an internal narrative that positioned himself as the victim—the one who had suffered at the hands of Adrian and Veronica. But everything changed when Veronica gave him a letter, he had written to Adrian forty years earlier, shortly after Adrian had begun his relationship with Veronica. The letter contained language so venomous, so unforgivable that it shattered his carefully maintained self-image, "All I could plead was that I had been its author then, but was not its author now. Indeed, I didn't recognize that part of myself from which the letter came" (97). When Tony is confronted with undeniable evidence of his own cruelty, his reexamination of past actions and identity reshapes his understanding of himself. This process reveals how his evolving memories intertwine with his present, carrying all his temporal selves within him.

Tony reflects, "We live with such easy assumptions, don't we? For instance, that memory equals events plus time. But it's all much odder than this. Who was it said that memory is what we thought we'd forgotten? And it ought to be obvious to us that time doesn't act as a fixative, rather as a solvent." (63). So as time passes, memories are reshaped to fit current self-narrative. This reshaping process dissolves inconsistencies and produces a version of personal memory that feels unified, even if it isn't fully accurate.

Tony believes his memory is orderly and reliable. In Part Two, when new documents, letters, and revelations appear, they trigger a surge of memories he had

suppressed or reshaped. These new memories don't just add new information — it breaks the linear timeline Tony built for himself. Events he thought were fixed suddenly shift, emotional meanings reverse and actions he minimized become central. Tony states: ‘personal time, which is the true time, is measured in your relationship to memory. So, when this strange thing happened—when these new memories suddenly came upon me—it was as if for that moment, time had been placed in reverse’ (*SE* 122). This concept, that memory has the potential to not only distort time, but to reverse it, is yet another example of the inherently entangled nature of memory and time and their power to transform and be transformed by one another. An initially straightforward quest for inheritance transforms into an examination of his entire life's narrative.

Memory, hence becomes an evolving narrative that shapes identity across time as Tony Webster reflects, “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” (130). Barnes frames time as both a relentless force and an unreliable collaborator in The Sense of an Ending, as Tony’s admission—'what you fail to do is look ahead, and then imagine yourself looking back from that future point… as the witnesses to your life diminish, there is less corroboration, and therefore, less certainty, as to what you are or have been' (59)—reveals how temporal dislocation destabilizes memory. The passage of time, here, is not just a backdrop but an active agent: it fractures the illusion of continuity, rendering the past as a site of revision rather than recollection. Tony’s futile attempt to look ahead in order to authenticate his identity underscores Barnes’s broader argument that time corrodes the very scaffolding of selfhood, leaving memory adrift in a sea of unverifiable narratives.

Tony's struggle with the irreversible logic of time lies at the heart of his anguish. Reflecting on remorse, he laments, "the chief characteristic of remorse is that […] the time has passed for apology or amends. But what if […] by some means remorse can be made to flow backwards, can be transmuted into simple guilt, then apologized for, and then forgiven?" (*SE* 107). By the novel's close, time's authority prevails: "I knew I couldn't change, or mend, anything now" (149), Tony concedes. His frustration arises from time's dual nature: it binds past and present in a fluid interplay that distorts self-perception, yet rigidly enforces their separation. This results in a self that becomes a disjointed entity suspended between irreconcilable temporal states. Accordingly, Barnes frames time as both architect and saboteur of identity, its relentless forward march leaving the past immutable yet perpetually haunting the present.

Time reveals itself as both the primary measure of human experience and its greatest distorting force. While historical time moves with apparent linearity, lived time operates according to entirely different principles, expanding and contracting according to the subjective rhythms of memory and consciousness. The time inhabited moment by moment proves elusive, as if the very act of existing within temporal flow prevents Tony from grasping its true nature. Barnes captures this central tension between experienced time and measured time through Tony's struggle with his own temporal immersion, showing how the protagonist's entanglement in time's current ultimately undermines his ability to navigate the deeper mysteries of his personal history and arrive at any reliable truth about his past.:

> Perhaps I just feel safer with the history that's been more or less agreed upon. Or perhaps it's that same paradox again: the history that happens underneath our noses ought to be the clearest, and yet it's the most deliquescent. We live in time, it bounds us and defines us, and time is supposed to measure history, isn't it? But if

> we can't understand time, can't grasp its mysteries of pace and progress, what chance do we have with history – even our own small, personal, largely undocumented piece of it? (*SE* 60)

Barnes uses a dual temporal structure in the novel where two time periods simultaneously unfold and intertwine. The narrative deliberately erases the boundaries of these timeframes, creating passages where memories from decades past and recent experiences coexist in the same passage. This technique mirrors the natural way memory is where past experiences can feel as immediate as yesterday's events. As Tony moves fluidly between these temporal zones, the reader experiences how past and present don't exist as clearly delineated periods but rather as overlapping dimensions of a continuous life experience. This manifests vividly during Tony's journey to meet Veronica:

> "On the train up to town, there was a girl sitting opposite me, plugged into earphones, eyes closed, impervious to the world outside, moving her head to music only she could hear. And suddenly a complete memory came to me: of Veronica dancing. Yes, she didn't dance-that's what I said- but there'd been one evening in my room when she got all mischievous and started pulling out my pop records.
>
> "Put one on and let me see you dance," she said.
>
> I shook my head.
>
> "Takes two to tango." "OK, you show me and I'll join in." (114)

Furthermore, Genette provides a comprehensive tool for analyzing the representation of time in literary texts. Genette introduces key concepts such as order, which refers to the relation between the sequence in which events are narrated and their actual chronological arrangement; duration, which examines how the time an event takes

to occur corresponds to the amount of textual space devoted to its narration; and frequency, which analyzes how often an event is narrated in comparison to how many times it occurs in the story(33-34). These detailed categories and their associated terminology have become foundational tools for examining the complex temporal structures of narratives, including the interplay between the present moment of narration and the past events being recounted, which is central to the representation of memory.

Gérard Genette's concept of order is especially pertinent when analyzing how memory processes are represented in narrative texts. Order refers to the relationship between the chronological sequence of events in the story world or story time and the sequence in which these events are presented in the narrative or discourse time (33-51). Narratives can create discrepancies between story time and discourse time by employing techniques such as analepses, or flashbacks, and prolepses, or flash-forwards, which deliberately disrupt the chronological flow of events. They can stretch across several pages or even entire sections of a novel. Genette defines prolepsis as "any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later" and analepsis as "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" (39–40). What makes them significant is that they break away from the main flow of time in the story. Story time itself is straightforward and linear, much like time in real life. Narrative time, however, can bend and loop as it allows for detours through analepsis and prolepsis. Each time the narrative suddenly jumps to an earlier or later moment, it steps outside the present flow of events to give the reader insight into something that happened before or that will happen after the current scene. In doing so, they mirror the non-linear and associative nature of human memory, where recollections of the past often arise out of order, triggered by present circumstances or stirred by powerful emotional associations.

Analepsis is a narrative technique used to stage memory processes by presenting events that occurred earlier in the story's chronology at a later point in the narrative discourse. This temporal disruption mimics the way human memory often recalls past experiences out of chronological order. Crucially, for an analepsis to effectively represent memory processes, the narrative must make it clear that the content of the flashback is being remembered by either the narrator or a character, rather than simply being an objective presentation of past events. The capacity of a narrative to effectively represent memory processes, can be intensified by frequently alternating between different time levels. By repeatedly shifting between the present moment of narration and the past events being recalled through analepses, the narrative constantly moves between the remembering consciousness and the remembered content.

Barnes' use of analepsis destabilizes linear chronology, framing flashbacks as subjective acts of retrospection, through which his characters actively reinterpret and even distort the past. The deliberate disruption of the linear sequence of events serves as a powerful technique to foreground the complex processes involved in remembering and the way Tony recollects and interprets his memories. The narrative presents Tony's life story as a jumbled series of analepses rather than a straightforward chronological account, it mimics the often fragmented and associative nature of human memory. By weaving analepsis into the narrative, Barnes creates a multi-temporal narrative structure which foregrounds the act of recollection itself as Tony admits that he has for years survived

> with the same loops, the same facts and the same emotions. I press a button marked Adrian or Veronica, the tape runs, the usual stuff spools out. The events reconfirm the emotions – resentment, a sense of injustice, relief – and vice versa. There seems no way of accessing anything else; the case is closed. Which is why you seek

> corroboration, even if it turns out to be a contradiction. But what if, even at a late stage, your emotions relating to those long-ago events and people change? (120).

Barnes also allows for a more intimate exploration of character. When events are revisited through memory, they're colored by the protagonist's current emotional state and understanding. The shifting emotions unlock buried memories, revealing the narrative's preoccupation with recollection and time as becomes evident in Tony's admission that,

> That ugly letter of mine provoked remorse in me. Veronica's account of her parents' deaths – yes, even her fathers – had touched me more than I would have thought possible. I felt a new sympathy for them – and her. Then, not long afterwards, I began remembering forgotten things. I don't know if there's a scientific explanation for this – to do with new affective states reopening blocked-off neural pathways. All I can say is that it happened, and that it astonished me. (120)

Barnes also allows for a more intimate exploration of character. What they choose to remember, how they remember it, and what they might be misremembering or suppressing all become meaningful elements of characterization. The act of remembering becomes part of the story itself, often serving as a means for the protagonist to process, understand, or come to terms with their past. As the story is told through Tony's perception, and his perception is defined by the irregularity of time, his narrative is organized in a way that it reflects "time's malleability" (*SE* 3) described above. In doing so, Barnes offers a non-linear narrative with temporal fragmentation and frequent flashbacks and flashforwards. The structure of the narrative involves recurring ideas, phrases and events. Every now and then certain memories, like the weekend spent with Veronica's family, resurface and therefore have to be re-considered. These repetitions and seemingly randomly resurfacing

elements follow an associative structure that resembles the operation of the human mind, the workings of memory and how the brain “throws you scraps from time to time” (*SE* 112).

OS is about an aging man reflecting on a romance that shaped his life, with the narrative spanning over thirty years and delving into the interplay of time and memory. The temporal structure of *OS* oscillates between past and present connecting Paul’s past to his current act of recollection. The present moment of narration works as a fixed point from which memories radiate outward each thread probing deeper into the past while remaining tied to the narrator’s consciousness. Though these digressions venture progressively further back in time, they inevitably loop back to the central axis of remembrance, mirroring how memory itself circles, interrogates, and reconstructs the past from the vantage of the present. This structure creates a pattern of expanding temporal circles, all anchored in Paul’s present act of storytelling.

At seventy, Paul Roberts the narrator and protagonist finds himself dwelling on the defining relationship of his life. As the narrator of *OS* he recounts his passionate first love that began when he was just nineteen and continued for a little more than a decade. On the very first page, Paul asks, "Would you rather love the more, and suffer the more; or love the less, and suffer the less? That is, I think, finally the only real question" (*OS* 3) He continues to reflect, “Most of us have only one story to tell… But there's only one that matters, only one finally worth telling. This is mine” (3). In recounting his singular tale, he tries to come to terms with his past and the present it has created, still wrestling with the persistent dilemmas and conflicts that defined his transformative love affair. The Paul of the present is working with memories that have been dissolved and reconstructed over time, offering a perspective that is inherently different from the immediate experience of

the past self. Paul grapples with a past that remains malleable, as time gradually erodes fixed perceptions and memories.

Through its passage, time permits endless reinterpretations, each iteration dissolving fragments of the original recollection, highlighting the unstable nature of historical and personal. This concealment creates a narrative tension, with the failed relationship becoming the central mystery around which his storytelling orbits. Like many who revisit their past, Paul's account relies almost exclusively on memory. Having never maintained a diary and with no remaining witnesses to consult, his recollection stands alone—coloured by time, emotion, and the inevitable distortions of retrospection. It is a tale of love and defiance. Young Paul, just nineteen, follows his heart into a relationship with Susan Macleod—a married woman nearly thirty years his senior whose daughters exceed his own age. Their romance unfolds in early 1960s greater London suburbia, a place so provincial its residents simply call it "The Village." This setting, still clinging to the conservative values and rigid social codes of the 1950s, provides the suffocating backdrop against which their love must struggle to survive.

In this environment of conventional middle-class morality, their relationship becomes instantly categorized as scandalous. Their age difference, Susan's marital status, and the community's unyielding standards of propriety all conspire to condemn their connection before it can truly begin. Yet it is precisely this opposition that highlights the courage at the heart of their story—the determination to pursue authentic feeling despite knowing society has already deemed their love inappropriate, deplorable, and ultimately impossible. They keep their relationship a secret for around two years and finally move to London to live together. The first half of the novel sets the stage for their challenges ahead. At the end of part one, Paul reflects that they lived together in London for another decade, followed by less frequent meetings. After her death years later, he vowed to remember her

fondly. In the final line of the first part, he admits, "And this is how I would remember it all, if I could. But I can't" (*OS* 83).

Barnes uses first-person narration as a narrative technique to convey memories here. As both the narrator and a participant in the story, the character's point of view is inherently subjective, shaped by their own biases and limitations. First-person narration creates an intimate and personal connection between the reader and the character, inviting the reader to empathize with the character's journey and understand the significance of the recounted memories. In this narrative style, the individual telling the story takes on a dual role, serving both as the narrator who relates the events and as a character who actively participates in the unfolding plot. The first-person narrative situation introduces a unique temporal complexity in storytelling. This complexity arises from the potential gap in time between two distinct moments: the moment of experience and the moment of narration. This temporal distance creates two perspectives within the same narrative voice: Narrating/Remembering-I and the experiencing-I. Genette highlights the important distinction between the narrating-I and the experiencing-I in first-person narratives (244-245).

Although the narrator and the character are the same individual, their functions and levels of knowledge differ significantly. The narrating-I is the person telling the story from a point in time after the events have occurred, equipped with a broader understanding of the narrative's context, consequences, and significance. The remembering-I or the narrating I has the advantage of temporal distance, allowing for reflection and reinterpretation. This perspective allows the narrating-I to provide insights and reflections that the experiencing-I could not have had at the time of the events. The experiencing I on the other hand is anchored in the past, at the time when the events actually occurred. It represents the

narrator's immediate, often limited understanding of events as they unfolded. The experiencing-I lacks the wisdom of hindsight and narrates from a position of temporal immediacy, conveying the unprocessed emotions and perceptions of the moment (Genette 194).

The narrating-I, situated at a later point in time and with the benefit of hindsight, can view the past self as an 'object-I' and allows the narrating-I to provide a more objective evaluation of the experiencing-I's thoughts and emotions. When the narrator chooses to focalize the story through the experiencing-I, they artificially restrict their field of knowledge to align with what the character knew and perceived at that specific moment in the story. This restriction of information can create dramatic irony or surprise for the reader, who may be aware of the narrator's full knowledge while witnessing the character's more limited understanding. Genette argues that this restriction of information through the experiencing-I is similar in both first-person and third-person narratives (204). In both cases, the narrator, whether a character in the story or an external entity, typically possesses more knowledge than the focal character. By consciously limiting the information conveyed to the reader, the narrator can manipulate the reader's understanding and emotional engagement with the story, regardless of the narrative perspective employed. His novels frequently explore the interplay between the experiencing-I and the narrating-I.

The narrative device of an elderly individual reflecting on their youth, or attempting to uncover the truth about another person's history, appears repeatedly in various forms in Barnes works. This recurring motif can be observed in his early works including *Metroland* (1980), *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), and *Talking It Over* (1991). This temporal gap where characters revisit and reinterpret their past shapes how memory and self-perception function in narrative. This gap creates a space where the past becomes not a

fixed reality but a malleable entity. The narrative present therefore becomes a vantage point from which to reassess and reconstruct their past as Adrian Finn in *SE* astutely observes: "That's one of the central problems of history...The question of subjective versus objective interpretation..." (12)

Paul's storytelling in *OS* shuttles continuously between the distant past of his lived experience and the immediate moment of narration, creating an oscillating movement that cycles backward through time while gradually arching towards the present. Each layer of the story foregrounds the dual presence of Paul as a mature narrator and the evolving younger self, charting the latter's journey toward becoming the consciousness that now reconstructs the past. Paul's narration mimics the motion of memory sifting through layers of time to align with the present. The effect is one of a layered spiral, where the act of remembering simultaneously circles outward and converges inward, intertwining threads of the past and the present. Paul narrates his youthful love affair with Susan Macleod first as the experiencing-I, full of passion and certainty, then as the narrating-I, older and more disillusioned. The novel shifts from a first-person narration filled with emotion to a more distanced, third-person perspective, reflecting Paul's growing detachment. His initial belief in love as pure and transformative gives way to painful realizations about emotional dependency and self-deception.

The layered narration presents a contrast between Paul's younger self, who naively believes in the absolute power of love, and his older self, who sees the irreversible consequences of his choices. Paul's older self oscillates between romanticizing and condemning his affair with Susan. He muses, "You might ask how deep my understanding of love was at the age of nineteen. A court of law might find it based on a few books and films, conversations with friends, heady dreams, aching fantasies about certain girls on

bicycles and a quarter-relationship with the first woman I went to bed with" (*OS* 88). This frames his entire narrative as a debate between his younger and older selves.

Paul, in old age, dissects his youthful affair with Susan with a mix of nostalgia, regret, and resignation. And as Paul reflects through his retrospective narrative voice, he suggests, "The lover, in rapture, doesn't want to understand love, but to experience it, to feel the intensity, the coming-into-focus of things, the acceleration of life, the entirely justifiable egotism, the lustful cockiness, the joyful rant, the calm seriousness, the hot yearning, the certainty, the simplicity, the complexity, the truth, the truth, the truth of love." (*OS* 88) In these lines Barnes prose transforms seamlessly from meditative introspection to present-moment exuberance. One can envision the elderly Paul speaking with measured wisdom, while the youthful Paul breaks through with a fervent declaration about the nature of love that embodies the unrestrained emotional intensity unique to nineteen-year-olds. The narrating-I, situated at a later point in time and with the benefit of hindsight, can view the past self as an 'object-I' and allows the narrating-I to provide a more objective evaluation of the experiencing-I's thoughts and emotions. And Paul's story stands as "a requiem for love that starts to depart as soon as it first insinuates itself and yet is less easily erased […] than anything else," (Craven).

The act of remembering by his characters inherently involves a navigation between different temporal planes, that of the present moment of recollection and the past events being recalled. Past events are recollected by his narrators at a later point in time, typically in the present. His works operate with multiple, co-existing time perspectives, as the past and present intertwine in intricate and varied ways. It creates a complex reference frame in which each event is connected to others in both a forward and backward direction. Every event is influenced by the preceding ones, carrying the weight of the past, while simultaneously shaping expectations and anticipations about future events. This interplay

between past and present in his memory-centric novels highlights the interconnected nature of experiences of his characters and the way memories continually inform and reshape their understanding of themselves. Memory and time are intricately woven into the narrative. Consequently, examining how Barnes' narratives structure and portray the interplay between these time levels can provide valuable insights into the ways in which memory processes are represented and experienced in his novels.

Time is also employed by Barnes as a crucial indicator of the protagonist's evolving emotional state throughout *OS.* Tony's retrospective realization that "He had given in to the old, continuing, ineradicable delusion: that lovers somehow stand outside of time" (169) reveals his journey from romantic idealism to painful wisdom. During the height of his passion, Tony inhabits an emotional world where time appears suspended, reflecting the intoxicating belief that true love transcends temporal boundaries and consequences. However, the shift from past tense certainty 'He had imagined" (169) to the harder-earned perspective of "Looking back, he saw" (169) demonstrates how Barnes maps the protagonist's emotional maturation through his changing temporal consciousness. The recognition that "time and place were no longer relevant to stories of love" (169) was itself an illusion. They signal not just intellectual growth but an emotional reckoning, that the protagonist's current state of loss or regret has stripped away the temporal fantasies that once sustained him.

Again, Paul's emotional discomfort and shame is reflected by the use of temporal fragmentation, "Now he was getting off the point. Susan and himself, all those years ago. There was her shame to deal with. But there was also, he knew, his shame" (169). The temporal marker "all those years ago" establishes the chronological distance between past events and present reflection, yet this distance paradoxically emphasizes how emotionally

proximate the shame remains. Paul's current emotional state allows him to perceive layers of shame that may have been obscured during the original events. The phrase "he knew" suggests a present-tense certainty about past emotions, demonstrating how Barnes uses temporal complexity to show that emotional understanding often arrives belatedly, requiring the distance of time to achieve clarity about feelings that were too overwhelming or complicated to process in their original moment.

Several techniques are employed to present time through memory. In the companion novels *TO* and *LE* the narrative rotates between Stuart, Gillian, and Oliver whose intertwined lives unfold through alternating first-person accounts. In *TO,* Stuart and Gillian's marriage becomes the centerpiece of the story. Stuart and Oliver share a friendship dating back to their school days. As events progress, the reader witnesses Oliver's increasingly passionate fixation on Gillian which he expresses through his eloquent and verbose narrative voice. The relationship dynamics shift dramatically when Gillian ultimately chooses to leave her husband for his oldest friend, shattering their long-established bonds and creating new, complicated ones. In the compelling sequel, there is a striking reversal. The once-passive Stuart transforms, becoming determined and methodical in his quest to reclaim Gillian's affections. The tale concludes with Gillian still bound to Oliver in marriage but pregnant with Stuart's child. This surprising development leaves their intertwined fates in a state of unresolved tension, with traditional concepts of partnership, loyalty, and family thrown into question.

The reader is told the story through character monologues, delivered not only by the main characters but also several supporting ones. Before each monologue, the character's name appears, creating a format somewhat similar to a play's script. Direct voices tell a story from three different perspectives, with no narrator standing between characters and reader. Each protagonist takes turns recounting their version of events in

first person. Occasionally, others who know the three main characters interject with brief asides, offering additional viewpoints. Through this alternating chorus of voices, the reader experiences the complete narrative without the presence of an intermediary storyteller.

The use of monologues serves as a powerful characterization tool, revealing each person's distinct personality through their speech patterns, unique quirks, and personal preoccupations. This orchestration of multiple distinct voices exemplifies what Mikhail Bakhtin termed polyphony. Each protagonist's opening statement establishes a distinct discursive style, allowing readers to identify them with ease. As time passes, it amplifies their selective recollections and they prioritize certain details to support their self-narratives. This polyphonic structure seems to mimic the non-linear nature of memory by presenting diverse, subjective accounts of events that evolve over time. In *TO* and *Love, etc*, the polyphonic structure reveals the subjective nature of memory through the distinct voices of Stuart, Gillian, and Oliver. Through these contrasting voices, each character's memories emerge as both complementary and contradictory, highlighting the personal biases that shape their recollections of the past. This also illustrates how time alters perception rather than preserving an immutable truth. When their relationship with time is disrupted, Barnes's characters are compelled to reexamine how their perception of reality is shaped, revealing the instability of what they take to be its essence. This temporal reorientation destabilizes established paradigms through which they perceive existence. Such disruption compels the readers to reconsider whether our previous understanding of reality was ever truly accurate or comprehensive.

Multiple first-person perspectives, or a polyphonic narrative structure transforms the novels into a mosaic of conflicting memories and temporal perspectives. This technique rejects linear chronology and emphasizes how subjective recollection distorts and reorders time. For instance, in *TO* the three characters in Julian Barnes' novel recount

Stuart and Gillian's wedding day with strikingly different details. Stuart nostalgically recalls, "It was a beautiful day. The sort of day everyone should have their wedding on. A soft June morning with a blue sky and a gentle breeze" (*TO* 6), painting an idealized, picture-perfect scene worthy of his significant milestone. Oliver, however, reconstructs the very same day through a more critical lens, describing "swirling clouds like marbled end-papers. A little too much wind, and everyone patting his hair back into place inside the door of the register office" (*TO* 11). These contrasting weather accounts—one serene and idyllic, the other blustery and inconvenient—reveal different observations and emotional experiences of the same event, showing how memory itself becomes shaped by one's position and perspective within the narrative's emotional landscape.

Oliver also remembers “trying to amuse the wedding company” while waiting at the register’s office by searching a London telephone directory for relevant professionals such as Divorce Lawyers and Rubber Goods purveyors (*TO* 11). Gillian however claims he was “leafing through the telephone directory looking for people with funny names” (8). Stuart, who asserts in his opening lines that he “remembers everything,” omits this incident entirely (1). Stuart remembers the registrar as a “dignified man who behaved with the correct degree of formality” (6), whereas Oliver scornfully calls him a “perfectly oleaginous and crepuscular little registrar. A flour - bomb of dandruff on his shoulders” (11). The variations in memory become apparent through their descriptions of a single object. Stuart remembers, "the ring I'd bought was placed on a plum-coloured cushion made of velvet and winked at us until it was time to put it on Gill's finger," (6) his recollection infused with sentiment and anticipation. Gillian's memory is more straightforward, noting her "wedding ring sitting on a fat burgundy cushion," (8) stripping the moment to its essentials with practical brevity. Oliver, meanwhile, transforms the scene entirely, observing that "the ring glittered on its damson pouffe like some intra-uterine

device," (11) introducing a clinical metaphor that subverts the romantic moment. These divergent accounts from Stuart's sentimentality to Gillian's simplicity to Oliver's provocative comparison, reveal how even shared experiences are interpreted through individual perspectives, with the humble ring cushion appearing as plum, burgundy, or damson depending on whose memory is trusted.

Stuart's understated "I said my vows a bit too loud and they seemed to echo round the light oak panelling of the room" (*TO* 6) contrasts sharply with Oliver's exaggerated "Stuart bellowed his words as if answering a court-martial and failure to enunciate perfectly would earn him a few more years in the glasshouse" (11). The disparity continues when Oliver recollects, "poor Gillie could scarcely vocalize her responses. I think she was crying, but adjudged it vulgar to peer," (11) yet Stuart, the bridegroom standing mere inches from his bride, makes no mention of Gillian crying, suggesting Oliver's account may be embellished or entirely fabricated for dramatic effect. Barnes thereby transforms the wedding ceremony into a masterful demonstration of how memory operates as a collection of emotionally charged fragments, with each character interpreting the event through the lens of their own desires and insecurities.

By juxtaposing the immediacy of lived experience with the wisdom of retrospection Barnes highlights how the passage of time can alter one's interpretation of events. The interplay between two temporal perspectives creates a narrative tension. The passage of time between the experiencing I and the narrating I in *TO* and *LE* spans almost a decade, each timespan offering different narrative possibilities. A shorter temporal distance might result in a more immediate, visceral recounting, while a greater temporal gap could yield a more reflective, analytical narrative style. This temporal duality in first-person narratives allows for a rich exploration of how time shapes memory.

The monologue format further amplifies this fragmentation. Each character's voice is a standalone snapshot of their memory. Collectively these voices create a collage of temporal perspectives. Stuart's memories in hindsight in *Love, etc* are steeped in bitterness and his tone rigidly anchored in the present as he dissects the past. In recounting the head collision between Stuart and Oliver, multiple perspectives emerge. Stuart characterizes it as an intentional attack, claiming he head butted or nutted Oliver. Oliver dismisses it to readers as "an unfortunate clash of heads" (*TO* 159) during a cigarette lighting, insisting he disregarded his bleeding and retired to bed. Gillian provides yet another account, revealing that "Oliver needed five stitches in his cheek" (172). According to Gilian however, Oliver "thought Stuart wanted to kill him." and that "the expression of violence on Stuart's face had to be seen to be believed." (172) Oliver's version seems calculated to manipulate Gillian to seek sympathy while simultaneously driving a wedge between Gillian and Stuart. The narrative unfolds through multiple competing voices that alternately challenge and expand upon one another's versions of events. Each character engages in their own intimate conversation with: the reader or an imagined audience, conscious that others are simultaneously sharing their perspectives. Throughout these exchanges, every narrator makes some implicit plea for the reader's understanding, sympathy, or intervention. As is seen in Oliver's need for approval, "I probably shouldn't be telling you all this if I want to keep your sympathy. (Have I got it in the first place? Hard to tell, I'd say. And do I want it? I do, I do!)" (86).

The fragmented and plural nature of memory, as theorized by scholars across disciplines underscores its inherent instability and multiplicity. This plurality extends beyond individual recollection to the collective realm, where memories are mediated by cultural norms, power structures, and interpersonal dynamics. Similarly, Ricoeur notes that memory's fragility makes it vulnerable to manipulation, yet its adaptability also allows for

redemptive reinterpretation (*Memory* 55-56). So, the self emerges not as a stable entity with a fixed history but as an ongoing project, perpetually revised through the interplay of selective remembering, forgetting, and reinterpretation. The total record of memory, then, is not a unified whole but a kaleidoscope of shifting fragments or an open-ended text that resists closure. By foregrounding memory's fragmented nature, theorists illuminate its dual role as a site of identity formation and a locus of epistemological crisis, where the stories we tell about ourselves are always entangled with the demands of the present.

The author's characters invent themselves through narrative. The Narrating-I isn't recalling a fixed identity but is actively building one. The divergent realities in *LE* also mirrors postmodernism's rejection of grand narratives. Barnes suggests that all stories are partial, biased, and shaped by the teller's agenda. By structuring his novels around this duality, Barnes elevates the first-person narrative from a mere stylistic choice to an exploration of how his characters invent, distort, and survive their own lives. The "two I"s are not just literary devices, rather, they're a metaphor for the stories we all tell ourselves to keep living. In these novels, Barnes employs the tension between *experiencing-I* and *narrating-I* to explore the instability of memory and the evolving nature of identity. His characters recount the past while constantly reshaping it, moving between resistance and acceptance as they confront its contradictions. This technique compels readers to question the very nature of storytelling, or how much of what we remember is true, and how much is shaped by the lens of time? Through this complex narrative structure, Barnes illustrates that the past is never a fixed entity, it is rewritten every time it is recalled.

The past and present selves of the characters are tightly intertwined. As a result, the "I" who speaks, shaped by time, reflection, and lived experience, is not only recounting the "I" who once acted, loved, or erred. Instead, the act of narration becomes an act of

meaning-making In *TO*, we witness an intimate moment in Gillian's studio where she is emotionally and physically "burning" (147) with desire, boldly suggesting to Oliver, "Let's go to bed" (147). Yet rather than responding to her advances, Oliver redirects her attention back to her work. This unexpected restraint leads Gillian to a revealing insight about the man she desires: " The thing about Oliver is, he's different when he's alone with me. You wouldn't recognize him. He's much quieter and he listens, and doesn't talk in that show-off way. He doesn't seem at all as confident as he probably appears to others" (148). However, the passage of time dramatically alters this understanding. When we encounter Gillian again at the beginning of "Love, etc.," her assessment has undergone a complete reversal. Looking back at their shared history, she now states with conviction, "But I've always thought of Stuart and Oliver as opposite poles of something… of growing up, perhaps. Stuart believed that growing up was about fitting in, about pleasing people, becoming a member of society. Oliver didn't have that problem, he always had more self-confidence" (*TO* 3).

Barnes destabilizes the notion of time as a linear, objective entity. Time, in his narrative universe, is not a fixed sequence of events but a malleable, contested space where past and the present intermingle. The stories become a tapestry of contradictions and revisions where the same event is remembered differently by different characters, or even by the same character at different points in time. This multiplicity of perspectives creates a polyphonic texture, but instead of resolving into a harmonious whole, it remains dissonant. Barnes suggests that our understanding of the past is not shaped by objective truths but by the ways in which we retrospectively interpret and, at times, weaponize our memories. The individual voices in *LE* and *TO* work on two levels simultaneously. Each character's distinct perspective captures a moment in time and when these individual testimonies interact and overlap, they create a more fluid and complex understanding of how events

unfolded. In *LE,* Stuart's reflection reveals this tension between remembrance and transformation: "I remember you, I remember you. I'd hardly forget, would I?" followed by his stark assertion "You probably think you're pretty much the same as you were back then. Believe me, you aren't" (1). They understand that their past selves become increasingly foreign to them, even as they maintain the illusion of continuity. This dynamic, where memory creates false bridges between incompatible versions of ourselves, permeates much of Barnes' fiction. Gilian expresses her situation with striking clarity acknowledging her shifting affections with remarkable frankness: "It happened to me. I married Stuart, then I fell in love with Oliver" (*TO* 177). Yet ten years later in *LE.,* Gillian's perspective has evolved significantly. Looking back at the same events, she now confesses, "Oliver, we did him damage, not the other way round" (49). This retrospective assessment demonstrates how time has reshaped her understanding of accountability and consequence in their shared history.

When Barnes revisits these characters years later in *Love, etc*. Time has changed them, but not necessarily healed anything. Time has allowed each character to solidify their version of past events. The years between the novels have given them time to polish their narratives, yet when confronted with each other again, these carefully assembled versions begin to crack. The emotional wounds from *TO* have festered rather than scarred. Stuart's return forces Gillian to confront the consequences of her past choices, while Oliver's charm has worn thinner with familiarity.

TO and *LE* employ a different kind of narrative complexity compared to Barnes's other works. Rather than being strictly non-linear through memory, it uses a multi-voiced narrative structure where different characters directly address the reader with their versions of the same event. This is brilliantly illustrated in the dinner episode. Each character’s

account of the same event reveals their distinct biases. Stuart recounts Oliver's condescending reception: "Oliver answered the bell, took the bottle from my hand, examined it and said, 'How witty.' Then he started reading out the back label. 'Contains sulfites,' ... 'tut, tut, Stuart, where are your green credentials?'" (*LE* 65). Oliver, however, presents himself as gracious and welcoming: "...but I put him at ease by praising the wine he had so plutocratically furnished for the occasion" (*LE* 70). Meanwhile, Gillian's memory differs entirely from both men: "He could have afforded to be patronizing, but he wasn't at all" (67)

According to Annette Kuhn, narratives of selves are shaped by two central concerns: “how memory shapes the stories we tell, in the present, about the past—especially stories about our lives” and “what makes us remember: the prompts, the pretexts of memory: the remainders of past that remain in the present” (232). Memory, she observes, is always a reconstruction from fragments. These traces of memory and the stories composed with them, constitute what Kuhn calls the domain of “living memory.” These markers of past presence enable a “simulacrum” of the event, a “patching together reconstructions out of fragments of evidence” (232). Highlighting the fragmentary and unfinished nature of memory, Kuhn further explains that memory is “interminable,” always leaving “something yet to be remembered” (233). The conflicting accounts of Gilian, Stuart and Oliver reflect the incomplete nature of memory. The contradictions and differing recollections make the narrative flawed and incomplete.

Barnes also uses photography as a powerful device for navigating and reframing memory. He demonstrates how visual artifacts can simultaneously preserve and distort our understanding of the past. Photography's capacity to capture and preserve temporal moments establishes a pivotal relationship with memory and recollection. The photographs

described throughout the narrative function as temporal anchors in several important ways. Photographs serve as concrete points of reference in the protagonist's journey through memory. Yet within each captured frame lie visual elements and subtle details that offer open-ended suggestions, inviting multiple readings and understandings, as the resulting image simultaneously constrains perception by establishing fixed boundaries around what can be observed. Barnes's personal experience with memory's fragility following profound loss provides crucial insight into his literary treatment of photographs as instruments for revisiting the past and redefining its meaning. His reflections on memory following the death of Pat Kavanagh, his wife and literary agent of three decades are:

> "You ask yourself, is it the same memory? And the answer is, well how can it be? Because your memory is now monocular, not binocular. And memory, when it does come back, seems to come back in the way of old photographs; you're not sure whether they relate to events; they're almost like photographs of photographs. It does come back, but I don't think it's restored as it once was." (Brockes, "The Sense of Another Ending")

This insight, that restored memory resembles layered photographs rather than direct experience, provides a key to understanding how Barnes employs actual photographs in his fiction as symbols of memory's unreliable nature. Photography's temporal complexity manifests in its ability to compress past, present, and future into a single frame, creating layered chronological meanings that extend beyond the moment of capture. In *Photography and the Optical Unconscious* (2017), Smith and Sliwinski describe the photograph as "a forward-looking document, so to speak, anticipating a future viewer who will recognize in it a spark of contingency that cannot be contained to one temporal moment" (11). Also, that the "camera can capture scenes that pass too quickly, too

remotely, or too obscurely for the subject to consciously perceive. By enlarging details, or by slowing down or stopping time, the camera pictures phenomena that the viewer has encountered and unconsciously registered but not consciously processed (14). The camera can zoom in on small details or freeze a moment in time, revealing things one might have seen but didn't fully notice at the time.

The photograph as a result, acts as both historical document and psychological artifact, operating across temporal boundaries in ways that mirrors time's progression. In *OS* While trying to give the readers a sketch of the village Paul's acknowledgement that his memories "might not have been strictly accurate" (*OS* 39) highlights how recollections become reconstructions. He doubts he "might have invented them" (39) and his hesitation to verify "I suppose I could do some real-life research-look for old postcards in the central library, or hunt out the very few photos i have from time to time, and retrofit my story accordingly" (39) suggests a resistance to potentially disturbing his preferred narrative with contradictory evidence, preserving the truth he's composed over factual accuracy. Barnes positions photographs not as reliable witnesses to the past but as supposedly objective evidence that becomes subjective through our interpretation, as we unconsciously process what we see through the lens of what we want to remember, illustrating how we often prefer our subjective, emotionally coherent versions of the past over documented reality.

Then again in *SE* as Susan's alcoholism consumes her and their relationship deteriorates, Paul confronts the poignant responsibility of preserving her essence beyond the tragedy of their ending. Despite his enduring love, he recognizes that "one of the last tasks of his life was to remember her correctly" (194), a mission both sacred and elusive. When genuine remembrance feels uncertain, he turns to what he can actually see, "In this

quest for authentic remembrance, “He had photographs, of course, and they helped. Smiling at him while leaning back against the trunk of a tree in some long-forgotten wood. …There was even a picture of her in that tennis dress with the green trim. Photographs were useful, but somehow, they always confirmed the memory rather than liberating it (194).

As time passes between the captured moment and Paul's later viewing of these photographs, the images remain fixed while his perspective continuously evolves, creating an increasing dissonance between the frozen past and the shifting present. The photographs of Susan against the tree or in her green-trimmed tennis dress exist in a peculiar temporal limbo. They preserve a specific moment with perfect fidelity while simultaneously also growing more distant and foreign as time stretches the gap between the person who took the photograph and the older self who examines it years later. Paul's observation that they "confirmed the memory rather than liberating it" (*OS* 194) suggests how photographs can actually constrain our relationship with the past. While photography freezes certain moments, everything that happened before or after and also the emotions tied to it remain permanently lost. Time transforms both the viewer and the meaning of what's viewed, so that each time Paul returns to these photographs, he brings a new accumulation of experience that alters his interpretation of them. The photographs themselves become palimpsests, collecting layers of meaning as time passes, demonstrating how memory isn't just stored but continually recreated at the intersection of preserved evidence and evolving perspective.

The photographs function throughout as temporal anchors in several important ways. This becomes particularly evident in the wedding photography episode in , where the same photographic session yields completely different recollections. Stuart remembers

with mild annoyance that "some of the pictures have silly camera angles because Oliver was fooling around" (*TO* 7), a relatively innocuous interpretation that dismisses Oliver's behavior as mere playfulness. Oliver, however, reveals a far more calculated and manipulative agenda behind his actions: "I purloined the camera and announced that the wedding album needed a few art shots. I pranced about and lay on the ground and turned the lens through 45 degrees and stepped in pore-scouringly close, but what I was really doing, what I was after was a good shot of Stuart's double chin. And he is only thirty-two" (*TO* 11).

Stuart's admission transforms the seemingly innocent photographs into weapons of subtle character assassination, demonstrating how photographs, while serving as concrete points of reference in the protagonists' journeys through memory, are themselves subject to manipulation and hidden motives. The camera becomes not a neutral recorder of truth but a tool wielded according to the photographer's intentions, undermining the very reliability of the visual evidence that might otherwise anchor collective memory. And in this way, Barnes exposes photography's dual nature—both documenting reality and simultaneously distorting it through selective framing, perspective, and intent.

In *SE*, the author threads the Trafalgar Square snapshot through four distinct temporal vantage-points, turning a single 1960s image into a prism to explore time and memory. Barnes shows that photographs function less as proof of what once happened and more as places where memory keeps shifting, allowing the past to be revised and understood differently at various points in time. The photograph is a point where three temporal layers, the moment of capture, the middle-aged confession, and Tony's late-life review collide and expose memory's drift. The photograph stands as a connection between past and present, where the protagonist's understanding of events shifts depending on when

he encounters the image. In the first moment Tony recalls the photo almost contemporaneously with its taking, where "she rearranged them: Adrian and Colin, the two tallest, on either side of her, with Alex beyond Colin" (31-32). This first viewing presents the photograph as focusing on physical looks where the print made her “look even slighter than she did in the flesh” (32). Time here feels immediate, the image is consigned to memory as a harmless keepsake, its meaning frozen with the shutter click.

A couple of years further on, Tony re-examines the photo once more and wonders why Veronica “never wore heels of any height,” (*SE* 32) speculating that her restraint was a silent way of commanding attention. Here the print becomes a site of unresolved enquiry, even after many years, Tony cannot decide whether Veronica’s gestures were instinctive or calculated. Then again “A year or two of marriage” (69) to Margaret when Tony has settled and decided to come clean to Margaret Tony produces the same picture for Margaret. The temporal gap between event and confession shows how photographs can stabilize a story even while decades seep around their edge. The same print now anchors a different present as Tony’s need to rewrite the past in a story of honesty and absolution. They become help in connecting earlier selves to newer ethical identities. The temporal dimension becomes crucial when Barnes shows how the same photograph takes on different meanings at different life stages. Years later, when he shares the photograph with his wife Margaret, it becomes a tool for confession and reconciliation. Margaret "examined it, nodded, made no comment" (*SE* 70) treating the photograph as evidence of a past that requires acknowledgment but not judgment. The photograph here serves as a bridge between Tony’s past deception and his desire for honesty in his marriage.

When Tony revisits the Trafalgar Square snapshot many more years later after Veronica’s abrupt letter and the two torn pages of Adrian’s diary arrive, the picture ceases

to be a casual memento, it becomes evidence. The fresh documents have unsettled his chronology of events, so he searches the image for visual proof that might confirm or refute the cryptic hints in Adrian's handwriting. Only now does he notice that Veronica stands slightly angled, "turning slightly in towards" Adrian, "Not looking up at him, but equally not looking at the camera. In other words, not looking at me" (*SE* 108) The photo hasn't changed, but Tony's temporal distance from the day of the shot has lengthened, but accumulated loss, regret, and fresh information focus his perspective differently. What had once seemed a straightforward snapshot becomes a clue to desires and alliances he failed to read at the time. In other words, the new textual artefacts recalibrate the temporal lens through which he views the old photograph, it shifts the present, which in turn re-edits the past. The snapshot's meaning therefore evolves as time passes.

Most significantly, Barnes demonstrates that photographs act as temporal anchors because time keeps moving. There is stability in fixed images, yet each return happens from a new 'present' so meaning migrates. The novel's paradox is that the past looks immutable on glossy paper, but memory, subject to the erosions and accretions of passing years, develops and re-develops the same negative. The temporal distance allows him to see what was always present but previously invisible, Veronica's orientation toward Adrian rather than toward him, the photographer. This revelation transforms his understanding of the relationships captured in the moment, suggesting that photographs contain layers of meaning that only become accessible through the accumulation of experience and the passage of time. For Tony, the photo is evidence and enigma, demonstrating how time itself edits the archive of memory, how photographs can reveal previously invisible truths when viewed through the lens of accumulated experience and changed perspective.

The writer uses photographs to suggest that memory doesn’t preserve the past intact; it reshapes it each time we look back. The photograph remains constant, but its meaning shifts as the viewer's perspective changes, illustrating how time doesn't simply preserve memory but actively transforms it. The device of photography becomes Barnes's means of exploring the unreliability of memory and the ways in which our understanding of the past is always subject to revision, making visible the complex interplay between time, memory, and the shaping of personal narrative.

Memory's malleable nature finds its formal expression in Barnes's distinctive narrative technique of repetition with variation. Barnes uses repetitions and variations to transform his novels from mere chronicles of remembrance into embodiments of memory's reconstructive processes. Like a palimpsest where traces of earlier writing remain visible beneath newer text, *TO* and *Love etc* layer more than a single version of the same events, conversations, and images upon one another, each iteration bearing subtle but significant alterations. When Barnes returns to specific moments or images throughout his novels, each reappearance carries the ghostly impressions of previous iterations while simultaneously presenting variations that challenge the authority of earlier versions. These repetitions with difference create a narrative texture that mimics the experience of remembering—where each recollection subtly reconfigures what came before, dissolving the distinction between authentic experience and recalled memory.

A revealing example occurs with the repeated mention of smoking and Alzheimer's disease. When narrating to readers about meeting Gillian and Stuart at the airport after their honeymoon, Oliver first offers the reader a cigarette and then casually mentions, "But I have puckish news for you. I read in the paper this morning that if you smoke you are less likely to develop Alzheimer's disease than if you don't" (*TO* 77). Later, when Stuart has

begun suspecting Gillian and Oliver's affair, he attempts to justify smoking one of Oliver's cigarettes to Gillian by stating "that it has been statistically proven that smokers are less vulnerable to Alzheimer's disease than non-smokers?" (*TO* 132). Stuart immediately confides to readers, "I was rather pleased with this obscure item of information, which I'd picked from somewhere" (132).

By employing this palimpsestic approach, Barnes invites readers to participate actively in the same processes of memory negotiation that his characters undergo. We become sensitized to discrepancies between versions by recognizing that Stuart has unconsciously absorbed and repurposed Oliver's exact justification while believing it to be his own original knowledge. This subtle repetition with variation reveals how memories and information transmit between characters without their awareness, alerting us to the significance of what changes and what remains constant across retellings. The resulting reading experience mirrors the unreliability and creative potential of human memory itself—where truth emerges not as an immutable fact but as a composite understanding built from accumulated layers of imperfect recollection. Barnes deploys this technique across his memory-centered novels, to show how repetition and variation function as structural principles that enable his fiction to perform memory's reconstructive nature rather than simply describe it. Through this approach, Barnes transforms narrative itself into an act of remembering, challenging readers to confront the ways we all continuously rewrite our own histories.

Trying to figure out how memory works is like looking into the secret workings of the brain. Memory is a tough topic, whether one is looking at it through science, philosophy, stories, or personal experiences. Every new view helps us understand memory better. Barnes's protagonists find that their efforts to understand the past become entangled

with their own experiences and worldviews. When they try to piece together what happened, their personal backgrounds, convictions, and accumulated experiences shape how they interpret events. The history they're investigating becomes inseparable from their own life stories, preventing any neutral or detached examination. This personal involvement means that the past they interpret reflects their own perspectives, blind spots, and emotional stakes in the outcome. These narratives create interpretations influenced by their particular circumstances and preoccupations, falling short of objective truth. Their understanding of events becomes as much about who they are as about what actually occurred.

Barnes recognizes that we can never approach history from a position of complete neutrality. Every attempt to understand the past involves bringing our present selves to bear on earlier events, and this inevitably colors what we see and how we interpret it. His protagonists demonstrate this process, showing how personal investment in certain outcomes or relationships affects their ability to see clearly. The result is that these characters often discover as much about themselves as they do about the events they're investigating. Their inquiries into the past become forms of self-examination, revealing their own assumptions, fears, and desires. The truth they seek remains elusive because the past is difficult to recount and also because their own subjectivity shapes every aspect of revisiting the past.

Chapter Four

Memories Multiverse: Unreliable Narrators in Barnes

> When the writer provides two different endings to his novel
> (why two? why not a hundred?), does the reader seriously imagine . . .
> that the work is reflecting life's variable outcomes? . . .
> The novel with two endings doesn't reproduce . . .
> reality; it merely takes us down two diverging paths.
> (Julian Barnes *Flaubert's Parrot* 89)

In this chapter, I examine Julian Barnes's narrators through the twin lenses of unreliable narration and possible-worlds theory. Building on Wayne C. Booth's definition of the unreliable narrator and Marie-Laure Ryan's adaptation of possible-worlds theory for fiction, I argue that Barnes's narrators, driven by the distortions of personal memory, create their own embedded worlds of past events which diverge from the story's actual world.

One of the key areas of exploration will involve an examination of how the novels address the concept of unreliability in relation to memory. Possible worlds theory offers an illuminating framework for analyzing Julian Barnes's novels that deal with memory. Each novel creates distinct narrative worlds where memory is both a constructive and destructive force, establishing alternative realities that exist alongside or challenge what characters perceive as actual. We see how Barnes's characters exist simultaneously in multiple realities created by memory, constantly negotiating the boundaries between what is, what was, and what might have been. Ultimately, this chapter aims to deepen our understanding of the role memory-based unreliability plays in contemporary fiction. Additionally, it seeks to illustrate the power of possible-worlds theory as a tool for literary analysis. Given the

interconnected nature of these subjects, examining any single topic necessarily involves discussion of the other central themes explored in this study. The overlapping relationships between these areas mean that analysis of one concept inevitably draws upon and references the remaining key concerns.

Unreliability is a universal human characteristic, rooted in the way we reconstruct our experiences. Its prevalence comes from our innate desire to shape others' actions to ensure our own well-being and survival. This tendency toward manipulation in communication is not a flaw but serves an evolutionary purpose. Rather than being failures, miscommunications are actually "an element of the proper functioning of social communication" and integral to how humans navigate complex social relationships (Sperber 177). In fiction, this inherent trust becomes a space for the unreliable narrator, who manipulates or conceals information, prompting us to question our beliefs and reassess who we can trust.

The chapter investigates mnestic narration, or fiction shaped by memory, showing how memory's partial, subjective and reconstructive aspects generate narrative unreliability. Since Wayne C. Booth introduced the concept of the unreliable narrator in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), it has become one of the most discussed issues in narratology in how we understand narrative transmission and authority. Booth's concept revealed that the act of narration involves complex negotiations between narrator credibility and reader interpretation that cannot be reduced to simple functional categories. While scholars have spent decades refining and debating the boundaries of this concept, they share a common recognition of its significance which is, in memory-centered narratives, the discrepancy between a narrator's recollections and actual events creates rich opportunities for both dramatic complexity and critical examination. This gap between

remembered experience and historical reality opens up essential questions about the nature of memory, truth, and storytelling. When narrators attempt to reconstruct their past, the inevitable distortions, omissions, and also reinterpretations that emerge reveal important aspects of human consciousness and the ways meaning is produced from experience. Barnes's explorations of remembering and misremembering reveal how his characters rationalize their choices and piece together identities from scattered recollections. In what follows I will define the unreliable narrator in the context of memory-based storytelling, drawing on Booth and later refinements. Additionally, I will also explore how possible-worlds theory maps the "memory-world" of the narrators against the text's reality. These ideas will be applied to Barnes's memory-driven protagonists so as to reveal how each narrator's selective recall builds a parallel fictional world that challenges our assumptions of trust in narration.

Since World War II, the unreliable narrator has emerged as a defining feature of contemporary fiction. Contemporary authors often increasingly employ first-person narrators who don't always deliberately deceive but rather offer incomplete, prejudiced, or self-deluding perspectives that highlight the inherently subjective nature of human memory. These narrators reveal how personal biases, psychological defenses, and cognitive limitations inevitably shape our understanding of events. The author exemplifies this approach through what might be called mnestic unreliability—the distortions that arise from memory's inherent instability and selective nature. Barnes creates characters whose recollections are unconsciously distorted by their affective attachments and self-preserving illusions. This technique forces readers to confront a troubling possibility, that objective truth may be essentially inaccessible through individual consciousness. The writer compels readers to question whether any single perspective can claim objectivity. The following

analysis will demonstrate how the intersection of unreliable narration and possible-worlds theory reveals the constructed nature of memory.

The struggle to grasp the past is consistently dramatized in the author's works. He achieves this by fracturing what might have been a single, continuous narrative into multiple storylines. His narrators don't simply misremember events. Rather, they continually interpret and reinterpret their own histories. This process forces readers to detect the gaps and inconsistencies that ultimately reveal the narrators' unreliability. Barnes's narrators inhabit worlds built from revised memories and selective recollections. In doing so, each character becomes the architect of their own experiential universe—one that may bear only a tenuous relationship to verifiable events but remains absolutely real within the boundaries of their consciousness. Since Booth's seminal work in The Rhetoric of Fiction, scholars have used the unreliable narrator to probe questions of truth, objectivity, and narrative authority. Barnes advances this investigation by demonstrating how realist assumptions ground conventional unreliability theories. These assumptions collapse when memory becomes the primary narrative mechanism. Through his fiction, Barnes challenges readers to question whether any viewpoint can achieve complete reliability, regardless of its apparent sincerity or good intentions. His work invites exploration of the subjective "possible worlds" that each narrator constructs and inhabits. This reveals the inherent instability that characterizes even the most well-intentioned attempts at truthful recounting.

In the author's narrative structure, the traditional distinction between reliable and unreliable narration dissolves entirely. This occurs because memory proves inherently reconstructive and self-serving. How readers understand and feel about a story largely depends on where the narrator stands in relation to the narrative, how much they

participate in the events they're telling, how obvious their presence is as they tell the story, and whether they can be believed (Rimmon- Kenan 94). Barnes' characters don't deliberately deceive always, but rather demonstrate how distortion also often arises from the inherent processes of recollection rather than intentional falsehood. This approach forces a reconsideration of narrative authority itself, suggesting that all storytelling emerges from deeply personal, limited perspectives that can never fully escape their own subjectivity. The author's exploration extends beyond simple questions of narrative trustworthiness to examine how individuals create meaning from fragmentary, often contradictory memories. Each narrator exists within their own interpretive reality, interpreting events through personal schema that may bear little resemblance to external verification. Nevertheless, these constructed narratives remain emotionally true to the individual's subjective experience of reality.

Unreliability in narration or focalization is a literary device where the person telling or perceiving the story provides an account that proves questionable or untrustworthy. In this technique, readers gradually come to recognize that the narrator or focalizer's version of events cannot be taken at face value. Readers detect unreliability when the narrator's version of events clashes with various signals embedded within the text. These signals include internal contradictions, dissenting perspectives from other characters, or a mismatch between stated facts and implied reality. When faced with these discrepancies, readers reconcile them by attributing the inconsistencies to the narrator's limited knowledge, hidden motives, or psychological state. This interpretive process enables readers to understand unreliability within the broader context of the story world. Wayne C. Booth's original conceptualization of the unreliable narrator has achieved foundational status in literary criticism. Though his pioneering definition has faced significant

challenges and revisions from subsequent scholars, it remains the most widely accepted theoretical model in the field.

Booth developed the term “unreliable narrator” to identify a particular type of storyteller whose account diverges from the text's underlying moral and factual norms. Central to his theory was the notion of literature as a communicative act that opens a dialogue between writers and readers. More specifically, he viewed this dialogue as occurring between the “implied author” embedded within the text and the individual reader who engages with it. Booth's concept of the implied author, represents the moral intelligence and value system that guides a literary work. This implied author stands as the text’s ethical authority, distinct from both the narrator who recounts events and the writer who created the work. While the narrator serves as the voice through which the story unfolds, the implied author exists as an implicit presence revealed through the text's overall ethical approach and artistic choices.

The key purpose of distinguishing between the implied author and the actual writer is to recognize that a text conveys an authorial perspective without necessarily reflecting the real author's personal views. Hence the definition of the term, “I have called a narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say the implied author’s norms), unreliable when he does not” (Booth 158-159). He also notes that the “narrator is often radically different from the implied author who creates him” (152). A narrator's reliability depends on the degree to which their perspective aligns with the underlying ideological structure that governs the text, rather than with objective truth or factual accuracy. The implied author serves as the organizing consciousness that operates behind a literary work, revealing itself through the text's moral, aesthetic, and ideological orientations. This consciousness shapes the work's overall perspective without

directly participating in the narrative action or dialogue. This allows literary theorists to identify a controlling intelligence within the text that shapes meaning and values while maintaining a distinction from the biographical author who exists outside the work. The concept proves particularly useful for analyzing works where the narrator's worldview conflicts with the deeper ethical or philosophical commitments embedded in the text's structure and themes. By recognizing this implied authorial presence, readers can detect instances where narrators may be presenting distorted or limited perspectives that diverge from the work's moral or intellectual norms. Booth emphasized that an unreliable narrator is often mistaken or self-deluded rather than deliberately lying.

However, according to some narratologists, the concept of the implied author is not a reliable basis for determining a narrator's unreliability. Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes between the narrator as the "narrative 'voice' or 'speaker' of a text" and the implied author, which she describes as "voiceless and silent" (87). She further argues that "the implied author must be seen as a construct inferred and assembled by the reader from all the components of the text" (87). Rimmon-Kenan also argues, "The values (or 'norms') of the implied author are notoriously difficult to arrive at" given that the implied author's values must be inferred indirectly through the text (101).

The distinction between reliable and unreliable narrators forms a central concept in narrative theory that significantly impacts how readers interpret fictional works. Rimmon-Kenan defines a reliable narrator as "one whose rendering of the story and commentary on it the reader is supposed to take as an authoritative account of the fictional truth (100). And an unreliable narrator as, "one whose rendering of the story and/or commentary on it the reader has reasons to suspect. There can, of course, be different degrees of unreliability." (100). This definition establishes that reliability exists on a spectrum rather than as a binary

opposition, with narrators exhibiting varying levels of trustworthiness that readers must continuously assess. However, determining where a narrator falls on this spectrum presents considerable challenges, as readers must somehow discern the implied author's intended meaning behind the narrator's potentially distorted account.

Given the difficulties in arriving at the implied author's norms, Rimmon-Kenan draws attention to various textual features that may indicate the narrator's unreliability. This provides readers with concrete tools for navigating the complex relationship between narrative voice and fictional truth. First, contradictions with established facts occur when the narrator's statements conflict with verifiable information within the story's world details that other sources or objective evidence contradict. Second, the divergence between outcomes and narration becomes apparent when subsequent plot developments reveal that the narrator's earlier accounts or predictions were inaccurate or distorted. Third, contrasting perspectives emerge when other characters consistently perceive events or view the narrator in ways that differ from the narrator's self-presentation. Finally, internal inconsistencies manifest within the narrator's own discourse through contradictions, unexplained gaps, or stylistic signals such as overly defensive language or extreme bias that suggest compromised credibility (100-103).

Cognitive narratologist, Ansgar Nünning challenges the traditional rhetorical method for understanding unreliable narration by proposing that unreliability should be analyzed through cognitive rather than textual mechanisms. He argues that Wayne Booth's focus on the relationship between implied author and narrator problematically marginalizes the reader's active role in perceiving narrative unreliability. According to Nünning's cognitive approach, unreliability emerges during the reading process itself, shaped by individual readers' interpretive basis, cultural knowledge, and cognitive processing

strategies rather than being predetermined by textual features. Building upon Booth's foundational work, Nünning offers a revised cognitive model of narrative unreliability that centers on the reader's personal values and their ability to detect contradictions between the narrator's accounts or observations and supplementary information embedded within the text. This shift emphasizes unreliability as a reception-based phenomenon rather than a fixed textual property. Despite these challenges, Booth's model, and its focus on the gap between narrator and implied author, remains a cornerstone of narratological discussions of reliability. Despite divergent approaches to reconceptualizing unreliable narration yielding no definitive consensus, narratologists universally recognize its significance as a cornerstone of narrative theory and critical analysis.

In his early German essay on unreliable narration, Nünning provided a systematic taxonomy of textual signals that might prompt readers to judge a narrator as unreliable. Greta Olson has translated and adapted this list into English, identifying fourteen distinct markers. These include contradictions between a narrator's words and actions, divergences between self-characterization and others' views, multiperspectival contrasts, metanarrative admissions of fallibility, and even paratextual elements such as titles or prefaces (98). Olson's adaptation is particularly significant because she argues that unreliable narration emerges from a triangular relationship between three perspectives: the narrator, the reader, and the textual evidence. Her analysis reveals that readers actively judge narrator reliability by detecting textual signals that contradict the narrator's account, then move beyond surface-level reading to assess the narrator's personal qualities of trustworthiness and competence.

Olsen's key insight is that unreliable narrators fall into two distinct categories that require different reader responses. Untrustworthy narrators are those whose character flaws

or deceptive intentions make their entire account suspect, requiring readers to reinterpret their narratives to uncover the truth. Fallible narrators, by contrast, are essentially well-meaning but make occasional errors or have knowledge gaps that readers can identify and compensate for without questioning the narrator's overall integrity. This distinction is crucial because it determines how readers engage with the text: untrustworthy narrators evoke skepticism about their moral character and deliberate misrepresentation, while fallible narrators receive more charitable treatment as readers simply fill in missing information or correct minor mistakes. Olsen's view emphasizes that understanding unreliable narration requires recognizing both the collaborative nature of meaning-making between reader and text, and the important qualitative differences between various types of narrative unreliability.

A comprehensive method for analyzing unreliable narration has been outlined by literary theorist Vera Nünning. Nünning explains that ideas of what is “normal,” “rational,” or “moral” shift across historical periods, altering how readers evaluate narrators. She emphasizes that such norms are not fixed or universal but shaped by historical and cultural contexts. And that reliability is not an inherent feature of the text itself. Instead, it is a context-dependent judgement shaped by changing cultural expectations. Readers assess narrators through the lens of their own cultural expectations and moral beliefs. These internal assumptions guide how they interpret a narrator’s actions and voice. As a result, trust in a narrator depends as much on the reader’s worldview as on the text itself. Nünning explains that a narrator seems unreliable when their attitudes or behavior clash with the values embedded in the text or with the expectations readers bring to it. This can happen if the narrator’s moral perspective diverges from the work’s implicit norms, if their actions break familiar genre conventions, or if their self-presentation simply feels abnormal to the reader. Unreliability, therefore, arises less from deliberate deception than from a deeper

mismatch of values and expectations. For Nünning, unreliability is therefore a value-laden, context-dependent interpretation created through the interaction of textual cues and the reader's own cultural framework (238 -50).

The inescapable presence of a narrator in storytelling leads Toolan to argue that: "narratives have to have a teller, and that teller, no matter how backgrounded or 'invisible', is always important" (5). When a narrator remains outside the story's events without taking part in the action, they are termed 'heterodiegetic'. Conversely, when a narrator appears within the story in some form—participating in the events they describe—they are classified as 'homodiegetic' (Genette 255-6). Homodiegetic narrators participating within their own story or a heterodiegetic narrator positioned outside the narrative world, may demonstrate forms of unreliability in their presentation of events. Omniscient, heterodiegetic narrators can develop distinct personalities that become evident through their narrative presence. While discussions of unreliable narration often concentrate on homodiegetic or heterodiegetic voices, Gunther Martens argues unreliability is not confined to first-person or homodiegetic narration. Even third-person narrators can signal bias in selective ways. Their unreliability typically manifests not in misrepresenting basic facts but in how they interpret, contextualize, and assign significance to narrative events (82-84). Building on Martens's point, this understanding emphasizes that narration is not completely neutral but navigated by subjective choices that create vulnerabilities in narrative reliability. Readers are led to question a narrator's credibility not because they fabricate or misstate the events themselves, but because their ways of understanding and evaluating those events appear problematic. In such cases, unreliability emerges from interpretive distortion rather than factual misrepresentation.

BSMM demonstrates this phenomenon through its third-person voice that remains narrowly focalized through Graham Hendrick's perceptions. Barnes chooses not to deploy a detached omniscient all-knowing narrator who possesses insight into multiple consciousnesses and factual certainties. Instead, the author confines the entire narrative detail through Graham's individual perception of circumstances. The narrative consciousness therefore, remains characteristically limited by Graham's psychological state and motivations. As the primary focalizer, Graham continues to operate under the same pressures that drive first-person unreliable narrators, namely, the need to preserve his credibility, manage his overwhelming jealousy, and form an understanding of Ann's romantic history. These motivations inevitably influence which details the narrative voice chooses to emphasize or omit, creating systematic distortions that generate the unreliability we can detect through textual analysis.

His unreliability stems from overlapping competence deficits that compromise his capacity to assess evidence accurately. Perceptually, he lacks direct access to the events he's attempting to reconstruct, relying instead on fragments and assumptions. His limited knowledge of film industry practices leads him to conflate staged intimacy with genuine romantic involvement, while his emotional investment blinds him to alternative explanations that might challenge his increasingly paranoid worldview. These cognitive and knowledge gaps, compounded by his narrative skill deficits in shaping his interpretations, create a focalizer whose perspective systematically distorts the reality he attempts to convey. This steady distortion makes him fundamentally unreliable, even as he presents himself with absolute sincerity. In *TO* and *LE* Barnes abandons any unifying omniscient voice, instead presenting juxtaposed first-person accounts that clash with each other and with the story world’s facts.

Some narrators mislead unintentionally through sincere belief in their own flawed memories or limited understanding, whether they function as homodiegetic or heterodiegetic voices. Subtle textual inconsistencies gradually expose their self-deception to attentive readers. Conversely, other narrators engage in deliberate deception, strategically withholding or fabricating crucial details throughout the narrative. These intentional omissions or distortions are typically revealed late in the text, compelling readers to retroactively reassess all preceding events and interpretations. This distinction between sincere error and conscious manipulation serves as a concise lens for understanding how fictional voices can both guide and betray our trust. This distinction is essential for classifying unreliable voices in fiction, whether they speak from within the story or from an external vantage point.

However, to further explore the functional role of narrative unreliability in Barnes' novels, this study turns to Possible-Worlds Theory which offers a model for understanding multiple coexisting versions of reality within a narrative. Every narrative consists of events in which characters participate, and it thereby generates a whole narrative universe, a possible world according to Marie-Laure Ryan. Yet narrative mediation requires a narrator who selects and frames a subset of those events for the audience. Unreliability therefore emerges in the narrator's act of selecting which events to include or omit, which are the moments where their version of reality misleads the narratee. Characters in Barnes' work narrate their own stories with recollections that are incomplete or contradicted by other perspectives and events, undermining any claim to objective self-narration. By conceptualizing characters' remembered pasts as possible worlds that may diverge from other textual indicators or reconstructed occurrences, I argue that this framework can be adapted to analyze Barnesian unreliable narrators.

Narratologists grant the narrator absolute authority over the fictional world, treating the narrator's account as the primary source of information about what exists and occurs within that world. Yet they then employ this same narrator-constructed fictional world as an independent standard to evaluate whether the narrator is reliable or unreliable in their telling. The fictional reality that serves as the measure of narrative reliability is itself entirely dependent on the very narrator whose credibility is being assessed. The dilemma reveals a primary tension between the narrator's constitutive role in creating the fictional world and the need for some external tool against which to judge narrative truthfulness. Marie-Laure Ryan clearly identifies this contradiction, pointing out that while it seems perfectly normal for fictional stories to have unreliable narrators, this situation actually contains an inherent logical puzzle. The very mechanism that allows narrators to shape meaning also limits the reader's ability to verify their truth claims, raising fundamental questions about how narrative authority can be both exercised and scrutinized.

Ryan illustrates this problem by contrasting fictional storytelling with everyday conversation. In real-world communication, listeners can identify when someone is lying or making mistakes because they can check the speaker's claims against other sources of information - either their own direct experience or what they've heard from other people. Fictional storytelling, however, creates a unique epistemological situation where readers only have access to what the narrator tells them about the fictional world. Without independent sources of verification, the question readers face is how they can determine whether the narrator is being truthful or accurate about events in the story.

As Ryan makes clear, the challenge lies in the absence of an external frame of reference by which to verify a narrator’s truth claims. If the text is the reader’s only access to the fictional world, then any assessment of reliability must be generated from within the

discourse itself. It is precisely at this point that Ansgar Nünning's contribution becomes valuable. He compiles an extensive array of textual cues that can alert readers to a narrator's unreliability, but he stresses that identifying such signals is only part of the puzzle. What is really needed, Nünning argues, is a "systematic account of clues to unreliable narration" and to identify "What textual and contextual signals suggest to the reader that the narrator's reliability may be suspect? ("But Why Will You" 95). For Nünning, an "alliance between narratology and possible worlds theory" offers exactly this potential, since it allows critics to connect the indeterminacies at the level of discourse with the multiple versions of the story-world that readers themselves construct ("Reconceptualizing" 68). Possible-worlds theory is rooted in analytic philosophy. It conceives of reality not as a single fixed domain. According to Marie-Laure Ryan, reality

> "is a universe composed of a plurality of distinct worlds…. This universe is structured like a solar system: at the center lies a world commonly known as 'the actual world', and this center is surrounded by worlds that are possible but not actual. These worlds lie at a variable distance from the actual world and resemble it to various degrees". (From Parallel Universes 644)

By framing reality as a solar system of actual and possible worlds, Ryan provides a conceptual basis for understanding how narrators can shift, distort, or privilege certain versions of events, revealing the interpretive instability at the heart of unreliable narration. Possible worlds theory was adapted to literary theory by scholars like Thomas Pavel, Lubomír Doležel, and Marie-Laure Ryan in the 1970s. Ryan further notes that, when a reader engages with a fictional text, "the realm of possibilities is thus recentered around the sphere which the narrator presents as the actual world", creating an entirely new means for what counts as real within that textual universe. This recentering places the reader within

"a new system of actuality and possibility" (*Possible Worlds* 22). Within this reoriented model, readers encounter not just a single alternative reality but a complex ecosystem of what Ryan terms "alternative possible worlds" or APWs. And within this recentered fictional universe, characters operate through the same cognitive mechanisms we employ in reality. Ryan explains that just as readers manipulate possible worlds in their own minds, the inhabitants of fictional universes also remake their worlds by engaging with alternate versions shaped by their beliefs, wishes, dreams, and counterfactual imaginings. Their mental processes mirror our own engagement with possibility, as "their actual world is reflected in their knowledge and beliefs, corrected in their wishes, replaced by a new reality in their dreams and hallucinations" (22). Most remarkably, when fictional characters create their own stories, they generate what Ryan identifies as "a second-order, and for us a third-order, system of reality" (*Possible World*s 22).

In this way, fictional universes not only mirror the logic of human imagination but also multiply the layers of actuality and possibility that readers must navigate. Literary applications of possible-worlds theory adapt this lens to explore the relationship between multiple worlds within the fictional universe and between the reader's world and the fictional world. Ryan refers to these as intrauniverse relations which describe the relation among worlds inside the fiction and transuniverse relations one that explore the relation between the reader's world and the storyworld. At the core of each fictional universe lies the textual actual world which is surrounded by the mental worlds of all characters (*Possible Worlds* 32)

This concept suggests that unreliable narration occurs when what the narrator believes, perceives, or claims doesn't align with what the text establishes as actually happening in the story world. The narrator speaks from their own subjective understanding

which is shaped by their beliefs, biases, or limited knowledge, while the narrative simultaneously provides cues that reveal a different reality. This creates a gap between the narrator's version of events and the "actual" events as created by the text itself. Such discrepancies highlight how the narrator's perception reshapes or distorts the narrative reality, creating gaps for the reader to question the credibility of what is told (Zipfel 115-17). In this context, unreliability is a deliberate narrative strategy that foregrounds the instability of perspective and the multiplicity of possible worlds within the text. When the mental world of characters conflicts with the story's textual actual world, discrepancies and contradictions arise. Those clashes between the narrator's inner reality and the external narrative facts are the very essence of unreliable narration.

Within this framework, I argue that it becomes evident that memory, too, should be considered a generator of possible worlds. When characters recollect the past, they do not retrieve an objective or stable actual world but rather construct what I propose to call a *memory-world*. While narratology conventionally treats the story world and the textual actual world as reference points for narrative action and representation, the term *memory-worlds* describes the narrative domains that emerge through acts of remembering. They are shaped by what the remembering self chooses to notice, the emotions that color the past, the distance created by time, and the perspective through which events are reinterpreted. Here, *memory-worlds* are not transparent windows onto the past but imaginative reconstructions that carry the same ontological weight as other narrative worlds. The remembered event is not just retrieved but reconstructed, often altered by present knowledge, emotional investment, or narrative need.

When memory works as a form of world-building, it demonstrates how recollection introduces multiple perspectives, shifting interpretations, and inherent unreliability into

narrative structures. Rather than providing fixed truths, memory generates various versions of events that create instability within storytelling, challenging the notion of singular, authoritative accounts. Memory, then, functions as an additional mode of possible-world creation within narrative fiction, much like the mechanisms of belief or dream. In this way, characters' memories enrich the ontology of fictional universes by multiplying the versions of the past available to both narrator and reader, foregrounding the unreliability of narrative representation.

Ryan maps fiction onto three nested worlds: the Textual Actual World or TAW which is the story's presented reality, next is characters' worlds of their private projections of plans, dreams and fantasies and the third one is the readers' worlds of the conjectures we build while reading (*Possible Worlds* 24). Barnes's narrators often mistake their own memory-world for the TAW, only for later clues to expose the gap. In possible-worlds terms, their minds occupy an alternative world that diverges from the narrative's primary reality, with memory serving as the most prominent and most fallible world. Memory is a crucial form of mental representation in Julian Barnes's novels, and it can be seen as a case of a character's belief-world. His narrators look back, effectively shaping a world of the past in their mind. It is a subjective reconstruction that may be incomplete or distorted. In narratological terms, a narrator's memories from the remembered world might diverge from what actually happened in the story's timeline.

Unreliable acts of recollections can be conceptualized as the incongruity between the narrator's reconstructed world and the textual actual world. Across every Barnes' novel in this study, the story world's actual truth must be assembled by the reader from the overlap and inconsistencies between the embedded narrative worlds of its narrators. Reality in these novels exists somewhere in the convergence or collision of multiple

possible versions of memory versus the world that the evidence eventually supports. In an interview with Linda Wertheimer, Julian Barnes admits that memory is "not only faulty, but sometimes over-reliant on the imagination" ("Speak, Memory"). Each of Barnes' unreliable narrators proves that personal history is nothing more than a provisional world stitched together from selective remembrance.

In *BSMM*, Graham Hendrick becomes obsessively jealous of his wife Ann's past relationships. He develops a consuming fixation on his second wife Ann's life before their marriage. Ann had worked as an actress in B-movies, taking on small parts that frequently cast her as romantic interests. Sometimes she became romantically involved with her male co-stars both during and after filming. Ann's past romantic and sexual encounters haunt Graham, filling him with torment. He irrationally interprets them—whether filmed or private—as betrayals of their marriage, even though they occurred long before their relationship began. His inability to separate Ann's past from their present marriage creates an ongoing source of anguish that defies logical reasoning. Graham embarks on an intensive investigation to piece together the details of his wife's former life, but his efforts to understand these events are heavily colored by his imagination rather than grounded in factual evidence.

Unreliability in *BSMM* acts on two levels simultaneously. On one level, he appears genuinely convinced that his suspicions reflect truth, suggesting self-deception rather than conscious manipulation. He transforms what appears to be purely professional acting into what he perceives as concrete evidence of actual infidelity, his jealousy distorts fictional performance into a memory of betrayal: "The first time Graham Hendrick watched his wife commit adultery he didn't mind at all. He even found himself chuckling. It never occurred to him to reach out a shielding hand towards his daughter's eyes" (*BSMM* 1). However, his

behavior also reveals a more active process of distortion—he deliberately seeks out ambiguous details about Ann's past and systematically reinterprets them as validation of his fears.

This pattern suggests that while Graham may deceive himself about his motivations, he is nonetheless engaged in a deliberate process of creating evidence to support his predetermined conclusions about Ann's infidelity. His fixation on Anne's past, especially her previous relationships and performances in films, leads him into a state of distorted perception. When his friend Jack asks whether he believes Ann might be unfaithful, he replies sharply, "No, it's not that. Good God, that would be awful. Awful. No, it's sort of. . . retrospective, it's all retrospective. It's all about chaps before me. Before she met me" (*BSMM* 45), hence the book's title. His judgments, driven by jealousy and imagined betrayals, create a discrepancy between his version of reality and the Textual Actual World. Graham reconstructs Anne's past by consuming material artifacts like old films, photographs, newspaper clippings, and stories shared by acquaintances.

He is tormented by disturbing dreams in which Ann's previous partners ridicule him, and at the outset tries to comfort himself with the essential separation dreams and the actual world: "Dreams couldn't be true, could they: that was why they were dreams" (*BSMM* 84). Nevertheless, he begins to assign a truth-revealing role to his "dreams which were so strong, and so contemptuous, that they strode carelessly across the barrier of consciousness" (80). Despite their shared time and experiences together, Graham begins to question everything when dream figures reveal that Ann had desired simultaneous intimate relationships with multiple partners, leading him to wonder "What if it were true? …. No, it couldn't be true. But what if it referred to a sort of truth?" (95). This further leads him to create a mental world composed not of lived experiences but of interpretations of dream

fragments. These reconstructions become increasingly detailed and emotionally charged, despite their speculative nature.

Graham interprets scenes from Anne's films as evidence of real emotional or sexual engagements, conflating fiction with reality. Graham explicitly acknowledges how watching one particular film triggered his obsessive preoccupation with Anne's romantic past:

> "You see, I told you about the film at such length because it was the catalyst. That was what sparked it all off. I mean, obviously I knew about some of Ann's chaps before me; I'd even met a few of them. Didn't know them all, of course. But it was only after the film that I started to care about them. It suddenly began to hurt that Ann had been to bed with them. It suddenly felt like ... I don't know - adultery, I suppose. Isn't that silly?". (46)

He is aware of his irrationality and tries to repress or rationalize it, producing an internal conflict between his reasonable self and his obsessive self. The reader detects world conflicts between Graham's mental state and the behavior of other characters, especially Ann and Jack Lupton. It becomes evident that Graham's assumptions about Ann's infidelity stem from his own insecurities rather than any verifiable reality. As the reader pieces together a more coherent version of the fictional world, Graham's steady emotional unraveling comes into focus. Barnes presents the novel as a study in unreliability, showing how an apparently ordinary man traps himself within a self-constructed story of betrayal, its instability rooted in the clash between his imagined world and the narrative's reality.

There is a noticeable discrepancy between the narrative voice and the Textual Actual World reconstructed by the reader. This gap widens gradually, as the calm,

seemingly assured account gives way to distortions shaped by Graham's retrospective jealousy. The unreliability does not stem from deliberate falsehood, but from an emotional misalignment with reality—Ann's past is processed through Graham's insecurities and possessiveness rather than grounded in verifiable truth. This distorted perspective is exemplified when Graham deliberately schemes to monitor Ann's movements: "Outside, Graham paused, sniffed the dusty privet and the overflowing dustbins, and made a decision. If he cut out going to the good butcher, and did all his shopping at the supermarket, he could slip into *The Good Times* on his way home and catch Ann committing adultery again" (52). Graham's visits to cinemas to watch Ann's old films are pivotal for detecting unreliability. He constructs these scenes as evidence of Ann's infidelity, with vivid descriptions of her on-screen actions fueling his jealousy. Graham interprets these scenes as thinly veiled depictions of real-life affairs, and he imbues casual gestures or glances with sexual implications.

As Graham probes Anne's past, he constructs an intricate mental picture of her romantic history. This obsessive need for confirmation drives him to systematically scrutinize their shared space "On his afternoons alone at the house, Graham found himself more and more on the lookout for evidence…The effect of his driven searches was to re-acquaint himself with almost all of Ann's possessions only now he saw them in a different, more tainted light." (61) From a cognitive perspective, Graham's interpretations are not based on direct access to events but on a mix of inference and imagination in which his anxieties and insecurities guide the meaning he assigns to evidence. A look between Ann and a male co-star, or a moment of scripted intimacy in a film, becomes for Graham a clue to past betrayal. The reader notes the lack of corroborating narrative cues and begins to decouple Graham's interpretations from the narrative's underlying reality.

At the heart of the novel lies a tension between Graham's subjective world and the TAW. While he convinces himself that he is uncovering the truth about Ann's past, the reader comes to see his conclusions as products of imaginative projection rather than credible evidence. Graham's mental world begins to overwhelm the logical structure of the narrative universe, thereby introducing unreliability. A key mechanism in this unreliability is Graham's obsessive examination of representational artifacts, films in which Anne acted, photographs, her books, maps and stories passed on by mutual acquaintances. These artifacts function as gateways into Ann's past, but Graham misuses them, treating these as documentary records and confessions. This leads to a series of intrauniverse world conflicts. The reader must navigate Graham's obsessive mental reconstruction of Anne's past, gradually recognizing the growing chasm between what the narrative presents on the surface and the emotional turbulence beneath. Barnes does not provide a definitive corrective perspective, instead, he allows the reader to reconstruct the by measuring the gaps between Graham's perceptions and the cues embedded in other characters' behaviors and responses. By separating mental worlds, detecting conflicts, and reframing narrative authority, the reader reconstructs a more plausible version of events.

At first, the narrative presents Graham's world as plausible. His voice is composed, his affection for Ann appears genuine, and his curiosity about her past seems, at worst, a slightly neurotic instinct for order. At this stage, the reader tentatively accepts his perspective as proximate to the textual actual world (TAW). Yet, as Graham's investigation intensifies and his judgments become more emotionally charged, conflicts between his mental world and those of Ann and Jack Lupton begin to surface. Ann's composed behavior and Jack's sarcastic detachment both serve as external checks on Graham's worldview, introducing dissonance that compels the reader to reconsider the narrator's authority.

Ann's apparent comfort with her past and her candid nature stands in stark opposition to Graham's escalating distress and ethical condemnation. This disparity becomes evident particularly in their intimate moments. Graham perceives her confidence as an implicit critique of his own insecurities: “In bed, for instance, her confident easiness often seemed to him to be showing up (criticizing, mocking almost) his own cautious, stiff-jointed awkwardness. ‘Hey, stop, wait for me,’ he thought; and at other times, with more resentment, ‘Why didn’t you learn this with me?’” (*BSMM* 16). Ann also starts to modify her memories. She tries to reshape how Graham perceives her past, minimizing certain recollections or assuring him that her memories of past lovers are vague and unimportant. She starts viewing her past in terms of his insecurities, diminishing the significance of previous relationships and obscuring details that might trigger his suspicions. This defensive editing creates a striking contradiction: Ann deliberately manipulates her memories as a strategy to cope. She uses the malleability of memory as a means to safeguard her marriage. She selectively chooses what to reveal to Graham, and over time, she begins to internalize this altered version of her past. What begins as careful selection in her storytelling gradually transforms into self-deception, as she starts believing her own revised accounts. She reconstructs her past to fit his troubled expectations, no longer certain whether she's protecting Graham or herself.

In one scene, the narration highlights Graham’s growing unease during a discussion about potential holiday destinations. He becomes unsettled on discovering that Anne has already visited many of the places he suggests, often in the company of former lovers such as Benny. Seeking to soothe his insecurities, ‘She kissed him on the temple, and stroked the far side of his head, as if to calm the sudden turbulence inside. “And if I had known you then, I’d have wanted to go with you. But I didn’t know you. So I couldn’t. It’s as simple as that”’ (57). Yet while Ann’s reassurance reflects the textual actual world,

Graham interprets such memories as threats, widening the gap between his increasingly distorted mental world and the reality the narration makes available to the reader. He begins to ascribe intentions and feelings to Ann that are not grounded in observable behavior, and his readings of old films and photographs become acts of imaginative projection rather than historical inquiry. The reader, meanwhile, reorders belief structures, assigning greater reliability to the emotional coherence of Ann's responses and to Jack's ironically disarming pragmatism. Jack attempts to ground Graham with his characteristically unvarnished advice, offering a straightforward approach to Graham's tortured overthinking: "It's in the nature of marriage. It's a design fault. There'll always be something,…(49) and again, " Do something irrelevant if you like, but do it seriously. Have a wank, get drunk, go and buy a new tie. Doesn't matter what it is, just as long as you have some way of fighting back. Otherwise, it'll get you down. Get you both down' (49).

It is important to note that Graham's failure to differentiate between fictional representation and lived experience, his conflation of Anne's film performances with her private life, establishes the gap between Graham's perception and the textual actual world, as framed by the third-person narration. The reader, no longer trusting Graham's perspective, must reconstruct a new TAW by interpreting emotional undercurrents and implicit narrative signals that contradict his version of events. Cognitive narratology complements possible-worlds theory by explaining how readers construct the fictional universe and detect unreliability through cognitive processes. Readers prioritize the textual actual world over Graham's represented mental world by evaluating the degree of trustworthiness the narration accords him. The third-person narration signals Graham's unreliability through real-world parameters which are his obsession, insecurity, and eventual violence all suggesting psychological instability. At the same time, the novel resonates with Barnes's broader oeuvre, in which unreliable narration serves as a means of

interrogating memory and truth. The theory of possible worlds provides a versatile tool for analyzing these themes across Barnes's works, since it foregrounds the conflicts between individual mental worlds and the textual actual world, highlighting how narrators—or focalized characters—manipulate or distort truth in order to cope with guilt, insecurity, or emotional dissonance.

TO is structured around multiple homodiegetic narrators, primarily Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian each offering their perspective on shared events. They often interrupt, contradict or subtly reframe each other's narratives. They take turns addressing the reader directly, recounting their interconnected lives and relationships from their subjective perspectives. The novel pushes narrative unreliability beyond the limits of a single flawed narrator and into the territory of polyphonic contradiction. The result is a constantly shifting fictional universe in which memory, bias, and emotional motivation create clashing accounts of the same incidents. Their narratives are rooted in memory and often provide mutually incompatible narratives regarding the romantic triangle involving Stuart and Gillian's marriage and Oliver's role in its dissolution. The narrative, composed entirely of first-person monologues that alternate without a mediating narrator, destabilizes any unified perspective on events. These are homodiegetic, retrospective accounts, and each narrator positions themselves as honest and perceptive. However, the contradictions between their accounts, coupled with tonal inconsistencies and rhetorical self-justifications, signal that none of the narrators can be taken as wholly reliable.

Each of the three primary narrators constructs a highly subjective world, which they present as the truth. These narrator-worlds are marked by unique linguistic registers, ethical values, and emotional investments. Oliver's world stands out for its flamboyance and intellectual arrogance. He declares, "I'm Oliver, and I remember all the important

things" and dismissively observes that most people over forty "whinge like a chainsaw about their memory not being as good as it used to be or not being as good as they wish it were" (*TO* 9). He inhabits a world shaped by deliberate recollection, employing memory as a mechanism for controlling his personal narrative. He explains, "So I believe in coddling my memory, just slipping it the finer morsels of experience" (10) and boasts " I certainly never insulted my memory by asking it to store all that routine junk" (14). This selective memory shapes a reality where Oliver always remains in control, curating his past to suit his ego and worldview. His baroque metaphors and ostentatious style contrasts starkly with Stuart's subdued, ostensibly sincere tone.

Restraint and emotional hurt define Stuart's narrative voice throughout. However, his unreliability emerges more subtly, his calm demeanor masks aggression and a possible inflexibility that may have contributed to the breakdown of his marriage. When speaking about Oliver, he insists, 'Please don't take against Oliver like that. He goes on a bit but he's basically very good-hearted and kind. Lots of people don't like him, and some actively loathe him, but try to see the better side' (*TO* 32). He continues by portraying Oliver as a victim of circumstance: 'He hasn't got a girlfriend, he's practically penniless, he's stuck in a job he hates. A lot of that sarcasm is just bravado, and if I can put up with his teasing, can't you?' (32). His seemingly generous defense subtly positions him as the more tolerant, morally superior among the three, while quietly reinforcing Oliver's faults.

Differing versions of their shared summer of falling in love are offered by Gillian and Stuart. Stuart romanticizes the period as a harmonious time enriched by Oliver's presence recalling: "We were cheerful that summer. Having Oliver with us helped, I'm sure it did…; he was just easy to be with" (*TO* 37). His tone is nostalgic and inclusive. Gillian, by contrast, offers a more measured perspective. For her, Oliver's presence feels

like an imposition as “he did tend to monopolize things. Almost telling us what to do (39). While acknowledging their romance, she subtly resists Stuart’s version, noting Oliver’s intrusive presence: “I’m not really complaining. I’m just making a small correction” (39). Her tone is more skeptical, highlighting the complexities of that triangle. For Gillian, love was not as seamless or idyllic as Stuart remembers—it involved negotiation, distance, and the assertion of space.

Oliver is the charming interloper who justifies betraying his best friend by constructing a memory-world in which his pursuit of Gillian is an act of authenticity. He proposes that Gillian's father left the family during her childhood, and, based on Freudian psychology, this early abandonment causes daughters to pursue older male partners as substitutes for their father. He argues that while Stuart is only thirty-two, he's essentially an old man in spirit as he has the boring, conventional lifestyle of someone much older: gray suits, bank job, pension contributions, mortgage, modest appetites, and diminished sexuality. So, Oliver argues that Gillian, seeking a father-substitute due to her abandonment issues, has “landed herself nothing other than the youngest older man she could find"(*TO* 44), someone who provides the security and stability of an older man even though “he happens to be thirty - two” (44). Stuart, according to Oliver, represents safe, predictable domesticity rather than bohemian excitement. Narrative irony is evident in Oliver’s smug self-assessment of Gillian’s shift from Stuart to him. The gap between Oliver’s grandiose self-perception and the reality apparent to readers is highlighted when he says, “I would argue that the replacement of Stuart by Oliver in the heart of Gillian was—as you silky, wiggy, mouthy bipeds tend not to put it—no bad thing. She was, as the phrase goes, trading up” (15). Although Oliver describes his falling in love with Gillian as inevitable and natural, Stuart portrays it as a betrayal of trust. Both claim to understand Gillian’s desires better than she does herself. Stuart believes Gillian is committed to him,

whereas Gillian's own narrative reveals a more ambiguous emotional trajectory. Each narrator invites belief and simultaneously undermines it, prompting the reader to continuously recalibrate their assessment of narrative authority. Each narrator is performing their version of themselves for an implied listener—the reader.

Unreliable narration frequently depends on the narrator's rhetorical strategy and awareness or lack thereof, of their own flaws. Barnes' characters address the reader directly, self-consciously aware that they are presenting their case. This deepens the unreliability, transforming the narrative into a metafictional commentary on how people construct their own histories and identities. Each character's recollection is flawed due to memory, and also shaped by the desire to persuade, to justify and to rewrite the past. Stuart portrays himself as a stable, rational victim of betrayal, highlighting his financial security and moral rectitude. He attributes the marriage's collapse to Oliver's charisma and Gillian's disloyalty. However, the TAW, inferred from Gillian's and Oliver's accounts and subtle textual cues for instance Stuart's clinginess, suggests a more complex reality where Stuart's emotional repression contributed to the marriage's failure. This conflict signals Stuart's potential unreliability, as his narrator's world omits or distorts his own role.

Oliver's florid and theatrical narration casts him as a passionate lover destined to rescue Gillian from Stuart's mundanity. His exaggerated language and literary allusions conflict with the textual actual world, which portrays him as manipulative and self-absorbed, as seen in Gillian's occasional frustration with his theatrics. This discrepancy highlights Oliver's ironic unreliability, rooted in his need for self-dramatization. Gillian's narration is more restrained, presenting her as caught between Stuart's reliability and Oliver's allure. She rationalizes her affair as a practical choice, but her emotional conflicts suggest a textual actual world where her motivations are less clear. Her unreliability is

subtler and primarily evaluative: she minimizes her own agency in the affair yet still creates tensions with the textual actual world. This understated distortion invites readers to question the stability of her account. Barnes, therefore, explores narrative unreliability by mapping its structure through the interplay of multiple memory worlds.

Gillian's narrative voice reveals her unreliability through emotional turmoil and self-deception. Her conflicted feelings surface in moments of startling vulnerability, as when she reflects on her growing attachment to Stuart: "…as I began to love Stuart, this thought: please don't let him be disappointed. I'd never felt that before with anyone. Worrying about their long-term future, how they'd turn out. Worrying about what they might think when they finally look back" (*TO* 57).

This moment of vulnerability differs sharply from how she responds later, when Oliver arrives with flowers and a confession of love, prompting fresh doubts about her motives and credibility. Her unreliability becomes even more pronounced when Oliver presents her with flowers and declares his love. Rather than transparency, Gillian chooses concealment, admitting her disorientation: "I'm thoroughly confused. And that's putting it mildly" (94). This moment of confusion signals the beginning of her duplicitous behavior, as she consciously decides to hide Oliver's romantic gesture from Stuart. Her subsequent reflection reveals both self-awareness and rationalization: "What should I have done? If I were trying to keep things straight, I should have told Stuart about Oliver's appearance at the door and what I did with his flowers" (99) Gillian recognizes that the narrative voice is shaped by a self-justifying interpretation. Memory for her is sometimes a source of doubt, she occasionally questions her own recollections. This almost metafictional frustration as if she too is struggling to manage the narrative underscores that Gillian's memory is less reliable.

Her unreliability stems not from ignorance but from the deliberate compartmentalization of her conflicted desires. She guides readers through her emotional maze while obscuring the true nature of her motivations and simultaneously justifying her choice to maintain the deception. This is evident when Gillian acknowledges her divided loyalties and shifting desires, saying, “The other two, they each want one thing, for me to be with them. I want two things. Or rather, I want different things at different times” (127) and her admission “But I know why I feel guilty. Perhaps you guessed. I feel guilty because I find Oliver attractive” (114) This admission reveals that Gillian is fully aware of her divided affections. It indicates that even in her private moments of supposed honesty, Gillian cannot maintain a consistent account of her own motivations. The correction suggests she recognizes that admitting to wanting both men simultaneously would be considered wrong, so she reframes her desires as temporally separate rather than concurrent. Gillian’s world is introspective and emotionally layered, and offers less judgment and more ambivalence about the events unfolding between the three of them. The result is a fragmented universe in which the TAW cannot be located in any single voice, but must instead must be inferred through the interplay of divergent accounts. What makes her unreliable is not confusion or self-deception but rather a deliberate choice to maintain both relationships while crafting a narrative that downplays her culpability. She becomes an unreliable narrator who consciously withholds her duplicity from both her romantic partners and from readers who must piece together the truth from her carefully constructed admissions.

As Stuart begins to perceive the growing intimacy between Gillian and Oliver, each narrator's response reveals their self-centeredness and inability to acknowledge the others' pain. When confronted with the possibility of betrayal, Stuart anticipates his own victimization, declaring: "Whatever happens… whatever happens, I'm the one that's going

to get hurt" (138) His repetition of "whatever happens" suggests both his growing certainty about the affair and his projection of his role as the injured party. Gillian's response with, “I'm the one that's going to get hurt." expresses her feelings for Oliver. Rather than acknowledging the pain she is actively causing her husband through her emotional infidelity, Gillian repositions herself as the primary victim of circumstances she has helped create. Her claim to future suffering serves as both deflection and also a justification for her betrayal. Oliver's reaction proves equally self-serving, though his complaint takes a different form: "Why do I always get the blame?" (139) His question reveals his refusal to accept responsibility for pursuing his best friend's wife. When he later echoes the others with "I'm the one who's going to get hurt" (128), he completes a trilogy of self-pity that demonstrates how each character views themselves as the central victim of the triangle. This repetitive claiming of victimhood—each narrator insisting "I'm the one that's going to get hurt" (139 exposes the instability of the novel’s textual actual world, where each narrator constructs a private possible world shaped by self-interest. Their near-identical reactions underline how little genuine empathy informs their accounts; instead, Gillian, Stuart, and Oliver retreat into versions of events that prioritize their imagined future suffering. The identical phrasing suggests not shared truth but parallel, competing possible worlds in which each positions themselves as the primary victim. In doing so, they fail to acknowledge the shared responsibility embedded in the actual world of the text, turning their narratives into performances of injury rather than acts of moral clarity.

Conscious manipulation, not self-deception, characterizes Oliver's unreliable narration. The calculated nature of his unreliability as a narrator is revealed when he tells the reader, “The story of our life is never an autobiography, always a novel - that’s the first mistake people make. Our memories are just another artifice: go on, admit it.” (*TO* 13) He first states definitively that his father “really liked hitting me across the back of the legs

with a billiard cue" (*TO* 149), but later becomes uncertain, saying he "used to beat me up with a hockey stick when I was barely weaned. Or was it a billiard cue?" (*LE* 28). Oliver's unreliable narration emerges from the mismatch between his memory-world and the novel's textual actual world. His shifting recollections produce different internal versions of the same past, and these unstable memory-worlds clash with how other characters remember and describe him. The dissonance between these worlds signals that his account cannot be fully trusted.

Stuart's observations further undermine Oliver's credibility when he states that "Oliver is a liar, of course" and "Oliver is a snob, as you might have noticed' (*LE* 171-2). These external perspectives confirm Oliver's narrative inconsistencies, establishing him as unreliable. While he may have genuine reasons to be depressed, such as his perceived failing, his depression stems from misplaced blame on the shortcomings of others, instead he is unwilling to take accountability for his own flaws and life circumstances. His depression comes across as an act of self-victimization rather than authentic self-reflection.

The distinct narrative voices Barnes employs allow Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian to speak in characteristic styles that become interpretive lenses for the reader. Stuart's cautious tone contrasts sharply with Oliver's elaborate and digressive flamboyance, while Gillian's self-questioning voice creates yet another distinct perspective. These stylistic differences enable the readers to distinguish between the three narrator-worlds and understand each character's particular worldview. These unique voices allow readers to separate what each character claims from what may actually be true within the novel's TAW.

Each narrator addresses the reader directly, projecting a narratee's world—the assumed perspective of the listener. Stuart seeks sympathy as a wronged husband, Oliver

aims to charm or impress, and Gillian appeals for understanding. However, the narratee's world, shaped by the novel's ironic tone and contradictions, aligns more with the TAW than any single narrator's account. For example, Oliver's grandiose claims are undermined by his own admissions of insecurity prompting the narratee to question his reliability. Their unreliability intensifies as their emotions escalate. Early chapters show milder conflicts, for instance Stuart's mild irritation with Oliver, but as the affair unfolds, contradictions deepen. Stuart's vengeful fantasies and Oliver's defensive exaggerations increase their unreliability, while Gillian's growing detachment is still tinged with ambiguity.

Furthermore, the primary characters are driven by a desperate need for validation and forgiveness. Their accounts become exercises in self-justification rather than honest confession because they want to be understood but only on their own terms, revealing enough to gain sympathy while concealing details that might undermine their preferred self-image. They seem to be desperately seeking external validation for their choices while engaging in selective remembering. Understanding these characters requires analyzing both their self-presentations and how others perceive them. Therefore, Barnes' employs secondary characters who also serve as crucial observers of the central drama, each offering their own interpretations of events. Set ten years later, in *LE* Barnes continues the story of Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian, with the same three narrators addressing the reader directly about their evolving relationships.

The narrative remains multi-perspectival, memory-based, and laden with contradictory accounts, but the passage of time introduces new dynamics. Stuart returns wealthier and more assertive, seeking to reconnect with Gillian, now married to Oliver and raising their daughters, while Oliver grapples with professional and personal decline. Oliver's narration, still theatrical, exaggerates his artistic struggles and casts Stuart as a

philistine threat, but his unreliability is evident in his denial of personal failures as he is still financially dependent on Gillian which is exposed by Gilian and Stuart. Stuart's self-presentation as a confident, benevolent figure is undercut by hints of lingering obsession, his fixation on Gillian's family, suggesting self-deception. Gillian's measured narration, while seemingly reliable, reveals unreliability when she justifies her loyalty to Oliver despite his decline, hinting at suppressed doubts. The novel's gradual revelation of the narrators' altered circumstances and motivations requires readers to adjust their TAW. Stuart's return for instance initially seems benign, but his manipulative nature in offering financial help to Gillian's family prompt readers to revise their understanding of his intentions.

Stuart now presents himself as a mature, successful entrepreneur who has moved on from past betrayals, offering to support Gillian and Oliver out of goodwill. His narrator's world emphasizes his wealth and emotional stability. However, the TAW, inferred from Gillian's wariness and Oliver's accusations, suggests Stuart harbors vengeful or possessive motives, as seen in his strategic involvement in their lives. This conflict signals Stuart's unreliability, rooted in self-deception or manipulation. Oliver's florid narration casts him as a tragic artist oppressed by Stuart's return and societal philistinism. He exaggerates his creative struggles and vilifies Stuart portraying him almost as a capitalist vulture. The textual actual world constructed from Gillian's accounts of Oliver's laziness and financial dependence, contradicts this, highlighting Oliver's ironic unreliability driven by denial and ego. Stuart depicts Oliver as a parasitic failure and claims Oliver's unemployment is self-inflicted, while Oliver insists Stuart's financial help is a trap. This factual and evaluative conflict leaves the TAW unclear, as both narrators' biases, namely Stuart's resentment and Oliver's defensiveness, cloud the truth. Oliver romanticizes their marriage as a creative partnership, while Gillian's pragmatic narration

reveals his irresponsibility. This conflict underscores Oliver’s unreliability, as Gillian’s perspective aligns more closely with the Textual Actual World’s hints of marital strain. Textual Signals enable readers to identify the narrators’ worlds and separate them from the TAW and character’s memory worlds. Each narrator’s memory world is distinguished by stylistic cues. Stuart’s narration is pragmatic reflecting his newfound confidence, it masks his vindictiveness, Gillian’s is introspective and cautious highlighting her conflict and Oliver’s remains verbose and melodramatic masking his decline.

Readers navigate Barnes' narrative through distinct storytelling styles, identifying separate memory worlds while detecting conflicts through contradictory details between narrators. Although Gillian's nuanced perspective may initially appear more trustworthy, her evident bias stemming from loyalty to Oliver complicates this assessment. Similarly, Oliver's partial admissions of fault, acknowledging some responsibility while deflecting blame, sustain the narrative's fundamental ambiguity. His tendency toward exaggeration introduces unreliable elements that further destabilize any definitive reading. The novel's outcome demonstrates how the Textual Actual World suggests Oliver's decline results from multiple interconnected factors, yet readers cannot fully resolve the conflicting accounts. This irresolution exemplifies Barnes' deployment of unreliable narration, where uncertainty becomes a deliberate narrative strategy rather than a flaw.

The sequel's retrospective narrative structure, which revisits events from *TO*, introduces significant memory distortions as narrators reshape past events to justify their present circumstances. Stuart's tendency to minimize his previous emotional repression exemplifies this pattern, as characters rewrite their histories to construct more palatable self-images. This technique aligns with Barnes' broader thematic exploration of memory's unreliability, suggesting that personal narratives inevitably become self-serving

reconstructions rather than accurate historical accounts. Through this temporal layering, Barnes demonstrates how the passage of time doesn't clarify truth but rather multiplies the possibilities for self-deception and narrative manipulation. Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian's conflicting narrators' worlds create a fluid Textual Actual World shaped by memory, regret, and evolving motives. Possible-worlds theory maps factual and evaluative conflicts. The sequel's retrospective narration and direct address engages readers as co-constructors of truth, reflecting Barnes' postmodern exploration of subjectivity.

Unlike *TO*, which incorporated more comedic peripheral voices, *LE* has three important secondary narrators also who serve as keen observers of the romantic chaos. Gillian's mother Mme Wyatt, Stuart's American second wife and Stuart's present girlfriend, provide an outsider's perspective on the unfolding drama. Their collective testimony exposes the self-absorbed behavior in this romantic triangle. Mme Wyatt's remark that "Stuart tells me that he is happy to be returned to England" followed by her blunt admission "I do not believe all of this, of course" (124) exemplifies how these external voices cut through the protagonists' carefully constructed narratives. Her crucial insight that "What matters is how much of it Stuart himself believes" reveals that these narrators are deceiving others by their mental constructions which serve emotional needs rather than truth (*LE* 124). They also reveal crucial information that the primary characters carefully omit from their self-presentations. Mme Wyatt's sharp assessment that Oliver "makes a lot of noise because he is terrified of the silence within" (90) strips away his flamboyant exterior to reveal underlying self-hatred and psychological fragility, while her matter-of-fact reference to his "nervous collapse" (90) introduces the readers to information that Oliver himself has concealed. Similarly, Sophie's casual mention of her father getting "down in the dumps again" (180) reveals Stuart's history of depression, a significant detail absent from his own cautious, controlled narrative.

These revelations by secondary narrators demonstrate how the primary narrators curate their testimonies to maintain favorable self-images. These external perspectives highlight the overwhelming self- delusion within this love triangle. Barnes builds his fictional world using multiple, unreliable viewpoints instead of a single, trustworthy narrator. Hence readers cannot easily determine whose version is more credible or true. Each narrator's unique voice betrays their biases, inviting readers to question what's unsaid and distrust their versions of events. This narrative technique transforms the act of reading into a continuous process of interpretation, where understanding emerges not from any single perspective but from the interplay between multiple, potentially conflicting viewpoints.

The first section in *OS* is narrated by Paul, looking back as an older man on events from when he was nineteen. In the late 1960s, Paul joins a tennis club in a suburban town during his gap year before university. There he meets Susan Macleod, a married woman in her late forties who becomes his tennis partner and eventually his lover. Five decades after a relationship with a woman nearly thirty years his senior, Paul reviews his memories and acknowledges that this failed love remains the core narrative of his life. Barnes signals Paul's unreliability as a narrator from the very outset when Paul admits that his story has been "most often told and retold, even if—as is the case here—mainly to yourself," and then pointedly asks, "Do all these retellings bring you closer to the truth of what happened, or move you further away?" (*OS* 3), a self-doubt that destabilizes his authority from the beginning. Paul's memory shapes his memory world according to personal significance. Practical details of 1960s suburban England – the village setting, class norms, the disapproval of family and neighbors – are largely pushed to the margins of Paul's narrative. What matters in his memory-world are the emotional essentials of his love story.

Paul explicitly acknowledges the subjective nature of his account when he states, “You understand, I hope, that I’m telling you everything as I remember it? I never kept a diary, and most of the participants in my story—my story! my life! —are either dead or far dispersed. So I’m not necessarily putting it down in the order that it happened” (16). What readers encounter in Paul's narrative is an admission: objectivity remains unattainable because unreliable narration arises through the unconscious editing and modification of events, all filtered through the narrator's personal needs and perspective. His confession recasts the entire narrative as a selective reconstruction rather than a factual record. By privileging the demands of memory by the rememberer over chronological order, Paul signals that accuracy is subordinate to personal need, thereby positioning himself as an intrinsically unreliable narrator. His assertion, that "Memory sorts and sifts according to the demands made on it by the rememberer" (16). And again that “memory prioritizes whatever is most useful to help keep the bearer of those memories going” (16) makes Paul particularly complex as an unreliable narrator because he is aware of how such selective perception affects the story he tells. In terms of possible worlds theory, the novel oscillates between reconstruction and reflection highlighting how Paul's present self-examines the remembered world of his past. Paul’s past world is the intense, seemingly perfect experience of first love. His present world, by contrast, is a reflective and melancholy perspective shaped by the passing years and the knowledge of how it all ended. Together, these embody two distinct temporal perspectives. The conflict between these two temporal perspectives creates ambiguity about what actually occurred. Truth remains suspended between youthful idealization and mature disillusionment. Barnes strengthens this effect by shifting narrative voice and addressing readers directly highlighting that memory-based storytelling creates fictional worlds within the larger narrative.

Furthermore, his assertion that memory possesses its own authenticity paradoxically reveals the constructed nature of his entire narrative, inadvertently demonstrating how his recollections have been shaped to fulfill his psychological needs. This selective process of memory is biased and functions to preserve Paul's identity rather than the truth. Paul unconsciously curates his past, emphasizing certain details while suppressing others, in order to construct a narrative that creates coherence and justifies his past actions so that this version of events allows him to live with himself. Paul's memory world acts as a shield of self-preservation, reshaping his experiences according to what he can mentally accommodate than and not what actually occurred. The possible world Paul creates through his selective memory becomes more subjectively authentic than factually accurate, allowing him to maintain his self-image as Susan's romantic savior rather than confronting the more troubling aspects of their relationship.

In Part One of the narrative, Paul's recollection of his first love is mostly shaped by the emotional demands of his memory, which prioritize the intensity and purity of the experience over any practical or painful realities. He describes his affair as singular and intensely meaningful, with his memory amplifying the joy and thrill of the romance while downplaying any negative consequences or challenges. The warm, almost idyllic tone of Part One reflects this idealized view, painting a world where love reigns supreme, unburdened by practicalities.

Paul's youthful conviction in the invincibility of love further underscores this romanticized lens. Paul's narration, in Part One, is unreliable because his account of his youthful love affair with Susan is screened through his 19-year-old perspective, which idealizes their relationship and overlooks red flags. The older Paul, narrating at seventy, gently undercuts his younger self's naivety, producing a gap between his memory world

which is the romanticized past, and the textual actual world, which the reader reconstructs from narrative cues such as Susan's decline and Gordon's threatening presence. Paul's distortions can be attributed to his inexperience and emotional bias. Paul's description of Susan as vibrant, contrasts with hints of her dependency, which become clearer in later parts. Paul's narration conflicts with Susan's character world, inferred from her actions and dialogue. In Part One, Paul portrays Susan as a willing partner, but her hesitations, such as her guilt over leaving Gordon, and her later decline suggest a more conflicted mental state, contradicting Paul's romanticized view. He declares, "Put it another way, I was nineteen, and I knew that love was incorruptible, proof against both time and tarnish" (*OS* 46), revealing a belief that his feelings were eternal and unassailable. This also shows the naivety and fervor of his nineteen-year-old self, where love is not only a powerful force but an untouchable one, immune to the erosion of time or external judgment. The gradual shift in perspective across parts forces readers to revise their understanding of the TAW. In Part One, readers may accept Paul's romanticized view, but Parts Two and Three reveal Susan's tragic decline, prompting a reevaluation of his earlier narrative. Admittedly, Paul's narrative in Part One is a powerful testament to the intensity of first love, which interprets his memories through a romanticized lens when love felt limitless.

Paul's casual dismissal of concrete details reveals the highly selective nature of his memory and, by extension, his narrative reliability. His inability to recall seemingly mundane elements, like the weather, his clothing, the food he ate, or even the specific colors of the Macleods' car, suggests that his memory has filtered out anything that doesn't serve his romantic construction of events. These omissions are telling because while he claims clothes were "unimportant necessities" and food was "just fuel," his failure to remember such basic sensory details raises questions about what else his memory has chosen to discard or reshape (*OS* 32). The irony lies in his recollection of emotional

experiences while simultaneously admitting ignorance about the physical world that contained them. He brushes it off with “Who cares? My memory certainly doesn’t, and it's my memory which is my guide here” (32). Even more revealing is his frank admission that "there are things I can't be bothered to tell you" (32). This statement exposes Paul's active role as curator of his own story, acknowledging that he is deliberately withholding information from his readers. His claim that memory is his guide while recounting his only story reads less as a justification than as an admission of the arbitrary nature of his account. Memory works here as a guide, discarding the mundane to prioritize emotional significance over factual accuracy. Paul constructs a version of events that suits his purposes, filtering out inconvenient details while emphasizing those that support his preferred narrative of transformative love.

Similarly, Paul's repeated refrain of “I can't remember” throughout these recollections creates a striking paradox at the heart of his narrative. Paul presents these episodes as decisive in his relationship with Susan—their brief holiday together, their professions of love, and Susan’s enigmatic mention of a number that he later interprets as the count of their sexual encounters. However, his memory simultaneously betrays him by failing to retain the very particulars that would substantiate these experiences as he says, “But I can’t remember when or where we first kissed, or who made the first move, or whether it was both of us at the same time” (*OS* 24). The irony in Paul’s claims to remember the emotional significance of these moments while simultaneously admitting he cannot recall their concrete circumstances cannot be missed. He cannot remember “what lies we told” (63) to arrange their getaway, nor whether they stayed in a hotel or rented a flat, or even the context in which Susan mentioned keeping count of their lovemaking.

Such chronic lapses in recollection reveal the constructed nature of his only story. His memory has preserved the intimacy, the stolen time together but has erased the messy realities that would ground these experiences in actual events. The vagueness surrounding even their most private moments suggests that Paul's recollections may be less about what actually happened than about what he needs to believe happened. His inability to remember whether they constantly repeated "I love you in confirmation" (73) while somehow being certain of the emotional weight of their relationship exposes how his memory does not prioritize factual accuracy. Paul creates a version of events that serves his need to believe in the transformative power of their connection.

This selective memory underscores the unreliable narration of Paul, where the past is shaped not by objective truth but by what resonates with his emotional experience. The gaps in his recollection, details that might appear essential to an outsider, are eclipsed by the intensity of his youthful emotions, especially the experience of first love, which dominates his narrative in Part One. By acknowledging memory as the guiding force of his narration, Paul reveals that his story is less concerned with factual precision and more with the emotional truth that endures, presenting a past in which trivialities like clothing, food, or car details fade against the intensity of his feelings. His curated recollection reinforces the romanticized tone of Part One, where love's boundless power overshadows the minutiae of everyday life.

Paul's memory world in the first part is shaped by his youthful infatuation. His beliefs and desires at that age color the narrative. His retrospective account warps everything through the emotions of a nineteen-year-old. Paul genuinely believes their love transcends societal rules. His curt note, "Dear Mum and Dad, I am moving up to London. I shall be living with Mrs. Macleod" (*OS* 83) shows his immaturity even though he thinks it

“sounded properly grown-up” (83) The same selectivity appears in his dismissal of their 30-year age gap: “I never reflected on our age difference. Age felt as irrelevant as money” (46). By relegating such obvious social obstacles to irrelevance, Paul’s memory preserves the purity of first love and omits complexities that might tarnish it. His remembered world centers on a romance freed from chronology or practicalities. What survives in his narrative is not an objective sequence of events but an emotional truth—one that is carefully curated to sustain the youthful infatuation, “the only story” worth telling. Paul's admission that "this is how I would remember it all if I could. But I can't" (83) at the end of Part One is an inadvertent confession that his reconstruction of first love, with its selective omissions and emotions, represents not what happened but what he wishes had happened. Within a possible-worlds perspective, Paul’s unreliability stems from the discrepancy between the textual actual world and the subjective possible world he projects through memory.

Part Two chronicles the deterioration of Paul and Susan's relationship as Susan spirals into alcoholism and depression, shattering the romantic fantasy that dominated Part One. The idealized world Paul constructed in his memory confronts harsh reality as Susan begins drinking in secret, transforming their once-passionate connection into something strained and destructive. Paul's narration becomes increasingly defensive during this period, as he struggles to reconcile Susan's self-destructive behavior with his cherished belief in their transformative love. His admission in Part Two that "There's some stuff I left out, stuff I can't put off any longer" (94) exposes the calculated nature of his storytelling, that he has been consciously withholding information. It reveals him as a narrator who has been deliberately shaping his account to preserve a version of events that serves his purpose. This narrative technique emphasizes the gap between Paul as narrator and Paul as protagonist. The mature Paul possesses complete knowledge of the story’s tragic

conclusion and occasionally allows this awareness to break through, even as he lets his youthful perspective dominate the narrative in Part One. This is a warning signal for readers that Paul's romanticized recollections are incomplete and unreliable, that Paul's memory-world in Part One is not the whole story, it is a possible world of youth.

Emotion and belief heavily shape Paul's memory-world in Part Two. His enduring belief in the power of love leads him to interpret reality in the rosiest possible way even as evidence mounts against it. The reader can easily recognize what Paul cannot: that Susan's alcoholism is neither minor nor manageable. This becomes most apparent when Paul recounts his interactions with concerned friends who attempt to warn him about Susan's drinking. When one friend expresses worry about Susan's condition, Paul's own recollection of his responses exposes the extent of his self-deception: "You protect her by denying it; you admit there are occasional lapses; you say the two of you have talked about it and she has promised "to see someone". You may even say all three things in the course of a single conversation" (121). His recollection tells the reader that he simultaneously denied the problem, minimized its severity, and claimed it was also being addressed, often within a single exchange. Even as events unfolded, Paul was constructing multiple possible worlds depending on his audience's expectations: a world where Susan had no drinking problem, another where she was actively seeking help, and yet another where her alcoholism was only a temporary setback.

His narrative reveals a frantic effort to justify and legitimize her drinking problem, "You understand that in certain, very limited circumstances, she needs the small lift of a small drink… She is sometimes very lonely when you're away… She also has 'my bad time'… so a little nip helps her" (121). Paul's willingness to accept Susan's explanations reveals his desperate need to maintain their relationship's stability. Rather than questioning

her behavior or seeking the truth, Paul accepts Susan's justifications at face value: "You believe what she says. You believe that the bottle she keeps beneath the sink… is the only bottle she drinks from" (121). This is the belief-world Paul constructs – one in which Susan is only drinking occasionally and manageably, with good reasons, and thereby their life can continue as before. This careful selection of what to believe illustrates how denial becomes mutual, with both individuals conspiring to uphold a comforting illusion instead of confronting what they fear to acknowledge. It is evident thus how his compromised reliability as a narrator serves to protect his idealized notion of love even as their bond disintegrates. It also reveals how self-deception had distorted his viewpoint beyond simply misremembering events to include a basic failure to acknowledge difficult truths as they unfolded.

Through Part Two, Paul's narration becomes an uneasy mix of self-justification, being confused, and feeling sorry even though he doesn't fully admit it. He does small things that show he's in denial - like choosing not to confront Susan after a friend catches her watering down whiskey. These moments reveal that Paul isn't a reliable narrator - he's lying to himself as much as he's lying to the readers. The possible worlds Paul built around Susan, worlds in which she was fine, or could be made fine with his help slowly fall apart as the truth about Susan's real condition becomes impossible to ignore. By the end of Part Two, the gap between Paul's memory-world and the textual actual world has widened considerably. His story becomes a painful mix of truth and lies he tells himself. We recognize that Paul is least reliable here because this was when he was most emotionally overwhelmed and most determined to fool himself about what was really going on with Susan.

However, in Part Three of *OS,* Paul, now an older man, speaks about his younger self as if about a different person. The tone in this section is notably cool and distant. With the passage of time, Paul's memories have become less visceral, less certain and more speculative. He has told and retold his "only story" to himself many times over the years, and with each iteration the narrative has evolved and ossified into something almost impersonal. In Part Three, Paul is looking back at events from much further in the future - he's remembering things that happened decades ago, including what finally happened to his relationship with Susan. Because so much time has passed, he tries to analyze and understand what it all meant. The voice telling the story often stops to think about bigger questions - what love really is, how memory works, and how we tell stories about our own lives. Paul is trying to figure out what lessons or meaning he can take from everything that happened to him.

Furthermore, Paul's reflections on the unreliable nature of memory, questioning whether it leans toward optimism or pessimism, underline his role as an unreliable narrator within literary possible-worlds theory. Paul muses that "an optimistic memory might make it easier to part from life, might soften the pain of extinction" (163) even if not triumphant. Alternatively, he considers:

> if, retrospectively, all appears blacker and bleaker than it actually was, then this might make life easier to leave behind. There might also be an evolutionary advantage to a pessimistic memory. You couldn't mind making room for others in the food queue; you could see it as a social duty to wander off into the wilderness, or allow yourself to be staked out on some hillside for the greater good". (163)

Paul's reflections are attempts to construct alternate versions of his experience, suggesting that memories are curated not for accuracy but for individual purposes. His inability to

settle definitively on either interpretation signals the collapse of narrative authority that characterizes unreliable narration. In the context of possible worlds theory, Paul's narrative constructs multiple interpretive realities in which each memory is a possible world shaped by his current emotional needs and not a definitive truth. His pauses to ponder broader questions about love, memory, and self-narration highlight the constructed nature of his story, where the interplay of optimistic and pessimistic biases creates varying versions of his past. This leaves readers to work through the ambiguity of which world holds the most truth. His acknowledgment of memory's unreliability further complicates his narrative authority, as he consciously admits to reshaping his past according to his present perspective, a hallmark of unreliable narration. Within literary possible worlds theory, his reflections suggest that each memory constitutes a version of reality shaped by subjective interpretation rather than objective recounting.

By questioning whether memory's bias serves to affirm life or prepare for its end, Paul underscores the fluidity of these worlds, where the same events can be recast as either a triumphant romance or a tragic misstep, depending on the narrative frame he adopts. His detached references to Susan's death, juxtaposed with the passionate immediacy of his younger voice, further destabilize the narrative's coherence, inviting readers to question the reliability of his account. This self-aware interrogation of memory and storytelling positions Paul as a narrator who not only constructs but also deconstructs his own possible worlds, leaving the reader to reconcile the fragmented and subjective truths of his life story. Paul's pithy maxim about memory further encapsulates his role as an unreliable narrator and aligns with literary possible worlds theory, illustrating how memory reduces the complexity of lived experience into a single, constructed narrative:

> "That's the thing about memory, it's ... well, let me put it like this. Have you ever seen an electric log-splitter in action? They're very impressive. You cue the log to a certain length, lay it on the bed of the machine, press the button with your foot, and the log is pushed onto a blade shaped like an ax-head. Whereupon the log splits pure and straight down the grain. That's the point I'm trying to make. Life is a cross section, memory is a split down the grain, and memory follows it all the way to the end." (97-98)

Paul's metaphor suggests that while life consists of many simultaneous realities and possibilities, memory chooses a single trajectory and pursues its inner logic to the end, even at the cost of ignoring other aspects of reality. So his memory constructs a singular narrative world, elevating one version of his past. It demonstrates his consciousness that his own retelling has selected just one strand from the many possible versions of his relationship with Susan. Paul acknowledges that his narrative process might be creating distance from literal truth rather than approaching it. This self-awareness paradoxically reinforces his status as an unreliable narrator, he understands that his memory has constructed "the only story" from multiple possible stories, yet he remains unable to step outside this constructed narrative world to access the fuller, messier reality of what actually occurred.

One of the most striking narrative moments in Part Three comes near the end, when Paul describes his final visit to Susan. Susan, by this time, is institutionalized, suffering from dementia caused by her alcoholism. Paul, in late middle age, goes to see her to say a last goodbye. The narration, which mostly had been third person, now briefly reverts to first person, as if the immediacy of this final encounter breaks through Paul's detachment. In this scene, the author describes, in first person, what a sentimental conclusion to their

story might look like – almost like a possible world of a comforting ending. He imagines a cinematic farewell: "I wondered if I should kiss her goodbye… And, no doubt, in that film, she would stir slightly in response, her frown lines uncrease, and her jaw relax… I would indeed lift back her hair, and whisper… a final 'Goodbye, Susan.'… Then, with the tears unwiped from my cheeks, I would rise slowly and leave her" (253). He paints the scene of how the movie-version of their parting would go, replete with Susan's slight smile and a tearful yet beautiful goodbye. But then he pointedly cuts it off: "None of this happened" (253). Instead, what follows is painfully prosaic reality, Susan unresponsive and frowning and Paul's mind wandering to trivial thoughts like his drive home, the petrol in his car, what might be on television that night as he sits with the sedated woman who meant everything to him. Paul consciously constructs a possible world of the idealized goodbye only to immediately expose it as a fabrication of his own making. In contrasting the romanticized version with the anticlimactic encounter, stripped of closure or meaning, Paul reveals his self-awareness of memory's tendency to reshape experience into a satisfying narrative.

Initially, Paul recounts his story using the first-person 'I' establishing immediate intimacy and ownership over his experiences. As the narrative progresses, however, he shifts to the second-person 'You' creating psychological distance between his present self and his remembered experiences. This pronoun shift functions as more than stylistic variation—it represents a defensive maneuver that allows Paul to observe his younger self as if from the outside. By addressing his former self as 'you' Paul achieves a form of emotional protection while simultaneously gaining the detached perspective necessary to examine his life with something approaching objectivity. This gradual shift in narrative perspective also highlights how Paul's relationship with his own life story transforms over time. As he ages and gains new insights, he reinterprets his past experiences and sees them

through a changed perspective. Paul's journey from ‘I’ to ‘You’ serves as a metaphor for his process of self-discovery and the evolution of his self-understanding. It shows that over time, memories become more distant and Paul’s relationship with his past experiences transforms him.

Paul moves from being immersed in his story to becoming its observer, ultimately achieving a perspective that allows him to examine his younger self with both compassion and critical distance. Paul's retrospective vantage point does not provide him with clarity or tranquility. He acknowledges that in the process of recounting his past, he inevitably revises his experiences, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Paul’s admission highlights the subjective nature of memory and the ways in which individuals may reshape their own narratives over time. Paul's perspective is not one of objective truth or acquired wisdom, instead, it is a deeply personal and emotionally charged account of his life. Paul’s recollections are distorted, and influenced by his emotional state and the passage of time which characterizes Paul as an unreliable narrator. His deep emotional investment in the story and his admitted tendency to revise his memories suggest that his account may not be entirely trustworthy or accurate. Through its acknowledgment of Paul’s narrative subjectivity, the novel invites readers to reflect on how individuals construct their own realities and on the limitations of relying solely on a single point of view.

Essentially, Paul’s memory-world in Part Three is characterized by detachment and a melancholic acceptance, which shifts the narrative focus from the immediacy of his past with Susan to a more introspective reflection. Susan, who was a vivid presence in Part One, fades into a distant, almost absent figure in Part Three. At times, Paul reduces her to almost a symbolic entity, embodying his guilt and shame rather than existing as a fully realized person. The narrative becomes overtly Paul-centric, prioritizing his process of

understanding and healing. From the standpoint of literary possible worlds theory, Part Three no longer attempts to sustain the overlap between the textual actual world and the narrator's remembered world; instead, it constructs a narrative universe dominated by an older, rueful Paul, who contemplates the meaning of a long-past love. In this universe, the factual details of the past recede into the background, subordinated to the emotional and philosophical insights he derives. This shift again underscores Paul's unreliable narration, since the possible world of Part Three does not function as a reconstruction of historical truth but as a reconfigured world shaped by the narrator's present consciousness. Susan's diminished presence highlights how memory selectively reshapes the past to serve the narrator's current needs, creating discrepancies between the lived world of events and the narrated world shaped through Paul's subjectivity.

Possible worlds theory helps explain this dissonance: the reader is encouraged to navigate between the textual actual world, in which Susan was once central and Paul's narrated world, in which she has become spectral and symbolic, thereby exposing the fluidity of these constructed worlds. By questioning whether memory's bias serves to affirm life or prepare for its end, Paul dramatizes the instability of narrative reference, where the same events can be recast as either a triumphant romance or a tragic misstep depending on the frame he adopts. His detached references to Susan's death, juxtaposed with the passionate immediacy of his younger voice, further destabilize the coherence between worlds, inviting readers to recognize the gaps between them and to question the reliability of his account.

Self-aware interrogation of memory and storytelling positions Paul as a narrator who not only constructs but also deconstructs his own possible worlds, leaving the reader to reconcile the fragmented, subjective truths of his life story. This preoccupation shows

that Paul's belief-world in Part Three has shifted: where once he believed love was singular and all-powerful, he now treats it as a riddle he cannot solve, an experience that might be beyond the reach of reason or language. The narrator's inability or refusal to give a clear verdict on his own story, the questions which remain unanswered- Was it worth it? Was he right or wrong? What does it all mean? – means that *OS* ends not with a tidy moral or lesson, but with an ambiguous silence. Paul simply carries his story, the 'only story' with him into old age, still turning it over in his mind. The possible world of Part Three is open-ended and somewhat fractured, multiple interpretations coexist, and the reader is left to piece together Paul's identity from the first-person lover of Part One, the conflicted 'you' of Part Two, and the hollow 'he' of Part Three.

Each part of the novel presents a distinct memory-world that Paul constructs, the romanticized world of youth where love conquers all, the turbulent world of denial and pain in which Paul struggles to reconcile love with reality, and the distant reflective world of later years, in which Paul dissects his past from afar. In each of these worlds, emotion and belief heavily color what is remembered and how it is told. Part One's world is shaped by passionate idealism, yielding a narrative that emphasizes joy and downplays conflict. Part Two's world is shaped by fear, hurt, and self-deception, yielding a narrative full of contradictions and second-person self-talk – a mind in crisis trying to defend its chosen reality. Part Three's world is shaped by loss and introspection, yielding a narrative that is analytical, speculative, and sometimes numb, as Paul tries to impose order and meaning on what happened.

Paul's unreliability evolves across the novel's three parts. Part One's youthful narration is naively unreliable, Part Two's mixed perspective reveals growing self-awareness but persistent blind spots, and Part Three's detached tone suggests regret but

selective memory, maintaining ambiguity. This progression reflects Paul's emotional journey, with unreliability deepening as he grapples with guilt. As Paul's memory-worlds evolve over time, they indeed become increasingly unreliable in the sense that they stray further from any pretense of objective recounting.

Moreover, the frequent use of first-person pronouns in Part One and verbs of perception—such as "I looked at her in bewilderment" (*OS* 11), "I feel at the same time baffled and at ease" (12), and "It felt to me like a friendship whose hierarchy had been established long ago" (22), foreground Paul's subjective interpretation rather than any claim to objective truth, immediately signaling his unreliability as a narrator. In terms of possible worlds theory, the textual actual world here overlaps heavily with Paul's memory, drawing readers into a version of events that privileges his perceptions over the textual actual world. In Part Two, the conflicting mix of first-person reflections and moments of third-person detachment exposes Paul's inconsistent self-awareness and his inability to sustain a coherent perspective on his own story. This inconsistency produces more than one memory world, one framed by intimate self-reflection, the other by an attempted distance that further destabilizes the reader's ability to reconcile the textual actual world with Paul's narration. By contrast, Part Three's third-person narration creates a false impression of objectivity while events are presented through Paul's biased consciousness. The guise of neutrality conceals the same distortions of memory and self-justification that defined his earlier voice. Susan's character emerges through her dialogue and actions, such as her drinking in Part Two, but remains severely constrained by Paul's focalization. Readers encounter her as she exists in Paul's possible worlds, each one shaped by his selective memory and unreliable narration.

As Paul himself philosophizes, memory sorts and also sifts what it needs and creates a cohesive story out of the chaos of life. In Paul's case, that story is one of first love and its lifelong aftermath. Paul's story is a construct, something made. It is subject to revisions, to forgettings, to embellishments and erasures. Personal memory is fictional not because it is a lie, but because it is a narrative and is subjective. Paul's narration highlights how an unreliable narrator can lay bare the very process by which we all narrate our lives, selecting and interpreting our past to align with our needs and beliefs. The novel's conclusion finds Paul still grappling with the question and notably, he never provides a definitive answer. This ambiguous resolution reinforces that Paul's final possible world is one of ambivalence. He doubts his own story even as he cannot escape it. For the reader, this is a poignant illustration of the novel's core message that our memories and personal histories are our stories, our only stories, and they are rife with subjectivity.

The novel moves between Paul's immediate, first-person impressions and his later reflections as an older narrator. His retrospective framing requires readers to interpret events through Paul's shifting sense of reality and subjective viewpoint. The reader therefore navigates the possible worlds Barnes creates, aware that his narrators may be unreliable. Paul's unreliability creates layered realities. We have the reality Paul remembers which is subject to bias, the reality we suspect might have been -inferred from clues Paul drops unwittingly, and even the hypothetical realities such as his musings on whether he'd have been happier if he had loved less. Barnes positions Paul's unreliability not as a failure of memory, but as its natural function. Memory serves the self as Paul's narrative becomes a testament to how his characters inevitably rewrite their own stories to make them bearable.

SE centers on Tony Webster, a retired divorcé who has grown comfortable with what he calls "the story of my life. The version I tell myself, the account that stands up" (116). This carefully constructed self-narrative becomes unstable when Tony receives an unexpected inheritance from Sarah, the recently deceased mother of his former university girlfriend, Veronica. Tony's connection to Veronica ended decades earlier, following a brief romantic relationship during their student years. The inheritance puzzles him deeply: Sarah, whom he encountered only during one uncomfortable weekend visit to Veronica's family home, has left him five hundred dollars along with the diary of Adrian, Tony's intellectually gifted childhood friend. The bequest stirs painful recollections of how Veronica became involved with Adrian shortly after her breakup with Tony, and of Adrian's subsequent suicide. When Tony reaches out to Veronica to clarify the inheritance, she withholds explanations and access to the full diary, sharing only a brief excerpt. This fragment holds mysterious clues about Adrian's death, forcing Tony to reexamine his own involvement in the sequence of events that led to the tragic outcome.

Tony is both the storyteller and a central figure within the narrative, establishing him as a homodiegetic narrator. His account unfolds retrospectively from the perspective of an elderly man attempting to reconstruct and reassess fragments of his past—his youth, former friendships, and romantic disappointments. From the outset Tony characterizes himself with self-effacing humor while candidly confessing the fallibility of his recollections: “This last isn’t something I actually saw, but what you end up remembering isn’t always the same as what you have witnessed” (3). This confession serves as an early warning to readers about the narrator's potential unreliability.

Tony’s act of remembering is frequently disrupted by his age, biased interpretation of events, and limited perspective on the world around him. As a result, he repeatedly

cautions the reader through various statements that his account is grounded in these unreliable memories. First-person narrators like Tony interpret everything through their consciousness, so there is an inherent risk of discrepancy between the TAW of the novel and Tony's beliefs or assumptions about that world. In possible-worlds terms, Tony's account may occupy a different space than the actual events, a kind of embedded narrative world shaped by his mind. And hence, Tony's story is one version of reality which is his mental world which might conflict with the underlying truth of what occurred. Tony deliberately chooses what to remember and hides important information. He doesn't tell the reader about his angry letter or the real reasons for Adrian's suicide. These missing pieces create empty spaces in the story. These gaps are places where Tony's mind tries to fill in what happened. He often gets it wrong. This leads to different versions of the same events that don't match each other. The way Tony's thoughts work with real events shows the difference between what actually happened and what exists only in his mind. His mental pictures of events often don't match the facts.

Tony recounts his formative years through school and into early adulthood, chronicling his relationships with close friends Colin, Alex, and the intellectually gifted Adrian Finn, as well as his romance with Veronica Ford. The section unfolds as Tony's recollected past, viewed through the lens of several intervening decades. Throughout, Tony acknowledges the unreliable nature of memory itself—describing how uncertain recollections have hardened over time into definitive truths. This admission reveals that Tony's memory world is a reconstruction, not an accurate reflection of past events. Because Tony's focalized perspective dominates Part One, the portrayals of other characters and events are shaped by his biases and gaps in understanding. Tony's account of his breakup with Veronica and the aftermath is tinged with resentment and hurt, which shape how he depicts Veronica's character, whom he characterizes as calculating and

manipulative. These biases represent fundamental absences within Tony's constructed narrative. Rather than recognizing them as gaps, Tony fills them with assumptions from his own mental world, effectively constructing a narrative that feels truthful to him but varies significantly from what actually occurred.

The distance between his long-held understanding of the past and reality grows sharply in Part Two when confronted with Adrian's diary and Veronica's responses, creating cognitive discord in the story. After reaching out to Veronica in hopes of accessing Adrian's diary, Tony is shocked when she presents him with a copy of the spiteful letter he wrote in his youth. Confronting his own words years later, Tony is appalled, as the letter proves to be far more vicious than his recollection of it. This moment is pivotal as it forces Tony to realize that his earlier narrative was not just incomplete but distorted by his younger self's resentments and his older self's forgetfulness. Reflecting on these events decades later, Tony attempts to significantly minimize the letter's impact. When confronted with its actual contents, he wrestles with acknowledging his own capacity for cruelty while also recognizing the futility of complete denial. , "I had been its author then, but was not its author now. Indeed, I didn't recognize that part of myself from which the letter came. But perhaps this was simply further self-deception" (97). This moment questions his reliability as a narrator suggesting that he recognizes he may have been deceiving both himself and the reader. He revises the past to cast himself in a better light. He constantly reminds us and himself that "...as the witnesses to your life diminish, there is less corroboration, and therefore less certainty, as to what you are or have been" (59). We gradually realize that Tony's younger self and his older narrating self, do not agree on every detail, and that Tony's recounting conceals important truths even from himself.

It gradually becomes clear that Tony was not a passive or indifferent observer of Adrian and Veronica's relationship, rather, he reacted with hostility, writing them a vitriolic, harassing letter. The eventual revelation of the angry letter to Adrian and Veronica contradicts Tony's self-image as harmless and morally neutral. These contradictions force the reader to detect world conflicts between Tony's self-narration and alternative perspectives embedded in the text. Tony presents Adrian's death as a thoughtful, even honorable act. His narrative suggests that Adrian's decision was entirely self-determined and possibly connected abstractly to Adrian's high-minded ideals about living an authentic life.

What Tony omits because he does not yet know are the personal circumstances behind Adrian's despair—his secret involvement with Veronica's mother and the child that resulted from their liaison. Those facts belong to the story's TAW but lie outside Tony's knowledge world in Part One. The narrative reality we have by the end of Part One is therefore Tony's construct of his memory world. While he ostensibly seeks verification of his recollections, his reluctance to contact Alex and Colin reveals a deeper fear that alternative perspectives might destabilize his carefully constructed narrative. As he admits: 'I briefly considered tracking down Alex and Colin. I imagined asking for their memories and their corroboration. But they were hardly central to the story; I didn't expect their memories to be better than mine. And what if their corroboration proved the opposite of helpful?" (*SE* 108).

Tony tries to discern Adrian's diary, of which he only ever sees excerpts and the letter he wrote years ago. During a series of tense meetings, Veronica repeatedly tells him, "You just don't get it, do you? You never did and you never will" (126)—a pointed reminder that Tony still fails to grasp the full truth. It also leads readers to infer that Tony

has misunderstood or misrepresented key events. His persistent investigation leads to the shattering revelation that the middle-aged man with mental disabilities, whom Tony initially mistakes for Veronica and Adrian's son, is actually the child of Adrian and Sarah. This discovery upends Tony's long-held view of Adrian's suicide as a purely philosophical act. Tony is forced to confront the possibility that his own vicious letter from youth, urging Adrian to consult Veronica's mother about her, may have inadvertently set the stage for Adrian's involvement with Sarah. This realization compels Tony to overhaul his memory world, aligning his beliefs with undeniable facts he can no longer dismiss.

Subsequently, this painful revelation exposes Tony's unreliability as a narrator on multiple levels. At first, Tony demonstrates certainty in his version of events, as though he possessed complete understanding of the circumstances he describes. He treated his limited perspective as if it were the whole truth. The narrative shows that Tony's recollected version of the past forms a memory world of possibility which was flawed. It was a world he long believed to be the truth. And the TAW does not perfectly coincide with Tony's long-held narrative. The readers witness the collision of two narrative realities. Tony's unreliability stems from both memory's inherent subjectivity and the constraints of first-person perspective. His narration ultimately suggests that all personal histories are, to some degree, fictionalized by memory and self-perception. The knowledge gaps that exist in his understanding of events, are filled with his prejudices and even fabrications. It is crucial to recognize that, alongside Tony, readers are compelled to reassess their initial perceptions as fresh revelations surface, exposing the inconsistencies and gaps that permeate his original account. This irony goes beyond dramatic effect, working at a cognitive level to prompt readers to consider how imperfect memory and psychological defense mechanisms influence the construction of personal truths. Like Tony, readers are prompted to

reconsider their assumptions as new details emerge, uncovering oversights and errors in judgment within Tony's earlier narrative.

As the narrative progresses, the narrator's epistemic authority weakens, leading readers to privilege the alternative memory worlds and textual revelations that challenge his version of events. This change doesn't happen immediately, it develops slowly as new details create unease, leading the reader to rethink earlier beliefs. Importantly, this mirrors Tony's own internal struggle, he too begins to question his memory and interpretation, creating a recursive loop between narrator and reader. Barnes complicates this process through ambiguous cues and subtle moments where the narrative withholds resolution. For instance, Veronica's motivations and emotional state remain partially opaque, leaving certain world conflicts unresolved. Tony Webster's narrative world is initially dominant as it is orderly and self-reflective. The reader accepts his account as authentic because of its tone of sincerity and humility. However, as new information emerges, the reader begins to question Tony's narrative. This leads to a reshuffling of perspectives, where Tony's viewpoint is gradually seen as less trustworthy.

Consequently, Tony's memory world preserved an image of the past that ultimately proved inaccurate. His evolving narrative shows how individuals assemble mental worlds from fragmentary evidence and shifting emotional needs, often mistaking these constructions for objective truth. At first, Tony assembles a unified account of his youth that seemed sufficient to him, with no reason to doubt its accuracy. Only when concrete evidence appears is Tony forced to significantly revise his mental world to accommodate these facts. So he has to alter his belief-world in light of new truth – a process by which his memory world moves closer to the actual world of the story. The collision between these overlapping versions of reality underscores Tony's unreliability, showing how radically the

narrative shifts once fuller knowledge comes to light. Barnes intentionally leaves certain ambiguities intact, especially around Veronica's feelings, Adrian's choices, and the nature of responsibility, ensuring that the reader's final judgment remains provisional. In this way, the novel achieves not just a critique of unreliable memory, but a meta-narrative commentary on the fragility of narrative certainty itself.

Therefore, the flaws and inaccuracies in the narrator's recollection render both the narrative and the broader concept of history in these novels untrustworthy. Their narrative also takes on a self-justifying tone, as the story they present to the reader is ultimately revealed to be false, with key details omitted. Through his narrators Barnes invites readers to question the tidiness of any retrospective life story. Marie-Laure Ryan's theoretical framework illuminates this by suggesting that each narrator's unreliable account can be seen as a clash of possible worlds – the mental world they inhabit versus the fuller world that remains partly beyond their sight. The 'sense of an ending', as these narrators discover, is never definitive, it hinges on who constructs the narrative and what knowledge they possess. In each novel, the endings initially perceived by narrators are revealed to be incomplete or misleading. Both narrators and readers grapple with the disquieting realization that memory and narrative are fluid, and understanding one's past is a process of constant revision, one that may never yield total certainty. The author encourages readers to assemble a coherent truth from competing viewpoints, echoing how human memory works in fragments.

Narrative unreliability here works on both the intrauniverse and the transuniverse levels at the same time. Intrauniverse, as explored, refers to the relationships within the storyworld, the interplay of multiple narrators in the same fictional universe, or the conflict between a narrator's account and the diegetic reality. Barnes structures his novels to

maximize these internal tensions, whether through multi-voiced narration as in *TO* and *LE*. or through internal duality as in *BSMM, SE* and *OS*. The intrauniverse relationships between different possible versions of events become the driving force of the plot. The transuniverse dimension of Barnes's unreliable narratives extends beyond the immediate confines of the fictional world to engage with broader epistemological and existential contexts. Thematically, these narratives establish connections with real-world philosophical inquiries concerning the nature of memory, the construction of historical truth and also the subjective filtering of experience through consciousness. Simultaneously, they foster a dynamic engagement with the reader's experiential world by demanding active interpretation. This process requires readers to draw on their own cognitive resources and personal horizons of meaning to decode and comprehend the layered complexities within the narrative

In the case of *TO* and its sequel *LE.*, the fictional universe extends across two texts, requiring readers to negotiate continuity between them. This expansion compels readers to integrate the information provided by both novels and to reassess how the 'truth' established in the first is revised, complicated, or even overturned in the second. Meaning therefore, emerges through the shifting interplay between two interconnected storyworlds. This approach reinforces the idea that no single text, just like no single perspective, has the final word. The second half of this chapter has expanded the discussion of memory and unreliability in Julian Barnes's novels by applying the lens of possible-worlds theory.

Through these lenses, Barnes's unreliable narrators are presented not as aberrations to be solved, but as integral to the storytelling strategy, a means of depicting the subjective worldmaking power of memory. Barnes's fiction suggests that personal memory is always a process of constructing a narrative, a "story we have told about our life" (*SE* 95) in Tony

Webster's words, and as such it is inherently prone to adjustment, omission, and also re-interpretation. Rather than a flaw, this unreliability is portrayed as an essential aspect of how individuals make meaning of their lives. In each novel, the reader's active role in detecting unreliability and piecing together the storyworld mirrors the protagonists' own efforts to synthesize their past. By attending to intra-universe cues such as internal contradictions and competing perspectives, the reader begins to track the limits of each narrator's account. At the same time, by drawing on real-world awareness of memory's fallibility, the reader engages in the same acts of worldmaking as the narrators themselves.

The possible-worlds model illuminates how Barnes uses narrative unreliability not only as a narrative device, but as a philosophical inquiry into the limits of self-knowledge, the mutability of memory, and the moral ambiguity of retrospection. By using unreliable narrators who earnestly, even though imperfectly, narrate their memories, Barnes closes the gap between fiction and the lived experience of memory. Readers are left with the recognition that all narrations of the self, whether in literature or in life, are provisional stories, shaped by forgetting as much as remembering. And in the end, as Barnes's works demonstrate, these personal fictions can convey emotional and existential truths even when their factual reliability is suspect. The unreliability itself becomes a source of meaning, inviting us to consider why a story is being told a certain way, what needs or fears shape its telling, and how, as readers and as people, we piece together our own realities from the multiplicity of perspectives and memories available to us. The blending of memory and unreliability not only deepens the narrative but also serves as a meditation on the human struggle to comprehend the past.

To conclude my examination of memory's inherent unreliability, I turn to Barnes's seasoned reflection, which encapsulates the central paradox explored throughout this chapter:

> I now agree that memory, a single person's memory, uncorroborated and unsubstantiated by other evidence, is a feeble guide to the past. I think, more strongly than I used to, that we constantly reinvent our lives, retelling them – usually – to our own advantage. I believe that the operation of memory is closer to an act of the imagination than it is to the clean and reliably detailed recuperation of an event in our past. I think that sometimes we remember as true things that never even happened in the first place; that we may grossly embellish an original incident out of all recognition; that we may cannibalise someone else's memory, and change not just the endings of the stories of our lives, but also their middles and beginnings. I think that memory, over time, changes, and, indeed, changes our mind. (Barnes, "We Remember as True Things")

Given that all narrators operate from limited perspectives and possess incomplete knowledge, even the most seemingly trustworthy narrator inevitably introduces gaps, biases, or uncertainties into their account of events. The very act of narrative representation requires selection, interpretation, and linguistic mediation, which necessarily creates distortions or odd representations that deviate from any objective reality. Consequently, the concept of a fully reliable narrator becomes theoretically problematic, as reliability exists on a spectrum rather than as an absolute category, with all narrators exhibiting varying degrees of limitation, subjectivity, or fallibility in their storytelling.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Contemporary fiction has been marked by a turn toward reexamining and revisiting the past. Writers increasingly recognize that the past is neither fixed nor transparent but a living material, continuously reshaped through acts of remembrance. This reflects a broader awareness that identity or selfhood is not innate or unchanging, but is instead constructed through the stories we tell ourselves and share with others about our lives. To survive, one must often retell their own story, reshaping the past through acts of remembering and reinterpretation. Given that memory is fragile and ever-shifting, it is shaped as much by what we choose to recall as by what we try to forget. Through this constant negotiation between remembrance and forgetting, a person gradually reconstructs personal identity. Moreover, both personal and collective narratives allow individuals to locate themselves in the world and comprehend their lived experiences. Since the act of remembering is deeply shaped by perspective and subjectivity, the past remains an unavoidably subjective interpretation, continuously subject to revision and erasure. This makes an objective observation of the past inherently difficult.

This study of the five novels of Julian Barnes focuses on individual memory and its representations, examining a core aspect of his narrative art that has received limited critical attention. In his works, memory provides the means by which characters construct, reconstruct, and contest their identities, while also serving as the ground on which questions of time, truth, and reliability are dramatized. Memory is employed as a central device through which both the plot unfolds and the characters take shape. His protagonists search for a stable identity and grapple with memories that are fragmented and also distorted.

In the selected novels the spectrum of memory forms the backbone of narrative design. *BSMM* unravels the dangers of obsessive remembrance, where the past becomes a corrosive force shaping the present. In *TO*, memory splinters into competing versions of truth, each narrator reconstructing events to justify love, betrayal, or guilt. *Love, etc.* continues this pattern, layering recollections and revisions, exposing how time reshapes affection and resentment alike. SE reflects on the instability of recollection, where fragments of memory make it difficult to distinguish between truth and self-deception. And, *OS* captures remembrance as both burden and refuge, tracing how love endures not in experience but in the flawed persistence of memory.

Paul Ricoeur's concept of narrative identity posits that individuals construct their identity through the stories they tell about their lives. These narratives function to consolidate past experiences, present conditions, and future goals into a unified conception of personal identity. However, as time passes and new experiences are encountered, these narratives may need to be revised or updated. This holds true in the works of Barnes where memory plays a crucial role in the construction of narrative identity, as it provides the raw material from which individuals draw to create their life stories. Ricoeur also highlights the complex interplay between remembering and forgetting. Inaccuracies, distortions, or gaps in memory undermine the coherence and stability of his characters personal narrative. Even forgotten or fragmented recollections shape their narratives. The act of narration demands choice, deciding what to recall, what to silence and what to reinterpret. Through this continual process of revising and re-evaluating memory, his characters confront the distortions and absences that haunt their past. In doing so, they craft a version of life that feels well-structured and credible. By recognizing the fragility of both memory and identity, the challenges involved in constructing a stable personal identity is better understood.

Barnes' use of narrative as a means of structuring memory highlights the human need to create continuous and meaningful stories out of the fragmented and chaotic nature of life experiences. His characters engage in retrospective storytelling. The narration of memories facilitates a process of self-discovery and identity formation. The memories are shaped into a narrative that imposes order, causality, and significance onto their past. Through this structuring, they are able to derive insights that contribute to a deeper self-understanding.

In the selected novels, narrative and remembrance are inseparable because the act of recalling becomes the act of telling. The stories evolve not from external events but from the inner reconstructions of those events, shaped by perception, emotion, and time. Because memory is selective and interpretive, the resulting narratives carry the marks of uncertainty, incompleteness, and distortion. The use of unreliable narrators highlights the fallibility of memory and the ways in which individuals may unconsciously or consciously alter their stories to protect themselves, to cope with trauma, or to maintain a desired self-image. The unreliability of memory in Barnes' works serves as a reflection of the complex and elusive nature of personal truth and identity. Using the lens of possible-worlds theory, the study examines how the "memory-worlds" constructed by these narrators coexist with, or diverge from, the objective reality of the text. Each character's remembered world is an alternate version of events, a subjective universe governed by emotion, regret, and reinterpretation. The gaps between these personal worlds and the textual reality highlight how memory generates multiple, overlapping versions of truth rather than a single well-formed one. Barnes's exploration, therefore, reaches beyond questions of whether a narrator is trustworthy. It probes deeper into how individuals build coherence out of contradiction, how they transform scattered recollections into a meaningful life story. The novels suggest that storytelling itself is an act of memory, always mediated by personal

bias, emotion, and temporal distance. In this view, narrative authority is never absolute but perpetually entangled with the limitations of perception and the fluidity of time, making every story an evolving reflection of how human beings remember and reimagine their own experience.

The temporal distance between the events being recounted and the moment of narration further underscores the idea that memory is a mutable force. Time becomes a shaping force that defines and transforms identity. As the narrators look back on their experiences from a removed vantage point, they grapple with the challenges of accurately reconstructing the past. They confront the ways in which time, emotion, and subsequent experiences alter their perceptions of events. This temporal gap also allows for a more reflective and introspective approach to storytelling, as the narrators offer insights or interpretations that were not available to them in the moment of the original experience. By foregrounding memory through the use of first-person narration and the narrators' acknowledgment of the potential inaccuracies in their recollections, Barnes explores the nature of memory and its impact on an individual's self-conception.

In *BSMM*, time exposes the corrosive effects of obsession, in *TO* and *LE*, time becomes a prism through altered memories and emotional decay are refracted. In *SE*, the resurfacing of forgotten moments exposes not just lapses in recollection, but the subtle ways in which time itself reshapes identity. Similarly, in *OS*, the passage of time reveals how memory and aging erode certainty and reshape meaning. Across these works, Barnes uses time to distort, clarify and also determine who his characters become by forcing them to reckon with what endures and what fades. In *Talking It Over* and *Love, etc.*, the emotional entanglements of Stuart, Gillian, and Oliver are shaped by betrayal, guilt. There is a slow corrosion of trust and the repeated failure of understanding between people who

once shared intimacy. Stuart's suffering, Gillian's conflicted loyalty, and Oliver's self-deception collectively trace a pattern of survival through emotional loss. Each character, in confronting the aftermath of love, bears the invisible scars of choices made and words spoken too late. The past lingers as a living presence that the characters cannot entirely repress or reconcile. Time, here, emerges as both torment and refuge, allowing distance yet never completely erasing the remembered wounds.

Barnes' presentation of memory in *TO and LE* is polyphonic, allowing multiple, often conflicting versions of the past to coexist without resolution. The narrative mirrors the instability of memory itself, where each recollection is coloured by desire, resentment, and self-justification. Rather than seeking a definitive truth, the act of narration becomes a means of surviving the present—an attempt by each character to reassert coherence.

They wrestle with the distortions and betrayals of memory and tend to reinterpret, reframe, or even falsify the past as a way of negotiating their identity in the present. In *BSMM*, Graham's obsession with his wife's sexual past becomes a destructive confrontation with his own fragile identity, an inability to locate the boundary between memory, imagination, and selfhood. The narratives of *TO* and *LE* explore the instability of shared memories, where multiple narrators reshape the same events to justify their emotional survival. In *SE*, the evidence that surfaces, dismantles Tony Webster's seemingly stable recollection, exposing memory's deeper impulse toward self-protection. Barnes's protagonists come to terms with their memories through narrative revision, through the act of retelling itself. Their confrontation with the past is less redemptive than ironic, marked by belated recognition, self-deception, and moral uncertainty

Memory and forgetting emerge as paradoxical processes that define both the characters' inner worlds and the structure of the narratives themselves. Forgetting also

becomes both a form of defence and a form of loss, as his characters struggle between the desire to preserve the past and the need to escape it. Tony Webster's selective memory exemplifies this tension, his recollections of youth are gradually dismantled by the intrusion of forgotten or repressed truths. For Tony, the act of remembering involves a deliberate and cautious process of excavating memories that were thought to be lost or buried. He positions himself as the reasonable observer, constructing a version of his past that flatters his restraint and rationality. Yet, as fragments resurface and contradictions accumulate, the narrative dismantles his self-portrait.

In *OS* Paul Roberts narrates his past love affair with a tone of irony, critiquing society's hypocrisies while evading his own complicity in Susan's eventual disintegration. His retrospective narration becomes an exercise in partial confession, an attempt to aestheticize pain rather than inhabit it. Their apparent candour is revealed to be a form of concealment, and their moral blindness persists until the narrative itself betrays them. It is only through the act of narrating that memory begins to contradict itself, forcing them to confront the uncomfortable recognition that the flaws they once observed in others were mirrors of their own. In this way, Barnes transforms memory into a narrative tool. In *TO* and *LE* the relationship between Stuart, Oliver, and Gillian exposes how memory becomes contested territory, each retelling alters the emotional truth, revealing how forgetting may serve as both self-protection and evasion. Across these novels, Barnes's characters ultimately find a form of reconciliation not by erasing the past but by integrating it into their ongoing life narratives. Their acceptance is rarely triumphant, rather, it is marked by humility and awareness of the limits of knowing. Painful memories are neither fully resolved nor transcended, they are accommodated, absorbed into the texture of being. Remembering and forgetting are transformed into acts of existential negotiation, through

which his characters come to recognize that the self is continually rewritten by the shifting interplay of memory and time.

The representation of time is a central narrative strategy that shapes the characters' understanding of memory and identity. The shifting temporal structures, marked by retrospection and fragmentation reveals the instability of both memory and self. The narrative oscillation between past and present becomes a means of charting the gradual reshaping of identity through memory's distortions and absences. Photographs, recurring throughout Barnes's fiction, acquire particular significance in this process. They appear as fixed images of the past but ultimately reveal the fragility of recollection. The study also examines how these photographic images function as narrative devices and also instruments that question authenticity and permanence in the recollection of the past.

While not all of Barnes's characters arrive at a conclusive or affirmative selfhood, each undertakes a journey marked by introspection, disillusionment, and gradual transformation. Through their conflicts they grapple with questions of existence, purpose, morality, and belief. Time and temporality, which often function as living presences deepen these explorations. Barnes's narrative strategies, nonlinear storytelling, shifting perspectives, and the recursive movement between past and present, serve to heighten this interplay between temporal experience and emotional evolution. Time itself therefore becomes both participant and witness in the unfolding of identity.

Memory reconstructs the life experiences of Barnes's characters, yet they often observe unfolding moments as spectators rather than active participants. Throughout this reconstruction, their self-perception and imagined views of how others see them shift dramatically, forcing a reluctant reconsideration of previously held certainties. Coming to terms with a changed version of the past becomes a challenge in itself. Each new

examination reshapes their history and also their understanding of themselves. The gaps in their self-protective narratives get filled as they adopt a more complete perspective. This broader view emerges through storytelling itself and the emotional crisis that initiates the recollection becomes the spark for this re-evaluation. This study has also established that the theoretical intersection of unreliable narration and possible-worlds theory offers a productive critical framework for interrogating Barnes's narrative methodology. His work also posits that human existence unfolds not within a singular, determinate reality but within the perpetually evolving narratives through which individuals construct meaning—narratives fundamentally shaped by memory's relentless imperative to interpret, rationalize, and reconstitute the self. Barnes's fiction thus illuminates the essential narrativity of consciousness itself, wherein identity remains always provisional, always subject to the reconstructive energies of recollection.

Chapter 6

Recommendations

The intersection of affect and memory presents a rich and evolving area of inquiry that holds significant potential for interdisciplinary research. The affective dimensions of memory remain comparatively underexplored, particularly in the context of literary and cultural studies. Affect, as understood through contemporary theory, refers to the pre-conscious, bodily intensities that shape emotional experience and perception. Memory, conversely, often carries the connotation of conscious recollection and narrative reconstruction. The interface between these two—how affect shapes memory and, in turn, how memory organizes affective life—offers a fertile ground for expanding current understandings of identity, and narrative form.

Future research can engage this intersection by examining how emotional intensities structure the process of remembering and forgetting. Affect not only colors recollection but also determines what is retained or repressed, and how past experiences continue to reverberate in the present. Affective memory may not always manifest in linguistic or representational forms; it may surface instead through mood, atmosphere, gesture, or tone. Studying affect and memory together therefore, would require an interdisciplinary methodology that draws on psychology, cognitive narratology, and affect theory. Literary texts, film, and visual culture can serve as productive sites for investigating how affective residues shape narrative temporality and identity construction.

One promising avenue involves the exploration of embodied memory—how the body stores affective traces that resist narrative articulation. Research in this area could analyze how writers and artists use sensory imagery, rhythm, or silence to evoke the bodily dimensions of memory. Such an approach could be extended to analyze trauma narratives,

where the breakdown of conventional storytelling often signals the pressure of unassimilated affect. In these cases, affect functions as both the medium and the obstacle of remembrance. Examining this dynamic could deepen our understanding of how cultural representations negotiate the boundary between what can and cannot be remembered. Another productive direction lies in the study of collective or cultural memory as an affective phenomenon. Communities, like individuals, remember through emotional attachments like nostalgia, pride, resentment, or mourning, that circulate across generations. Investigating how affect sustains or destabilizes collective memory could illuminate broader questions of belonging, identity politics, and historical continuity. Literature and cinema, with their capacity to mediate shared affective experiences, provide particularly fertile grounds for such inquiry. A comparative perspective can trace how different cultures encode and transmit affective memories of national trauma, migration, or loss, highlighting both shared patterns and culturally specific modes of remembrance.

In addition, the study of affect and memory opens new possibilities for engaging with the temporal complexity of narrative. Affective intensities often disrupt linear time, producing recursive or suspended temporalities that mirror the workings of memory itself. Future research might examine how affective disruptions reconfigure narrative structures. This focus on affective temporality can contribute to broader debates on the nature of time-consciousness, particularly in postmodern and contemporary fiction where memory often replaces action as the primary mode of progression. Moreover, recent advances in cognitive science and neuroscience furnish a valuable grounding for such investigations. The integration of affect theory with cognitive models of memory could yield a nuanced understanding of how emotion and cognition interact in shaping narrative experience. Empirical studies of reading or viewing responses, for instance, could complement textual analyses by tracing the affective responses of audiences to representations of memory and

time. The affect–memory perspective represents a promising frontier for future research, bridging the personal and the collective, the psychological and the aesthetic, the cognitive and the emotional. It invites an expansion of critical vocabulary beyond the limits of representation to encompass the pre-verbal, the sensory, and the embodied dimensions of human experience. By pursuing this line of inquiry, scholars can contribute to a more integrated understanding of how individuals and cultures construct meaning not only through what they remember, but through how they feel what is remembered.

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