



Fiction as Non-Linear History: A Study of Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* and *The Noise of Time*

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Abstract

Memory provides the animating logic of Julian Barnes's writings underpinning and connecting his exploration of love, death, art, history and politics. His continuous struggle with form is a measure of his untiring search for an adequate artistic expression. The aim of this research paper is to understand how, for Julian Barnes, memory actually organizes, in a non-linear way, our understanding of history. It demonstrates how fiction can grapple with the complexity of history. Barnes rejects any theory of history that reduces it to a certain continuum or to a pattern. Fiction for him, far from being the antithesis of history, deepens the experience of history and thus complements it. He scrutinizes the conventional idea of history and offers a surprising and subversive fictional history of the Earth told from a variety of perspectives. This is done with special reference to his two novels: *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* as an effort to offer a substitute to conventional historical narrative and *The Noise of Time* as an attempt to recreate selectively and microscopically a period from Soviet history which conventional histories have usually addressed from a purposeful distance and in broad and general terms. In order to understand Barnes's work, it is important to study his continuous struggle to develop an appropriate form to understand and communicate the complex reality of human existence. For Barnes, each individual work makes a specific demand on form. The paper also deals with the evolution of form as an outcome of Barnes's effort to deconstruct the so-called objective truth in historical knowledge and to question the authenticity and finality of history.

Keywords: Memory, History, Fiction, Historical narrative, Form, Absolute truth

Introduction

The aim of this research paper is to understand how, for Barnes, memory actually organizes, in a non-linear way, our understanding of history. This is done with special reference to his two novels: *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989) as an effort to offer a substitute to conventional historical narrative and *The Noise of Time* (2016) as an attempt to recreate selectively and microscopically a period from Soviet history which conventional histories have usually addressed from a purposeful distance and in broad and general terms. However, in order to understand Barnes's work, it is important to study his continuous struggle to develop an appropriate form. For Barnes, each individual work makes a specific demand on form. Therefore, the paper also deals with the evolution of form as an outcome of Barnes's effort to deconstruct the so-called objective truth in historical knowledge and to question the authenticity and finality of history.

Most of the evidence of history, of the lives of people, of what they did and what happened to them, has disappeared. What we think of as historical evidence is a minuscule fragment of all the evidence that was available during the individual lifetime of people. And therefore, there is an inevitable limitation to the recording of history. When efforts are made in order to write a history more attentively and probingly than the obvious evidence of available artefacts and recorded facts, one of the consequences is that it tends to become a literary genre. In an interview, Barnes notes how history is necessarily selective because the vast majority of events go unrecorded and, so whenever it departs from a simple description of facts it shades off into the literary. The narrator in *Flaubert's Parrot* even remarks that sometimes history is

perceived as a literary genre (90). This statement echoes what the French philosopher, Michel Foucault, tries to convey in his study of traditional historiography. A reading of Foucault's major writings can be understood as an effort to disrupt the continuity and intimacy that historians seem to have with the past. This understanding of history of Foucault is influenced by Nietzsche's epistemological critique of history, or the traditional understanding and recording of history.

Barnes calls history "a soothing fabulation" in the half-chapter titled "Parenthesis" (242). The term "fabulation" was first used in literary criticism by Robert Scholes in his work *The Fabulators* to denote a literary technique that "tends away from direct representation of the surface of reality, but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy" (96). A related term is "confabulation" which according to Oxford Concise Medical Dictionary refers to 'the invention of circumstantial but fictitious detail about events supposed to have occurred in the past. Usually this is to disguise an inability to remember past events. It may be a symptom of any form of loss, but typically occurs in Korsakoff's syndrome.' In simple words, confabulation is the production of false memories about oneself or the world, but without the intention of deception. It is a filling in of gaps in memory through the fabrication of memories not rooted in facts by an individual who is affected with an organic brain disorder (such as Korsakoff syndrome) and is unaware that the fabricated memories are not only inaccurate but also false. Even normal human beings need the illusion of a full story. So, the mind fabulates and convinces itself that the fabulation is true and concrete. It coherently links the real and the imagined in a plausible narrative. Historians write history in a way that they expect

will satisfy this need of the human mind and give the readers the whole story to understand the logic of events and the human motivation behind what happened in the past. However, when Barnes writes a fragmented narrative of the history of mankind in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* or a personal account of a specific period in Soviet history in *The Noise of Time*, he makes an effort to offer us a way out of the fabulation; he offers his readers an alternative point of view to look at history to question its authority and authenticity. He comments on the nature and unreliability of history in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* when the narrator says:

Now, I realize that accounts differ. Your species has its much repeated version, which still charms even sceptics; while the animals have a compendium of sentimental myths. But they're not going to rock the boat, are they? Not when they've been treated as heroes, not when it's become a matter of pride that each and every one of them can proudly trace its family tree straight back to the Ark. They were chosen, they endured, they survived: it's normal for them to gloss over the awkward episodes, to have convenient lapses of memory. But I am not constrained in that way. I was never chosen. In fact, like several other species, I was specifically not chosen. I was a stowaway; I too survived; I escaped (getting off was no easier than getting on); and I have flourished. I am a little set apart from the rest of animal society, which still has its nostalgic reunions: there is even a Sealegs Club for species which never once felt queasy. When I recall the Voyage, I feel no sense of obligation; gratitude puts no smear of Vaseline on the lens. My account you can trust.

(*History* 4)

A History of the World in 10½ Chapters was published in 1989. It is one of Barnes's experimental works. In it he scrutinizes the conventional idea of history and offers a surprising and subversive fictional history of the Earth told from a variety of perspectives. He uses different genres and styles along with multiple narrators, substituting conventional chronological narration of history with ten fictional narratives and a parenthesis. The stories have subtle connections and seem to gradually disclose a deeper sense of history. It has occasioned doubts in some critics as to whether this book should be called a novel because, in it Barnes pushes, apart from experimenting with the narrative technique, the limits of the novel as a genre. David Sexton points to this aspect of Barnes's practice:

Barnes writes books which look like novels and get shelved as novels but which, if you open them up, are something else altogether...*A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* is even odder. The ten chapters contain ten quite different stories, some factual, some not. They are related only by image and theme.

Barnes's primary concern here is the nature of history. The book demonstrates how fiction can grapple with the complexity of history. He rejects any theory of history that reduces it to a certain continuum or to a pattern. Fiction for him, far from being the antithesis of history, deepens the experience of history and thus complements it. Barnes believes that art both illuminates and transcends history:

The history of the world? Just voices echoing in the dark; images that burn for a few centuries and then fade; stories, old stories that sometimes seem to overlap; strange links; impertinent connections.... We

make up a story to cover the fact that we don't know or can't accept; we keep a few true facts and spin a new story round them. Our panic and our pain are only eased by soothing fabulations; we call it history. (*History*, 242)

The novel does not have a single plot, chronology, or even apparent narrative coherence. It brings together several genres, such as short story, historical fiction, essay, travel writing, legal proceedings and what Barnes calls "love prose". It also offers a variety of stylistic registers, and mixes contradictory versions, narrative voices and focalizations as each chapter proposes a new narrator and a fresh point of view on history.

The narrator of the first chapter, "The Stowaway", the woodworm, tells the story of Noah, his Ark and the Great Flood. This story is followed by "The Visitors", the story of a cruise ship hijacked in the Mediterranean in the 1980s. The third chapter, "The War of Religions" is a transcript of a fifteenth-century ecclesiastical trial of woodworms who damaged a bishop's throne and caused him injury; it is followed by the story entitled "The Survivor" of a woman who has survived a nuclear war. The story of the wreck of the *Medusa* in 1816 is told unusually in the fifth chapter, "Shipwreck" and it is also an analysis of Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*, his painting that depicts a moment from the aftermath of the wreck of the French naval frigate *Méduse*. "The Mountain" is the story of a Victorian Irish woman's attempt to scale Mt. Ararat. "Three Simple Stories" tells three stories that are similar and related. There is the story of the Titanic, the sinking cruise liner, the story of Jonah and the Whale (from the *Bible*; the story is of a prophet thrown overboard and saved from death by a big fish who vomits him three days later), and then the story of Jewish refugees refused

entry into the United States while struggling to survive at sea. The eighth chapter "Upstream!" is an account of a narcissistic actor making a movie in South America: this one is epistolary, and the letters becoming progressively more abstract as the story proceeds. Appended to it is a parenthetical, metafictional essay about the narrator's opinion on love. The narrator discusses various artworks, including a poem by Philip Larkin. This is the half-chapter from the title and it is called "Parenthesis". "Project Ararat", the ninth chapter, is a space story about Spike Tiggler, an astronaut who mans an expedition to recover Noah's Ark. Tiggler's character is based on the life of the astronaut James Irwin. The trip is sublime and the story makes connections to other stories in the novel. The final chapter of the book is "The Dream"; it offers a detailed depiction of New Heaven, the heavenly realm and the afterlife.

Barnes purposefully crosses boundaries between fiction and history. The movement between real facts and fiction spotlights the problems in the plausibility of history. It not only brings to the forefront the possibility of doubt on the validity of historical facts but also helps Barnes inquire into the possibility, nature and use of historical knowledge. The narrator of "Parenthesis" ironically reminds the reader:

History isn't what happened. History is just what historians tell us. There was a pattern, a... plan, a movement, expansion, the march of democracy; it is a tapestry, a flow of events, a complex narrative, connected – explicable. One good story leads to another. First it was kings and archbishops with some offstage divine tinkering, then it was the march of ideas and the movement of masses, then little local events which mean something bigger, but all the time

it's connections. Progress, meaning, this led to this, this happened because of this. And we, the readers of history, the sufferers from history, we scan the pattern for hopeful conclusions, for the way ahead. (242)

By arranging the chapters at random, the novel undoes the illusion of a coherent model of history and its innate logic of progression produced by arrangement of historical dates. The absence of chronology replaces the consistent and coherent course of history with a sense of entropy, reflecting the mutability, discontinuity, arbitrariness and disorder of lived history. Reviewing the book, Salman Rushdie observed that what Barnes was attempting was "the novel as footnote to history, as subversion of the given [...], fiction as critique" (*Imaginary* 241). As Seen in this light, the book can be seen as belonging to the same genre as Rushdie's novels, the fiction written on and about the margins of life that nevertheless manage to occupy the centre. The generic and narrative instability of *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* is, however, the sign of an unrelenting quest for new forms, as Barnes acknowledges:

I'm very interested in form and in seeing what happens when you bend the traditional narrative and fracture it, but the novelist was well aware of the risks of stretching [the book] to the point at which you hope the chewing gum doesn't snap. (Stuart 1989)

Throughout the book, Barnes experiments with genre, style and narrative techniques, challenging classification and categorization and thus resisting the apparently inexorable logic of division between pure and impure, clean and unclean, weak and strong, victorious and

defeated in history. The novel celebrates plurality and hybridity through its polymorphous form, while remaining accessible to its reader. In “The Stowaway” Barnes challenges received mythology by reimagining the story of Noah’s Ark and the Great Flood from the perspective of a woodworm, a species which was specifically not chosen, but was a stowaway, who had escaped, and feels no obligation to put “smear of Vaseline on the lens” (*History* 4):

It wasn’t like those nursery versions in painted wood which you might have played with as a child – all happy couples peering merrily over the rail from the comfort of their well-scrubbed stalls. Don’t imagine some Mediterranean cruise on which we played languorous roulette and everyone dressed for dinner; on the Ark only the penguins wore tailcoats. (3)

The use of narrative voice of a stowaway, marginalized species in this re-telling of history is in a way an acknowledgement of a possibility of multitude of histories of the world. In the fourth chapter, “The Survivor”, Barnes uses two narrative voices, alternating between first-person narrator, Kathleen Ferris and third-person narrator to tell the story of someone who experienced the Chernobyl disaster and remembers how it was downplayed. Kathleen offers the perspective of a woman who has been an outsider for most of history, whose story remains untold, much like the woodworm. Both these narrative voices belong to the marginalized whose stories were neglected. Kathleen insists:

They say I don’t understand things. They say I’m not making right connections. Listen to them, listen to them and their connections. This happened, they say, and as a consequence that happened. There was a

battle here, a war there, a king was deposed, famous men – always famous men. I’m sick of famous men – made events happen. Maybe I’ve been out in the sun too long, but I can’t see their connections. I look at the history of the world, which they don’t seem to realize is coming to an end, and I don’t see what they see. (97)

This chapter opens with the first two lines from the “Columbus Day Poem” which was used in Britain to help teach the history of Columbus. It is a critique of a parroting learning method which uses repetition and recitation of facts accepting them blindly.

The fifth chapter “The Shipwreck” is divided into two parts: an unusual retelling of the story of the wreck of the ship called *Medusa* in 1816 and the second part is an analysis of Géricault’s painting *The Raft of the Medusa* that depicts a moment from the aftermath of the wreck of the French naval frigate *Méduse*. The two parts are divided by a folded coloured reproduction of the painting. In *Rewriting History in the Novels of Julian Barnes*, Alina Roşcan comments on the relationship between the story and the essay and the significance of the second part of the chapter:

After exposing all these elaborate steps which the artist took in search of authenticity, the narrator points out that which is not painted, as well as the reasons underlying this exclusion. In a bulleted format, Barnes includes notes on the political, symbolic, theatrical, shocking, thrilling, sentimental, and documentary background of the painting and the artist’s intent to leave no room for ambiguity. (90)

The eighth chapter of the book entitled “Upstream!” is epistolary, the story of an actor shooting a movie in the Amazonian jungles told through letters and telegrams that he sends to his beloved. However, as we read the story, we feel the distinction between fact and fiction blurring, corresponding to how Barnes understands history and historical knowledge. For Barnes, “history is a form of fabulation, in which one keeps only a few true facts and then spins a story around them.” (Roşcan, 108)

Barnes’s *The Noise of Time* was published in 2016. It is a short fictional account of the life of the famous Russian composer and pianist, Dmitri Shostakovich. Through Shostakovich, Barnes reflects on the significance of art in a period of political terror in Soviet history. Shostakovich’s case exemplifies the clash between art and power. He is among those artists who suffered under Joseph Stalin’s regime and later under Nikita Khrushchev’s. The novel shows how forced collaboration may be more pernicious than naked persecution under totalitarian regimes. Marking another departure in Barnes’s quest for the right form, the novel uses numerous biographical and historical facts, both recorded and remembered. It has the narrative form of a biography yet it is a novel. Its significance lies in confronting its readers in the twenty-first century with historical events that are slipping fast into oblivion. The novel’s peculiar power comes from the microscopic view it takes of history’s canvas, by focussing on an individual’s passage through a nightmare of history. In the novel Barnes recreates a period from Soviet history, which conventional histories usually address from a distance and in broad, general terms. The book is a powerful meditation on the relationship of art and politics against the backdrop of history. Barnes establishes the significance of art by writing about art, its influence, its

significance and its relationship with life in a time of great political terror through Shostakovich, a character from history, in order to articulate his own reflections on the vocation of the artist.

As we move through the narrative, we realize that although Shostakovich is the central subject of the novel, around whom the plot revolves, there is also a silent witness, the unmentioned presence of Osip Mandelstam, the famous anti-establishment, non-conformist Russian and Soviet poet and essayist. He was exiled by Stalin for being a critic of his methods and policies. After a friend's meditation, he was allowed to return to Russia, but was still banished from the larger cities. In the following years, he wrote poetry, glorifying Stalin ("Ode to Stalin") but at the outset of the Great Purges, the literary establishment began a systematic assault on him accusing him of harboring anti-Soviet views. Shostakovich has a somewhat similar trajectory in terms of how his life moves through commitment and complicity, charting and ambivalent moral course. Barnes believes that great art redeems us from the 'noise of time', an idea he borrows from a book by Mandelstam with the same title. It is a collection of Mandelstam's selected prose. Barnes follows his example by writing in brief sections, which are as vividly imagined as the prose-poetry of Mandelstam in *The Noise of Time*. Mandelstam is thus an abiding presence in Barnes's novel, in spite of being unnamed like a deliberately buried memory.

Instead of narrating an entire life's story, Barnes uses three important events in the life of Shostakovich to give us a picture of an artist's battle with power in his pursuit of making music. All the action takes place in the head of the composer while nothing happens in the narrative as such as

he reflects on various things in the middle of a vaster, more than private, crisis.

In the first section, entitled “On the Landing”, Shostakovich stands on a landing, waiting for a lift and smoking a cigarette. This section deals with his first denunciation in 1936. He has fallen from official favour following a series of attacks on him in an unsigned editorial of the official Soviet magazine called *Pravda*. The editorial is entitled “Muddle Instead of Music: On the Opera *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*”. In this piece, Shostakovich’s popular opera has been condemned as “formalist,” “bourgeois”, “coarse” and “vulgar”:

Petit-bourgeois, formalist, Meyerholdist, Leftist. The composer has written not an opera but an anti-opera, with music deliberately turned inside out. He had drunk from the same poisoned source which produced ‘Leftist distortion in painting, poetry, teaching and science’. In case it needed spelling out – it always did – Leftism was contrasted with ‘real art, real science and real literature’. (*Noise* 27)

The rumour has it that it is Stalin who has written the editorial. It is a turning point in Shostakovich’s career as a composer, the first consequence of which is a decrease in his salary by three quarters and, further, a cut on his commissions. The year 1936 also marks the beginning of Great Terror (or Great Purge) which has initiated systematic political repression in the Soviet Union. Many of Shostakovich’s friends and relatives have been imprisoned or eliminated because they were believed (baselessly) to be secretly plotting Stalin’s assassination. When he is overcome by fear, Shostakovich thinks like any ordinary man afraid of dying. The narrator remarks that all the composers in Stalinist regime are either dead, or if they

are alive, they are scared for life. He then places Shostakovich in the larger context:

Men who left home with a case in their hands traditionally returned. Men who were dragged from their beds in their night-clothes often did not. Whether or not this was true was unimportant. What mattered was this: it looked as if he was not afraid. (51)

The second section, entitled “On the Plane”, is about 1948 when, at Stalin’s behest, Shostakovich reads a paper at a peace conference in New York. This paper has not been written by Shostakovich and it is more of a political pamphlet that condemns the music of the West, including the music of Prokofiev and Stravinsky (deeply admired by Shostakovich himself). Ironically, Shostakovich’s fourth symphony shows how greatly he has been influenced by Western music. Shostakovich is thus subtly led to betray his deepest convictions and, thus, himself. It is a kind of slow self-execution. According to Julian Barnes, “Tyranny might be paranoid, it was not necessarily stupid.... Tyranny understood how some parts – the weak parts – of most people worked” (*Noise* 67).

Barnes widens his narrative from the life of an individual artist – so thoroughly shaped by the accommodations and abiding terrors that characterize life under authoritarian rule – to create a complex meditation on the power, limitations and likely endurance of art. “Art belongs to everybody and nobody,” he writes, seemingly from inside Shostakovich’s consciousness. We see how talented writers like Stravinsky and Prokofiev and the untalented ones deal with power. Barnes suggests that character and fortune are at least as important as moral

rectitude in determining how a human being deals with power:

To be Russian was to be pessimistic; to be Soviet was to be optimistic. That was why the words Soviet Russia were a contradiction in terms. Power had never understood this. It thought that if you killed off enough of the population, and fed the rest a diet of propaganda and terror, then optimism would result. But where was the logic in that? (71)

The final section, “In the Car”, is about an episode in Shostakovich’s life that takes place in the 1960s. Nikita Khrushchev’s government wants to appoint the composer as the General Secretary of the Composers’ Union, but in order to hold that position he is required to get Party membership. This is a moment of personal crisis for him; in fact, he is believed to have been blackmailed by the party to accept the proposal. Eventually, the composer, after the death of Stalin and during the governance of Khrushchev, joins the Communist party, in order to lend a flattering sheen to the “new” Communist Party. This event has been interpreted variously as a show of commitment, a mark of cowardice, a result of political pressure, or as an instance of Shostakovich’s freedom of choice. But Barnes spells out in detail the troubling grey zone between being a coward and being a hero in these words:

It was not easy being a coward. Being a hero was much easier than being a coward. To be a hero, you only had to be brave for a moment – when you took out the gun, threw the bomb, pressed a detonator, did away with the tyrant, and with yourself as well. But to be a coward was to embark on a career that lasted a lifetime. You couldn’t ever relax. You had to anticipate the next occasion when you would have to

make excuses for yourself, dither, cringe, reacquaint yourself with the taste of rubber boots and the state of your own fallen, abject character. Being a coward required pertinacity, persistence, a refusal to change – which made it, in a way, a kind of courage... Perhaps courage was like beauty. A beautiful woman grows old: she sees only what has gone; others see only what remains. Some congratulated him on his endurance, his refusal to submit, the solid core beneath the hysterical surface. He saw only what was gone. (54)

The strange beauty of the novel lies in the fact that it is not just about the trial of a composer and it does not even take sides. Fiction maybe representative of reality but unlike reality it can search for a deeper truth otherwise unattainable, consequently forming a connection between reality, truth and fiction. Shostakovich, as imagined by Barnes, is a man who appears to compromise at every step because he cannot make up his mind about what he wants, except music to which he is devoted. It is a part of his personality to be unsure, to equivocate, to hesitate, while wishing for a harmony that he can only occasionally and fleetingly attain. He tries to remain faithful to himself, while being submissive to power. This paradox is the key point in the novel. Barnes repeatedly returns to the phrase ‘noise of time,’ commenting on the capability of music, or of art in general, to transcend the vulgar, unseeing judgement of the so-called history:

What could be put up against the noise of time? Only that music which is inside ourselves – the music of our being – which is transformed by some into real music. Which, over the decades, if it is strong and true and pure enough to drown the noise of time, is transformed into the whisper of history. (125)

There is a passage in the second part of the book that reads like an appeal to the readers and an authorial comment on the working of Power. It is a comment on the dangerous delusions of anti-establishment poets, artists and others:

Then there were those who understood a little better, who supported you, and yet at the same time were disappointed in you. Who did not grasp the one simple fact about the Soviet Union: that it was impossible to tell the truth here and live. Who imagined they knew how Power operated and wanted you to fight it as they believed they would do in your position. In other words, they wanted your blood. (107)

Thus, *The Noise of Time*, apart from being the story of the great Soviet composer Shostakovich, of Russia, and of Stalin's tyranny, is also a study in the collision of art and power and a meditation on the spirit of an artist facing persecution. It asks significant questions about the role and responsibilities of the artist in society. The novel offers a potent antidote to the contemporary commercial world, where art has lost its purpose.

In these two novels, Barnes probes the received truths about points of view, history, memory, art, and storytelling. The novels turn toward history, with all its complications, in order to make sense of the present, of human life, of truth and love. History – which we have blindly believed to be a collection of facts to be ‘the truth’ – is in fact an elaborate collection of stories all attempting to capture a bit of the truth of an event, a neat collection of data and various explanatory accounts which still leave out more than they include. And why this flawed approach to

history? The woodworm attacks our dogma and theology and proffers his speculations:

That is nearly the end of my revelations. They are intended – you must understand me – in the spirit of friendship. If you think I am being contentious, it is probably because your species – I hope you don't mind my saying this – is so hopelessly dogmatic. You believe what you want to believe, and you go on believing it. But then, of course, you all have Noah's genes. No doubt this also accounts for the fact that you are often strangely incurious. You never ask, for instance, this question about your early history: what happened to the raven? (*History*, 25)

Perspective changes everything. The truth looks increasingly impossible to arrive at either due to our willful ignorance or to the fact that a lack of linear structure forecloses the encounter with complexities. Barnes offers his readers a possibility of multiple interpretations, by giving them familiar stories from history seen from unfamiliar perspectives. For him it is probably the only way to get at any truth and to underline the fact that the narrative of the history of the world is not linear. When a story is told from a new perspective, particularly an outsider's, the reader may begin to see afresh and hence be likely to trust more readily the tale and the reading of its significance.

The entire problem of the relation between history, truth and fiction can be summarized by the central question posed by the narrator in *Flaubert's Parrot*, "Does the world progress? Or does it merely shuttle back and forth like a ferry?" (105). To these, the narrator of the half chapter of *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* entitled

“Parenthesis” who claims to be Julian Barnes, suggests the following:

We think we know what we know who we are, though we don't quite know why we're here, or how long we shall be forced to stay. And while we fret and writhe in bandaged uncertainty – are we a voluntary patient? – we fabulate. We make up a story to cover the facts we don't know or can't accept; we keep a few true facts and spin a new story round them. Our panic and our pain are only eased by soothing fabulation; we call it history. (*History* 242)

When we create art, we create from fragments and bits of memory, and we put it all together, and then when it has been like that for a long time, we start believing it as if it is the absolute truth. We treat it as authentic and then we celebrate it. It is a fabulation all over again – convincing ourselves of a coherence between things that are largely true and things that are wholly imagined. Barnes relied upon historical documents in order to be able to locate all the stories in a particular context. History doesn't have an ending, or even a teleological progression. There is no absolute truth about the past that can be achieved. What we believe to be true depends upon the set of conventions that we believe in. Therefore, the relationship between the past and the present is not a continuous, convenient relationship. Traditional historians choose a narrative to emplot the facts about the past available to them. Barnes uses literature to approach what is not accessible with the tools available for recording history and undermines the claims of history of objectivity. Fiction helps Barnes articulate his own pursuit for an appropriate form to talk about the narratives which were stowed away, and the narratives which were imposed. It is a popular notion that fiction represents what is real. But, unlike reality, fiction

can be used to find a deeper truth otherwise unattainable, consequently forming a connection between reality, truth and fiction.

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