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The Degree of Master of Arts in English Literature**

**Subject:**

**A Foucauldian Reading of Julian Barnes's**

***Nothing to Be Frightened of and Arthur and George***

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*In His Name*

*Dedicated to the dearest people in my life,  
My mom, dad and brother*

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## **Abstract**

The present research is an analysis of the two great works of art by Julian Barnes, *Nothing to Be Frightened of* and *Arthur and George*, by drawing its theories from Michel Foucault's critical thinking. Julian Barnes, a contemporary English author and the winner of the 2011 Man Booker Prize for *The Sense of Ending*, has attracted readers worldwide through his experimentation with different forms and his new treatment of conventional topics such as love, history and fiction. Apart from that, his works, dealing with social, political and cultural context, widen the scope of research to be carried out to give a better understanding of them. This study, through Foucauldian perspective, has attempted to investigate power mechanisms in the world of the two books; how power relations lead to new sets of rules within different discourses such as medicine, literature and even death has been the main focus of this study. In *Arthur and George*, the articulation of literary discourse on the legal system is analyzed and shown to produce knowledge of individuals. Moreover, the discourse of marriage and its interconnectedness with other discourses is discussed. In *Nothing to Be Frightened of*, the discourse of death is analyzed through medical discourse and at the same time cremation and old age as two important notions within the discourse of death are elaborated. Finally, the problematization of parrhesia, truth and truth-telling are traced in the context of the two works while discussing how other discourses such as art, religion and literature have produced truth by exercising different forms of power mechanisms.

Keywords: Discourse, Discursive Formation, Institution, Parrhesia, Power/Knowledge, Problematization, Statement.

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## **Chapter One**

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### **Introduction**

The aim of the present study is to interpret concisely, but thoroughly two great works of art by Julian Barnes, *Nothing to Be Frightened of* and *Arthur and George* in so far as it can examine them in their historical, social, political and cultural setting in relation to critical thinking of Michel Foucault.

In this chapter, a brief account of Julian Barnes's life and major works will be given first. In the following sections, statement of the problem, the purpose of this research, the significance of the present study and the research questions will be presented which is followed by review of literature introducing related literature and studies. The final sections of this chapter deal with methodology and thesis outline.

## **1.1. General Background**

### **1.1.1. A Brief Biography of Julian Barnes**

You don't want to go to the grave having not tried out every prose facility and faculty you've got," said Julian Barnes whose diverse literary production implies he has never stopped experimenting with new forms, subject matters and style (qtd. in Guignery 132).

Julian Barnes is a critically acclaimed British author. He was born in Leicester, England on January 19, 1946. He was the second son of Albert Leonard and Kaye Barnes who were both French teachers. His brother, Jonathon Barnes, is a professor of Philosophy in France. Julian Barnes was educated at the City of London School. He graduated in Modern Languages from Oxford University in 1968 whereupon he worked as a lexicographer for *The Oxford English Dictionary* supplement. He, then, studied Law, but he never practiced since he started working as a journalist and during this time he wrote many articles and reviews.

In 1979, he married his literary agent Pat Kavanagh whose surname served as Barnes's pen name for his detective fiction. He wrote four detective novels under the pseudonym Dan

Kavanagh and he has dedicated almost all of his works to his wife. She died of a brain tumor on 20 October 2008.

He has been the recipient of numerous awards and honors such as Somerset Maugham Award 1981, Médicis Essai prize (France 1986) and American Academy award 1986. He has been shortlisted several times for his books *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *England, England* (1988), *Arthur and George* (2005) and *The Sense of an Ending* (2011). And he won Man Booker Prize for *The Sense of an Ending* in 2011.

Being a prolific author as he is, Barnes has treated many subject matters in his works such as love, Englishness, identity, history etc. He experiments with different forms and the hybridity can be found in most of his works intended to blur and challenge the conventional forms. In *The Fiction of Julian Barnes*, Vanessa Guignery says:

The distinctive feature of Barnes's work taken as a whole is its diversity of topics and techniques, which confounds some readers and critics, but enchants others. While some underlying themes can be identified, such as obsession, love, the relationship between fact and fiction, or the irretrievability of the past, it is clear that in each novel Barnes aims to explore a new area of experience and experiments with different narrative modes. (1)

Barnes's books have received a worldwide critical acclaim. His book *Flaubert's Parrot* met with huge success and *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* brought him another commercial success and in 2011 he became the winner of the Man Booker Prize for *The Sense of an Ending*. Some of his books were adapted for television such as *Love etc.* and *Metroland*.

### **1.1.2. Julian Barnes's Principal Works**

Julian Barnes's works can be divided into four groups of novels, collections and non-fiction, short stories and finally the works he wrote under the pseudonym Dan Kavanagh. They are as follows:

Novels: *Metroland* (1980), *Before She Met Me* (1982), *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), *Staring at the Sun* (1986), *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989), *Talking It Over* (1991), *The Porcupine* (1992), *England, England* (1998), *Love, etc.* (2000) – sequel to *Talking It Over*, *Arthur & George* (2005), *The Sense of an Ending* (2011).

Collections and Non-Fiction: *Letters from London* – non-fiction essays, *Cross Channel* (1996) – stories, *Something to Declare* (2002) – essays, *The Pedant in the Kitchen* (2003) – A collection of essays (journalism on cooking), *The Lemon Table* (2004) – stories, *Nothing to Be Frightened of* (2008) – memoir, *Pulse* (2011) – stories.

Short stories: *Homage to Hemingway* (2011), *Carsassonne* (2011), *Sleeping with John Updike* (2010), *Harmony* (2010), *Complicity* (2009), *The Limner* (2009), *60/40* (2008), *East Wind* (2008), *Marriage Lines* (2008), *Trespass* (2003), *The Fruit Cage* (2002), *The Silence* (2001), *The Story of Mats Israelson* (2000), *Appetite* (2000), *Hygiene* (1999), *Vigilance* (1998), *A Short History of Hairdressing* (1997), *The Revival* (1996), *Evermore* (1995), *Experiment* (1995), *Interference* (1994), *Shipwreck* (1989).

Works as Dan Kavanagh: *Duffy* (1980), *Fiddle City* (1981), *Putting the Boot In* (1985), *Going to the Dogs* (1987).

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

The present research aims at reading Julian Barnes's *Nothing to Be Frightened of* and *Arthur and George* through Michel Foucault's critical theories. It is intended to trace Foucauldian notions such as discourse, power/knowledge and institution in the context of these two works by showing how power relations in a give-and-take process with discourses produce knowledge and this knowledge, in turn, gives way to new mechanisms of power.

### **1.3. Objectives and Significance of the Study**

#### **1.3.1. Hypothesis**

By borrowing from Michel Foucault's critical thinking, this thesis attempts to show how, according to Foucault, different discourses function within society and could lead to the production of different literary and non-literary texts. This implies that all forms of texts, regardless of the role of the creator or writer, can be considered as the arena where power mechanisms interplay with different discourses; texts not only are given shape by this interplay, but also, once produced, reflect the very interplay out of which they are produced.

Thus, the Hypothesis is that text is a society in miniature representing the economic, social, political and cultural functionality of power relations being exercised within the same society and text as the locus of functioning of different discourses can be studied and analyzed without considering the role of the author and their intention.

#### **1.3.2. Significance of the Study**

No one perhaps can question the universal appeal and impact Barnes's fiction can make. There has been a growing concern in the researches devoted to Julian Barnes's fiction. Books such as *Understanding Julian Barnes* by Merritt Moseley or *Julian Barnes* by Mathew Pateman or *The Fiction of Julian Barnes* by Vanessa Guignery are few of many examples interpreting his fiction and also there have been some essays written on his works mostly drawing their analysis from theories of narratology, postmodernism and deconstructionism. However, despite their useful comprehensive accounts of Barnes's books, style and technique, almost no research has ever been carried out to interpret Barnes's books from Foucauldian theoretical standpoint. This research is unique in the way it has treated its subject.

In the light of the theories cited in the review of related literature and studies, especially *Power/knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* and *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* Vol.1, this study aims to develop a new conceptual framework to explain the socio-cultural political structures within Barnes's works. It is mainly conducted to enrich one's understanding of Barnes's fiction by providing an analysis of two of his books from Michel Foucault's standpoint in order to show the interplay between power relations and discourses within them.

This study would be beneficial for the readers and future researchers. Through this study, the future researchers and readers would be able to know how the two works can be interpreted through the effects of power circulation and institutions, regardless of the role of the author as the creator of them. What distinguishes this study from the previous researches devoted to Barnes's fiction is that it investigates the dynamic processes of exchanges in diverse contexts which not only have been referred to in his works, but also will receive his literary texts once they have been produced.

### **1.3.3. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to analyze *Arthur and George* and *Nothing to Be Frightened of* written by Julian Barnes through the perspective of Foucauldian critical theories. Since these two works deal with and arise from a socio-cultural context, power relations, as one of the key concepts in Foucault's critical thinking, can be studied to show how different discourses function and articulate on power mechanisms and how they are interrelated in the context of these two texts.

Both texts, one in the form of a semi-autobiography and the other a recreation of a real event in the past, deal with notions such as marriage, literature, medicine, sports etc. which have

not only been the contexts within which these two books arise but also provide the very contexts for referring to and analyzing the books. In other words, both works can be studied to show the interplay between different discourses and institutions and power relations which have led to cultural conditions for the way these texts are produced and received.

This research attempts to figure out how power, in a give-and-take process, through discourses and institutions, makes the production of facts, knowledge and truth possible and keeps the produced truth in circulation and how, this production of knowledge and truth may in turn give way to new mechanisms of power.

#### **1.3.4. Research Questions**

In order to investigate Foucauldian key concepts in *Arthur and George* and *Nothing to Be Frightened of*, the present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do the legal system and the discourse of marriage articulate on one another?
2. What forms of productivity do power relations affect through the discourse of marriage?
3. How can the interconnectedness of the legal system and the discourse of literature be inferred?
4. How does the legal system produce truth or different forms of truth through fictional and factual texts?
5. How does the Foucauldian notion of delinquency lead to new mechanisms of power?
6. What factors can be considered to be involved as to make the study of the discourse of death possible?
7. How do the two discourses of medicine and death articulate on one another?
8. How can the Foucauldian notion of the author-function relate literary discourse to the discourse of death?
9. How can the problematization of truth be studied in both works?

10. What discourses can be analyzed to produce truth(s) in the texts?

#### **1.4. Review of Literature**

This section gives an account of literary contributions, used as the primary or consulted sources for the present study. It aims to review related literature and studies in two areas; the first introducing previously conducted literary research projects on Julian Barnes's fiction and the second, books and essays written either by or on Michel Foucault.

It should be noted that despite the wide-ranging researches, literary contributions and rich studies carried out in these areas, the present study is unique in the way it has treated its subject like no other research ever has. Although the richness of the sources should be taken into account as a valuable literary background, this introduction, at the same time, suggests why the present study is worth being undertaken.

As mentioned above, some of the works consulted to write this dissertation are analyses of Julian Barnes's fiction. The first to introduce is *The Fiction of Julian Barnes*. This book is written by Vanessa Guignery and published in 2006. It yields an analysis of Julian Barnes's major works which were published before 2006, namely the time of the publication of her book. In this book, Barnes's latest novel (before 2006), *Arthur and George*, is interpreted. Through the presentation and assessment of key critical interpretations, Vanessa Guignery provides the most wide-ranging examination of his fiction and non-fiction, considering key issues such as his use of language, his treatment of history, his handling of the common themes in his books such as love, Englishness and the relationship between fact and fiction. In the final chapter of her book written on *Arthur and George*, she refers to the historical documents which Barnes actually used for this book. She also argues how Barnes has given a new shape to those documents through his imagination by inserting conversations and dialogues that might have taken place.



*Voices and Silence in the Contemporary Novel in English* is another book by Vanessa Guignery, investigating the two concepts of voice and silence by discussing the “language of resistance” and “in between the lines” in both contemporary British and American literature. Although no chapter of this book is specifically devoted to Julian Barnes’s fiction, in the introduction of the book, entitled *So Many Words, So Little Said*, she refers to Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot* and *Talking It Over* as two examples of silence and polyphony respectively.

In the recent years a great deal of research has been conducted on Julian Barnes’s fiction. One of the research projects done in this respect is “Story and History: The Reconciliation of Realism and Postmodern Approaches in Julian Barnes’s Fiction” by Alexandra Medzibrodzky. In this thesis, Medzibrodzky tries to show how realist and postmodern approaches are harmonized and reconciled in Barnes’s fiction and how this reconciliation culminates in the book *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*. She renders the problems of defining the words “Realism” and “Postmodernism” and tries to find a broader context for postmodern literature to connote. Finally, she says that Julian Barnes’s fiction is mediation over history and literature which has been able to overcome the dichotomy between realist and postmodern approaches.

In ““We are no longer Mega” in *England, England* by Julian Barnes,” Laura Fernanda Bulger shows how Barnes through parody and language technique challenges long-held cultural and historical beliefs as established memories constituting the concept of Englishness. Historical and cultural constructs and people such as Rabin Hood or Francis Drake who have long been considered national memories, are shown to be “as unreliable as the memory of the fading female protagonist, who no longer believes that innocence can be reinvented” (51). Fernanda Bugler says the disintegration of the Empire has made England face various religious and racial tensions which in turn induced the desire to search for the English national character. This quest

in the form of an obsession is parodied in *England, England*. According to Bulger, Julian Barnes points to the artificiality of the concept of Englishness.

One of the theses written on Barnes's novels is "Julian Barnes and the Postmodern Problem of Truth" by Abigail G. Dalton investigating the notion of truth and how truth can be represented through Barnes's fiction. She examines truth in relation to the "real" and the "fictional" and the postmodern problems of representation and interpretation in *Flaubert's Parrot*, *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, *Talking It Over and Love*, etc. Finally, she concludes that, despite Barnes's insistence that fiction can tell the truth, "his fiction reveals a persistent doubt as to whether or not truth can be found" (91).

"Fabulation" of Metanarratives in Julian Barnes's Novels *Metroland*, *Flaubert's Parrot*, *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*, and *England, England*" is a PhD research project carried out by Volha Salman in 2009. In this thesis, Salman argues that metanarratives are revived in the era of postmodernism through "fabulation". She discusses that the resurrection of metanarratives are not meant to transform the world but to broaden individuals' horizons by manifesting faith in the existence of truth and obtainability of meaning. She goes on to say that Julian Barnes has masterfully treated metanarratives "as the only cure making one's existence truly meaningful" (7). She analyzes the process of "fabulation" through revived metanarratives in Julian Barnes's *Metroland*, *Flaubert's Parrot*, *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* and *England, England*.

Aura Sibişan, in "Julian Barnes Against the Background of Contemporary Fiction," compares modernist writings with postmodern ones saying that while modernist writers deal with epistemological questions within the context of their works, postmoderns are concerned with ontological questions. She states that the reflection on the world or the nature of the world we

live in can be found in the works of British writers such as Julian Barnes. Sibişan also notes that in order for postmodern British writers to explore new ways of writing literature, they need to borrow from France and America. She goes on to say that the affinities with French literature shown by British writers such as Julian Barnes is not their weakness, but a way of breaking conventions to “maintain its freshness, complexity and leading position in contemporary fiction” (88).

In the recent years more writings have been devoted to the analysis of the way history is treated in Julian Barnes’s fiction. One of them is “Julian Barnes’s Theses on History (in 10 ½ Chapters)” written by Jackie Buxton. In this essay, Buxton yields a paralleled analysis of Walter Benjamin’s *Theses on the Philosophy in History* and Julian Barnes’s *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*. While enumerating their similarities in the way they treat history, she points to their dissociations. Both writers, according to her, make a demand on a critical historiography which at the same time proffers “an apocalyptic philosophy of history routed in a vehement disavowal of the concept of historical progress” (58). However, Buxton concludes that while Benjamin finds apocalyptic concept of redemption among a history of repression, Barnes appeals to love as the only solution to overcome an oppressive history.

An article written to analyze the treatment of history in Julian Barnes’s fiction is “History’s Genres: Julian Barnes’s *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*” by Gregory J. Rubinson. Rubinson argues that historical fiction has been brought about by postmodern questioning of enlightenment, as a result of which historiography, as opposed to the nineteenth-century realism advocating scientific objectivity, applies literary models and conventions. This, he says, leads to different approaches to studying history as well as ways to narrate it. Rubinson exemplifies Julian Barnes’s fiction, specifically *Flaubert’s Parrot* and *A History of the World in*

*10 ½ Chapters*, as something offering alternative narrations for understanding history. Rubinson concludes that these two works “consist of a mix of what are usually considered “historiographic” and “literary” genres” (164).

Not only historiographic metafiction, but also the effect of Julian Barnes’s detective stories on forensic science has been studied by different scholars and researchers. D. Michael Risinger, in “Boxes in Boxes: Julian Barnes, Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes and the Edalji Case”, points out the effect of Sherlock Holmes detective stories (written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle) on the forensic scientists and how Julian Barnes bases his novel *Arthur and George* on the actual case of crime and punishment. He argues how Barnes’s art imitates life and whether this imitation of a real historical record constrains Barnes to stay reasonably close to the event or he violates the constraints and fails to take into account the actual details of the event. In this article, Risinger examines the real and fictional characters and the meaning of Sherlock Holmes against the background of the Victorian era and the way he is treated in *Arthur and George*.

In “The Search is All?: The Pursuit of Meaning in Julian Barnes’s *Flaubert’s Parrot*, *Staring at the Sun* and *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters*,” Wojciech Drag explores meaning in idea and texts in relation to postmodernism. It is shown how the pursuit of meaning in Barnes’s fiction creates a dichotomy between the pursuit of meaning and postmodern view that there is no absolute meaning. Drag examining this search for meaning through different discourses, namely art, religion and love, says although each discourse fails to reach the ultimate goal it had set to achieve, this very “pursuit of meaning is shown as a value in itself” and that love is the only solution to transcend the relative and disillusioned postmodern world (2).

“The Invention of Cultural Traditions: The Construction and Deconstruction of Englishness and Authenticity in Julian Barnes’ *England, England*” is an article written by Vera