Critical Literary Studies

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Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* and the Writerly Text

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Abstract: This paper examines Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* by the five semiotic codes of the French literary critic Roland Barthes introduced in his renowned work *S/Z*, to show that the novel is a 'writerly' rather than a 'readerly' text. The paper defines what Barthes means by the text of the writerly and then attempts to see if the selected novel yields to this sort of interpretation. Since the novel has been categorized as both modernist and postmodernist by prominent literary critics, it can be a proper case to be examined as a writerly text. The paper shows that the codes of semantic, symbolic and cultural which produce the writerly text are at work in this novel whereas the codes of the hermeneutic and proairetic which are concerned with the conventional realist novels are marginalized or even absent. The article examines the writerly text makers of the author role, the theme of biography, the notion of literary criticism and the narration of the novel, referring to the codes creating the writerly text. The paper finally concludes that the semiotic sophistication and innovations in the narrative act of the novel stem from the categories discussed in the essay, ending in the construction of a highly sophisticated writerly text.

Keywords: Barthes; Writerly Text; The Five Semiotic Codes; *S/Z*; Julian Barnes; *Flaubert's Parrot*.

1. Introduction

This paper aims to analyze *Flaubert's Parrot*, published in 1984, by the British author Julian Barnes. Critically acclaimed, this novel is among the top examples when addressing innovation in the British tradition of the novel. The success and appreciation of the novel brought about a Booker Prize nomination for Barnes and consequently fame and fortune. In post 1950s British fiction, Barnes remains an eminent author for his treatment of postmodernism, historicity and biography. His works could be categorized as autobiographical, historical and pseudo-biographical. *Flaubert's Parrot* should be categorized as a work belonging to pseudo-biography, a category that some scholars tend to call anti-biography or mock-biography.

Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* is a narrative that accommodates an odd and extraordinary narration. It is narrated by a Flaubert enthusiast -- Geoffrey Braithwaite -- who in search for the Parrot that Flaubert addresses in his short story "A Simple Heart," travels to France and explores the museums for the parrot's taxidermy. With a comic tone and an unconventional style, Barnes builds up his novel on the figure of the author Gustave Flaubert. On this matter, William May in his book, *Postwar Literature 1950 to 1990,* writes: "Braithwaite's digressions on animal imagery in Flaubert, his strained relationship with other Flaubert obsessives, and his increasingly guilty musings on his own wife's suicide make Flaubert a cipher as well as the focal point of the novel" (68). The animal imagery in the quotation is one of the odd features of Barnes's writing in this novel that would be scrutinized later in this study.

Roland Barthes, known as one of the key figures in both Structuralism and post-Structuralism, holds an outstanding place in the circle of Parisian thinkers including other famous figures such as Jacques Lacan, Claud-Levi Strauss and Michel Foucault. Much of Barthes's reputation comes from his contribution to the study of semiotics based on Saussurean linguistics. Barthes's wide range of interests from semiology to narratology, to cultural studies and textual analysis, makes it hard to categorize him as a literary theorist or even a literary critic. There is a line in Barthes's framework of thought that is distinguishable in some of his controversial texts, showing his transition from structuralism to post-structuralism. This line, according to many scholars and theorists, is crossed with "The Death of the Author" (1967) and *S/Z* (1970). (Lodge and Wood 88; 145), (Peck and Coyle 214), (Sadjadi 70)

2. Literature Review

With the help of Roland Barthes's "The Discourse of History," Brian Finney in an essay entitled "A Worm's Eye View of History" identifies Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* alongside *Flaubert's Parrot* as texts "adopting an ironic approach to history as a genre" (1). Finney puts forth Barnes's claim about his two novels maintaining that they both deal with the question of "How do we seize the past?" and argues that "[he] would appear to agree with Barthes's objection to what he calls 'the fallacy of representation' attaching to traditional historical discourse" (1) where the historical discourse is seen as an imaginary elaboration.

Larry Shiner, after giving a short summary of Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* in his article "From 'Reality Effect' to 'Fiction Effect,'" with focus on Barthes's "The Reality Effect," argues that the phenomenon of the 'reality effect,' when regarded less scientifically, can be tested in a non-fictional context. Shiner is aware of the objections of different theorists like Fredric Jameson, Colin McCabe and Christopher Prendergast towards Barthes's reality effect and asserts that these theorists "challenge what they see as Barthes's denial of any genuine referential possibility for language" (168). The gist of the argument in this article is that "some of the very techniques used in fictional narrative to generate a "reality effect," when used in non-fiction narrative, end up generating a "fiction effect" (168). Moreover, there lies a focus on Flaubert's objective description of reality and the fact that its mere objects are interpreted differently.

Erica Hateley in her essay "*Flaubert's Parrot* as Modernist Quest" addresses the novel as a text maintaining strong modernist aesthetics. She argues that despite being labeled as a postmodern novel, *Flaubert's Parrot* is "the product of a modernist quest intruded on by a postmodern culture" (177). Moreover, commenting on the narrator of the novel, Hateley maintains: "Geoffrey Braithwaite in accepting the problematics of postmodern subjectivity, evolves into the ultimate modern subject" (177). Withal, the main assessment of this essay is that alongside the postmodern tendencies of pluralism, relativity and truth, *Flaubert's Parrot* remains moderately modernist in that it embraces the psychological complexes of an artist in search of his interest in a fellow artist.

Aura Sibisan in the article "Julian Barnes – a cosmopolitan author" addresses Barnes's collection of essays *Something to Declare* (2002), where the novelist puts forward his passion for France and Flaubert as his favourite author. Sibisan relates this to the idea of 'the

fascination for the Other' and argues that "Julian Barnes creates images and characters that go beyond the stereotype, showing that the intersection with another culture generates meaning, gives a new perspective on reality, or offers the subject the environment desired" (104). This article mainly focuses on the literary and cultural phenomenon that have influenced Barnes and the way the French culture and particularly Flaubert stands as his significant Other.

Borrowing Linda Hutcheon's terms, Eric Berlatsky in his article "'Madame Bovary, C'est Moi!': Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* and Sexual 'Perversion,'" calls *Flaubert's Parrot* a novel of 'historiographic metafiction.' Berlatsky maintains that the chief interest of this novel is its psychological realism and "its investment in the story of Geoffrey Braithwaite's troubled relationship with his wife Ellen" (175). The other significant point for Berlatsky is the novel's "clever metafictional denaturalization of the realistic plot" (175) which makes it different from other postmodern works in that it is "particularly a kind of apolitical postmodernism that may interrogate and undermine historical and philosophical reality" (175), definitions that may help highlighting the ultimate nature of Barnes's text.

In a psychoanalytical study, Emma Cox explores the subjectivity of *Flaubert's Parrot*'s narrator. In the article entitled "'Abstain, and Hide your Life': The Hidden Narrator of *Flaubert's Parrot,*" Cox asserts that "Braithwaite's interest in Flaubert is intimately related to traumas in his own personal life" (53). She believes Braithwaite uses the Flaubertian world as a means of avoiding his own traumas, the most important of which being his wife's suicide. Cox argues that the reason for these projections is for Braithwaite to understand his trauma. Moreover, it is mentioned that Braithwaite lacks a sense of self-worth and thus "he tries, in his account of Flaubert, to identify himself with the great author in terms of both his life experience and his character" (53).

The two keywords of 'precision' and 'ambiguity' are the main engagement of Matthew Pateman with *Flaubert's Parrot*. In his article "Precision and Uncertainty in *Flaubert's Parrot*" Pateman tries to give a convincing definition of these terms and demonstrates how "one group of concepts play off the other in this novel" (48). The other objective for Pateman is to decide whether *Flaubert's Parrot* is a novel or not. He asserts that "The book's tangential and seemingly discontinuous narrative form has led a number of critics to question the novel's status as a novel" (58). Pateman continues his discussion about the significance of stereotypes in the novel and Barthes's assertions on this issue. Referring to Barthes's *Roland*

Barthes by Roland Barthes, Pateman addresses Braithwaite's -- the main character of *Flaubert's Parrot* -- mode of narration as one that "shares a curious affinity with the French academic [Barthes]," a mode of narration that is merely related to a text of biographical aspects (56).

The main focus of Elena Miller's article "'Perhaps' – the relativity of knowledge and identity in Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot*" is the closing sentences of *Flaubert's Parrot* that is: "I stared at them for a minute or so, and then dodged away. Perhaps it was one of them" (Barnes 196). Functioning as the starting and also the ending point of her study, Miller relates the keyword 'perhaps' to the idea of relativity of knowledge and identity. The other notion followed in this article is how miller endeavors to address *Flaubert's Parrot* as an example of 'self-conscious' or 'self-reflexive' contemporary fiction. Miller's ultimate conclusion regarding Barnes's mode of writing is that "Barnes moves between modernist and postmodernist convictions" (51). Modernist regarding the notion of "ambivalence and ambiguity concerning the true self" and postmodernist "regarding the unreliability of truth" (51). This idea shows how subjectivity functions as a key role in Miller's study of *Flaubert's Parrot*.

3. Theoretical Framework

The best and most important example of Barthes's theory of the text is his *S/Z*. In this work which is Barthes's reading of Balzac's *Sarrasine* (1830), he divides the text into 561 lexias as units of reading. These units, however, are not fixed, and as Barthes suggests, every reader may have a different division. Barthes's main argument relies on the five semiotic codes that he introduces in this book. He maintains that every unit of meaning in a text, or better to say a narrative, could be categorized under one of the five semiotic codes. Using his own terms, he writes: "The five codes create a kind of network, a *topos* through which the entire text passes (or rather, in passing, becomes text)" (20). For analyzing how meaning is produced and spread throughout the text, the Hermeneutic, Proairetic, Semantic, Symbolic and Cultural codes are proposed and put into practice. Thus, Barthes's methodology in *S/Z* is to define the five semiotic codes and apply them to the divided lexias, and consequently, determine the nature of the text as being either readerly or writerly.

The Hermeneutic Code: Hermeneutics basically refers to the concept of textual interpretation. In defining the hermeneutic code, Barthes writes: "Under the hermeneutic code, we list the various (formal) terms by which an enigma can be distinguished, suggested, formulated, held in suspense, and finally disclosed (these terms will not always occur, they

will often be repeated; they will not appear in any fixed order)" (19). This code represents the element of mystery and is entangled with the cryptic nature of the narrative. The hermeneutic code needs to be deciphered by the reader and in order to make sense and lead to a logical perspective, it follows a specific order. Since it poses and answers questions, the hermeneutic code is structural in nature. This does not mean that there is a chronological order in the juxtaposition of the hermeneutic codes, but rather it means that these kinds of codes in their relation to one another hold an intermingling order. Thus, for making sense, they should be read in the chronological order.

The Proairetic Code: The word Proairetic refers to a deed. In a narrative the actions are performed one after the other, governed by a cause-and-effect relationship. Thus, this code, like the hermeneutic code, is structural. The proairetic code is basically related to the question of 'what will happen next?' therefore, it plays a crucial role in the integrity of the narrative. In classical texts, the proairetic code is the one that permeates the majority of the text, following a chronological order. This, however, is forsaken in the modern literature and specially the avant-garde movements.

The Semantic Code: A sentence as a chain of signifiers, signifies a meaning. The semantic code works with the connotations of the signifiers and consequently is related to the plurality of meaning. Barthes describes the semantic codes as units that "we allow them the instability, the dispersion, characteristic of motes of dust, flickers of meaning" (19). Barthes designates the semes without linking them to characters, places or objects or even grouping these units. Moreover, he does not provide a tangible and concrete definition for the semantic code. Since this code is made up of units of semes, it would connote rather that denote. This means that when dealing with semantics, we face several layers of meaning or even a meta-literal layer of meaning. This could be the reason that Barthes refuses to give a definition for the semantic code.

The Symbolic Code: Barthes also refuses to give a specific definition for the symbolic code and writes: "this is the place for multivalence and for reversibility" (19). The word 'multivalence' refers to the multiplicity of values, thus, the symbolic code like the semantic is concerned with connotation. The most significant symbols for Barthes are 'paradox' and 'antithesis'. The paradox is when the opposing semes befall through the intervention of the narrator and the antithesis is the opposing units of meaning juxtaposed beside one another. It would be worth mentioning that the fundamentals of the symbolic code are prearranged organisms of semes.

The Cultural Code: The cultural code could be referred to as the referential or historical code because it mainly alludes to the knowledge and events outside the text. Barthes's own definition for the cultural code is the most comprehensive one. He writes: "the cultural codes are references to a science or a body of knowledge; in drawing attention to them, we merely indicate the type of knowledge (physical, physiological, medical, psychological, literary, historical, etc.) referred to, without going so far as to construct (or reconstruct) the culture they express" (20). This means we should remember, a common knowledge for the author could be irrelevant or too specific for the reader and therefore, the meaning could be lost within the cultural code.

Graham Allen in his book *Roland Barthes* (2003) divides the five codes into two groups of 'sequential' and 'non-sequential'. According to Allen, the narrative codes of hermeneutic and proairetic are sequential in nature in that they build a chronological sequence from a beginning to an end, in favor of closing the plurality of meaning. On the other hand, the three non-sequential codes of semantic, symbolic and cultural, produce meaning against the flow and development of the text and bring the reader and the text into a realm of intertextuality. Allen concludes that the sequential codes work for the irreversibility (a narrative working on a linear or syntagmatic dimension) of the text, while the non-sequential codes are for the reversibility (to break the narrative or syntagmatic order of sequences) (87-88).

3.1. The Writerly Text

Defining the writerly text, Barthes provides the reader with some vague assertions that make the reader yield to the obligation of fantasizing the concept. He writes:

> On the one hand, there is what it is possible to write, and on the other, what it is no longer possible to write. [...] What evaluation finds is precisely this value: what can be written (rewritten) today: the writerly. Why is the writerly our value? Because the goal of literary work (of literature as work) is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text. (*S/Z* 4)

The expression that the reader should be the producer of the text could be the simplest way of defining the writerly text. Producing and re-writing a text is reliant on the necessity of having multiple significations. In fact, the quality of not fixating on a rigid signified but rather pointing to a floating meaning in the realm of signifiers is one of the major aspects of a writerly text. Thus, to produce the augmented meaning, the codes of semantic, symbolic

and cultural may play the original role; the non-sequential codes that give the text the plurality of meaning and therefore, the ability for the text to be re-writable and reproducible.

Barthes maintains that the process of evaluating a text, as either readerly or writerly, is a process of interpretation. However, his idea of interpretation as he himself asserts is, in a Nietzschean sense, not giving meaning to it; rather, it is an estimation on how much plurality of meaning the text possesses. The concept of plurality in meaning frees the text from a particular narrative structure or a specific reasoning in the description of what happens. In the writerly text, this plurality is of a great significance, a quality that makes the reader a producer rather than a consumer. This quality resembles the justification for the writerly text as being a value.

Barthes's most definitive description of the writerly text in *S/Z* is when he writes:

> The writerly text is a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages. The writerly is the novelistic without the novel, poetry without the poem, the essay without the dissertation, writing without style, production without product, structuration without structure. (5)

This extract can shed some light on what Barthes means by the writerly text. The expression 'perpetual present,' refers to a text that is eternal on the one hand and current on the other, leading to the conclusion that the writerly text is an ongoing state of currency. This notion could be related to the reversibility of the writerly text which is weaved with the non-sequential codes of semantic, symbolic and cultural. The nature and texture of the three non-sequential codes, could somehow represent the idea of a 'perpetual present text;' a text that according to Barthes cannot be covered or overlaid by a resulting or subsequent language. Moreover, the writerly text is described as the situation where the reader is involved in the act of writing, before the continuum of the world is stopped, overlapped or crossed by a specific ideology that would curtail or subjugate the infinity of language. In other words, the text of writerly is the kind of writing that is not restricted in any sense and is in favor of the immensity of language.

The above extract ends with some expressions that may seem paradoxical. For example, 'the novelistic without the novel' or 'writing without style.' These jargons are best described by the last expression 'structuration without structure' which refers to the nature of the writerly text as a concept that does not bear any boundaries and constantly escapes frames and conventions. The poem that is not poetry or the product that is not necessarily an outcome of a production circle, are the assessments that Barthes uses to imply his definition of the writerly text. Graham Allen in defining the writerly texts maintains:

> The radically scriptible text, therefore, does more than simply involve the reader in writing (activating, producing) it as text. More profoundly, it questions very fundamental notions of language's relation to the human subject and of what it is to be a human subject. Such texts suggest that, as subjects, we are ourselves part of textuality or writing, the products of the vast codes, conventions and discourses which make up the cultural text within which we think and write. (*Roland Barthes* 92)

Allen does not simply reduce the definition of the writerly text to a text that makes the reader participate in the act of writing and producing a text. Rather, he believes that the writerly text deals with the relationship between language and human as subject and additionally, he asserts that the writerly text proposes the question for the nature of a human subject. The defining feature of the writerly text, Allen suggests, is that it shows the human subject as a part of the writing or the text. This text -- the writerly -- as a product of immense and intermingling codes, conventions and discourses makes the cultural text that the human subject thinks, acts, writes or basically lives in it. With this argumentation, Allen describes the writerly text with the help of the theory of human subjectivity and the relation that is held between the two phenomena of writing and subjectivity.

4. Exploring Elements of the Writerly Text in *Flaubert's Parrot*

4.1. The Author Role

The title 'Flaubert's Parrot' may suggest some semiotic significance, the most important one being the cultural code. When accosting the title, the figure of the famous French author -- Gustave Flaubert -- comes to the mind; a reference that exists outside the created diegesis of the author that the reader is about to encounter. Following 'Flaubert' there is the word 'parrot' which with the preceding word creates a sense of possession. For the professional readers of literature, this expression refers to a text by Flaubert that is the short story "A

Simple Heart*"*. The idea that the title of a text refers to another text may allude to the intertextual nature of the novel and therefore clearly constructs a cultural code of the relative body of knowledge outside the text in hand.

Following the epigraph, there is a note from the author that embodies Barnes's wit before the novel starts. He appreciates the permission for using some lines from 'A German Requiem' and writes: "The translations in this book are by Geoffrey Braithwaite; though he would have been lost without the impeccable example of Francis Steegmuller" (11). The point is that the translator of the lines is the main character of the novel -- Geoffrey Braithwaite. Moreover, the attempt of the character has been related to another figure who is Francis Steegmuller. The embodiment of the main character in the note from the real author of the novel situates the standpoint of the author segregated from the main character and therefore establishes the nature of the narration. On the other hand, relating the character's effort to Francis Steegmuller creates another cultural code. The postmodern and intertextual qualities of the epigraph and the author's note alongside the reference to 'A German Requiem,' all represent cultural codes. As mentioned before, the significance of the cultural codes in delivering a text of writerly is eminent; therefore, the addressed instances could function as supports for structuring the novel as a writerly text.

Chapter nine, entitled 'The Flaubert Apocrypha,' basically deals with the never written texts of Flaubert. This chapter opens with an epigraph that maintains the mentioned idea. It writes: "It is not what they built. It is what they knocked down. It is not the houses. It is the spaces between the houses. It is not the streets that exist. It is the streets that no longer exist" (119). This quotation delivers various interpretations in a close reading. In these sentences, the notions of destruction and absence are privileged over construction and presence. In other words, this statement glorifies the texts that could have existed in the writings of Flaubert, holding a rather deconstructive approach. This idea could be related to the concept of the writerly text in that it refers to a text that could be written by a Flaubert reader, yet adhering to the writings of the author that is Flaubert. The following extract from chapter nine supports the argument. He writes:

> With Flaubert, the apocrypha cast a second shadow. If the sweetest moment in life is a visit to the brothel which doesn't come off, perhaps the sweetest moment in writing is the arrival of that idea for a book which never has to be written, which is never sullied with a definite shape, which never needs be exposed to a less loving gaze than that of its author. (119-120)

The critical point in the above extract is the line that refers to the idea for a book that the author does not intend to write. The imaginative and fantasizing qualities of such a text that does not embody a specific form, can get close to the abstract concept of the writerly text proposed by Barthes in *S/Z*. The never written text here is compared to a joyful moment of reaching to a sinful and wild desire that is not going to happen. The subject fantasizes about the satisfied desire in a shapeless and abstract way. The fascination of the author about the desirable writing could be read between the lines of the written text which could be written by the reader. This idea might be the ultimate quality of a writerly text for if the reader's writing is the definition and recipe for a writerly text then 'it is not what is written. It is what to be written.'

One of the prominent demonstrative elements of the writerly text in this novel is the penultimate chapter called 'Examination paper' where the author invites the reader to participate in the very act of writing. The examination paper includes sections on 'literary criticism' where it asks: "Trace the mellowing of Flaubert's attitude towards critics and criticism as represented by the following quotations" (179), presenting eight quotations from Flaubert. It also raises the question of 'the differences between art and life' in relation to the four provided quotations from Flaubert's letters and two situations related to Flaubert based on actual facts.

The examination chapter of the novel clearly invites the reader to write; a definitive characteristic that makes it easy to allude the nature of writerly to the text. The questions have a biographical perspective and help the ultimate view of the novel. Bringing the reader into the constructing process of writing a biography, this phenomenon engages the reader into participation and makes him responsible in achieving the intended goal. The reader thus is bound to share the possible inadequacies and defects in the writing of a text with this particular genre. In every question, there is a document or event related to the writings or the life of Flaubert. Therefore, the reader is not naively asked for his or her subjective opinion. There are texts in these questions to reflect upon, a notion that is followed by the narrator. 'The reader, writing' is the eventual objective of a writerly text, and thus this chapter of *Flaubert's parrot* serves as an epitome of engaging the reader to write.

4.2. The Theme of Biography

The novel opens with an epigraph and a note that may have a definitive role in giving the first impressions to the reader; the epigraph is "When you write the biography of a friend,

you must do it as if you were taking *revenge* for him" (9), a sentence from Flaubert's letter to Ernest Feydeau in 1872. The concept this sentence introduces is the notion of biography. The other concept is the idea of taking revenge for the author which may refer to the premise of telling things that the author did not get the opportunity to tell himself. With this epigraph, Barnes puts forth the overall perception of the novel that is the biography, and at the same time -- quoting from Flaubert -- reveals Flaubert's definition of the concept. Thus, Barnes wittily prepares the reader before even the text begins. This epigraph functions as an introduction to the novel by the author and therefore embraces the semantic code.

Through his narration, Braithwaite divulges some facts and events in the life of Flaubert. These lines, devoted to Flaubert, are assets that make the novel a text with biographical values or themes. This phenomenon is the main theme and content in the second chapter entitled 'Chronology.' This chapter provides the reader with three different chronologies of Flaubert's life in various respects. Following the exact and precise dates, the chronologies are numbered and divided, each of which following a specific order. The first chronology focuses on the life and events in the life of Flaubert, narrated in the classic and conventional way of writing chronologies. It begins with the birth of the writer to his death, containing the pivotal points of Flaubert's career.

The second chronology focuses on Flaubert's family and friends. Giving dates of the events that may not be directly related to the life of the author, this chronology deals with his family and even presents the dates for the death of the children born before Gustave in the Flaubert's household. It should be mentioned that the entries in these chronologies maintain a narrative and they do not merely present the events with the dates. Moreover, the third chronology is built with Flaubert's quotations furnished with dates. All the entries in the last chronology are Flaubert's quotes regarding different concepts and ideas. They range from statements on literature and writing to personal ideas about life. With these quotations about diverse subjects, Barnes constructs an informative data-base that helps getting familiar with the personality of Flaubert.

The significant point is that the created gap in the narrative by the chapter of chronology establishes an innovative perspective on the concept of narration. There is no single relation between the first and the second chapters, yet the chronologies do not seem incoherent and do not cut the flow of the narrative. In other words, the second chapter is not irrelevant or useless in the narration making process. A chronology usually precedes a

novel and is focused on the life of the author serving an introductory purpose. However, in this novel, the convention of providing a chronology of the author is deconstructed in that it is one of the chapters of the novel and it is not about the author; rather, it functions as a tool for the narrative helping the narration move forward. A parody on a classic convention in biography writing, this chapter of the novel embraces a radical perspective celebrating the notion of avant-gardism; a phenomenon that is appreciated by Barthes in defining the characteristic elements of the writerly text.

The fourth chapter of the novel probably is the most peculiar, getting closest to the idea of biography. It is called 'The Flaubert bestiary'. This chapter contains an epigraph from a letter to Alfred Le Poittevin: "I attract mad people and animals" (49) and focuses on the animal imagery in Flaubert's writings. Each represented animal is given an entry and described using Flaubert's own words and the way he has practiced the imageries through his writings. This chapter contains some quotations from some of Flaubert's books and real events from his travels around the world. Moreover, there are some comparisons between the mentioned animals and Flaubert's personality. It should be mentioned that each animal functions as a symbol for Flaubert and therefore this chapter is weaved with numerous symbolic codes and consequently cultural significances.

The first animal in this bestiary is a 'bear.' This entry opens with the sentence: "Gustave was the Bear" (49). In this entry, the qualities of Flaubert that relates him to the bear are discussed. All these statements hold whether a semantic or a symbolic code in that they either use bear instead of Flaubert or use the characteristics of a bear in describing Flaubert. The best part in this section that conveys this argument is where it writes: "Once you catch your bear, says the Macedonian proverb, it will dance for you. Gustave didn't dance; Flaubear was nobody's bear. (How would you fiddle that into French? Gourstave, perhaps)" (50). The words 'Flaubear' and 'Gourstave' -- *Gour* means *Bear* in French -- are portmanteaus made for establishing the notion of bear imagery for Flaubert. This phenomenon exemplifies the semantic codes in the mentioned chapter.

'The Camel,' 'The Sheep' and 'The Parrot' are among the animals attributed to Flaubert. However, 'Dogs' are the most important ones. The entry for dogs, is categorized into four sections: 'The Dog Romantic,' 'The Dog Practical,' 'The Dog Figurative' and 'The Dog Drowned' as well as the Dog Fantastical.' All these dogs have a symbolic reference in the life and writings of Flaubert. For instance, the figurative dog refers to Madame Bovary's.

The entries on dogs, each with their respective significance, build the imagery of this animal in the eyes of Flaubert. These intertextualities and references to the knowledge outside the text (the cultural codes) make Barnes's writing a text that allows the reader to participate in the writing process of the text in order for the reader to engage actively in understanding the novel; he or she should entangle with other texts and write what is left out.

4.3. The Notion of Literary Criticism

The other phenomenon that the novel and generally Barnes is famous for, is the notion of literary criticism in his fiction. Barnes tends to have a critical outlook on the concept of literature and this quality is present in most of his works, either the autobiographical or the historical ones. *Flaubert's Parrot* in particular is full of literary and critical instances throughout its narration. In fact, the frequency of such examples has motivated some scholars to label the novel as a narrative on literary criticism in which the border between literature and criticism is blurred. The following extract is one of the first instances of this critical quality that could be significant in that it brings to the mind one of the famous essays of Roland Barthes:

> I begin with the statue, because that's where I began the whole project. Why does the writing make us chase the writer? Why can't we leave well alone? Why aren't the books enough? Flaubert wanted them to be: few writers believed more in the objectivity of the written text and the insignificance of the writer's personality. (13)

The opening sentence of the extract holds a code of hermeneutics. It refers to the beginning of 'the project' that is unknown to the reader and in some sense creates a sense of mystery and enigma that perplexes the reader to find out about. The hermeneutic code of 'the project' is followed by three questions. These questions are entangled with the figure of the writer preceding the text. Additionally, the questions are followed by Flaubert's opinion on the matter which is the objectivity of the text and insignificance of the author's personality. The idea of asking questions and referring to the opinion of a legitimate author about the figure of the writer or the concept of the author behind a text could have a symbolic significance here; to forget about the author.

Here, Barthes's controversial essay, "The Death of the Author," comes to mind. The conveyed thought of letting the author figure go, is a critical approach in reading literature and as a matter of fact, a prominent and controversial one. Barnes, bringing a critical

discourse into his writing, blends literary criticism into his fictional narrative. Acquiring a postmodern or a somewhat post-structural taste in the narrative, Barnes invites the reader to an unstable world that is not governed by classic and conservative rules of narration. His radical perception on the narrative gives the reader a liberal perspective in which other discourses whether literary or not could participate and therefore create a suitable circumstance for the development of the writerly text.

Furthermore, the sixth chapter of *Flaubert's Parrot*, 'Emma Bovary's Eyes' relies strictly on the famous novel *Madame Bovary* by Flaubert. The main focus of this chapter is on the concept of Literary Criticism where the narrator despises critics for their inaccuracy. Bringing a quotation from Enid Starkie, an Oxford professor on the imprecision of Flaubert's description on the colour of Emma Bovary's eyes, the narrator defies this statement and addresses the six times that Flaubert has mentioned the eyes of Emma Bovary. In a sense, this chapter stands for the definition of literary criticism for the author and how a literary text should be read by a critic.

The notion of literary theory and criticism builds the overall foundation of the seventh chapter called 'Cross Channel.' Moreover, this chapter demonstrates how the novel is going to proceed to its conclusion. Additionally, this chapter involves the narrator's resort, writing: "Just getting braced to tell you about … what? about whom? Three stories contend within me. One about Flaubert, one about Ellen, one about myself" (86). The three stories are intermingled throughout the rest of the novel and it perfectly proves the idea that the novel is not merely a biography since it deals with a persona apart from Flaubert. This chapter, as mentioned before, focuses on literary theories to the extent that it delves into the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and even Roland Barthes by directly addressing them. It also contains the ideas of the narrator on the concept of narration style, making the chapter theoretical in some parts. In this respect, it moves the idea forward to a point where it writes: "As for the hesitating narrator – look, I'm afraid you've run into one right now. It might be because I'm English. You'd guessed that, at least – that I'm English?" (91).

4.4. The Narration

The first chapter of the novel is entitled same as the title of the text: Flaubert's Parrot. The initial paragraph of the chapter holds various semiotic codes. It also reveals the writing style of the author and demonstrates how Barnes is under the influences of the realist tradition of narration. The descriptions in this paragraph follow the narrative method of the realist

authors of this particular school of writing and in a sense repeats the peculiar obsessions with details like Flaubert's fiction. The following extract containing proairetic, semantic and cultural codes could be a suitable example for exploring different semiotic codes in the text of Barnes. Additionally, the paragraph, being the opening of the novel, could embrace significant points about the narrative world the author constructs. *Flaubert's Parrot* opens with:

> Six North Africans were playing *boules* beneath Flaubert's statue. Clean cracks sounded over the grumble of jammed traffic. With a final, ironic caress from the fingertips, a brown hand dispatched a silver globe. It landed, hopped heavily, and curved in a slow scatter of hard dust. The thrower remained a stylish, temporary statue: knees not quite unbent, and the right hand ecstatically spread. I noticed a furled white shirt, a bare forearm and a blob on the back of the wrist. Not a watch, as I first thought, or a tattoo, but a coloured transfer: the face of a political sage much admired in the desert. (12)

The foremost line of the above extract maintains several semiotic codes. The setting of the executed act that is 'playing boules' is built with the reference to the Flaubert's statue. Thus, this sentence holds the proairetic code of playing and the cultural code of the statue. Instead of simply directing the reader to the name of the place or forming the setting by describing the exact place and environment, the author points to the statue of Flaubert. This is a cultural code because it refers to the reality outside the text. The reader that knows the location of the statue is familiar with the setting or at least could generally locate the place regarding the city or the country. The other concept that holds a cultural code is the game that is being played: boules. Moreover, the six North Africans could refer to the people and consequently the society so it maintains the semantic code.

The following lines of the paragraph describe the sounds in the setting and shows how the game is being played and what is happening. The attentions paid to the details in describing the situation, is a reminiscent of the realist narration. This impression might be taken that the author is paying his dues to Flaubert as the realist author. The concluding lines of the extract also carry a cultural code in that after referring to a 'coloured transfer' on the forearm of one of the players, the image is described in a referential and vague manner. 'A political sage admired in the desert' refers to a body of knowledge outside the created diegesis that its real though hidden source may not be fathomable for every reader.

Nonetheless, it is significant that the notion of constituting several cultural codes in the opening paragraph of the novel is a phenomenon that might be crucial and determining in the formation of a writerly text.

The previously examined chapters delineate how this novel rejects the classic conventions of narration and how it tries to broaden the concept of narrative. In a sense, this novel could be labeled as an anti-story. There are numerous supporting evidences for this claim in the text: the nature of the narrative, the role of the narrator and the presence of various paradigmatic writings, to name a few. The presence of these features in *Flaubert's Parrot* put forward a legitimate argument for the novel to be labeled as a writerly text for it is radical in narration and unlike a readerly text does not rely on the simple structure of storytelling depending on the sequential codes of proairetic and hermeneutic.

The final chapter of the novel is dedicated to the definitive gist of the text that is finding the petrified parrot that Flaubert kept on his desk and influenced him to write in "A Simple Heart". This chapter entitled 'And the Parrot…' is concerned with the functioning role of the parrot for Flaubert. The narrator identifies the role of the parrot for the character of the story "A Simple Heart" and for himself writing: "to Félicité, it was a grotesque but logical version of the Holy Ghost; to me, a fluttering, elusive emblem of the writer's voice" (188). Here, the parrot is a representative of Flaubert's voice for the narrator. In his quest for finding the petrified parrot, the narrator is searching for the voice of the author that is trapped in the biographical narrative on Flaubert. Finding numerous parrots designated as Flaubert's, he cannot locate the exact parrot or at least he cannot make sure which parrot is the authentic one. Thus, the voice of the author is lost among the parrots.

In this respect, when Braithwaite finds out that there are numerous parrots in several museums and that each museum claims his parrot as Flaubert's, he concludes that it would be utterly impossible to make sure about the real and singular parrot. It writes: "I felt pleased and disappointed at the same time. It was an answer and not an answer; it was an ending and not an ending. As with Félicité's final heartbeats, the story was dying away 'like a fountain running dry, like an echo disappearing'" (194). As this quotation shows, the narrator cannot decide whether this resolution is delightful or not. He is in doubt about finding the final answer or the ultimate closure for the story. He proclaims that the story is dying away referring to the ending lines of "A Simple Heart". Furthermore, the quoted extract reveals the narrator's uncertainty and ambivalence towards this resolution. He

grapples with the inability to definitively find the ultimate answer or closure for the story. By using the metaphor of the story dying away, akin to Félicité's final heartbeats in Flaubert's "A Simple Heart," the narrator emphasizes the fading nature of the narrative's significance and the elusiveness of a clear-cut conclusion. The reference to Félicité's story in "A Simple Heart" highlights the thematic connection between Barnes' work and Flaubert's own writing. Both narratives explore the complexities of human existence, the limitations of knowledge, and the fleeting nature of meaning. By echoing Flaubert's text, the narrator suggests that like Félicité's story, the search for a definitive answer in "Flaubert's Parrot" remains elusive and perhaps ultimately inconclusive. Thus, the quoted passage captures the narrator's conflicting emotions, his contemplation of the story's fading significance, and his acknowledgment of the inherent uncertainty in literary interpretation and the pursuit of definitive answers.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Julian Barnes's work, *Flaubert's Parrot*, exhibits a remarkable innovation in its narrative techniques, seamlessly intertwining biographical, fictional, and autobiographical perspectives. This novel serves as a compelling case study for exploring the Barthesian concept of the writerly text, which is thoroughly examined with regard to its style and narrative structure.

Functioning as a mock-biography, Barnes's creation adeptly blends the traditional biographical writing style with a fictional narrative that unfolds through the lens of an implied author. The infusion of a comedic tone and literary-critical elements within the text imparts a distinctive and stylistically challenging quality to the novel. By defying the conventional proairetic and hermeneutic sequential codes, *Flaubert's Parrot* emancipates the narrative from the constraints of classic storytelling, embracing a somewhat radical postmodern approach.

The narrative of the novel heavily relies on cultural and symbolic codes, presenting several characteristics that align with Roland Barthes's descriptive elements of the writerly text. The fundamental notion underlying the concept of a writerly text, where the reader actively participates in the act of writing, is ingeniously upheld by Barnes throughout the narrative, with its most evocative manifestation occurring in the penultimate chapter of the novel.

To put it concisely, Julian Barnes, through his distinctive mode of writing and his postmodern perspective, skillfully crafts a text that embodies the defining attributes of the writerly text. Notably, *Flaubert's Parrot* extends an invitation to the reader to engage in their own interpretation and composition of the narrative, making it an exemplary embodiment of the writerly text paradigm. This intricate interplay of narrative, style, and reader engagement elevates the novel to a prominent status within the realm of literary discourse, where it stands as a notable exemplar of the writerly text concept.

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