ABSTRACT

In tune with the heterogenous and multipart representation of the world in the postmodern epoch, Julian Barnes creates a world where metanarratives are devalued and the border between fiction and reality is blurred. The aim of this study is to examine how Barnes portrays contemporary human condition and to what extent he challenges the conventions and traditions of fiction writing in his novels. The study attempts to situate the ideas explored in the novels in relation to the discourses of postmodernism.

The critical assessment will briefly follow the critical thoughts of Jean-François Lyotard, Nietzsche, and Heidegger and will try to relate these to the validity of master narratives. Patricia Waugh, Linda Hutcheon and Mark Currie will also be brought in while dealing with aspects of Metafiction in Barnes. Beyond ideological and political speculations, which this study does not aim to deal with in any detail, the main focus will be upon certain textual characteristics that are consciously foregrounded in the fictional world of Julian Barnes.

The thesis argues that Barnes’s novels’ dramatisations of the notion of search for ultimate truth and meaning position them in dialogue with the postmodern notion of the lack of absolute meaning and truth. The characters begin a quest for meaning as belief in grand narratives fails to act as a source of stable meaning. Barnes’s novels flag the importance of search itself and suggest that the search is all. Search emerges as a value in the novels and its final failure to reach the meaning does not undermine its purposefulness.
Barnes, by generating metafictional illusions and problematizing fictional conventions, enters into a perpetual process of creation through which the readers are invited to co-create, and the meanings of the texts are exposed. The thesis delineates Barnes’s meditations on memory and how he considers love's capacity to transcend the entropy and relativity of the disillusioned world of postmodernity.

Depicting the world after the emergence of new idea of truth and history in the shadow of vanishing metanarratives; crossing the traditional conventions of writing fiction; and challenging the traditional concept and role of the narrator in Julian Barnes are the critical areas of investigation in the thesis.