

The Linguistic Singularity of the Novel the Sense of an Ending by Julian Barnes

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the linguistic singularity of the novel *The Sense of an Ending* by Julian Barnes. It deals with some linguistic means, which allow us to characterize this novel as a bright example of postmodernism. This approach contains the idea about the impossibility of new style invention and the necessity of different styles combination. The novel is full of different jargon words (hook up, pick-up line, and pick up girls), idioms (get under skin, put finger on), and even juridical terms (vexatious) which are used all together creating unique style. It is important that in postmodernism literature good or bad words or styles do not exist; they are all equal. Secondly, the idea of game. There are two levels of representing this idea: the mix of styles and the loss of figurativeness by phraseological units. The first level has already been mentioned and the second one can be explained as exemplified by idiom get under skin that is used in its direct meaning while describing the way of roasting a chicken. Moreover, the novel is full of references to other stories and poems and in this case, we can speak about rewriting as a common method of postmodernism. Postmodern writers create new work through the stealing of images and texts from an earlier period and appropriated in a present context, say scientists.

Keywords: Linguistic singularity; Postmodernism; Game; Rewriting.



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1. Introduction

In October 2011, the novel *The Sense of an Ending* by Barnes (2011) was awarded the Man Booker Prize, and many literary critics said that it was the best modern literary work. This novel has a strong emotional impact on readers not only owing to brilliant characters but also owing to such topics as love, memory, death and skillful usage of linguistic means. Many authors pointed out how strong and bright this novel is, e.g. (Bondarchuk, 2002).

2. Methodological Framework

In order to investigate the novel the methods of empirical and theoretical researches are used, for instance analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization and componential, contextual and comparative methods of investigation. Moreover, the interpretative method is useful while studying the novel.

3. Discussion

In general, a lot of Russian and foreign literature scientists investigated novels (Barnes, 2011). The Russian readers got acquainted when the discussion called the phenomenon of was published in the magazine *The Foreign Literature* (Barnes, 2011). This discussion resulted from the publishing of the novel talking it over. The articles by Frumkina (2002) and Radchenkov (2008) were published in this magazine and were devoted to different aspects of Barnes's works (Barnes, 2011). Moreover, nowadays in Russia many dissertation works deal with his masterpieces (Candel, 1998). As to foreign literature scientists who wrote about the works *From Romanticism to Postmodernity: Two Different Conceptions of Nature in History of the World in 10½ Chapters* by Higdon (1960) and *Unconfessed Confessions: the Narrators of Graham Swift and David Leon Higdon* (A, n.d) are bright examples. Many scientists describe the novels by Barnes as postmodernism novels pointing out the great importance of two features. The first important thing is a game and the second one is intertextuality (Higdon, 1960); (Ahmadi et al., 2018).

The intertextuality phenomenon is common for many literary works by Barnes, and as Russian as foreign scientists mentioned it repeatedly. For instance, (Antúnez, 2014) gives as an example of such a literary technique as rewriting the novel *Flaubert's parrot* by Barnes where according to his words there are many references to the novels by Flaubert *Madame Bovary* and *A Simple Soul*. Moreover, the reasons of the usage of references are different: from showing respect for literary tradition (with irony, of course) till playing hide-and-seek with readers. One more researcher (Calinescu, 1997) notices that there is variety of rewritten literary works (more French than English works) in the novels *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, *Staring at the Sun* and *Flaubert's parrot* by Barnes. Calinescu (1997) stresses that there is frequently a sense of the novels' executing a series of arabesques around plotlessness while at the same time obsessively challenging the reader ontologically to discern the relations in which the seemingly disparate parts may be said to exist in relation to the whole. Inherently, the novel *The Sense of an Ending* which is a new work by Barnes is almost completely uninvestigated and, of course, researchers did not study the problem of its linguistic singularity (B., 2004).

4. Results

The novel *The Sense of an Ending* consists of two parts. The first part is devoted to the youth of the main characters: Colin, Alex, Adrian and Tony. It includes stories about their first love, first disappointment and first brush with death. The second part shows Tony as an old man when he inherited money from the mother of his ex-girlfriend Veronica and found out that he had to become an owner of the diary by Adrian who had removed himself from life many years ago. The intension to understand why he had inherited the money and to find out the reason of Adrian's suicide made Tony come back to the past and remember all that had happened many years ago. Obviously, these two parts are different in view of linguistics. The first part includes many jargon words, which are usually used by young people: hook up, taking the piss, creep, sap, pick-up line. But even the first part cannot be described as homogeneous because there are also terms (e.g. vegetable matter) and words which are typical for sublime style (e.g. in the flower of youth).

The stylistic diversity allows describing the characters better, especially Tony who is a point of view character. On the one hand, the main characters were people who were young in 70-s years of XX century, in the period, which is said to be a period of freedom so the word combination pick up girls was usual for life style description. On the other hand, the characters were the best of the best in their generation, so they read and thought a lot and could use sublime style words, but usage of such words was only game for them, only taking the piss. The dialogue between Adrian Finn and history teacher can be interesting as an example of such diversity: Finn, you have been quiet. You started this ball rolling. You are, as it were, our Serbian gunman. Hunt paused to let the allusion take effect. Would you care to give us the benefit of your thoughts?

I do not know, sir.

What do you know?

Well, in one sense, I cannot know what it is that I do not know. That is philosophically self-evident. He left one of those slight pauses in which we again wondered if he was engaged in subtle mockery or a high seriousness beyond the rest of us. Indeed, is not the whole business of ascribing responsibility a kind of cop-out? We want to blame an individual so that everyone else is exculpated. Or we blame a historical process as a way of exonerating individuals. Or it is all anarchic chaos, with the same consequence. It seems to me that there is – was – a chain of individual responsibilities, all of which were necessary, but not so long a chain that everybody can simply blame everyone else. But of course, my desire to ascribe responsibility might be more a reflection of my own cast of mind than a fair analysis of what happened. That is one of the central problems of history, is not it, sir? The question of subjective versus objective interpretation, the fact that we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us. There was a silence. And no, he was not taking the piss, not in the slightest. The dialogue shows that Adrian knows philosophical and historical terms, has his own opinion about different serious topics and, of course, while discussing such topics he uses many words and word combinations of sublime style: philosophically self-evident, ascribing responsibility, anarchic chaos, reflection of my own cast of mind...

Moreover, this dialogue as any other ones can be an example of such literary technique as irony, which is used in different works by Barnes. The problem of irony in the novels by British writers is not new; it was investigated, for example, in the dissertation work by Jagannathan (2016). As to the novel *The Sense of an Ending*, the irony is achieved by two means: firstly, by using of phraseological units of informal style (started this ball rolling) while discussing serious topic, secondly, by inappropriate comparison with Serbian gunman. As to the second part of the novel *The Sense of an Ending*, it is free of jargon words but full of phraseological units, which the elderly people love: put finger on, get under skin, it was not worth the candle, late-flowering love. Moreover, there are many juridical terms as the main topic is accession to estate. The example of such terms is vexatious which is marked in a dictionary as juridical. What are more, juridical topics in general and the usage of juridical terms in novels by Barnes in particular are not accidental as the author wrote not only novels but also detective stories (under the pen-name - Dan Kavanagh) that why he knows juridical science quite well. Some fragments of the second part connected with the coming back to the past, the theme of memory often differ in view of stylistic and are full of jargon words, youth slang. For example, the scene where Tony re-read the letter, which had been written by him many years ago, when he had known that Veronica had left him for Adrian. There is, for instance, such a word as a «cockteaser» which is jargon (Mace, 2008).

Tony's short meetings with his ex-wife – Margaret and his ex-girlfriend – Veronica were returning him to the past, too. It is not accidental that dialogues during such meetings are full of youth slang (remember: they are in their 60-s in the second part): fruitcake, get it, etc. This novel is said to relate to postmodernism. It means that it contains many specific postmodernism features. One of them is a game, especially language game. As it was pointed out, Barnes changes the styles easily, moving from one to another, for example, from conversational to scientific. Moreover, he uses idioms, which are stable structures, as he wants. Thus, Barnes breaks one of the most important feature of idioms – figurativeness. For example, in the part where Tony noticed the link between the phraseological unit get under skin and the situation how his wife roasted chicken. I said I wanted to get under her skin, did not I? It is an odd expression, and one that always makes me think of Margaret's way of roasting a chicken. She had gently loosen the skin from the breast and thighs, then slip butter and herbs underneath. Tarragon, probably. Perhaps areclumy, and I imagine them ripping the skin. Margaret told me of a French way of doing this which is even fancier. They put slices of black truffle under the skin – and do you know what they call it? Chicken in Half-Mourning. I suppose the recipe dates from the time people used to wear nothing but black for a few months, grey for another few months, and only slowly return to the colours of life. Full-, Half-, Quarter-Mourning. I do not know if those were the terms, but I know the gradations of dress were fully tabulated. Nowadays, how long do people wear

mourning? Half a day in most cases – just long enough for the funeral or cremation and the drinks afterwards. One more example that (Barnes, 2011) uses idioms as he wants is his variant of the phraseological unit once bitten twice shy. It means that person, who makes a mistake, in the future will be more careful and will try to avoid similar mistake. However, writing about late-flowering love, Barnes stresses that people are not always able to learn from their own mistakes and vice versa make their mistakes repeatedly. That why he replaces famous idiom once bitten twice shy with his own variant once bitten, twice bitten.

The second feature of the postmodernism, which is common to the novel by Barnes. The Sense of an Ending, is intertextuality which means following. Firstly, there are a lot of quotes and references to other literary works in the novel by Barnes. The Sense of an Ending. For instance, during the argument between Veronica and Tony for Adrian Finn's diary the phrase a wrangle for a ring is used. This phrase is taken from the poem Annus Mirabilis by an English poet, novelist and librarian Philip Larkin (1922-1985). One more example of the direct quote is words they shall grow not old as we that are left grow old, borrowed from the poem For the Fallen included in Ode of Remembrance by Laurence Binyon. However, Barnes does not always use direct quotes in order to show the connection of two literary works, the references can be indirect but clear enough. For example, describing the first day of Adrian Finn at the new school and his acquaintance with Colin, Alex and Tony, the author writes, there were three of us, and he now made the fourth. Such a phrase, of course, brings to mind the beginning of the famous novel by Alexandre Dumas The three musketeers where d'Artagnan gets acquainted Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. The comparison is clearer if we take into the account that French literature plays an important role becoming writer and how often he deals with it (Todd, 1997).

5. Conclusion

Therefore, in view of the linguistic means the novel by Barnes can be characterized as inhomogeneous. The usage of different styles (from conversational to scientific), on the one hand, helps to describe characters who are many-sided personalities, but on the other hand, is one of the most important means to represent irony – literary technique which is common for British literature in general, and Barnes's masterpieces in particular. Moreover, in view of the linguistic the novel The Sense of an Ending is postmodernism work, which is proved by two features: intertextuality and language game. The last one is represented in diversity of styles and the extraordinary way of idioms usage.

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