



## Deceptive Re-narration and Self-Justifying Narrative in Julian Barnes' *The Sense of an Ending*

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### Abstract

It was the modernist and post-modernist authors who added new dimensions to the long-existed term 'unreliable narrator'. Julian Barnes, as a postmodernist author, was constantly involved in questioning the concepts of history, memory, and truth. He formed a new mode of an unreliable narrator who has an ability to deceive the reader, consciously or unconsciously, by suggesting different alternatives of his past actions as a means of self-justification. Tracing the idea of self-preservation, this paper aims at following the main character of *The Sense of an Ending* (2011) to find how the narrator misleads the reader through the course of the story to self-justify his past actions as a new way of creating an unreliable narrator. Focusing on Freudian psychoanalytic interpretations of reconstruction of selfhood through mending the memory, the main character's narrative of *The Sense of an Ending* will be scrutinized through this study.

**Keywords:** memory, truth, repression, narrative technique, unreliable narrator

*"I have an instinct for survival, for self-preservation."*

*Julian Barnes*

In *The Sense of an Ending*, Barnes thoroughly explores the depths of unreliable narrator through the main character who comes to a point of re-evaluating and simultaneously re-writing about suicide of his childhood friend and his own role as the one who inherited Tony's diary after his death. In an unreliable discourse, the reader's attention is intentionally drawn away from the story itself, since in postmodernism, the concepts of truth, history, and grand narrative

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had already been challenged, and these concepts become evidently more ambiguous for an unreliable narrator. The narrator, Tony Webster, is an unreliable narrator, even if he constantly reminds his reader of limitations of his memory, and therefore his credibility. Although, Tony tries to justify himself, in some occasions by criticising the grand concepts, he inevitably distorts the flow of his story and misleads the reader.

The book is comprised of two chapters. The initial part dates to Tony's teenage years depending upon the topics such as family, friendship, love or deeper subjects in Tony and his friends' case. The second part of the novel is set forty years later, with Tony having a daughter, an ex-wife, and living on his own. However, a letter and a small inheritance are enough to disrupt the serenity of his life. By using first person narrative, Tony finds a chance to speak directly to the reader, and by recalling some of the events of his past, he is consciously trapped in a position of distorting the authenticity of the events. Later, the protagonist also discovers a repressed remorse deep inside him, ignored through false accusations and alterations.

Therefore, the paper aims at exploring the depths of unreliable narrative of the novel and the way Tony disturbs the order of events to justify his behaviours at certain points. As Daniel L. Schacter, who published on memory, explains:

We extract key elements from our experiences and store them. We, then, recreate or reconstruct our experiences rather than retrieve copies of them [...]. In other words, we bias our memories of the past by attributing to them emotions or knowledge we acquired after the event (2011, p.9).

Studying the novel, reader easily realizes the narrator's traumatic experiences and failure of dependency which indicate psychic defences. Defense mechanism works in different levels in the novel affecting personal relationships and life structure of the characters. The defense mechanism prevents the dangerous impulse from achieving an active form of repulse. About their connection to emotions, Freud states:

Ideas are only repressed because they are associated with the release of feelings which ought not to occur. It would be more correct to say that repression acts upon feelings, but we can only be aware of these in their association with ideas (1907, pp. 48-49).

The roots of unconscious motivation for distortion of the events can be in a traumatic experience revealed in consciousness. This hypothesis was first brought up by Sigmund Freud who studied the clues including slips of the tongue, failures of memory or bungled action for referring to defense mechanism. Moving on from Freud, at the beginning of the 1990's psychologists have discovered a recent mental illness, the false memory syndrome which causes people who had experienced psychotherapy and sought help from counselling, to talk about series of childhood abuse which actually never happened. The reason for such a condition was assumed to be a wrong medical therapy, since most of the therapist, despite lack of interest or relevant clues, tried to practice some kind of hypnosis to detect psychological problems caused by traumatic or abusive events of the childhood which are currently forgotten or repressed.

As Phil Mollon, the author of *Freud and False Memory Syndrome* (2000) suggests, "our current knowledge of memory shows that it can be subject to a number of distortions" as remembering is also highly resembles telling a story by reconstructing the elements and order. (p. 6)

As for defense mechanism, Baumeister et al. (1998) define it as any effort by individual sustaining "preferred views of themselves" (p.1082). Likewise, McAdams (1998) concentrates

on how people ‘make sense’ of their identities or life stories. Defense mechanism is “viewed as narrative strategies that shape how a life is told” and “an affinity between stories and human life” is emphasized (pp. 1125-1127). Repression may also be defined as the act of turning away from, and inhibiting wishes and desires that are presumed to endanger threat. Discussing repression, the question of conscious repression arises. However, the purpose of repression is to develop a mean to prevent the target from being conscious.

People with traumatic experiences may choose to deceive themselves since their self-image is challenged and damaged. The act of deceiving not only occurs by telling lie, but also by evading or exaggerating the truth or casting doubt on it. There are three main functions of self-deception. First, for protecting the self, self-deception can be used as a means of self-protection, to prevent harm to self-esteem, etc. Secondly, for achieving the goal, self-deception may also be instrumental in focusing only on the desirable aspects of the goal, ignoring the undesirable interference. Last, deceiving the others by concealing the current psychological status, it may also be used to manipulate others.

Present paper has adopted Freud’s defense mechanism to study the causes of unreliable narration in *The Sense of an Ending* by Julian Barnes. Because the unreliability of the narrator in *The Sense of an Ending* could better be explained through a psychoanalytical reading of the story. In traditional sense, the use of unreliable narrator is to divert the reader’s attention from the story, however, in Tony’s case, the reader soon realizes that there are multiple ulterior reasons as to why Tony suppresses some of the truth behind the stories. Bertens, here claims that, “psychoanalytic criticism focuses on [...] ‘cracks’ in the text’s façade and seeks to bring to light the unconscious desires of either the author or the characters the text presents” (2014, p. 133). The gaps, omissions and unconscious misremembrance of the events signals the working of a kind of defense mechanism, to protect the self, and thus, represses it to the unconscious.

In their early work, Freud and Breuer believed that traumatic events lead to neurosis. They believed that external events had more impact on the subject far greater than what is known or studied. For them, a normal person had the ability to work through a traumatic event bringing the disappearance of the unwanted affect, while for other people the memories of such events were too painful to recall and that they could not cope with the past. Thus, such memories disappear from the consciousness. The working of the mechanisms of the defense through different mediums is how an adult or a child deals with the destructive effect of a traumatic experience.

The traumatic event causes the subject’s feeling of unreality, automatic movements, lack of emotion, sense of detachment and inability to feel deeply about anything. For Schacter, trauma can also be explained as a “sudden discontinuity in experience leading discontinuity in the memories of the subject, probably as a way for self-protection” (1996, p.135). Tony in *The Sense of an Ending* is caught in two different challenging positions: he struggles to come up with an overall story of his past and that story told by himself. He makes argumentative statements about some specific themes of life itself, such as time, truth, history, etc., however, as it is constantly suggested by his adolescent girlfriend, Veronica, that he “doesn’t get it” and until the very end of the novel he “never did” (138) which refers to his inability in the narrating his own life story:

I remember, in no particular order:  
a shiny inner wrist;  
steam rising from a wet sink as a hot frying pan is laughingly tossed into it;

gouts of sperm circling a plughole, before being sluiced down the full length of a tall house;  
a river rushing nonsensically upstream, its wave and wash lit by half a dozen chasing torch beams;  
another river, broad and grey, the direction of its flow disguised by a stiff wind exciting the surface;  
bathwater long gone cold behind a locked door (Barnes, 2011: 11).

The novel starts with an impressionistic narrative, providing reader with a set of images that neither are in a specific order, nor have a certain meaning in the story. This impressionistic use of narrative provides a set of random data not organized in a sequential order. Moreover, he neither knows the relativity of these images, nor the reality behind them. As soon as the narrative starts, the reader will inevitably notice that what he does is to rewrite the story by filling the blanks in his mind. This may be symbol of constructive narrative. The recurrent images are the clues which will accompany the reader through the story. The signs from Tony's subconscious are Freudian repressed ideas not ceasing away from the unconsciousness but visiting the subject through flashback, recurrent feelings and horrific pictures:

I'm not very interested in my schooldays, and I don't feel any nostalgia for them. But school is where it all began, so I need to return briefly to a few incidents that have turned into anecdotes, to some approximate memories which time has deformed into certainty (Barnes, 2011: 4).

The concepts of memory and remembering have always been under the spotlight for scientist, artists, writers and philosophers who know that memory is not a sole unit of the mind, on the other hand it is highly subjective, distinct and diverse. The function of memory or the concept of remembering is evoking the right data rooted in the mind with a stimulus, although, the narrator's initial notion is that "what you end up remembering isn't always the same as what you have witnessed" (Barnes, 2011: 11). However, it is also accepted that the way memories are stored and retrieved are not passive, yet they are highly vulnerable to the emotions which are attributed to the events. It is also important to note that it is not possible to separate memories from the experiences happened previously. For Freud, the circle of knowledge starts with perception and it ends with response, during this circling; it can easily be manipulated by being diverted, transformed, or erased. The natural modification starts from the very beginning when information goes through the first memory system. From this perspective, as Holman et al., argued in their article, "memory is always constructed. What people remember will be constructed from remaining materials..." (1992: 62). Schacter, in his book named *Searching for Memory* states:

Memory, as complex and usually reliable asset, can sometimes deceive us badly. Yet even though memory can be highly elusive in some situations and dead wrong in others, it still forms the foundation for our most strongly held beliefs about ourselves (1991, p. 7).

Memory, therefore, is a unit which is systematically augmented through the process encoding and retrieving. However, physical elements are also crucial to the reliability of the memories. The subject who is trying to recall the past, not only loses some parts of the material, but also systematically augments the material to create a uniting meaning out of it. The process is filling in blind spots of the memory. Another related perspective is the status of the subject, in terms of age, encoding, retention and forgetting. Simply stated, memories cannot be retrieved unless there are enough materials to recall, and the reliability of a memory depends on external

factors such as age or the mental readiness to encode a piece of memory in the brain. From this perspective, an event may only be recalled in adulthood if perceptual details were initially encoded and are still recoverable to be recoded and given an adult interpretation.

Likewise, in the novel the process of remembering is often disturbed by the narrator's age, his selectivism, tendentiousness to the events, and limited perspective upon the events happening around and beyond him. Therefore, the narrator reminds the reader through various expressions and statements that his narrative is entirely based on these uncertain memories. Hence, through the fallacies and inaccuracies of the narrator's memory, the narrative and the general idea of history in the novel could be accepted as unreliable. The narrative of Tony also gains a self-justifying purpose since what he provides to the reader as the story, is finally understood to be false, and some of the significant details are ignored. For instance, when he meets with Veronica years later, it is revealed that Tony was not a victim or rather indifferent to hear Adrian and Veronica's relationship; on the contrary, he acted very fiercely and wrote them a harassing letter cursing them. He then realises how misremembered memories can change anything that first seems to be accurate. He states:

How often do we tell our own life story? How often do we adjust, embellish, make sly cuts? And the longer life goes on, the fewer are those around to challenge our account, to remind us that our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about our life. Told to others, but – mainly – to ourselves (Barnes, 2011: 95).

Through first person narrative, Webster finds the chance to rewrite his life story speaking directly to the reader while having the power to change the course of the events. Although it is revealed at the end that most of his perception of the past was merely true, he shows a degree of remorse that has already been hidden deeply inside him and he had managed to repress it by modifying the events. While attempting to create an authentic life story out of his events, Tony Webster was haunted by the imperfection of his memory and the complicated network between past and what is the basis of his novel. Unreliability of Tony's narration works in an abusive way as well, since the reader is exposed to no other narrator, they become the subject of Tony who projects his personal views on the truth.

While his first intention was to create an authentic life story out of his events, Tony Webster is haunted by the imperfection of his memory and the complicated network between past and what is the basis of his novel. Unreliability of Tony's narration works in an abusive way, since the reader is exposed to no other narrator and they become the subject of Tony who contaminates the truth with his personal view.

Daniel L. Schacter defines memory as a manly trait: "sometimes we forget the past and at other times we distort it," (2001: p.1), however, it is not very dependable, since "we often take it for granted until an incident of forgetting or distortion demands our attention" (Schacter, 2001: p.1). Similarly, what Tony will experience through the course of the story is that memory, contrary to what he thought at first, is not a reliable tool, because as Schacter expresses memory is always affected by emotions, feelings, beliefs and deteriorating effect of time. It is also important to note that the past is beyond comprehensibility due to Tony's unreliable narrative and because of a constant re-editing of the past events. He is constantly in a mood of re-writing the events that does not provide him a pleasure.

The novel revolves around two features of the concept of memory, activism and selectivism. While activism of the memory refers to transformation of some information memorized at a certain point of time, selectivism provides certain elements of the things happened to the subject while repressing others according to the factors such as age, cultural

level, desires, fears or interests. Therefore, the novel is involved in bridging the past and representation of it in the past, as most of the events happened during adulthood of Tony, but reoccured as facts or return of repressed feelings in the present. What Tony is struggling to do is attempting to reconcile with the past in order to continue his life in the present. Throughout the novel, Tony uses various expressions and statements to remind the reader that the whole narrative is his own memories and his own limited perception, but this adds little reliability to the novel because all events lead the reader to believe in his version of truth.

The selectivism in the novel operates in different ways: Tony recalls some events of his schooldays when he used to team up with a gang of three boys, Alex, Colin and lastly joined Adrian. The short introduction of this gang from the very beginning shows that they are different from others their age; they wear their watches facing inside of their wrist, symbolising that at that age they do not feel the pressure of time and the time is a very broad term for them, because later in life, they will start wearing their watches, as it should be. Adrian, on the other hand, is different from the other two and complexity of his personality and way of thinking impresses his teachers and Tony.

The problematic nature of truth and history is represented by Adrian as he suggests once in class time that "the question of subjective versus objective interpretation, is 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" (Barnes, 2011: 30). Questioning Sir Patrick Lagrange, Adrian concludes to define history from individual and collective aspects: "History is that certainty produced at the point where the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation" (Barnes, 2011: 40). The mind of the gang members is obsessed with philosophical terms and it is unusual compared to the others same age.

As an instance, students indirectly learn that Robson, one of their classmates, had got his girlfriend pregnant, hanged himself in the attic, and was found only two days later. He had written a short letter before his death that shook Adrian's strong personality: "Sorry, Mum." (Barnes, 2011: 41). The letter haunts Adrian from a Freudian psychoanalytical perspective connecting it to Oedipus concept, because reader understands from Tony's recollections that Adrian's mother has left her family and his father has raised him and her sister. Despite trying to repress this crucial moment of life in his memories, he will try to find substitute for mother figure in Veronica's mother.

In his relationship with Veronica, Tony constantly questions and thinks about a short visit to Veronica's house where he met her parents and her elder brother Jack. The memories of this visit dispersed his mind and interrupted his life because one does not memorize his past and there is an ongoing reproduction of rewriting these events. Tony also represents the unreliability of the memory telling: "I must stress that this is my reading now of what happened then. Or rather, my memory now of my reading then of what was happening at the time" (Barnes, 2011: 93). For Hutcheon, "knowing the past becomes a question of representing, that is, of constructing and interpreting, not of objective recording" (1988, p.74). The selectivism of memory also functions as Tony notices child abuse in Veronica's case by her father or elder brother. This is what Tony proposes in a direct address to the reader:

Some admit the damage and try to mitigate it; some spend their lives trying to help others who are damaged; and then there are those whose main concern is to avoid further damage to themselves, at whatever cost. And those are the ones who are ruthless, and the ones to be careful of (Barnes, 2011, p. 98-99).

In second part of the novel, Tony is in his fifties, divorced and having a daughter. He is forced to revisit past events of his life when he receives a letter from a solicitor telling he has inherited five hundred pounds from Veronica's mother and a personal diary of his childhood friend Adrian. He is unable to make a connection with how the diary ended up in Veronica's house or the reason for her to bequeath the diary to a man whom she only met once. After thinking about the events thoroughly, he tries to contact Veronica through the address on the letter he has received to learn more about her relationship with Adrian. Although it is implied that he knows nothing about the letter, he curses Veronica and Adrian for their poisonous relationship which can damage both permanently. After reading the letter, he finds himself in a self-questioning position:

At first, I thought mainly about me, and how – what – I'd been: chippy, jealous and malign. Also, about my attempt to undermine their relationship. At least I'd failed in this, since Veronica's mother had assured me the last months of Adrian's life had been happy. Not that this let me off the hook. My younger self had come back to shock my older self with what that self-had been, or was, or was sometimes capable of being. And only recently I'd been going on about how the witnesses to our lives decrease, and with them our essential corroboration (Barnes, 2012: 98).

Like his carefree affair with Veronica, learning about Veronica's affair with Adrian does not represent negative effect in Tony's life. However, after the revelation of some facts, he is forced to revise his memories as well his own identity. Later, the overall reconsideration of the fragments in Veronica's house reminds Tony of past years that the oppressor must have been her mother who ended up stealing her own daughter's boyfriend, Adrian, and worst of all had a baby with him. However, Tony blamed Veronica when he first learnt that she broke up with him and engaged with his best friend Adrian. All fragments of Tony's memories lead the reader to suspect the reliability of Tony's account of what really happened in the past.

After meeting Veronica years later, Tony recalls other memories of the events repressed in his unconscious, after an emotional trigger. Readers along with him involve in a process of searching for the truth beneath all the fragments. The tendency towards return of the repressed is associated with Freudian concept of 'the uncanny', which is the return of something familiar or homely previously estranged for a period from the conscious-awareness due to depression. Therefore, what Tony does afterwards, is simply trying to face with the ghosts of his past, which have been buried under his subconscious for a long time. He traces the clues like a detective and follows Veronica who meets a young-handicapped man, resembling Adrian. He immediately concludes that Veronica and Adrian had an intimate relationship that she was pregnant like their colleague who committed suicide. Adrian, despite looking strong, found himself in the same situation.

Later the narrator, Tony Webster, realises that the emotional reasons for writing such a letter was triggered by the fact that he and Veronica split up; and the repressing feelings allowed him to rewrite the history skipping some traumatic parts. He states:

I think – I theorise – that something – something else – happens to the memory over time. For years you survive with the same loops, the same facts and the same emotions. I press a button marked Adrian and Veronica, the tape runs, the usual stuff spools out. [...] But what if, ever at a late stage, our emotions relating to those long-ago events and people change? That ugly letter of mine provoked remorse in me. [...] Then, not long afterwards, I began remembering forgotten things. I don't know if there's a scientific explanation for this – to do with new affective states reopening blocked-off neural

pathways. All I can say is that it happened, and that it astonished me (Barnes, 2012: 120).

The letter reveals Tony's self-deception employed as a means of desire to see or to show himself better than what he really was. Therefore, the narrative is accepted as a way of coming to terms with his past while still inviting the reader to question the memories since they may be edited, deformed and altered whether by time, or Tony's obvious self-deception. From psychological definition, Tony signals symptoms of victim complex, which is defined as a state of mind where the subject believes that he is the constant victim of harmful actions of others. Tony altered his perception and presented Veronica as a negative person to repress his guilt of having a relationship with her mother. For this reason, his narrative reflects how he was always disrespected and misbehaved by Veronica. He is conscious of his actions throughout the novel, claiming:

And then there is the question, on which so much depends, of how we react to the damage: whether we admit it or repress it, and how this affects our dealings with others (Barnes, 2011, p.44).

For making an amendment, he sends an email to Veronica to ask for her forgiveness, but the answer is the same with previous ones and he still does not understand what really had happened in the past. Furthermore, after revisiting the place where he saw Veronica with the boy, he incidentally learns the bitter truth: the boy he initially mistook for Veronica's son is actually her brother, the result of Adrian's affair with Veronica's mother. The revelation of the final truth in fact destroys the credibility of Tony's version of truth one more time.

Tony Webster expresses that he had imagined his senescence to be mentally silent and peaceful: "Later in life, you expect a bit of rest, don't you? You think you deserve it. I did, anyway. But then you begin to understand that the reward of merit is not life's business" (Barnes, 2012: 59). However, what he discovers is that remorse and guilt are two emotions that must be dealt with until the very end of life:

You get towards the end of life –no, not life itself, but of something else: the end of any likelihood of change in that life. You are allowed a long moment of pause, time enough to ask the question: what else have I done wrong? [...] There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest (Barnes, 2012: 150).

Undoubtedly, the nature of the past is ambiguous, and it occasionally refers to the imperfections of memory, therefore the impossibility of the uniting narratives, therefore, he exerts dominance on his past and over the narration. Resisting the flow of time in the novel symbolically resembles Tony's witnessing the Severn Bore, which is a natural event as a river rushes upstream, showing Tony's endeavours to tell a nice story. Inevitably, Tony later admits his defeat: "I know I couldn't change, or mend, anything now" (Barnes, 2011: 149).

Thus, Tony in *The Sense of an Ending* appears as a problematic character and an unreliable narrator who tried to control the order and the accuracy of the events to justify his actions that later resulted in his remorse. His inability to be a passionate lover, a dependable father, and a reliable narrator mislead him. He claims that he survived to tell his own story:

How often do we tell our own life story? How often do we adjust, embellish, make sly cuts? And the longer life goes on, the fewer are those around to challenge our account, to remind us that our life is not our life, merely the story we have told about our life (Barnes, 2011, p. 202).



The study of human mind, despite all the efforts to conceptualize and rationalize it, still remains as one of the most elusive concepts. Julian Barnes's novel, *The Sense of an Ending* is deeply tied with the concepts of continuously working memory and the effect of time on it.

The narrator in *The Sense of an Ending*, Tony Webster, and his narration depends on uncertainty, with the narrator confessing trust in his memories. However, even when admitting the unreliability of his narrative, he still does not avoid claiming the past. Through Tony Webster, Barnes helps his reader to understand uncertainty and incomprehensibility are two components of the memory. If not stated explicitly, through a traumatic reading of the novel, the reader may find some indirect references to traumatic elements deeply rooted in characters' unconscious.

As Tony Webster embarks on a journey of narrating his past, he is altering the reality of the events, changing with the chronological timeline of the story and leading the reader to suspect on the concept of reality. On the unreliability of the narrators, David Lodge suggests, "unreliable narrators are invariably invented characters who are part of the stories they tell" and are used "to reveal in an interesting way the gap between appearance and reality, and to show how human beings distort or conceal the latter" (2015, pp. 154-155).

Using unreliable narrator is as old as literature, but the unreliable narrators of postmodern time are different compared to their priors as they are self-reflexive and also self-conscious in terms of their limited point of view, with subjective an interpretation of the events. From this perspective, Tony the narrator in the novel, acts as a postmodern unreliable narrator who is conscious of his unreliability yet seems to enjoy authorial power and thus altering and re-inventing his past in self-preserving way.

Representing Freud's discussions on the repressed memories, Tony claims that people develop specific methods as mechanism of self-preservation to cope with the possible damage including the repression of memories, also altering or omission of certain memories. On the other hand, one of the major damages occurs as Tony receives a letter from Adrian announcing his affair with Veronica and kindly requests Tony's blessing.

Likely, the reader realized that throughout the novel, what Tony does is re-inventing speculations about the people once involved in their mutual past, however, since he does not share any other perspectives or possibilities, which leaves the reader in doubt. Close to the ending of the novel he claims:

It strikes me that this may be one of the differences between youth and age: when we are young, we invent different futures for ourselves; when we are old, we invent different pasts for others (Barnes, 2011, p.80).

Throughout the story, what Tony aims to do is recreating an alternative story focusing mostly on the victimization of himself by Veronica and Adrian, while the real story turns out to be the relationship between Tony and Veronica's mother Sarah, possibly ending with a disabled child. In order to show himself as a victim, Tony's narration abounds in gaps and omissions. From traumatic reading of the passage, one may argue that Tony's mind, whether consciously or not, portrayed himself as a victim, reminding him that he was the one hurt. He created a Tony-ed version of the events. He diverted the narrative into his own version of truth interpreting the events.

It is hard to decide what Tony does is conscious or unconscious, but there are multiple times when he is aware of his manipulation of the memories and preventing a possible chaos. Tony says, "If I can't be sure of the actual events anymore, I can at least be true to the impressions those facts left." (Barnes, 2011, p.4). In the scene where Tony meets his wife

Margaret, whom he later divorced, he omits Veronica from his life, which is a conscious decision. He pretends that Veronica never existed. Tony claims:

The odder part was that it was easy to give this version of my history because that's what I'd been telling myself anyway. I viewed my time with Veronica as a failure-her contempt, my humiliation- and expunged it from the record. I had kept no letters, and only a single photograph, which I hadn't looked at in ages. (Barnes, 2011, p. 69)

Reading Tony's account of story, the reader acts like a detective trying to follow the truth beneath his version of the narrative. In Freudian sense, memory distortions appear due to the exclusion of painful memories from consciousness, thus the past should be read as part of a psychoanalytic process leading the patient to retrieve lost traumatic memories. The narrator forgot and altered certain memories as a means of survival, intentionally, in order to protect his own self because of the burden of guilt he had been carrying over years. However, time as an intricate web forced him to go back and forth to confront with his guilt. Tony, therefore, can be accepted as a character showing his inability to cope with his past traumas and the story's end gives the reader feeling that the sense of guilt and shame will not end with the end of book, but will continue in future as well. In conclusion, the narrator of Julian Barnes's novel has told the story in self-preservation fashion, justifying his actions from his own perspective and not providing any other possibility of truth.

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