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POSTMODERN LIQUIDATIONS? MARINE METAPHORS, ETHICAL CONUNDRUMS AND COMPLICITOUS CRITIQUE IN JULIAN BARNES'S *A HISTORY OF THE WORLD IN 10½ CHAPTERS*

Estella Antoaneta Ciobanu
Ovidius University of Constanţa

Abstract: *This paper examines certain episodes from Julian Barnes's postmodernist novel* A History of the World in 10½ Chapters *(1989) to unravel the ethical conundrums which a light-hearted parody of Christian narratives and articles of faith may broach. I apply Willem Schinkel's theorisation, in* Aspects of Violence *(2010), of* liquidation as method *to suggest that, at least in Barnes's case, exposure of ethical lapse does not ipso facto eradicate that which it critiques, which verifies Linda Hutcheon's postulate about postmodernist* complicitous critique *(in both theory and practice). Through the slippery metaphorical pairing of voyage/freedom/escape and boat/security/containment against implicit or explicit seascapes, History not only re-enacts the biblical Noah's Flood scenario in novel guises, but also suggests that parodic re-visions of tradition and generally of the past cannot liquidate (eradicate) the latter through the deconstruction of premier topoi, but can perhaps liquefy (dilute) conviction regarding the robustness of received wisdom.*

Keywords*: Julian Barnes,* A History of the World in 10½ Chapters, *seascape, voyage, liquidation of theory (Willem Schinkel), ethics, representation, epistemic violence, complicitous critique (Linda Hutcheon)*

"How do you turn catastrophe into art?" (Barnes 125), the narrator of chapter 5 in Julian Barnes's novel *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989) wonders rhetorically. The query, a self-standing paragraph, opens the second part of a chapter ("Shipwreck") centred on a historical catastrophe and its semiotic remediation.[1] If in the first part we "witness" the events, in the second one Barnes's narrator contemplates aesthetically and ethically Théodore Géricault's Romantic painting, *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819), eventuated from the catastrophic happening at sea (1816) recounted in a survivors' memoir (1817) – the same source which grounds the chapter's first part.

Indeed, seascapes often, though not exclusively, frame the events narrated in the ten chapters of Barnes's novel,[2] and the events themselves verge on catastrophe. Only the oddly numbered half chapter (entitled "Intermezzo") is exempt from both such framing and the narrative-descriptive structure. Barnes explicitly devotes the Intermezzo to ethical and

[1] I use *remediation* in Bolter and Grusin's sense: that new communication technologies challenge the cognitive-epistemic capacities of their predecessors, even as the latter attempt to reaffirm themselves; remediation also entails re-mediating prior modes of social and cultural modes of communication (Bolter and Grusin 5–15).

[2] The liquid element is absent in chapters 3 ("The Wars of Religion"), centred on a medieval animal trial, 6 ("The Mountain"), on a 19th-century Irish woman's Mount Ararat expedition, 9 ("Project Ararat"), on the American football player turned volunteer astronaut who follows, in the 20th century, in the footsteps of the Victorian woman of chapter 6, and 10 ("The Dream"), on the afterlife in a customised heaven.

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epistemic issues centred on love, history and representation, a different tune indeed. However, if the half chapter as supplement renders this intermezzo, if not the entire novel, a mock-historiographic metafiction, to borrow Linda Hutcheon's term, the ten chapters, irrespective of their settings, address metafictional, epistemic and moral issues not less obtrusively, but apparently unsystematically. On the face of it, the liquid setting of Noah's Flood, the biblical episode which chapter 1 mocks in every sense, appears to liquidate earnestness – through the tongue-in-cheek, bottom-up approach – and therewith ethical questions too. Carnivalisation reigns supreme, and even the humblest character – the woodworm narrator – will now sound haughty and smug. However, as the woodworm who narrates (*das erzählende Ich*) cannot belong to the group that experienced Noah's Flood (*das erlebende Ich*), the chapter's narrative unreliability may virtually infect the entire novel. "My account you can trust" (Barnes 4), the unreliable narrator of chapter 1 avows. Of course we cannot, and not only in retrospect. The narrator-character is actually no eye-witness, but rather a rumour-monger who relies on hearsay, on what the birds have told him – and they "could be trusted" (18) as (anonymous) informants, even if proverbially unreliable. Yet, precisely this unreliable narrator also raises the issue of the bias and inherent unreliability of accounts – such as the biblical one – which we traditionally trust as genuine and truthful. The chapter's argument, therefore, is modelled on the famous Cretan liar's paradox: what can be truly known when the one who demystifies traditionally held convictions is unreliable, at times even a mystifier (*sic*) himself, [3] and implicitly what are the ethical ramifications of both instances of de/mystification?

This paper examines certain episodes from Julian Barnes's postmodernist novel *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989) to unravel the ethical conundrums which a light-hearted parody of Christian narratives and articles of faith may broach. I apply Willem Schinkel's theorisation, in *Aspects of Violence* (2010), of *liquidation as method* to suggest that, at least in Barnes's case, exposure of ethical lapse does not ipso facto eradicate that which it critiques, which verifies Linda Hutcheon's postulate about postmodernist *complicitous critique* (in both theory and practice). Through the slippery metaphorical pairing of voyage/freedom/escape and boat/security/containment against implicitly or explicitly oppressive seascapes, *History* not only re-enacts the biblical Noah's Flood scenario in novel guises, but also suggests that parodic re-visions of tradition and generally of the past cannot liquidate (eradicate) the latter through the deconstruction of premier topoi, but can perhaps liquefy (dilute) conviction regarding the robustness of received wisdom.

Willem Schinkel theorises *liquidation as method* as a follow-up to his critique of traditional approaches to violence, which he faults for reifying violence. Whilst his critique of the literature on violence is certainly warranted, certain theoretical approaches prior to Schinkel's are worth recalling here. Already in the 1980s–1990s various theorists started investigating what an edited volume calls the *violence of representation*. As Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (3–9) sum up the volume's research scope, what at a literal or pictorial level appears to be a scene representing violence, on closer inspection can reveal a rhetorical argument which has mystified its violence of representing the *us*/*them* binary, especially the allotment of subject positions and therewith speech entitlement (see also de Lauretis 240). Parsing Barnes's first chapter in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* demonstrates no less, and moreover does so in metaepistemically self-conscious terms, as we shall see.

[3] The narrator of chapter 1 provides aetiological explanations for the inexistence of what are now regarded as mere mythological beings, the unicorn and basilisk: they are extinct species due to incidents aboard Noah's Ark.

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Save the salience of physical violence, the deconstruction of representations of violence as violence of representation tallies with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (275–9) analysis of the scope of representation. The "staging of the world in representation – its scene of writing, its *Darstellung* – dissimulates the choice of and need for 'heroes,' paternal proxies, agents of power – *Vertretung*" (Spivak 279): texts and images alike often focus attention on representation as *Darstellung* (depiction in any medium), and deflect attention from its underpinnings, representation as *Vertretung* (juridical-political standing-for). Hence, Spivak (280–94) critiques the *epistemic violence* of western representations, especially of the subaltern other, through the intellectuals' complicity in legitimating an oppressive status quo. The interplay of *Darstellung* and *Vertretung* becomes particularly compelling in religious representation, as Barnes amply demonstrates, especially in the *History*'s first and final chapters.

To revert to Schinkel, he champions liquidation as a methodological strategy which "entails the critique of absolute definitions and theories of violence, of theories that claim to capture violence as a whole" (Schinkel 4). The conceptual liquidation of violence "is an attempt to liquify, or make fluid, what theories of violence all too often solidify, and to thereby harvest and preserve the *aspects of violence* that many theories do correctly but incorporate in a one-sided manner" (4, original emphasis). Schinkel (5) insists that he does not reject the possibility of substantial claims concerning the nature and presence of violence. Rather, he aims "to *liquidate* any *theory* of violence, and to similarly *liquidate* any *empirical definition* of violence" (5, original emphasis) in a bid "to tear down, to counter claims of absoluteness, and at the same time to liquify, to make fluid," *without* thereby also eliminating "that which is at the core of such a claim and which may be of fundamental relevance" (5):

> To liquidate a theory is to strip it bare to its most fundamental insights, and to then preserve those insights by storing them in a horizon of aspects that each shed their own distinctive light on a certain phenomenon. Each theory of violence and each empirical definition of it will possibly have at its core a relevant aspect, a relevant searchlight that sheds light on one side of the phenomenon of violence, but since each theory and each empirical definition tends to overstate its case, these turn into abstractions that freeze the flowing reality of violence. To liquidate is to recognize that with each objectification something is lost, since the processual character of reality does not allow freeze-framing without the loss of relevant aspects. Therefore, to keep those aspects from totalizing, like, for instance, a pre-reflexive understanding of violence has the tendency to become a naive realistic view on what violence "is," is to keep open the possibility of, as Wittgenstein has said, "changing the aspect."
>
> (Schinkel 5)

Schinkel's theoretical position can conceivably be extrapolated to the study of postmodernist practices at large, even where they depart from any kind of violence as their topic,[4] for, violence notwithstanding, liquidation and liquefying can be construed in abstract terms to reference concept dynamics. Specifically, I am persuaded by Schinkel's proposal to apply liquidation – viz. both dismantling *totalising* theoretical claims and liquefying (fluidising) concepts – as a paradoxically solid (viz. robust) conceptual approach to the complexity of both life and creation (whether artistic or theoretical) in postmodernity. In this respect, Schinkel's critique of totalising theories of violence is consistent with Lyotard's (31–41)

[4] This is not to say that Barnes's novel does not address violence explicitly, for instance in chapter 1.

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overview of (post-)Enlightenment totalising theories of intellectual progress and social emancipation, which postmodernist critique has attempted to delegitimate.

It may be argued that postmodernist theoretical and practical attempts to liquidate/liquefy received wisdom do not thereby terminate the latter. Rather, they suspend, if only provisionally, the "willing suspension of disbelief" that some of our contemporaries have embraced. As Rosi Braidotti (65–6) cogently notes, totalising theories have never seen their demise simply because, or when, any postmodernist theorist decrees their suspicious nature. Political or religious discourse – whether framing the "War on Terror" or the belief in the transcendental causation of life on earth – has not ceased appealing to comprehensive explicatory schemes. Nor have most people, including theorists and artists, stopped accepting such discourse as valid. Even those who have, moreover, may not necessarily fully endorse the proposition that only partial knowledges and *petites histoires* can account for the complexity of life in the social, however partially and provisionally; and their lapse of faith may sometimes be unconscious rather than deliberate. The case of *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* may be even more complicated, for Barnes's novel is a parodic work and as such it includes, by definition, that which it parodies.

Barnes's *History* dramatises, I submit, the postmodern *metafictional* liquidation of the grand narrative of history as progress towards knowledge of the past. Two interrelated aspects of this liquidation interest me here: (a) the liquidation of the historiographic narrative schema of coherence and teleological progress – debunked by historian Hayden White as but narrative emplotment – through fragmentation into historically unrelated chapters; and (b) the liquidation of historical certainty, manifested in the historians' traditional, though not exclusive, claims to certainty and to historiography's veridicality. The former strategy is responsible for the ten-chapter structure of the novel's historiographic metanarrative, appended a dubious supplement, the half chapter of the title, between chapters 8 and 9. This Derridean supplement undermines numerology's thesis that ten is the perfect number, just as it mockingly erodes the definition and function of a chapter: what would a half chapter be? The latter aspect, the liquidation of historical certainty, becomes apparent in the choice of both narrative genres – short story, diary, memoir, letters, court transcripts – and "informant" types, typically the marginal (or the "subaltern other") whose claims to knowledge and (self-)representation have traditionally been thwarted, engendering what Foucault names "subjugated knowledges" (*Power*/*Knowledge* 81).[5] By the time we reach the final chapter, on the Christian heaven, our historical and eschatological certainties have been liquefied: Barnes's heaven is a consumer's paradise[6] which has abrogated the law of crime and punishment as the religious avatar of the law of causation in deterministic thinking.

Notwithstanding, like Foucault (according to feminist critics, e.g. Teresa de Lauretis), Barnes adopts, unquestioningly/uncritically, the traditional masculinist perspective; his novel thereby endorses another grand-narrative claim: to *know* the *world*. Admittedly, the

[5] I am drawing upon Foucault's theorisation of knowledge. In *The Birth of the Clinic* (137), Foucault contrasts *savoir*, "epistemic knowledge," with *connaissance*, "accumulated, refined, deepened, adjusted knowledge," i.e. empirical-scientific knowledge. However, in his lecture of 7 January 1976, included in *Power*/*Knowledge*, he addresses another dimension of knowledge, that of its legitimation through representation (Foucault 80–4): the "totalitarian theories" (80) of institutionalised "erudite knowledge" (83) have disqualified and marginalised *le savoir des gens*, "a popular knowledge" (82), thereby deeming illegitimate the subaltern's "particular, local, regional knowledge" (82). Foucault distinguishes between such "subjugated knowledges" (81) and "a general commonsense knowledge" (82). Arguably, we can trace in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* the tension accruing to subjugated knowledges as a "historical knowledge of struggles" (Foucault, *Power*/*Knowledge* 83) with hierarchy-prone hegemonic knowledge, yet Barnes's is but a mock epistemic battle.

[6] The pun was contemplated by the author: in chapter 10, on return from his trip to the US the narrator-protagonist's brother-in-law wishes to experience heaven as "go[ing] shopping in America" (Barnes 286).

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presupposition of comprehensiveness in both approach and epistemic ambit, apparent in the title's "world" appended the definite article, is somewhat toned down by Barnes's narrative strategy – to make up "history" as a random collection of *petites histoires* – and, in minor key, by his title's Joycean indefinite article qua number to indicate that other possibilities do exist. Yet what would they be? Perhaps the traditional non-fragmented perspective on history; or perhaps a view which transcends Euro-Americancentrism, for instance by circumventing the conceptual pitfall of positing *difference* as *difference from*; or perhaps a version that recuperates women without rendering them either whores or dubious accessories to men's myth-making and/or enterprises, i.e. without keeping women in their patriarchally allotted places, in a gendered version of Euro-Americancentrism.

Let us examine how some of Julian Barnes's *petites histoires* implicitly claim to liquefy patriarchal grand narratives. My *reflection* – to use a water term (see Bachelard ix) akin to *speculation*, which Irigaray (144–5) deconstructs in her 1974 *Speculum de l'autre femme* – concerns Barnes's use of the archetype of the biblical flood and, closely interrelated with it, Noah's ark, realised variously as voyage and sailing adrift. My purpose is to address definitions – and propose the de-finition/un-limiting/liquefying – of history as his-story/her-story and thus issues of representation in the dual sense of *Darstellung* and *Vertretung*. In *History*, the kaleidoscopic *watery imagery*, whether unnamed oceans (chapters 1 and 4), named or implicit oceans (chapters 5 and 7) and seas (chapter 2), or named rivers (chapter 8), provides the paradoxically *fundamental* topos which unites most of Barnes's otherwise disconnected stories; so does the simultaneously containing and constraining boat. Save for the first chapter, the conceptual matrix of the novel, which includes all three motifs, and for the tenth/final chapter, the denouement of all myth-making, which includes none, the other chapters are connected, in the absence of the first two motifs, by the stealthily present woodworm. Its activity undermines human efforts at control/predictability; under the circumstances, the quasi-invisible parasite acts as a liquefying agent in its own right, despite its solid habitat. Paradoxically, then, the fragmentary history strives for coherence motifically. This also affords pattern recognition, like the survival strategies of cruising tourists during the terrorist hijack (chapter 2), of Jews prior to the outbreak of WWII (chapter 7), or of the *Titanic* guests (chapter 7), which recalls the Christian practice of typological interpretation of the Bible, such as reading the Abraham and Isaac sacrifice as prefiguring God the Father's sacrifice of his Son. Furthermore, the novel's quasi-teleological progression from the first chapter, the biblical Flood, to the tenth and final one, the Christian otherworld qua customised heaven for all, imposes an alpha-and-omega pattern of sorts on the novelistic puzzle- (or patch-) work. Our deeply ingrained reliance on, indeed need for, coherence gains the upper hand and renders *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* fairly coherent once we unravel its Euro-American Christian-centrism.

At the most basic level, *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* frequently uses marine or, infrequently, riverine settings,[7] as well as voyages. With Gaston Bachelard in mind, it can be argued that "under the superficial imagery of water" (Bachelard 5) "a series of progressively deeper and more tenacious images" (5) will elicit Barnes's reader's "feeling for this penetration in his [*sic*] own contemplations; beneath the imagination of forms, he will soon sense the opening up of an imagination of substances" (Bachelard 5–6). However, Bachelard's "imagination of substances" – a metaphor for materiality, or material cause –

[7] The only riverine setting appears in chapter 8 ("Upstream!"), which consists of a series of (unanswered) telegrams by an actor, Charlie, to his girlfriend, Pippa. Charlie is shooting a film in the Amazonian rainforest, most likely in Venezuela (for capital Caracas is mentioned), possibly on the Guaire River. The chapter offers an upsurge of sentiment which ends up in the revelation that Pippa has left Charlie, paired with his frightened speculations why a fellow actor drowned during the shooting of a scene on the river.

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becomes, in Barnes, the beyond-the-setting materiality of cognitive depths: his seascapes and/or voyages reveal themselves, to the alert mind, as metaphors for cognitive opportunities, if not of the most desirable sort. Ironically, Irigaray's deconstruction of the *speculum*, the mirror best known nowadays as a medical instrument for gynaecological examination, to reveal its import for masculine speculative activities centred on metaphysics (Irigaray 144–5), further demonstrates the convergence between the fluid and solid mirrors – watery and solid surfaces, respectively – to offer prosthetic aids, including imagery, for conceptual investigation. Paradoxically, then, the grounding of philosophical speculation/reflection lies outside the Cartesian mind, in the *res extensa* – in Irigaray's case, the uterus – traditionally disavowed by philosophers of Cartesian persuasion, like Plato, even before Descartes.

On the one hand, the voyages which Barnes recounts rewrite old or even traditional sources. Such is the re-vision, in chapter 1 ("The Stowaway"), of the biblical account of Noah's Flood: the grotesque underside revealed here by the woodworm narrator – consistent with the material bodily lower stratum theorised by Bakhtin (chap. 5) – demythicises the biblical story as but one recounted by the victor turned oppressor. Deeper still, it invites ethical reflection in the margin of the novel's complicitous critique of patriarchy, to which I will return soon. Likewise, chapter 5 ("Shipwreck") fictionalises historical facts turned, in the meantime, into history and art: the star-crossed raft of the *Medusa* as a setting for human incompetence, meanness, struggles for survival, and cannibalism becomes the subject matter of Géricault's painting and of Barnes's ethical musings, with Michelangelo's *Flood* at the back of the novelist's (and my) mind. On the other hand, the voyage may be a relatively recent one, based on true facts, like the account of the Jews' maritime deportation from Germany, in chapter 7 ("Three Stories"). Alternatively, it may develop fictitious yet not unlikely scenarios, such as the terrorist hijack of a western cruiser to raise political demands, in chapter 2 ("The Visitors"), or nuclear catastrophe, domestic violence and female oppression under "scientifically" legitimated patriarchy, in chapter 4 ("The Survivor").

Beneath this narrative veneer run, in each case, deeply troubling ethical dilemmas which erode the certainty of our robust subject positions network and prescribed/prejudiced evaluations. The novel's first voyage, aboard the fateful Ark, whose "high seas of rumour" (Barnes 23) – as Noah would say, the narrator dutifully explains – fill in the gaps of evolutionism and legendary imagination alike, introduces the first ethical conundrum: about the righteousness of the righteous elect. All other seascape chapters will sound this question time and again, if under different guises, to reveal the unscrupulous dominant individual (white and male) or group (western and elitist), most often working in tandem. Chapter 2 exposes both the philandering boss for abandoning his secretary, turned into a flirt, to save his skin, and the West for interfering in eastern affairs and thereby causing the loss of innocent lives. Chapter 4 exposes both the mean egotistical alpha-male, in a lopsided domestic relation, and the self-centred western governments responsible for nuclear catastrophe, at global level, even as the hospital "subplot" undermines all this by insinuating that the female narrator is mentally unbalanced. Chapter 5 exposes both nepotism and survival-driven ruthlessness, on the one hand, and, metafictionally, the problematic ethical relationship between catastrophe and art, on the other. In chapter 7, each of the three stories exposes individual selfishness (the male *Titanic* survivor; the individuals who mediate the Jews' expatriation from Nazi Germany; the biblical Jonah intent on pursuing his business) and in the Jews' case also the western states' vested political interests in managing human disaster. Although not against a seascape, chapter 10 most provocatively depicts the otherworld as a consumerist heaven that accommodates everyone, with their peculiar wishes and desires, including Hitler, to the consternation of the narrator and, vicariously, of the righteous implied reader. Ranked as a matter of shallow judgement in a mock trial, in chapter 10, righteousness might accordingly

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be read back into chapter 1 to render its divine judgement of sinful humankind equally shallow and conventional. Mutatis mutandis, the first chapter's Noah is no better, in his extermination policy, than the tenth chapter's Hitler, by contrast a low-profile character, unlike his historical counterpart, allotted no voice but just mannerisms. Not only has the F/flood surge swept clean the earth, but it has liquefied any distinction in worth all the way to the afterlife.

Such liquefaction of ethical difference, or ethical de-differentiation, through immersion not only in the seascape but especially in the grand narratives of the West, here rooted in Christianity, can only be enacted at a cost – of reliability – which jeopardises the entire ethical system. The unreliable narrator (of chapters 1 and 10, in the latter through the time-honoured motif of the dream within the dream/death/fiction) offers one strategic tool in liquefying difference and thereby ethical tensions too. Another strategy is the confusingly alleged-yet-seemingly-proven madness of the female protagonist of chapter 4. Yet another is the customised, consumerism-driven *trompe-l'oeil* heaven of chapter 10. The spectrum of unreliability is too diverse to warrant faulting Barnes that he challenges the credibility of multiculturalism through the erosion of hierarchies of moral value, pre-eminently showcased in Noah and Hitler, respectively, as the alpha and omega figures of the novel's alpha and omega chapters of ever iterative beginnings and endings.

Let us parse Barnes's ethical musings on art, especially when art feeds on human suffering, for the issue silently relates to and, arguably, bears on the dilemma of righteousness and right deserts first broached in the alpha chapter and eventually mockingly unravelled in the omega chapter. As we have seen, chapter 5 queries: "How do you turn catastrophe into art?" (Barnes 125). Indeed, art has turned the unfortunate 1816 French expedition to Senegal into unheroic survival fuelled by Christian hope in salvation, or at least rescue. In more obviously political terms than chapter 5, chapter 2 shows the Arab hijacking of a cruiser in the Mediterranean, aimed to blackmail western governments to free the hijackers' fellow terrorists; the demands are made persuasive through the physical liquidation of innocent hostages. Yet who is innocent, the chapter intimates, when we live in the social and when the personal is political and the other way round? Who is undeserving of liquidation, chapter 2 wonders, when one can save one's life by turning others into the terrorists' hands, just as the nineteenth-century Frenchmen of chapter 5 did on the raft of the *Medusa* by cannibalising their weaker fellows? Arguably, chapter 2 twists and liquefies *politically* the problematic ethics of Christian atonement theory – peace-making through the *sacrifice of the powerless* – in terms not dissimilar to those of the Holocaust story in chapter 7, whose Jews are the currency (providers) for western states eager not so much to thwart Hitler's ethnic cleansing plans as to secure their own financially rewarding conditions. The *Titanic* story in the same chapter 7 recounts, in lesser, grotesque key, the "undeserving" survival of a male *Titanic* passenger through cowardly recourse to drag to be allowed onto a boat. Who "deserves" to die or not to die an untimely, violent death? How is history being "made" and "unmade" in ethical terms? The fluid settings of chapters 2 and 7 render visible the liquidation of ethical and epistemic certainty and the necessary liquefying/fluidisation of our conceptual tools and epistemic positioning.

There is room for unwholesome complicities with the agents of crime, even (mass) murder, these chapters amply demonstrate. Yet, there is also room for critique, if problematic in its fundamentals, as other chapters suggest more insidiously. Critical though it may be of mainstream historiography, of uncritical reception and subsequent dissemination of received wisdom, especially religious tradition, and generally of commonplace, Barnes's *History* nevertheless leaves intact the outlook, criteria and practices of androcentrism. In the parodic chapter 10, women act as sexual service providers on call; men's – never women's – dreams

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come true in the afterlife. Parody, Linda Hutcheon has argued, may often be guilty of complicitous critique (*Politics of Postmodernism* 2–4): criticising entails "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signaling of difference at the very heart of similarity," which "paradoxically enacts both change and cultural continuity" ("The Politics of Postmodernism" 185). In *History*, the earliest case of complicitous critique occurs in chapter 1: Barnes's revisionist his-story of the biblical Flood depicts women in accordance with traditional stereotypes, here the whore, and moreover deems them morally responsible for the extinction of certain animal species. Ham's wife's voracious sexuality looks like a narrative remediation of Diego Guttiérez's 1564 map of America, with its metaphorical construal of the fourth known continent as a most perilous place for male European conquistadores due to the twofold aggressor, sea monsters and alluring mermaids (Ciobanu 10–12). The only voice ever heard in Julian Barnes's first chapter is the narrator's – and an unreliable narrator, at that. Neither Noah and his sons, nor the allegedly sexually voracious anonymous wife, is ever entitled to direct speech. Nor any of the stowaway woodworm's informants is, either.

Contrariwise, chapter 4 ("The Survivor") features Kathleen Ferris's plight in her own words, spliced with the doctors'. Does her direct speech entitlement generate a credible story, or is she just as unreliable a narrator as the woodworm of chapter 1? Kath's story depicts alternately the woman floating adrift and being confined either to abusive home (through carceral heteronormativity) or to abusive psychiatric hospital (through disciplinary science/medicine). Her account liquefies the borderline between everyday reality (that of white/northern supremacist masculinity) and high politics degenerating into nuclear catastrophe, between domestic violence and ecological catastrophe, and, at another narrative level, between reality and hallucination. Nonetheless, precisely Kath's intractable hallucination, aetiology-wise, raises perhaps the most compelling ethical conundrum in Barnes's *History*: does her hallucination owe to sun-stroke during her voyage southwards to flee both abusive partner and abusive politicians, or is it rather symptomatic of a genuine mental condition – schizophrenia, polymorphous personality, etc? Is her psychosomatic condition – skin deterioration and hair loss alongside hallucinations – genuinely investigated and offered palliative treatment by the male doctors who attend Kath?[8] Or do the physicians belong in the league of patriarchy's mystifying agents, whose answers "doctor" reality? Could the latter be rather the backlash of Kath's mind's "fabulation," i.e. "keep[ing] a few true facts and spin[ning] a new story round them" (Barnes 110)? Could, moreover, *cross-voicing* female plight in this fictional account of disastrous personal relationships under patriarchy provide an "authentic" account? The chapter's narrative technique, with its third-person narrator and abundant free indirect style outside the dialogic make-up of the hospital scenes, complicates this classic instance of male authorial "transvestite ventriloquism" (Elizabeth Harvey), i.e. "the use of the feminine voice by a male author in a way that appears to efface originary marks of gender" (Harvey 16): in political and ethical terms, "ventriloquism is an *appropriation* of the feminine voice" which "reflects and contributes to a larger cultural

[8] When Kath complains that "something terrible was happening to her skin" (Barnes 99), the fractured text introduces the nightmares peopled by male doctors. The (hi)story of Kath's disease – and dys-ease in a patriarchal society – is thus inscribed into skin and mind alike, as she aptly suggests during her medical examinations (104). As a woman, she has been poisoned as much by convenience foods and radioactive dust – yet men too have – and therefore by the purportedly progressive science, as by the post-Enlightenment rationalist episteme. The gentleness of Kath's nightmarish visitors alludes to the working of the *micro-physics of power* (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 98–107; *Discipline and Punish* 149): a coerced bed-ridden condition imprisons the woman in the hospital cage, belittled to the condition of helpless infants and untamed zoo beasts, whilst also being strapped up so as not to protest (Barnes 100–1, 103).

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silencing of women" (Harvey 12).[9] Does Kath truly speak, or is her voice liquidated at the very moment of its emergence? Does she speak whilst *drifting* in her boat or when *confined* to the hospital bed and nightmarish doctor fabulation?

Unlike in the other "voyage" chapters of Barnes's novel, in chapter 4 the opposition between sea and containing structure (either house/home/family or hospital/dis-ease) is not just total, but able to wage a total conceptual war. Floating adrift images metaphorically the young woman's self-assumed agency and determination to free herself from societal constraints, even as the story repeatedly alludes to the biblical Noah's ark, hardly the institution of freedom, at least in view of Barnes's first chapter. Not a God-sent flood to liquidate human iniquity, but the human-engineered nuclear disaster liquidating the reindeer habitat persuades Kath to leave the world behind. Not external orders, but attachment to her pet and the accidental encounter with another cat makes Kath board the feline couple onto her boat and witness/dream they reproduce. On the contrary, the hospital bed renders Kath the prisoner of disciplinary techniques which strike her as coterminous with every thing patriarchal she has fled from. Drifting across the high seas (of hallucination), Kath frees herself from the shackles of political and heterosexual normalisation, particularly hurtful for women. Or doesn't she? Although the chapter ends with the narrative strand which shows Kath blithely afloat towards freedom, or at least away from patriarchal strictures and political disaster, doesn't the very intertwining of the narrative strands – voyaging *adrift* and being *caged in* the hospital *bar* bed, like in Noah's ark – suggest the illusory nature of *freedom from* when severed from any *freedom to*?

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We have seen that those chapters, in Barnes's *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, which have a seascape setting tend also to repurpose it metaphorically. Willem Schinkel's theorisation of *liquidation as method* may, arguably, provide a useful analytic tool to address whether, and if so, how the novel's marine environment is liquid beyond mere substantial veneer. Such chapters systematically address ethical issues and suggest that taking tradition at face value against a rigidly poised ethical system may be, and has been, counterproductive or downright falsifying. Using the short story format for these *petites histoires* provides an apt re-vision strategy to investigate what is depicted (represented: *darstellen*) in our received wisdom against the invisible background of what or who is used in the place of (represented: *vertreten*) that which the text depicts. Barnes's liquid setting becomes indeed the thing wherein we catch the conscience of western thought tradition, especially the victor's-view-is-*the*-view approach as unravelled especially in chapter 1. Granted the mock comprehensive scope of Barnes's historiographic metafiction and its systematic parody, the novel's insidious conceptual liquidation of totalising convictions and grand narratives of history, scientific progress and social emancipation cannot but be welcome, or at least is consistent with certain postmodern trends to delegitimate totalising theories. The marine settings also aid in the process of novelistic liquefying of rigid ethical positions – individual agents and collective outlook alike.

Notwithstanding, what remains stubbornly solid in Barnes's *History* is the patriarchal and western *Weltanschauung*: the critique of the victor's view turned capital-H History falls short of also critiquing received wisdom on, say, women's sexual proclivities and/or cognitive incapacity – the his-story of western philosophy. Even the ethically and epistemically most

[9] In this connection, see Diana Wallace's analysis of how May Sinclair's and Edith Wharton's fiction "ventriloquiz[es] the male" artist.

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sensitive chapter 4 suggests, through its cross-voicing of Kathleen, that critique may easily, if sometimes perhaps inadvertently, yield to complicities with the tenor of what is being critiqued. The chapter's take on fabulation, in many ways coterminous with chapter 10's take on the dream of waking (from death into the hereafter), may point not so much to the postmodern liquidation of certainty, of distinguishing between reality and hallucination. Rather, it points, more insidiously than anywhere in the novel, to the cognitive predicament of circumventing patriarchally hardwired thought processes which render the knower cognitively unreliable in women's, but not men's, case: chapter 4 simply endorses the traditional disentitlement of women as thinking/knowing subjects and legitimate agents. Furthermore, if we read chapter 4 together with chapter 1, the alleged unreliability of the protagonist of the former is endorsed by the proven unreliability of the narrator of the latter, which renders the two characters birds of a feather: subjugated knowledges will remain subjugated because distrusted. If, moreover, we factor in the ethical conclusions of chapter 10, that crime-and-punishment is but a myth for disciplining people and that the hereafter is but a dream to wake from, or perhaps to continue dreaming to boredom, then the cognitive uncertainty of chapter 4 turns out to be not worth examining at all. Nor is investigating the problematic ethics of translating catastrophe into art (*Darstellung*) worth either, in chapter 5, for all these instances cannot truly challenge – liquefy, if not liquidise – the politics of politico-ideological and epistemic representation (*Vertretung*).

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