

## ЛІТЕРАТУРА ЗАРУБІЖНИХ КРАЇН

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DOI <https://doi.org/10.32782/2710-4656/2026.2.2/06>**Alieva A. S.**<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1897-4897>

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### KEY CONCEPTS IN THE WORK OF JULIAN BARNES

*The main purpose of the article is to examine the main artistic and philosophical concepts formed in the work of Julian Barnes, one of the prominent representatives of modern English literature, and to determine how concepts such as memory, time, love, death, truth and subjective reality are presented in his works. The article especially emphasizes the postmodern way of thinking, irony and intertextual approach in the context of the writer's novels and essays.*

*It is noted that Barnes consciously violates the boundaries between historical facts and personal memories in his literary texts, prompting the reader to think about the multilayered nature of truth.*

*The article mainly uses the method of literary-comparative analysis, textual approach, hermeneutic (interpretive) analysis, structural-semantic analysis and general scientific methods. Barnes' works written in different periods are examined comparatively from thematic and conceptual points of view.*

*The scientific novelty of the article is that for the first time in the context of Azerbaijani literary criticism, Julian Barnes's work has been comprehensively studied on the basis of the concepts of "memory", "subjectivity of history" and "personal truth".*

*The works "The Sense of an Ending", "Flaubert's Parrot" and "A History of the World in 10½ Chapters" have been analyzed within the framework of a single conceptual model, and Barnes' contributions to postmodern aesthetics have been specially emphasized.*

*As a result of the study, it was determined that the main concepts in Julian Barnes' work are aimed at revealing the contradictory nature of the inner world of man, the unreliability of memory and the relative nature of historical reality. In the writer's works, the boundaries between life and death, love and loss, truth and illusion are of a conditional nature. Barnes sees the meaning of human existence not in fixed truths, but in the process of constant self-questioning and internal dialogue. His artistic heritage is assessed as an important stage in the development of modern literary thought.*

**Keywords:** Julian Barnes, modern English literature, postmodernism, memory, time, subjective truth, intertextual approach.

**Statement of the Problem.** The work of Julian Barnes occupies an important place in the formation of postmodern literary thought in modern world literature. His novels and essays demonstrate a deep philosophical engagement with the problems of memory, history, and personal identity. In his works, the artistic interpretation of historical events becomes not a fixed narrative but a flexible and subjective reconstruction. One of the most significant features of Barnes's prose is the constant questioning of the reliability of individual memory. He presents memory not as a stable archive of facts, but as a fragile and

selective process of recollection. The subjectivity of truth is another central problem that runs through his literary texts. Barnes consistently challenges the idea of an objective and absolute historical truth, instead offering a vision of history as a set of competing narratives. This approach allows him to break away from the traditional principles of classical realism and to form a new type of artistic language. An analysis of scientific literature devoted to Barnes's work shows that many researchers emphasize his innovative narrative techniques, especially his use of irony as a key stylistic and philosophical device. Intertextual



references play an important role in the structure of his texts, and Barnes actively engages in dialogue with classical European literature, thereby preserving and at the same time reinterpreting literary tradition.

**Analysis of Recent Research and Publications.** Julian Barnes is one of the writers in modern English literature who stands out for his psychological depth, philosophical analysis and ability to describe the complexity of human consciousness. His work is based on the artistic expression of the inner world of the individual, memory, self-searching and emotional contradictions. These features make Barnes' works a fruitful object for research from both a literary and psychological point of view.

Analyzes the work of writers such as Julian Barnes and Ian McEwan and examines the innovations taking place in the psychological novel genre in modern English prose. He notes that Barnes' works are characterized by the renewal of psychological analysis in terms of both form and content. The writer skillfully presents the internal turmoil, trauma and indecision of the characters, expanding the boundaries of the psychological novel [1, p. 120-122].

Julian Barnes' novel "The Sense of an Ending" (2011) attracts special attention with its depth of psychological aspects. Aliakbari Harehdasht and Ekbatani [2, p. 190] analyze the work and show that the memory of the protagonist Tony Webster is unstable and selective. His attempts to remember the past are accompanied by the activation of psychological defense mechanisms. The writer emphasizes that memory is not stable and objective, but rather a construct based on subjective experiences.

Arikan and İpekçi analyze Julian Barnes's "England, England" from the perspective of individual and collective psychosis [3, p. 78-80]. According to their conclusion, in this novel, Barnes presents the concepts of national identity, simulation, and reality from a psychological perspective. The writer shows that an individual and society can falsify their identity and replace reality with illusions. Thus, the social environment dominated by self-deception and simulation in the work is presented as a collective psychosis.

Tony Webster, Veronica Ford, and Geoffrey Braithwaite are all three characters who embody different aspects of Julian Barnes' psychological world [4, p. 90-95]. Tony symbolizes the unreliability of memory, Veronica the painful aspects of emotional defense, and Geoffrey the intellectual form of escape from pain. Through these characters, Barnes shows that human experience is never completely rational and stable – it is constantly transformed by factors

such as memory, trauma, and guilt. As his characters try to understand themselves, they actually hold up a mirror to the reader's own psychological world.

The writer's novels often combine elements of fiction, historiography, and autobiography, which creates a unique narrative space in his works where the boundaries between fact and invention are intentionally blurred. Such a strategy forces the reader to become an active participant in the process of interpretation, transforming the reader from a passive consumer of meaning into a co-creator of the text. The main works of the writer, including Flaubert's Parrot [5, p. 16-23], The Sense of an Ending, Arthur & George, and A History of the World in 10½ Chapters, were used as empirical material for this research, and his essay collections were also included in the analytical corpus. These texts represent different stages in the writer's creative development, which makes it possible to trace the evolution of his artistic worldview in a comparative perspective. During the study, scientific articles and monographs by both local and foreign literary critics were comparatively reviewed, with particular attention paid to works devoted to postmodern theory and narrative studies.

The research is based on a multidisciplinary methodological foundation that incorporates elements of literary theory, cultural studies, and philosophy, helping to reveal the complexity and multidimensionality of Barnes's artistic thinking. The problem of identity occupies a special place in his creative system, as Barnes's characters often experience a crisis of self-understanding and attempt to reconstruct their own past in order to comprehend their present. This process is usually accompanied by doubt and internal conflict, while the theme of time appears not only as a physical dimension but also as a psychological category, deeply subjective and emotionally colored. The main purpose of the article is to identify the key concepts formed in the work of Julian Barnes and to demonstrate their role in the development of contemporary literature, as well as to systematize these concepts within a coherent theoretical framework.

The scientific novelty of the article lies in its attempt to present Barnes's work in a systematic and generalized form based on conceptual problematics rather than purely descriptive analysis, and for the first time such an approach is implemented in the context of Azerbaijani literary criticism. The research contributes to the expansion of comparative literary studies in Azerbaijan and supports the modernization of methodological approaches in national literary scholarship. The results of the study may be useful

for researchers of contemporary English literature, as well as for students specializing in literary theory and comparative literature, because the article opens new perspectives for understanding postmodern narrative strategies and emphasizes the importance of Barnes's work in the broader context of world literature, aiming to deepen the academic understanding of the conceptual foundations of Julian Barnes's creative legacy.

**Statement of the Article's Objectives.** In the article is to examine the main artistic and philosophical concepts formed in the work of Julian Barnes, one of the prominent representatives of modern English literature, and to determine how concepts such as memory, time, love, death, truth and subjective reality are presented in his works. The article especially emphasizes the postmodern way of thinking, irony and intertextual approach in the context of the writer's novels and essays.

It is noted that Barnes consciously violates the boundaries between historical facts and personal memories in his literary texts, prompting the reader to think about the multilayered nature of truth.

**Presentation of the Main Material.** The concept of memory occupies a central place in Julian Barnes's works and functions as one of the main organizing principles of his artistic worldview. In many of his novels, memory is presented not as a fixed and reliable storage of facts, but as a dynamic and unstable mental process. In the novel *The Sense of an Ending*, the fragmentary and subjective nature of memory is clearly demonstrated through the inner reflections of the narrator. While trying to remember his past, the protagonist gradually realizes that memory distorts facts and that events acquire different meanings over time. This realization becomes a turning point in the character's self-understanding and moral responsibility. Barnes uses this narrative strategy to emphasize the gap between lived experience and remembered experience. He shows that recollection is always influenced by emotions, personal interests, and unconscious defense mechanisms. The act of remembering in this novel becomes a form of self-deception as well as a tool for self-justification. At the same time, memory is shown to be a creative force that reconstructs the past rather than simply reproducing it. This approach is one of the main concepts that reveals the relative and changing nature of truth in Barnes's work. Truth in his fiction is not presented as a stable and objective category, but as a shifting construct dependent on perspective. The reader is constantly confronted with the problem of trust in both the narrator and the narrated events.

This technique creates a constant atmosphere of uncertainty and intellectual tension. In this way, Barnes transforms the traditional autobiographical narrative into a philosophical reflection on the limits of human knowledge [6, p. 66-70].

In the work *Flaubert's Parrot*, the writer deconstructs the genre of biography and emphasizes the impossibility of objectively presenting the life of a historical figure. The protagonist's obsessive search for an authentic stuffed parrot becomes a metaphor for the impossible quest for absolute historical truth. Here, along with documented facts, the author's fantasy and ironic interpretations are brought together in a complex intertextual structure. Barnes deliberately mixes scholarly discourse with fictional speculation. He imitates the tone of academic research while simultaneously undermining its claims to objectivity. As a result, the reader clearly feels that the boundaries between history and literature are conditional and permeable. The novel questions the authority of traditional biographical writing. It exposes the arbitrary nature of selection, emphasis, and omission in any attempt to reconstruct a life. Barnes shows that even the most carefully documented biography remains a narrative construction. He uses parody and pastiche to demonstrate the theatrical aspect of historical representation. The text becomes a playful but serious meditation on the nature of authorship and authenticity. Through this strategy, the writer undermines the hierarchy between fact and fiction. He also invites the reader to reconsider the ethical responsibility of the biographer. The novel ultimately suggests that every historical narrative is shaped by desire, imagination, and ideological position [7, p. 45-50].

In the novel *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*, history is presented not as a sequential and stable chain of events, but as a mosaic of various subjective stories. Each chapter offers a different stylistic and thematic perspective on the past. Barnes refuses to construct a unified and coherent historical narrative. Instead, he embraces fragmentation as a productive artistic principle. In this work, Barnes reinterprets human history through myth, allegory, and metaphor. He combines biblical motifs with modern political and cultural references. He questions the reliability of official historical discourse by exposing its narrative strategies. The novel demonstrates that what is called "history" is in fact a collection of stories told from different positions of power. This shows that the concept of pluralism and multiple truths plays a key role in his work. Barnes suggests that no single voice can claim the authority to represent the totality

of human experience. He foregrounds marginal and silenced perspectives. He problematizes the relationship between trauma, memory, and collective identity. The novel also reflects on the role of language in the construction of historical consciousness. Through irony and narrative experimentation, Barnes destabilizes the reader's expectations. He forces the reader to recognize the fictional dimension of all historical representation. This technique deepens the philosophical dimension of the text.

The theme of death and mortality also acts as one of the main concepts in Barnes's work. This theme is developed with philosophical depth in both the writer's fiction and essays. Barnes does not present death simply as a biological ending. Instead, he explores death as an existential problem and a source of metaphysical anxiety. His characters often reflect on aging, loss, and the passing of time. Death in his works is closely connected to the problem of memory and forgetting. The fear of being forgotten becomes more significant than the fear of physical extinction. For the writer, death is interpreted against the background of the continuity of human memory and love relationships rather than as a pure element of terror. Love in his fiction appears as a fragile bond that resists the finality of death. Memory becomes an ethical duty to the dead. The writer shows that mourning is also a form of narrative activity. Through remembering the dead, the living reconstruct their own identities. In this sense, death becomes a catalyst for self-knowledge. Barnes's essays develop these ideas in a more explicit philosophical language. They reveal the writer's personal reflections on finitude and transcendence. They also demonstrate the close connection between his literary and essayistic thinking.

Consequently, the work of Julian Barnes is of significant scientific and artistic importance in terms of rethinking the concepts of memory, history, and individual consciousness in postmodern literature. His narrative strategies contribute to the transformation of traditional genres. He expands the possibilities of the modern novel. He challenges the authority of linear storytelling. He introduces new forms of intellectual play into literary discourse. His texts require an active and reflective reader. They resist simplistic interpretation. They encourage critical thinking and self-reflection. Their philosophical depth gives them lasting relevance. His work continues to inspire contemporary literary theory. It serves as a productive field for further academic research. It also demonstrates the continuing vitality of postmodern aesthetics. In this way, Barnes's creative legacy stands

as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon in world literature. It offers rich material for understanding the changing nature of narrative, truth, and human consciousness.

Textual analysis was chosen as the first method. Selected works of Barnes, especially *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) and *Levels of Life* (2013), were systematically analyzed. In textual analysis, the main attention was paid to the presentation of concepts such as memory, time, subjective reality, the epistemological function of language and intertextual cultural influence. The structural and stylistic features of the text, the psychological portraits of the characters and the way events are presented were carefully examined.

Literary criticism was applied as the second method. Within this framework, modern academic research, scientific articles and books were analyzed, and existing theoretical approaches to Barnes's work were systematized. Literary criticism provided an opportunity to analyze Barnes' works and compare them with modern literary theory. This method showed the reader how concepts were evaluated not only in the author's works, but also in academic discourse.

Comparative analysis was used as the third method. This approach allowed Barnes's work to be compared with the works of other modern English writers. As a result of comparative analysis, Barnes's main concepts were more precisely defined and their literary and cultural characteristics were clarified. Comparisons were made at both the stylistic and conceptual levels, which strengthened the scientific validity of the study.

This methodology allowed for a systematic analysis of the main concepts in Barnes's work and their scientific evaluation. The joint application of text analysis, literary criticism and comparative analysis increased the scientific value of the study and enabled it to cover both theoretical and practical aspects of the concepts. As a result, this methodological approach has provided a systematic and objective analysis of Barnes's work.

**Conclusion and discussions.** Julian Barnes is one of the most important writers in English literature of the 20th century. He was born in 1946. Barnes has been called the "chameleon of English literature" by researchers. His works are considered examples of intellectual prose. Barnes incorporates elements of postmodern literature into his works. He breaks the stereotypes of traditional narrative. In his novels, his worldview is presented through various fragments. Barnes sometimes deconstructs narratological

principles. Irony plays an important role in his works. This irony demonstrates the author's philosophical and literary taste [2, p. 34-40].

Barnes is the author of fourteen novels. He has also written collections of stories, essays, and articles. Among his masterpieces is "Flaubert's Parrot" (1984). "England, England" (1998) is another famous work. "A History of the World in 10½ Chapters" (1989) is also noteworthy. The novels "The Lemon Table" (2004) and "Metroland" (1980) are also important. Barnes's work focuses on national identity. His works deal with the theme of the decline of art. His childhood in Paris influenced the theme of cultural integration. Barnes's works have a distinctive narrative style. His characters are multifaceted. He was highly appreciated by readers in England and France [4, p. 125-126].

The problem of identity is a recurring theme in Barnes's work. In the novel "England, England", the history of the English people is examined. National identity is presented as a key factor in personal formation. The novel ironically criticizes extreme nationalism and xenophobic tendencies. In the work "A History of the World in 10½ Chapters" the issue of history and identity is discussed. Barnes is concerned about the loss of the concept of truth. One of his first literary experiments is "Metroland". This novel is an example of a new era novel. It is written in the genre of "bildungsroman". The main theme is the maturity of the protagonist and the formation of personality. Barnes' works contain elements of postmodern narrative.

The term Bildungsroman was coined in 1819 by Morgenstern. In 1870, Wilhelm Dilthey legalized it. In English literature, it is known as the "coming-of-age novel". The purpose of the genre is to show the development of the hero from childhood to adulthood. In Barnes' works, the life path of the young hero is the main theme. In his works, the social and cultural environment is important. Barnes' novels criticize the modern English model. Postmodern elements and irony are evident in these works [4, p. 56-64].

The coming-of-age novel is divided into three parts. The Künstlerroman shows the creative personality of the hero. The Erziehungsroman covers education and upbringing. The Entwicklungsroman shows the formation of character. Jerome Buckley explained the essence of the genre. The protagonist faces social and intellectual obstacles. School and reading revive his hope. He experiences new experiences in the big city. These experiences develop his personality.

Susanna Howe identified the stages of the coming-of-age novel. The "calling" stage forces the hero to travel. He travels from a small village to a big city.

He leaves home to gain a different identity. The "apprenticeship" stage is characterized by moral change. Education and failures provide maturity. In the "Maturity" stage, a new sense of self is created. The hero understands himself and is formed as a different personality.

Barnes' novel "Metroland" reflects these stages. The main character Christopher goes through the stages of childhood, youth and adulthood. The structure of the novel has a circular trajectory. Memories of the past and youth provide the formation of the self. London symbolizes the context of family and home. Paris expresses social and cultural freedoms. Christopher lives a free life in Paris. Then he completes his adulthood by marrying Metroland. Barnes' works use epigraphs and quotes. This method shows the hero's worldview [3, p. 99-100].

Barnes's work creates analytical thinking in the reader. Empathy and multilayered interpretation develop. The subjective reality and memory construction are an example of postmodern literature. The epistemological function of language determines the meaning of events. Intertextual cultural connections provide the reader with a rich context. Barnes' works are important not only for literary, but also for psychological and pedagogical research. The article systematically analyzes his concepts. Barnes' works are of both theoretical and practical importance. This study provides a basis for future research.

**Conclusions and suggestions.** As a result of the research, several dominant concepts have been identified in the work of Julian Barnes. The first concept is the subjective construction of memory and time; past events are not only formed as objective facts, but also through individual memories and directly affect the interpretation of the novel. This approach allows the reader to evaluate different perspectives of events. In Barnes' works, time is not linear, but there is a multilayered and flexible structure between memories and events. The concept of subjective memory develops empathy and analytical thinking in the reader [1, p. 77-79].

The second dominant concept is the formation of reality according to individual experience; the subjective perspectives of the characters reveal different meanings of events. The memories and experiences of each hero change the interpretation of events and allow the reader to determine the meaning not only with objective facts, but also with subjective views.

The third concept is the structuring of knowledge through language; for Barnes, language is not only a means of communication, but also a constructor

of events and reality. The constructive function of language plays an important role in the formation of the meaning of events and the interpretation of memories. This approach is considered a literary manifestation of postmodern epistemology.

The fourth dominant concept is cultural intertextual relations; Barnes's works bring different cultural and historical contexts into dialogue and offer the reader multi-layered interpretive possibilities. References from different periods and cultures create a rich understanding in the reader [10, p. 88; 11, p. 77; 12, p. 123; 13, p. 79; 14, p. 90; 15].

These concepts are closely related to each other in Barnes's work, and when analyzed together, the scientific and aesthetic value of the works becomes clearer. Textual analyses show that memory, time, and subjective perspectives allow the reader to actively analyze the meaning of events, while language and intertextual relations increase the contextual richness of events. These approaches can be applied not only to literary analysis, but also in the fields of psychological, cultural, and pedagogical research.

#### Suggestions:

- The concept of subjective reality should be involved in broader empirical research.
- New methods of literary analysis should be developed based on the subjective construction of memory and time.

– The epistemological function of language should be examined comparatively in postmodern novels.

– Psychological studies should be conducted on the impact of cultural intertextual connections on reader interpretation.

– The use of Barnes' works in educational programs for pedagogical application can be proposed.

– Barnes's work should be studied comparatively with the works of modern English writers.

– Discourse and text analysis methods should be expanded in Barnes's works.

– The role of subjective reality and memory in the cultural context should be investigated.

– The interaction of intertextual strategies with the historical and cultural background should be deepened.

– In future studies, Barnes's work should be studied from a literary, psychological and cultural perspective with multidisciplinary approaches.

Thus, the study shows that Barnes's work enables the development of analytical thinking in the reader, strengthening of empathy skills and multi-layered analysis of events. The concepts of memory, time, subjective reality, language and cultural intertextual connections reflect the structure and aesthetics of postmodern literature and are of both theoretical and practical importance.

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### Алієва А. С. КЛЮЧОВІ ПОНЯТТЯ У ТВОРЧОСТІ ДЖУЛІАНА БАРНСА

Головною метою статті є розгляд основних художніх та філософських концепцій, сформованих у творчості Джуліана Барнса, одного з видатних представників сучасної англійської літератури, та визначення того, як такі поняття, як пам'ять, час, кохання, смерть, істина та суб'єктивна реальність, представлені в його творах. У статті особливо наголошується на постмодерністському способі мислення, іронії та інтертекстуальному підході в контексті романів та есе письменника.

Зазначається, що Барнс свідомо порушує межі між історичними фактами та особистими спогадами у своїх літературних текстах, спонукаючи читача до роздумів про багатозаровість істини.

У статті переважно використовується метод літературно-порівняльного аналізу, текстуального підходу, герменевтичного (інтерпретаційного) аналізу, структурно-семантичного аналізу та загальнонаукових методів. Твори Барнса, написані в різні періоди, розглядаються порівняльно з тематичної та концептуальної точок зору.

Наукова новизна статті полягає в тому, що вперше в контексті азербайджанського літературознавства творчість Джуліана Барнса всебічно досліджена на основі концепцій «пам'ять», «суб'єктивність історії» та «особиста правда». Твори «Відчуття кінця», «Папуга Флобера» та «Історія світу в 10½ розділах» проаналізовано в рамках єдиної концептуальної моделі, а також особливо підкреслено внесок Барнса в постмодерністську естетику.

В результаті дослідження було визначено, що основні концепції у творчості Джуліана Барнса спрямовані на розкриття суперечливої природи внутрішнього світу людини, ненадійності пам'яті та відносної природи історичної реальності. У творах письменника межі між життям і смертю, коханням і втратою, правдою та ілюзією мають умовний характер. Барнс бачить сенс людського існування не у фіксованих істинах, а в процесі постійного самоаналізу та внутрішнього діалогу. Його художня спадщина оцінюється як важливий етап у розвитку сучасної літературної думки.

**Ключові слова:** Джуліан Барнс, сучасна англійська література, постмодернізм, пам'ять, час, суб'єктивна істина, інтертекстуальний підхід.

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