

Mourning and Melancholy in Julian Barnes's *Levels of Life* and *The Only Story*

Julian Barnes'ın *Hayatın Düzeyleri* ve *Biricik Hikaye* Adlı Eserlerinde
Yas ve Melankoli

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Abstract

The loss of the beloved, the fear or experience of it, either because of death or other reasons has been a repeatedly occurring theme in the work of Julian Barnes. In *Before She Met Me*, the fear of loss forms the subconscious of a humorous and meticulous examination of obsessive jealousy, in *Talking It Over* and *Love etc.*, it is analysed through deception, revenge and resentment. Even behind the apparent postmodernist strategies and playful tone of *Flaubert's Parrot*, there resides the story of a retired, bereaving narrator who is trying to overcome the recent death of his once infidel wife. Irony and humour have always been the main traits of Barnes, no matter how serious the issues he represented. However, since the publication of *The Sense of an Ending* in 2011, Barnes's novels have grown to be more melancholic and lyrical in tone and less humorous and playful in style. Barnes's latest novels – *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), *Levels of Life* (2013), *The Noise of Time* (2016) and *The Only Story* (2018) – all develop around an aged protagonist or narrator whose story unfolds in an ironically self-aware lyrical tone, which detaches Barnes from postmodernism. The writing style of Julian Barnes, as a mature novelist, gets plainer as his mood becomes more sentimental and melancholic. This paper examines Barnes's representation of mourning and melancholy in *Levels of Life* where he dedicates the last section to his bereavement process after the loss of his wife, Pat Kavanagh, and *The Only Story* where he offers the piercing and grim love story of Susan (48) and Paul (19). The concepts of mourning and melancholy will be analysed by reference to Freud's and Derrida's views to illustrate how Barnes subtly probes them in the two novels as an artist.

Keywords: Mourning, melancholy, Julian Barnes, Jacques Derrida, *Levels of Life*, *The Only Story*

Öz

Sevgiliyi kaybetme, ölüm veya başka sebeplerle sevileni yitirme korkusu ve deneyimi, Julian Barnes eserlerinde sıklıkla tekrarlanan bir temadır. Kaybetme korkusu, *Benimle Tanışmadan Önce*'de son derece mizahi bir tutum ve incedelikli biçimde alınmış olan saplantılı bir kıskançlık öyküsünün bilinçaltını oluştururken, *Seni Sevmiyorum* ve *Aşk Vesaire*'de aldatma, intikam ve içerleme duygularıyla birlikte ele alınmıştır. *Flaubert'in Papağanı* gibi, görünürde postmodern ve oyunbaz anlatı teknikleri ile yazılmış bir romanda bile biz aslında sadakatsiz karısının ölümüyle alt üst olmuş emekli kahramanın yas süreciyle baş ediş biçimlerini okuruz. İroni ve mizah, Barnes'ın ele aldığı konular ne kadar ciddi olursa olsun asla vazgeçmediği iki ana tavidir. Ancak 2011'de yayınlanan *Bir Son Duygusu*'ndan itibaren, Barnes

romanlarının tonu daha melankolik ve lirik olurken üslubu daha az mizahi ve oyunbaz olmaya meyletmiştir. Barnes'in son dönem romanları – *Bir Son Duygusu* (2011), *Hayatın Düzeyleri* (2013), *Zamanın Gürültüsü* (2016) ve *Biricik Hikaye* (2018) – odağına ironik biçimde lirik olduğunun farkında olan yaşlı bir karakter veya anlatıcı koyarak postmodernizmle arasına mesafe koymuştur. Artık olgun bir yazar olan Julian Barnes'in üslubu daha sadeleşirken anlatı modu gitgide daha melankolik ve duygusal olmaya başlamıştır. Bu makalede, Julian Barnes'in son bölümünü ölen karısı Pat Kavanagh'ın ardından yaşadığı kişisel yas sürecine ayırdığı *Hayatın Düzeyleri* ve Susan (48) ile Paul (19)'ün kalp burkan ve iç karartan aşkının anlatıldığı *Biricik Hikaye* adlı eserlerinde yas ve melankoli temaları incelenmiştir. Yas ve melankoli kavramları Sigmund Freud ve Jacques Derrida bağlamında açıklanıp Julian Barnes'in bu kavramların sanatsal temsilini nasıl yaptığı gösterilmeye çalışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yas, melankoli, Julian Barnes, Jacques Derrida, *Hayatın Düzeyleri*, *Biricik Hikaye*

As readers of Julian Barnes, we notice that recently his work has been more lyrical and elegiac, and less humorous and playful in tone, albeit maintaining irony as the Barnesian trait. He has assumed a more intimate and direct voice while concentrating on concepts such as aging, memory, time, friendship and love. As a mature writer, he sounds more contemplative and melancholic in his books which stand as meditative studies on certain emotions. After the death of his wife, Pat Kavanagh (1940-2008) whom he addresses as “the heart of my life and life of my heart,” (*Levels of Life*, 68) the uxorious Barnes is now 74, an aged novelist trying to get used to living alone after thirty years of married life. The process of getting old, yet remaining ignorant of the meaning of life at a late age, becomes a central theme in his recent novels namely, *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), *Levels of Life* (2013), *The Noise of Time* (2016), and *The Only Story* (2018). These books are all formed of three parts, designed as verbal triptychs which represent the focus of concern in triangular form. They all illustrate aged and desolate men undergoing a trauma of loss, angst or desperation in a way similar to the expressionist triptychs of Francis Bacon, the painter who used the technique to isolate images from each other in order to avoid traditional story-telling. Barnes has repeatedly probed love, jealousy and passion in various forms since *Metroland*, *Love, etc.*, *Before She Met Me*, and *Talking it Over*. He also wrote deadly serious and masterfully playful stories and meditative essays on death or loss in *The Lemon Table* (2004), *Nothing to be Frightened of* (2008) and *Pulse* (2011).

Even in his postmodernist, playful narratives such as *Flaubert's Parrot* or *History of the World in 10/5 Chapters*, there was, at the centre, the sensibilities of a uxorious man who either lost or cherished his wife. *Levels of Life* and *The Only Story* are no exceptions, yet sadder and more heart-breaking in tone. We can read Barnes's *oeuvre* as the extended versions of the half chapter, the “Parenthesis” section of *History of the World in 10/5 Chapters* (1989) as they all study various aspects of love, devotion and loss; a “parenthesis” which seals all writings of Barnes. He closes the “Parenthesis” in *History of the World in 10/5*

Chapters with a friendly warning: “We must believe in [love], or we’re lost. We may not obtain it, or we may obtain it and find it renders us unhappy; we must still believe in it. If we don’t, then we merely surrender to the history of the world and to someone else’s truth” (1989: 246). This remote echo of Barnes from 1989 is rephrased as the core question of his 2018 novel *The Only Story*: “Would you rather love the more, and suffer the more; or love the less and suffer the less?” (3). Barnes asserts that it is: “finally, the only real question” (3).

Levels of Life (2013) and *The Only Story* (2018) are exquisite and subtle novels of Barnes as a mature writer who believes now to know more about love and loss, and ironically, less about life. They focus on the psychology of aged and grieving men; elaborate on time and memory; and study love as the only thing that matters in one’s life.

Levels of Life brings history, fictionalized biography and memoir together in three parts. It begins with the chapter named “The Sins of Height” and focuses on the history of ballooning, aeronautics, and aerial photography to illustrate the euphoria of flight, soaring up, challenging gravity, and tasting freedom as the metaphors of love which elevates us once we fall in it. Ballooning, tasting the sins of height and its risks are used as foils to describe the experience of love and loss in the form of ascending and descending. The second part, “On the Level,” which is a fictional love story between two historical characters, Fred Barnaby and Sara Bernhardt, illustrates how unrequited love can be felt as being smashed down from the high altitudes of romantic euphoria to the firm ground of reality. And the third part “The Loss of Depth” shows that the first two parts were only the metaphoric introductions to Barnes’s main aim at writing the book, i.e. expressing his personal bereavement. The title, “The Loss of Depth” refers to the loss of love that renders life its depth, its meaning, which, once lost, causes void, agony and grief. This part, as an anatomy of grief, studies the writer’s mourning as a process, and melancholy as a state after his wife’s death, and considers grief not only as a moral duty, or a state which reconfigures time (“one day means no more than the next”) and space (“you enter a new geography, a new-found-land formed of pain” 84), but also as “the negative image of love” (89).

All three parts of *Levels of Life* begin with the same sentence, “You put two things [or people] together that have not been put together before,” (3, 31, 67) and analyse different outcomes of it: “The Sins of Height” puts aeronautics and photography together and shows how it can change our perception of the world by presenting to humanity the bird’s-eye view photographed for the first time; “On the Level” puts Fred and Sara together and shows that “Love may not be evenly matched; perhaps it rarely is” (32); sometimes it doesn’t work, and a wrong match may simply burn and crash; “The Loss of Depth” puts Pat and Julian together to show how sometimes it works. This part also examines how Julian’s bereavement after thirty years of marriage dissolves the world of the survivor into pain and grief:

You put together two people who have not been put together before. [...] sometimes it works, and something new is made, and the world is changed. Then, at some point, sooner or later, for this reason or that, one of them is taken away. And what is taken away is greater than the sum of what was there. This may not be mathematically possible; but it is emotionally possible. (67)

If "The Loss of Depth" is about the love of a normal couple, who, in their marriage, have been perfectly matched, had a healthy, balanced and socially approved relationship; *The Only Story*, is about a marginal couple where Julian Barnes puts together two characters: a 19-year-old university student, Paul Roberts with Susan Macleod, a 48-year-old housewife (with two daughters both older than Paul), and examines the consequences of love and loss. In many ways, the story of Paul and Susan reminds us of Adrian and Sarah (from *The Sense of an Ending*) whose love was kept as a secret, cut short, and where the depressed and self-destructive party was just the reverse. *The Only Story* illustrates a different version of Adrian/Sarah where the alternative choice – the road not taken by Adrian and Sarah – is scrutinized; Paul and Susan choose to live together despite everything and face the painful consequences.

The parts of *The Only Story* have no titles, they are numbered as One, Two and Three; but it would not look absurd if these parts were re-titled as "The Sins of Height," "On the Level" and "The Loss of Depth" after the chapter titles of *Levels of Life*. They perfectly match in meaning and content with the parts of *The Only Story*. The first part visits the first two years of Paul and Susan as lovers. They soar up with love, enjoy "the sins of height," feeling blessed, adventurous and free. They use the age difference as camouflage when they publicly appear, play tennis regularly, and use the local club as their safe heaven until they are noticed and expelled from it like Adam and Eve. At the end of Part One, Paul writes a goodbye note to his parents and, with Susan, moves to London to start a new and free life together. Part Two describes "the next ten years or so" of their relationship under the same roof. They live together, but still hide their relationship from Paul's school friends, from neighbours, from everyone else, as "there was always a question of shame at the bottom of their relationship: both personal and social shame" (107). The fact that Susan is old enough to be Paul's mother does not go well with anyone around them (50). From "the sins of height" they fall "on the level," of reality. Their love is now exposed and they endure the consequences. Susan, locked up in the house, succumbs to depression, self-reproach, and alcoholism. We see how they suffer, yet remain innocent in their love, no matter how grim it looked from the outside. As they are "on the level," they grow more disenchanting, desperate and disappointed with life. After living under the same roof for ten years or more, Susan becomes totally estranged to their relationship, does not respond to Paul's efforts for healing her from alcoholism, and is eventually sent by Paul to her daughter's care. Unlike the first two parts narrated in the first person (second part especially revolving around the internal dialogues of "I" addressing itself as "You"), part Three is a narrative in the third person. This shift of the narrative – from *I/You* to *He* – creates an objective sense, a look at Paul's story from the

outside. Thirty years or more have passed: Paul is now older, in his fifties, and he feels stilled. Life, for him, has been a mortal coil to shuffle off, yet he is still content with this. He makes it his life's task, "his final duty to both of them to remember and hold her as she had been when they were first together, happy and innocent of the future" (163). He wants "to keep the memory of the lost sight of the first person – the only person – he had loved" (164). He evaluates his whole life as sealed with the love of Susan and thinks that "he fell in love like a man committing suicide" (166). The third part covers the subsequent wreckage of their life, their "loss of depth". Paul's heart is cauterized and Susan is a hospitalized, elderly woman who has Alzheimer's. In the end, he couldn't save her, but he tries to save their story. When she turns sixty as a demented, and alcoholic woman, Paul walks away from her; knowing that he would always walk in life as a wounded man. He keeps on visiting her even if she does not remember anything, anymore. From this love, he learns to keep himself to himself, remains single and never regrets it. The third part reveals the intention of Paul to tell their story, the story of their love, his only story. This part ends with the death of Susan, when Paul is in his sixties and Susan in her nineties and totally senile.

The story of Julian and Pat in the third part of *Levels of Life* involves a healthy relationship and a socially acceptable love story (Pat Kavanagh is only six years older than Julian Barnes, and they are a perfectly matched couple as we understand from Barnes's narrative). This fact creates a difference in Julian Barnes's analysis of love and loss in two novels. If we use an analogy, we may say that the love between Julian and Pat was like a baby or a flower seed attentively and mutually cherished, grown to become in time what it is, i.e. a lifelong, exemplary and ideal love or a beautiful, precious flower. Contrary to it, the love between Paul and Susan was a dead seed from the start, a still born, meant to be buried, not to be cherished or nourished to grow to assume a public identity due to the scandalous nature and impossible temporal aspect of it. Paul and Susan had no purpose other than remaining loyal to their love since their relationship "proved as offensive to the new norms as to the old ones" (49). This love was deprived of chronicity, victimized by time, threatened by reality, devoured all possibilities, cauterised the heart, but still remained unique and precious. The love, for which Susan sacrificed her long past, and Paul his long future, always stood outside of time, yet time somehow played a greater role in it than expected.

Levels of Life and *The Only Story* can be read as twin stories in disguise, examining love and loss in different apparels, the questions raised by the former, find their answers in the latter. The difference, one might say, is that in *The Only Story*, the lovers could experience either "the sins of height" or "the loss of depth," whereas being "on the level" is doomed, from the start, to be destructive. The shameful nature of the relationship and the generation gap deprived the lovers of the possibility of a real life and public approval. Nevertheless, both novels ask, through the voice of an old, grieving man, "whether it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all" and both choose "love" at all costs. The answer would not be otherwise for Barnes

who contends toward the end of *Levels of Life* that “There are two essential kinds of loneliness: that of not having found someone to love and that of having been deprived by the one you did love. The first kind is worse” (111).

Barnes offers different views of mourning and melancholy in the two novels, and shapes his narratives as elaborations on grief (as the negative image of love) and loss in ways much deeper than Sigmund Freud's propositions. It wouldn't be wrong to suggest that Barnes's analyses of mourning and melancholy are more persuasive in theory, and wider in scope compared to Freud's examination of them, and closer to Jacques Derrida's in terms of perceiving melancholy not as a pathological state; approaching the process of mourning not necessarily as a work that starts with the death of the loved one, but as a lifelong work which involves the knowledge that “one must always go before the other. One must always die first. In the *Politics of Friendship*, Jacques Derrida demonstrates this as the law of friendship – thus of mourning” (Brault and Naas, 2001: 1). Nearly thirty years ago, long before Pat's death, Barnes asks what it would be like for a man in his sixties to be widowed and writes: “When she dies, you are not at first surprised. Part of love is preparing for death. You feel confirmed in your love when she dies” (*Levels of Life*, 114). Barnes already knows that in every relationship there is a mental and emotional preparation for death or loss that is to come. As he asserts in *Levels of Life*: “Every love story is a potential grief story. If not at first, then later. If not for one, then for the other. Sometimes for both” (36-37).

Freud's essay, *Mourning and Melancholy* (1917), defines mourning as “a work which starts with a normal reaction to the loss of a loved person, or the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal and so on” (1957: 243). Mourning, for him, is a healthy process and a conscious, deliberate work of introjections, whereas melancholia is a work of incorporation, not a process with telos; and therefore, for Freud, melancholy is a pathology, a complex which behaves like open wound, whereas mourning is the process of healing the wound: “In mourning, it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (246). As Woodward states, “mourning, for Freud, is a normal and finite process. As a psychic work, mourning aims to heal the ego from the loss. It is a work with a precise purpose and goal: to free ourselves from the emotional bonds which have tied us to the person we loved so that we may invest that energy elsewhere, to detach ourselves so that we may be uninhibited” (1991: 94). Feber similarly illustrates the Freudian distinction between the two as follows:

But soon enough, the mourner, who is reacting in a nonpathological manner, recognizes and responds to the *call of reality*, to let go of the lost-loved object and liberate libidinal desire. This is the point of divergence with the melancholic who remains sunken in his loss, unable to acknowledge and accept the need to cleave and in a self-destructive loyalty to the lost object, internalizes it into his ego, thus furthermore circumscribing the conflict related to the loss. The lost object continues to exist, but as part of the dejected subject, who can no

longer clearly define the borders between his own subjectivity and the existence of the lost object within it. (2006: 66)

Barnes, by focusing on the self-destructive loyalty of the dejected subject, shows how this subject endures and embraces melancholy in *Levels of Life* and *The Only Story*. In each story, Barnes puts at the centre a character who loyally internalizes, and incorporates the memories of the loved one. The lost one becomes an integral part of the narrator: *Levels of Life* illustrates it in a balanced and 'normal' relationship, whereas *The Only Story*, in a lame, 'shameful', and unbalanced relationship. In both novels, Barnes presents an ego which strives to ease itself by visiting the memories, tracking the traces of the past to overcome the feeling of loss. For Freud, going through memories is healthy insofar as they unbound the ties with the deceased; for Barnes it is quite the contrary, because, unlike Freud, he considers melancholy and incorporation as a moral duty, not as a complex that weakens the ego and causes self-denigration but as a state that enriches and matures the self. As a result, for Barnes, curing the ego does not necessarily entail detachment; rather it is an altruistic effort which aims to strengthen the tie between the dead and the living. In *Levels of Life* Barnes says: "Grief is a human, not medical, condition, and while there are pills to help us forget it – and everything else – there are no pills to cure it. The griefstruck are not depressed, just properly, appropriately, mathematically sad" (71).

A successful mourning, for Freud, is a process of introjection and internalization, and by silencing the voice of the deceased, it aims to assimilate the other into the self. By introjection Freud means the work of elaborating tactfully on the memories of the loved one in order to detach our being from the deceased, and move on with our lives with a secure ego. In a successful mourning we, in the end of the process, obey the behest of reality (245). Mourning is a memory work; every memory must be tested, remembered, contemplated, and meditated for the purpose of overcoming the grief. For a mourning to be normal and healthy, the condition is that it must come to an end; the voice of the other must be silenced. "Melancholy, on the other hand, is ultimately failed or unsuccessful mourning, a pathological state which needs treatment for it ignores the behest of reality and tends to resume dialogues with the deceased" (Woodward, 95).

Derrida contests Freud by proposing an alternative understanding of mourning and melancholy which, as Kirkby imparts,

depends neither on a refusal to mourn nor on abandoning the dead. It offers a respect for the dead Other as other; it allows agency to the mourner in the possibility of an ongoing creative encounter with the other in an externalizing, productive, future oriented memory; it emphasizes the importance of acting out the entrusted responsibility, which is their legacy to us; it upholds the idea of community and reminds us our interconnectedness with our dead. (2006: 469-470)

With regard to mourning, Derrida privileges incorporation over introjection essentially because incorporation acknowledges the other as other, not totally assimilating the other and therefore preserving a difference and heterogeneity being more respectful of the other person's alterity. Introjection, unlike incorporation, assimilates the other into the self in a kind of psychic plagiarism. Derrida states that the only successful and loyal way to mourn is to be unable to do so. "Success fails and failure succeeds, for this is the law of mourning, it would have to fail in order to succeed" (1989: 34). In that respect, Freud's successful mourning actually fails – or at least it is an unfaithful fidelity – because the other person becomes a part of us, and in this introjection, their genuine alterity is no longer respected. On the other hand, failure to mourn the other's death paradoxically appears to succeed because the presence of the other person in their exteriority is prolonged; the memory of the dead is incorporated to the memory of the living. For both Freud and Derrida, mourning is a work consciously done. Yet Derrida, unlike Freud, perceives this 'work' as a lifelong process where the one who mourns for the deceased is tested by his loyalty. In Derrida's perspective, if mourning aims at killing the dead, melancholy aims at keeping it alive (1989: 34-36).

Freud apparently treats mourning and melancholy as clear-cut binaries; however, Barnes, like Derrida, is sceptical of this treatment:

There is the question of grief versus mourning. You can try to differentiate them by saying that grief is a state while mourning is a process; yet they inevitably overlap. Is the state diminishing? Is the process progressing? [...] Grief is vertical – and vertiginous – while mourning is horizontal. Grief makes your stomach turn, snatches the breath from you, cuts off the blood supply to the brain; mourning blows you in a new direction. (*Levels of Life*, 87-88)

In *Levels of Life*, he examines the traditional approach by giving examples from his friends and their reactions to his bereavement and prefers to remain sceptic of the Freudian attitude because he knows that

You come out of your pain of loss in time. But you don't come out of it like a train coming out of a tunnel, bursting through the Downs into sunshine and that swift, rattling descent to the Channel; you come out of it as a gull comes out of an oil slick; you are tarred and feathered for life. (115)

For Barnes, the final tormenting comes to the mourner with the unanswerable question of success: "What is success in mourning? Does it lie in remembering or in forgetting? A staying still or moving on? Or some combination of both? The ability to hold the lost love powerfully in mind, remembering without distorting?" (116). Or, one might achieve it "when grief becomes 'just' the memory of grief – if it ever does" (117). "Is success at grief, at mourning, at sorrow an achievement or merely a new given condition?" (116-117). Barnes also scrutinizes whether mourning and melancholy have anything to do with free will. In that he disagrees with Freud's rational and pragmatic approach.

For Freud, success in mourning lies in its finitude and our ability to answer the call of reality. Thinking as such, we may say that mourning is an egotistic, subject-oriented process which attempts at killing the dead so that ego could regain its strength. Melancholy, on the other hand, can be perceived as an altruistic, object-oriented process which attempts at keeping the dead alive by way of giving a voice, a spectral presence to it to be able to save it. Accordingly, Julian gives voice to Pat in resuming his conversations with her even long after her death; and Paul narrates his only story, his love of Susan as a tribute to keep their legacy safe. Barnes, by combining mourning and melancholy in the word “grief,” confirms Woodward’s interpretation of Derrida in that “someone can be in between mourning and melancholy, living in grief in such a way that one is still in mourning but no longer exclusively devoted to mourning” (Woodward, 90). In *Levels of Life*, he subtly underlines the paradox of grief:

The fact that someone is dead may mean that they are not alive, but does not mean that they do not exist. I externalize her easily and naturally because by now I have internalized her. The paradox of grief: If I have survived what is now four years of her absence, it is because I have had four years of her presence. (102-103)

Julian mourns for Pat after her death “uncomplicatedly, and absolutely, [missing] her in every action and in every inaction” (81). Paul mourns for Susan absolutely but complicatedly, and not only posthumously. *Levels of Life* studies grief as a feeling that comes after love and loss, whereas *The Only Story* studies grief as the accompanying emotion in an ongoing relationship, coexisting with love, becoming its perpetual present. Julian has to get used to the singular pronoun “I” after Pat, whereas, for Paul and Susan becoming “we” was socially doomed from the start. Theirs is, sadly, a love lived in the form of grief. In the end, this love fixes Paul’s life, and becomes his “only story”. Only by telling their story, enclosing all their sadness and happiness, Paul believes that he can finally justify and give voice to the silenced plural pronoun “we” in the way as it privately and truly meant to them against its condemned moral and temporal aspect.

Both novels approach the concept of love as having its private morality, codes of honour which do not necessarily have to conform to public morality. This moral dimension of love is the very ground of grief felt after the loss of the loved one and as Barnes asserts: “If it is not moral in its effect – than love is no more than an exaggerated form of pleasure” (*Levels of Life*, 82).

Barnes, like Derrida perceives melancholy as a mood or disposition towards the world. Derrida states that “it is only in us that the dead may speak, that is only by speaking of and as the dead that we can keep them alive and this is a sign of fidelity” (1993: 36). Barnes, in *Levels of Life*, confirms Derrida, as he explains why he withdraws from his plans of committing suicide: “I was her principal rememberer. If she was anywhere she was within me, internalised. This was normal. And it was equally normal – and irrefutable – that I could not kill myself because then I would also be killing her. She would die a second time” (90). The grief-stricken melancholic is destructively satisfied by this split

tormented interiority, this unbearable paradox of fidelity which becomes an expression of his endless loyalty and moral duty. In *The Only Story*, Paul similarly lives his life in the form of melancholy in the presence and absence of Susan, and turns his failure in giving up Susan to a true sign of fidelity. His life, which could otherwise be seen as a waste, marks his success in love which he never regrets. *Levels of Life* and *The Only Story* are stories of grief which illustrate unsuccessful and therefore successful mourning. As Derrida states:

I pretend to keep the dead alive, intact, *safe (save) inside me*, but it is only in order to refuse, in a necessarily equivocal way, to love the dead as a living part of me, dead *save in me*, through the process of introjection, as happens in so-called 'normal' mourning. [...] Faced with the impotence of the process of introjection (gradual, slow, laborious, mediated, effective), incorporation is the only choice: fantasmatic, unmediated, instantaneous, magical, sometimes hallucinatory. (qtd in Woodward, 99)

Here we may examine melancholy as a state which embodies *différance*: on one hand, melancholy saves the difference and alterity of the deceased, on the other, it defers the absence of the dead by keeping his/her memory present: "The dead one resumes an ongoing conversation with us being both within us [present] and beyond us [absent], continuing to look at us with a look that is a call to responsibility and transformation" (2001: 161).

Mourning does not necessarily have to be posthumous, it is the "gift of death" which renders friendships and relations their meaning and value. As Kirkby states, for Derrida: "All our relationships are from the beginning tinged with mourning, for the unspoken truth of every friendship is that one of us will have to see the other die –there is no friendship without this knowledge of finitude. We are also who we are because of the memory of those we have loved" (2007: 464). We come into being in dialogue with the dead and can only think of ourselves in "bereaved allegory" (Derrida, 1989: 28). "For Derrida," then, "it is the memory of the future death of the other that constitutes our interiority" (Kirkby, 464).

In *The Only Story*, Paul and Susan, from the beginning of their relationship, were aware that Susan would normally get old, senile, wrinkled, unattractive, and die before Paul, as she was much older than him. This consciousness, which functioned as a constant "behest of reality," always shaded their joy. Paul's love has been a lifelong, life shaping grief to which he gladly submitted himself; a burden he faithfully carried:

Whenever he thought of her, Paul felt as he was holding her out of the window by her wrists, unable to pull her in or let her drop, both their lives in agonizing stasis... But they were locked together like trapeze artists: He wasn't just holding her, she was holding him. And in the end his strength gave way, and he let her go. And although her fall was cushioned, it was still very grievous because, as she had told him once, she had heavy bones. (*The Only Story*, 165)

Levels of Life and *The Only Story* can be read as two gifts of death, two eulogies that are designed as examples of “faithful failure” in mourning. Barnes adds another dimension to Freud’s and Derrida’s theories by turning grief into art. He challenges time and its effects on memory and emotions by placing love and grief outside of time; he shows that art can express one’s grief not for the sake of overcoming it but for keeping it alive, by ex-corporating/extracting most aesthetically what has been incorporated/introjected. In both cases Barnes gives voice to ego which strives to cure itself from a loss not by assimilating, transforming, killing the dead but by securing the memories of love and grief with the help of fiction, against the destructive power of time. Mourning, for Derrida, does not mean loss, it is rather a form of desire which affirms. Barnes obviously shares the same sentiment with Derrida in representing the two stories of love/loss by underlining the sense of fidelity not only to the lost one but also to the life of the one who outlives the other. Moreover, for Barnes, grief absolutely functions as a moral space where one can be deprived of the loved one, of time and memory. But once he is strongly willed, no one takes from him his only story, his grief story, his love story and therefore his life story. He knows that “pain shows that you have not forgotten; pain enhances the flavour of memory; pain is proof of love. If it didn’t matter, it wouldn’t matter” (*Levels of Life*, 113). “Grief,” he says “is like death, banal and unique” (70) and, “banal as it is, grief is a human, not medical condition” (71). Like Derrida, Barnes supports a new understanding of mourning, one that depathologizes melancholy and finds in it a gift of death. By honouring the otherness of the dead and our attachment to them; we do not abandon them and substitute another in their place, because “the dead are irreplaceable, and death is that which is irreplaceably mine” (Derrida, 1995: 41).

Susan exists in Paul, and Pat exists in Julian in their alterity; Paul and Julian become who they are through relating to their internalised others. Barnes knows that “Love could never be captured in a definition; it could only be captured in a story” (*The Only Story*, 206). The same thing is true for grief, as the negative image of love. He shows how time doesn't necessarily diminish sorrow, and offers a way that eases the pain by projecting melancholy/grief into fiction. *Levels of Life* and *The Only Story* translate (or sublimate) grief into aesthetic expression, capture it in a story. They are erudite and profound meditations on death where Barnes offers literature as the recuperative medium for bereavement. By filling the void in the soul with meaning and art; by writing with the other and for the other, he counterbalances the love and loss of the other with a fully aesthetic image that is fixed in immortality.

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