

History and Memory in *The Sense of An Ending* by Julian Barnes*Julian Barnes 'in Bir Son Duygusu Eserinde Tarih ve Hafıza***Münevver BARTAMAY*****Abstract**

This study aims to examine *The Sense of an Ending* in terms of history and memory. Anthony Webster's and his friends' past and the life of Anthony, or Tony as his friends call him, and the lives of all other characters are told from Tony's perspective, so the reader has to depend on his memory to reach a conclusion. But his ideas and memories show no stability, and every clue about the past changes or refutes his previous view, and sometimes everything becomes blurry. In La Grange's words, the absence of documents leaves a gap in memory and causes some facts that are not at all certain to appear as if they were real. Tony recalls his memories and tells the events exactly as if they were real, but with each new document that emerges - Tony's letter, Adrian's diary - everything changes and requires a new perspective. The story may need to be rewritten from Adrian's or Veronica Ford's point of view, but ultimately it is true that each character's narratives will fill the gaps differently, because memory is subjective; hence it is unreliable.

Keywords: History, memory, unreliable memory, memories, sensing the end

* Research Assistant. Dr., Department of English Language and Literature, Bingöl University, E-mail: mbartamay@bingol.edu.tr, ORCID.

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Münevver BARTAMAY*

Öz

Bu çalışma, *Bir Son Duygusu* romanını tarih ve hafıza açısından incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu romanda Anthony Webster’in geçmişine ve arkadaşlarına dair bilgiler verilmekte, Anthony ya da arkadaşların deyimiyle Tony’nin hayatı ve diğer tüm karakterlerin yaşamı Tony’nin bakış açısıyla anlatılmaktadır, yani okuyucu bir sonuca varmak için onun hafızasına bağlı kalmak durumundadır. Ancak fikirleri ve anıları hiçbir istikrar göstermez ve geçmişle ilgili her ipucu önceki görüşünü değiştirir ya da yalanlar ve bazen her şey bulanıklaşır. La grange’in ifadesiyle belgelerin yokluğu hafızada boşluk bırakır ve hiç de kesin olmayan bazı gerçeklerin gerçekmiş gibi ortaya çıkmasına neden olur. Tony anılarını hatırlıyor ve olayları tam olarak gerçekmiş gibi anlatıyor ama ortaya çıkan her yeni belgeyle – Tony’nin mektubuyla, Adrian’ın günlüğüyle – her şey değişiyor ve yeni bir bakış açısı gerektiriyor. Hikâyenin Adrian’ın ya da Veronica Ford’un bakış açısından yeniden yazılması gerekebilir ama sonuçta her bir karakterin anlatılarının boşlukları farklı şekilde dolduracağı doğrudur, çünkü hafıza subjektiftir; dolayısıyla güvenilmezdir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: tarih, hafıza, hafızanın yanıltıcılığı, anılar, son duygusu

* Dr. Arş. Gör., İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü, Bingöl Üniversitesi, E-posta: mbartamay@bingol.edu.tr, ORCID.

History And Memory In *The Sense Of An Ending*

The Sense of an Ending was written by Julian Barnes in 2011 and got the Man Booker Prize the same year. It is narrated by Anthony (Tony) Webster and consists of two parts, which gives the early memories of his and his schoolmates Alex, Colin, and Adrian. In the first part of the novel, in a history course they are asked about the reign of Henry VIII and “history” by their lecturer Mr. Hunt. Adrian answers with Joseph Louis de Lagrange’s (French philosopher and mathematician) words: “history is that certainty produced when the imperfections of memory meet the inadequacies of documentation” (Barnes, 2011, p.17). In other words, this produced certainty is a product of uncertain or unreliable memory but somehow it manages to seem reliable or certain. It is a typical postmodern paradigm that history is never objective or fixed. In another lecture, Mr. Hunt asks definition of history and Tony Webster replies:

History is the lies of the victors, I replied, a little too quickly.

Yes, I was rather afraid you’d say that. Well, as long as you

remember that it is also the self delusions of the defeated.

Barnes echoes these lines via Webster again at the end of the novel, when he learns about his brutal letter to Adrian and its consequences at the end.

Adrian is the intellectual of that story and most of times, Tony is jealous of him, his confidence and wit. After highschool, only Adrian is able to go to Cambridge with a scholarship. Tony goes to Bristol and other friends to somewhere else. Most important components of Tony’s story are Adrian and Veronica. Veronica Ford is Tony’s girlfriend from his years in Bristol and seemingly she has a supercilious attitude towards Tony or Tony feels so; we cannot be sure at the end of the novel. She, many times repeats that Tony cannot get it, and never will do. Tony deduces so many things from her silence or a tic of her eye, or they are only Tony’s delusions. As Paul Ricoeur states that, “The constant danger of confusing remembering and imagining, resulting from memories becoming images in this way, affects the goal of faithfulness corresponding to the truth claim of memory” (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 7).

Tony spent a single weekend at Ford’s house and two of the images in Tony’s memory, at the very beginning of the novel, belongs to that weekend. Tony was introduced to Ford family and he had a sense of being disputed by Ford’s, the sense that he mostly felt when he was with Veronica alone. He remembers the location of the house as “smug” (Barnes, 2011, p. 26), the Ford family as arrogant and sneering that reinforces his sense about Veronica’s “sense of social superiority” (Barnes, 2011, p. 27). Her brother Jack cares nothing for Tony, nothing more than

an “object of mild curiosity” (Barnes, 2011, p. 27). Tony gets Veronica introduced to his friends, Alex, Colin, and Adrian. He says:

At first I was watching to see how my friends reacted to Veronica, but soon became more interested in what she thought of them. She laughed at Colin’s jokes more easily than at mine, which annoyed me, and asked Alex how his father made his money (marine insurance, he told her, to my surprise). She seemed happy to keep Adrian for last. I’d told her he was at Cambridge, and she tried out various names on him. At a couple of them he nodded and said, “Yes, I know the sort of people they are.” This sounded pretty rude to me, but Veronica didn’t take offence. (Barnes, 2011, p. 27)

He wants to be approved for his choice and they spend a day together. Veronica asks about her brother to Adrian, as he is in Cambridge too. Tony feels jealousy for the conversation between them but when Adrian says he had heard about what kind of people are Jack and his group are, Tony feels a kind of relief- what he perceived as an approval of his image about Jack. But forty years later when he writes to Jack to learn about Veronica’s address, Jack’s help makes him a bit surprised but still he cannot admit and portrays in his mind an adventurous retirement for Jack in the South Pacific. If Jack was so supercilious about him, after all why did he reply Tony’s request in such a normal way? But he hadn’t still forgot about brother Jack’s “supercilious wink” (Barnes, 2011, p. 106) or Veronica’s “eyebrow-above-the-spectacle-frame-tic” (Barnes, 2011, p. 34). Or are they all his delusions? As it is stated in the novel by Barnes, to detect the factual events it necessitates “to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us” (Barnes, 2011, p. 7). In other words it becomes a requirement to know Tony’s history documents and the story he narrated in the absence of the documents should be compared.

Tony is to reconcile the factual events and the story he created in his memory. Barnes practised the theory of Lagrange upon his characters’ private life, this is all to say, Tony created a story with his memoir but he confronted with many missing or misremembered parts. As Estefania Lopez-Deflory (2016, p. 159) argued, there is a “missing middle”, and it becomes a bit enlightened with documents written forty years earlier. First part of the novel ends with Adrian’s suicide and Tony narrates us a story in which he had no intervention, and Adrian’s so much busy mind may have chosen to deny the gift of life with his free will.

After Tony and Veronica’s break-up, he receives a letter from Adrian. He declares to Tony that he was with Veronica and he wanted Tony to know that if it was disturbing for him, so he would revise the situation. Tony mentions about a short note that he had written to him and

wishes happiness. He wrote another letter but the reader and perhaps Tony himself reads the letter forty years later, a letter that contains Tony's bad wishes for them and implicated that Veronica had some traumatic experiences and he wanted Adrian to ask about it to Sarah Ford, Veronica's mother.

Tony learns about all when Sarah dies and leaves five hundred dollars and Adrian's diary to him. But he cannot obtain the diary, and he learns that it was kept by Veronica. He tries to reach her and obtain the diary but Veronica refuses to give it to Tony. He sent her mails and she let him have a single page of the diary on which there were many formulations that he couldn't give the meaning. But the page ended with the line "So, for instance if Tony..." (Barnes, 2011, p. 6) and aroused his curiosity about if he had a role in Adrian's last months and his suicide. But Mrs. Ford had written that Adrian was happy in his last months in her letter and still there was a gap about "the middle" of the story to be explored. Veronica gave him his letter that he had written forty years ago, in which he had wished them the worst as a couple and a child that would be a vengeance of "time" upon them, in their first meeting forty years later. Tony demanded another meeting, and they had a lunch, Veronica asked for his life and Tony summarized his all life, his adventure of America, his marriage with Margaret and divorce, his only child Susie –now married and has two children – and his retirement. Veronica listened to him and left with no words about her life.

Tony requested for another appointment and she accepted. She took him at a station and got him to somewhere they met a group of people, with a caregiver. Tony could not give meaning to that strange meeting and he expected an explanation from Veronica but she didn't and he accused Tony of not understanding and getting, still. She got him out of her car and Tony began to inquire about that group of people. He went to the place they usually went and he had heard while he was in Veronica's car that, Friday was pub night for them. He continued to go there, and in the market he confronted with the "badge man" he saw before with whom Veronica talked. He saw him in the shop on the third Friday he went. The badge man was frightened of him and in the pub, the social carer warned him about not to disturb him. When the badge man took out his glasses, his eyes and physical appearance, all reminded Tony of Adrian and he assumed that he was Adrian and Veronica's son.

He remembered again what he wished to them in his forty years earlier letter and he felt his responsibility in Adrian's death. "So I don't wish you that. It would be unjust to inflict on some innocent foetus the prospect of discovering that it was the fruit of your loins, if you'll excuse the poeticism." Remorse, etymologically, is the action of biting again: "that's what the feeling

does to you.” And finally he deduced that Adrian was afraid of the responsibility of a pregnant girl and a baby, like Robson who committed suicide in their school years as a result of the same reason. That was another delusion of Tony: “Now I had some answers to the questions I hadn’t asked. She had become pregnant by Adrian, and—who knows?—perhaps the trauma of his suicide had affected the child in her womb.”

Tony wrote an apology message to Veronica, he declared that he had given up his will to get the diary and it was hers, as Adrian was her baby’s father. And she replied “You still don’t get it. You never did, and you never will. So, stop even trying.” For Tony she was still preserving her mysticism. He visited the pub again, this time the other social carer, tall young man, Terry, came to Tony’s table and he warned Tony about Veronica’s son. Terry was disturbed of Tony’s presence and he didn’t want to see Tony. In this conversation Tony learned that his name was Adrian and he was not Veronica’s son, but brother.

“Thus, how might you express an accumulation containing the integers b , a_1 , a_2 , s , v ?” And then a couple of formulae expressing possible accumulations. It was obvious now. The first was Adrian; and the other was me, Anthony—as he used to address me when he wanted to call me to seriousness. And b signified “baby”. One born to a mother — “The Mother” — at a dangerously late age. A child damaged as a result.

Now it became more clear for Tony and he had a responsibility in this chain, which Adrian had formulated in his diary. Until now, many forms of his personal history were recreated by his memory and with every document it took a more complex and different state. With the revelation of the events, totally different from its former versions, Tony’s memory becomes more unreliable to the reader and his obsessions about Veronica’s supercilious behaviours towards him becomes questionable. Was she really the person he revealed before? Or was Tony wrong in his evaluations towards Ford family? Sarah Ford was the only normal person in the family, according to his first perceptions about Ford family, but now it became blurred with the love triangle between Sarah, Veronica, and Adrian.

Julian Barnes was inspired by Frank Kermode’s *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (1965). According to Kermode

men are born in medias res, as they jump into the middle of an ongoing world, and in medius rebus, since their lives are interrupted at a certain point in their middle. This emphasizes that human life is transitory, its lapse being only understood within a larger

frame of history that was going on before one's birth and will not cease after one's death. (Kermode, 1965, p. 7)

Adrian's life was cut in the middle and his story was lying between the story of Tony. It was necessary to undermine the middle of Tony's (hi)story. In the last period of his life, Tony was expecting a bit of rest, "However this assumption is soon refuted by means of a device labelled by Kermode as *peripeteia*, which consists of a disconfirmation of the predictable ending in fiction. In other words, a falsification of expectation so that the end comes as expected, but not in the manner expected" (López-Deflory, 2016, p. 161).

In Deflory's words, "past determines the present, and is thus projected onto the future, never ceasing to exert its influence" (2016, p. 161). The middle of Tony's story coincided with the end of Adrian's story and it projected onto the future with Adrian's son. At the end of the story, Tony repeats the answers given at the very beginning of the novel. "There is accumulation. There is responsibility. And beyond these, there is unrest. There is great unrest." And he remembers Adrian's definition of history, definition made by Lagrange. There was unreliability of memory and it was result of the unreliability of the self, as Barnes asserts that "memory is identity" (Barnes, 2011, p. 141). Through the end of the novel, history is redefined by Tony like that "History isn't the lies of the victors, as I once glibly assured Old Joe Hunt; I know that now. It's more the memories of the survivors, most of whom are neither victorious nor defeated."

Conclusion

To conclude, the postmodern paradigm of history is applied to the characters' private lives, and as it echoes in these lines "You get towards the end of life – no, not life itself, but of something else: the end of any likelihood of change in that life. You are allowed a long moment of pause, time enough to ask the question: what else have I done wrong?" It gives the sense that no sole ending but every ending leads to a new change in life, a change that is a consequence of the previous one. It brings with it a chain of responsibility that will be revealed eventually despite all the delusions of the narrator.

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