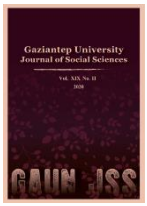

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"Holes Tied Together with String": Grief in Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot*

"İple Birbirine Bağlanmış Delikler": Julian Barnes'ın Flaubert'in Papağanı *Romanında Keder*

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ÖZ

Julian Barnes'ın *Flaubert'in Papağanı* (1984) anlatıcı Geoffrey Braithwaite'in Gustave Flaubert'in hayatıyla ilgili papağanları, çoklu biyografileri ve gerçek(ler)i aradığı deneysel bir romandır. Öte yandan roman Braithwaite'in kişisel hayatı ve yası hakkında anlatının yüzey katmanıyla eş zamanlı akan bir altyapıya sahiptir. Anlatı *romandaki* tüm bu kavramlara "iple birbirine bağlanmış delikler olarak" -romanın kendi biyografi tanımını yapmak için kullandığı bir ifadede olduğu gibi- yaklaşır. *Flaubert'in Papağanı* sıklıkla metinlerarası, parçalanmış, parodik ve özdüşünümsel anlatımıyla, romanın deneysel yönlerini merkeze alan Postmodern edebiyat teorileri göz önünde bulundurularak okunmuş ve analiz edilmiştir. Bu bağlamda, *Flaubert'in Papağanı* geçmiş, tarih, biyografi ve hakikate katı, güvenilir ya da statik olarak değil; akışkan, belirsiz ve çoğul olarak gören bir bakış açısıyla yaklaştığından postmodern bilinçle analiz edilmeye uygun bir kaynak olmuştur. Ancak, Braithwaite'in eşi Ellen'ın kaybıyla ilgili olan alt katman romanda köklü bir yer tutarak romanın varoluş sebebini oluşturur ve bu sebeptendir ki Braithwaite anlatısında "Ellen'ınki gerçek bir öykü; belki de size bunun için, onun yerine Flaubert'in hikayesini anlatıyorum" der (2012, s. 86). Bu çalışma, Julian Barnes'ın *Hayat Düzeyleri* başlıklı anı kitabına belli başlı göndermeler yaparak Braithwaite'in Flaubert, biyografi ve papağan arayışı anlatısının alt katmanına kederini nasıl yerleştirmeyi başardığını ortaya koyar. Çalışma aynı zamanda Braithwaite'in keder ve yas yaklaşımını bu kavramların Fruedyen yaklaşımlarıyla karşılaştırır.

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ABSTRACT

Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) is an experimental novel in which the narrator Geoffrey Braithwaite searches for parrots, multiple biographies, and truth(s) about the life of Gustave Flaubert. On the other hand, the novel has an infrastructure about Braithwaite's personal life and grief that flows simultaneously with the surface layer of the narrative. All these concepts are treated as 'holes tied together with string' in the narrative of *Flaubert's Parrot*, a phrase used for the definition of biography writing in the novel. With its intertextual, fragmented, parodic, and self-reflexive narrative, Flaubert's Parrot has been often read and analysed having Postmodern literary theories in mind, centralising the experimental aspects of the novel. In this regard, *Flaubert's Parrot* is a fruitful source to analyse with the postmodern consciousness as the novel approaches to past, history, biography and truth from the perspective that views these concepts not as solid, reliable or static, but as fluid, vague, and multiple. However, the infrastructure of the novel that is related with the loss of Braithwaite's wife Ellen occupies an essential part in the novel, forming its *raison d'etre* as Braithwaite indicates that "Ellen's is a true story; perhaps it is even the reason why I am telling you Flaubert's story instead" (2012, p. 86). This study, by making specific references to Barnes' memoir titled *Levels of Life*, presents how Braithwaite manages to insert his grief under the narrative of the search of Flaubert, his biography and his parrots. The study also compares Braithwaite's approach to grief and mourning with the Freudian sense of the concepts.

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Introduction

Flaubert's Parrot (1984) is accepted as one of the masterpieces of Julian Barnes' *oeuvre*. With its narrative structure, *Flaubert's Parrot* is an experimental novel built on the unreliability of narratives and the impossibility of creating authentic biographies, which are depicted through giving multiple and fragmented information about the life and the works of the great French author Gustave Flaubert, and the stuffed parrot(s) that Flaubert used while writing his *Three Tales* (1877). *Flaubert's Parrot*, which the American publisher Knopf names as a 'novel (in disguise),' celebrates hybridity as it compiles literary criticism, multiple biographies and fictional entities in its prosaic flow. In this sense, the novel escapes from fictional classifications and the text itself even despises such attempts. Vanessa Guignery states that *Flaubert's Parrot* "exhibits a proclivity for hybridity, multiplicity and decompartmentalization, and the mixture of genres enables the narrator to approach Flaubert in original and varied ways and to avoid the pitfalls of each individual genre" (2006, p. 40). By Barnes it is described as "an upside-down, informal piece of novel-biography" in which both the frames of biography and fictional writing are tested and subverted (qtd in Guignery, 2002, p. 105). Hence, the novel has been overtly analysed by many critics with regard to the postmodern literary theories due to its treatment of past, history, biography, originality, and multiplicities. Frederick M. Holmes defines the novel as "an unclassifiably hybrid text that manages to be (in terms of Roland Barthes) both *scriptable* or writerly and *lisible* or readerly, both intellectually challenging and highly entertaining" (2009, p. 71). The novel is seen as "a polygeneric book which challenges any attempt at categorization, classification and genre taxonomy" (Guignery, 2021, p. 85). The focus of critics, then, centralise the experimental parts of the narrative in their studies. This study, on the other hand, attempts to shed light upon a part of the novel which is very much central and foundational, yet always left in the shadow of the experimental aspects of the text: Braithwaite's mourning of his wife Ellen, which is the *raison d'etre* of the narrative. While searching for Flaubert and the parrot, Braithwaite has Ellen's loss in mind, yet he keeps postponing to tell it to readers throughout his narration until his short chapter titled "Pure Story." By referring to Barnes' memoir titled *Levels of Life*, this study attempts to present how Braithwaite seeds the narrative of his grief under his search for Flaubert, the parrot(s), and biographies, and how the experimental elements serve for the infrastructure of the novel. While depicting Braithwaite's grief, the study will also compare it with the Freudian sense of the concept.

The novel has 15 chapters that are mainly narrated by a doctor named Geoffrey Braithwaite who defines himself as an amateur Flaubert researcher. The peculiar aspect of the novel is that it lacks a certain plot structure, as chapters are fragmented in form and content and the narrative is an informal (*skaz*) narrative in which Braithwaite is in a mode of talking directly to the reader. Yet, the novel maintains its own coherent integrity as Frank Kermode states that "the book does feel disorderly at times, but it is true to the laws of its own being" (Kermode, 1985). The narrative includes various and fragmented chapters: Braithwaite's observations in the city of Rouen where Flaubert was born, the search for the parrot Flaubert had on his desk while he was writing *Three Tales*, three different chronologies about the life of Flaubert, Braithwaite's criticisms on literary critics, a narrative of one of the lovers of Flaubert telling stories about him and the story of his unfaithful wife Ellen and her loss that Braithwaite narrates in a chapter titled "Pure Story" are only some of the parts of the collage that Braithwaite creates. The novel ends with Braithwaite's finding multiple parrots, and realizing the impossibility of reaching the real one. For Peter Childs, "*Flaubert's Parrot* is striated with fictional invention but also has essayistic sections of a kind that more commonly appear in magazines and periodicals" (2011, p. 47). As Matthew Pateman suggests, Braithwaite's toiling to reach truth and "desire to know, absolutely, is also evident in the sub-text of his quest" which is related

with Ellen (2002, p. 22). The statement Braithwaite makes in the chapter titled "Cross Channel" can be taken as the point of departure for the path chosen to be followed in this study: "Books are not life, however much we might prefer it if they were. Ellen's is a true story; perhaps it is even the reason why I am telling you Flaubert's story instead" (2009, p. 86). It is as if the narrative of the novel goes on telling the Flaubert Apocrypha in order to prepare the reader for the pure story of Ellen. In this sense, the parts about Flaubert are implicitly or explicitly related with Ellen, or the idea of telling her true story as well.

The novel simultaneously puts some concepts, such as past, history, authenticity, and biography, at stake, and these concepts are interrelated both with the layer of Flaubert and the sub-layer of Ellen. Through the use of narrative techniques, the authentic information about the biography of Flaubert is situated in a distant position in the narration that the readers cannot totally reach. In an interview, for the point of departure of the novel, Barnes points out that while he was collecting various notes on Flaubert's life upon seeing his multiple parrots, he decided to turn it into a fictional narrative: "this was the start of a project, in which I could play off the real against the fictional and the contemporary against the nineteenth century in a productive way" (qtd in Guignery, 2002, p. 104). In this sense, *Flaubert's Parrot* is a narrative in which the separating line between real and fiction are blurred intentionally. Besides using history as an experimental element, the novel also carries intertextual, parodic and self-reflexive characteristics in its narrative structure, and the narrative representation is problematised by the use of multiple narrative styles, techniques and narrators. About the infrastructure, Barnes states that "beyond all that it's a novel about grief, it's a novel about a man whose inability to express his grief, and his love is shifted (I'm sure there's a psychiatric term for it - displacement activity might be the one), is transposed into an obsessive desire to recount to you the reader everything he knows and has found about Gustave Flaubert" (qtd in Guignery, 2002, p. 108). In *Julian Barnes from the Margins: Exploring the Writer's Archive*, Vanessa Guignery brings up brand new details of Barnes' early/first writings and drafts that are kept in Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas. The chapter Guignery looks for the first drafts of *Flaubert's Parrot* benefits – and strongly justifies – the reading of the novel as a narrative of grief. In the first draft of the novel, Guignery spots a sentence that directly presents the reason why Braithwaite was obsessed with Flaubert: "I tell his [Flaubert's] story to stop myself thinking of hers" (qtd in Guignery, 2021, p. 90). Another sentence that is removed from the published version is "Was I still grieving for my wife? Yes," and Guignery points out that this sentence was removed since putting it in the text would make Braithwaite reveal too much about his grief, and this is why the published document depicts Braithwaite as a "reticent and oblique narrator" (2021, p. 90).

The Infrastructure of Grief

By fragmenting the conventional fictional narrative form, Barnes consciously prevents readers from having a clear picture, not only of Flaubert and his parrots, but also of Braithwaite and his pure story. By titling the chapter about Ellen as "Pure Story" within a fragmented narrative, Braithwaite makes an ironic twist as he goes against the conventions of his experimental narrative which is built on the premise that there cannot be a pure/true story. Regarding his attitude, "the narrator/protagonist functions as a bridge between the reader of Barnes' novel and Flaubert […] In other words, the fictional narrator becomes a portal between history and fiction" (Bilge, 2021, p. 40). As he is the narrator of such a fragmented narrative, Braithwaite also parodies writers, believing that they are only sophisticated versions of parrots (Barnes, 2012, p. 18). For the readers, then, Braithwaite functions as a parrot who creates irritation through imitation and repetition. He disturbs and breaks the illusion of reality by multiplying the facts, truths, pasts and parrots.

The title of this study derives from an analogy made by Braithwaite on the act of biography writing: it is like trying to catch fish with a net, and a net is "a collection of holes

tied together with string […] the trawling net fills, then the biographer hauls it in, sorts, throws back, stores, fillets and sells" (Barnes, 2012, p. 38). The biography writer tries to collect information about that specific person's past, yet there are always remainders leaking out of the holes of the net. The analogy of the net can be seen as one of the main themes of the novel: in the second chapter titled "Chronology," the narrator provides three alternative chronologies of the life of Flaubert, each beginning with a different event in a different time, all ending with the death of Flaubert in 1880. Braithwaite does not provide one specific chronology, indicating that all three of them are equally (in)correct. The narrator's search for Flaubert's life and memories do not direct him to an authentic past or to an authentic document. As a result, the narrative chases multiple biographies of multiple people with the consciousness that none of them will be the true version.

In "Pure Story," Braithwaite turns into his own problematic past in which it is admitted that his is not quite different from that of Flaubert's regarding their fictional aspect. Barnes defines *Flaubert's Parrot* as "a novel in which there was an infrastructure of fiction and very strong elements of non-fiction, sometimes whole chapters which were nothing but arranged facts" (Guignery, 2002, p. 105). While introducing himself, Braithwaite states that "Being a doctor was what I did well. My wife…died" (2012, p. 13). Although Braithwaite states this sub-layer in the very beginning, the coming out of the infrastructure in the narrative keeps being postponed by Braithwaite, as he holds two different storylines in the novel. As Frederick M. Holmes states, the narrative of *Flaubert's Parrot* is fuelled by "the tension between the desire for truth and the fear that it is inaccessible" (2009, p. 71). The desire for truth is related with specific issues for Braithwaite as he states that "Three stories contend within me. One about Flaubert, one about Ellen, one about myself […] My wife's more complicated, and more urgent; yet I resist that too" (2012, p. 85). The stories that contend within Braithwaite are all holes tied together with string and the narrative is sustained by this resistance as Braithwaite postpones providing the details of Ellen's death all throughout the narration, keeping the best for the last. Braithwaite states that "by the time I tell you her story, I want you to be prepared: that's to say, I want you to have enough of books, and parrots, and lost letters […] and even the opinions of Geoffrey Braithwaite" (2012, p. 86). The chapter about Ellen is not only built on the characteristics of mourning, but also built on how even Braithwaite is not able to access, this time, Ellen as a full story, as he states that "I have to hypothesise a little. I have to fictionalise (though that's not what I meant when I called this a pure story). We never talked about her secret life. So I have to invent my way to the truth" (2012, p. 165). The fact that Ellen was an unfaithful wife and the fact that she had affairs was an unknown part of their personal history that Braithwaite fictionalises. As Braithwaite has a problematic relationship with biographies and truth(s), the fictional aspect of the "Pure Story" makes it another hole tied together with string.

The link between Flaubert's short story "A Simple Heart" and Barnes' novel cannot be denied, as they both centralise loss in their narratives. Although *Flaubert's Parrot* is not a rewriting of Gustave Flaubert's short story "A Simple Heart," the central symbol of parrot in the novel is inspired by the parrot named Loulou owned by a servant girl named Felicité in Flaubert's story. In this sense, Barnes' novel and Flaubert's short story are also tied together with strings. Flaubert's story is about how Felicité experiences losses in different times of her life, her lover, her nephew, and then her precious parrot which was the manifestation, first of her deceased nephew, and then the divine himself. Loulou the parrot is a gift given to Felicité, and upon losing the parrot even for a while leaves permanent damages on Felicité and afterwards, she becomes deaf to all voices but Loulou's, who, as a parrot, mimics the voices around to Felicité. Through Loulou, Felicité can hear the world around. As the parrot dies, it is

stuffed and becomes a divine incarnate, as Felicité sees the parrot in divine, and in divine the parrot. Felicité dies, seeing the image of Loulou in the sky.

Braithwaite summarizes "A Simple Heart" in the first chapter and thinks that the parrot is a 'Flaubertian grotesque' and indicates that the lives of Felicité and Flaubert had things in common: "Both of them were solitary; both of them had lives stained with loss; both of them, though full of grief, were persevering," the attributes he himself carries after the loss (2012, p. 17). In this sense, Braithwaite is somehow connected with both Felicité and Flaubert through Ellen's death. Braithwaite's seeing of the parrot for the first time is a turning point for him as he thinks that "his statue was a retread, his house had been knocked down, his books naturally had their own life […] but here, in this exceptional green parrot […] was something which made me feel I had almost known the writer" (2012, p. 16). Here, the last statement is ironic as, in the end, Braithwaite realises that neither Flaubert nor his parrot(s) can be really known. The authenticity of the parrot is a subject that no one cares about, and searching it is a task that even Braithwaite gives up when he sees 50 stuffed parrots at the end of the narrative, thinking "perhaps it was one of them" (2012, p. 190). In Braithwaite's narration, then, both Flaubert and his parrots are huge holes tied together with string. About the "Pure Story," Gasiorek states, "the reader is urged to construct a biography of Braithwaite while the writer constructs one of Flaubert. But Braithwaite remains as unknowable as his subject. The paradigm he selects for his autobiography constructs him in a way that conceals as much as reveals" (1995, pp. 160-161). In this sense, neither Flaubert's biography, nor Braithwaite's autobiography are reliable, solid or clear. The more Braithwaite writes, either about Flaubert, or about Ellen, the more he blurs the evidences and reality. About grasping Ellen's life, Braithwaite states: "My wife: someone I feel I understand less well than a foreign writer dead for a hundred years" (2012, p. 168). Once again, Barnes inserts – one of his most significant characteristics as an author – irony since somehow Braithwaite understands Flaubert's past better than Ellen's.

As it is depicted by the analogy of the net, the novel also ties many other holes with strings. The structure of grief depicted in *Flaubert's Parrot* presents similarities with the one depicted in Barnes' memoir titled *Levels of Life* (2013). In the memoir, Barnes presents grief within three chapters titled "The Sin of Height," "On the Level" and "The Loss of Depth," the last chapter being Barnes' reflections on the loss of his wife, Pat Kavanagh. For Barnes, "grief is a human, not a medical, condition, and while there are pills to help us forget it – and everything else – there are no pills to cure it" (2013, p. 71). In the memoir, the grief is seen as a fall: "As if you have dropped from a several hundred feet, conscious all the time" (2013, p. 77). Barnes refers to his past, the period before the loss, as "when my life was on the level" (2013, p. 75). With the coming of grief, he experiences the loss of depth, he falls but not to a specific place, but to an empty space, as "you lose the sense of your existence being rational, or justifiable" (2013, p. 84).

The theory of mourning, on the other hand, inevitably goes back to Sigmund Freud and his essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). For Freud, mourning is "the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or the loss of some abstraction" that derives from 'grave departures' (Freud, 1981, p. 243). While comparing mourning and melancholia, Freud contends that the two concepts present similar symptoms except that melancholy is pathological and brings self-reproaches (1981, p. 243). Apart from the lowering of the selfhood, mourning causes "pain, loss of interest in the outside world – in so far as it does not recall the dead one – loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love" (1981, p. 244). Freudian approach to mourning is the one in which the griefstruck person can achieve to finalize the mourning process, and this the reason why Freud states that "it never occurs to us to regard it as a pathological condition and to refer to it medical treatment. We rely on its being overcome after a certain lapse of time, and we look upon any interference with it as useless and even harmful" (1981, pp. 243-244). Furthermore,

for Freud, "when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (1981, p. 245).

In the beginning of "Pure Story" Braithwaite builds his own steps of grief as he starts the chapter by stating that

> 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. You got it right. This is part of it all.
>
> Afterwards comes the madness. And then the loneliness: not the spectacular solitude […] but just loneliness […] it's just misery as regular as a job (2012, p.160).

For Braithwaite, loss is seen as the pre-condition of love. The point where Braithwaite states his secondary reactions to the loss – which are madness and loneliness – is the point where he comes close to the argument created by Freud as he indicates that the survivor has "loss of interest in the outside world […] the same loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love" (1981, p. 244).

Braithwaite specifically deals with the question of closure in mourning, a subject in which Braithwaite presents contradictory views when compared with Freud. Freud views passing of time as a requirement for the process of mourning to be overcome: "in mourning time is needed for the command of reality-testing to be carried out in detail, and that when this work has been accomplished the ego will have succeeded in freeing its libido from the lost object" (1981, p. 252). Whereas the chapter "Pure Story" sets out to argue whether it is possible to come out of mourning. Braithwaite, as a medical doctor, consolidates the relatives of deceased patients by implying the fact that their grief will come to an end. However, Braithwaite realises the extent of grief only when it happens to him: "And then it happens to you. There is no glory in it. Mourning is full of time; nothing but time" (p. 160). Experiencing the loss of his significant other, Braithwaite's time is completely occupied with mourning for Ellen, as for him, time turns into a phenomenon in which it is filled only with mourning. The time filled with mourning, and/or mourning filled with time, indicates that it is not possible to detach one from the other. Braithwaite's configuration of time/mourning complexity leaves no room for the griefstruck to come out of it, as time, unlike Freud's approach to its function in mourning, is not a phenomenon that is separated from mourning, and vice versa. As a result, time is not a sphere to be used in order to heal, to complete the work of mourning. Braithwaite's experiencing of Ellen's death provides a splendid example on how grief is lived and whether it is something with a closure. In this sense, the novel does not only propose its own definition of biography writing, but also of mourning, grief and how to get over it (if one ever can). Braithwaite's description of coming-out-of grief does not correspond to Freudian sense of closure and the freedom of the ego as Braithwaite suggests that

> And you do come out of it, that's true. After a year, after five. 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 (2012, p. 161).

Braithwaite depicts mourning as a phase that leaves permanent marks on the survivor's life and to come out of grief, or in the Freudian terminology, to complete the work of mourning, is not an achievement, or a job that the griefstruck can ever be done with. The griefstruck person who is 'tarred and feathered for life' tends to show a retrospective look towards the memory in order to commemorate the deceased but past is not a phenomenon to ease this look. This is the reason why everything in the novel, including Ellen, is a huge hole tied together with string. The novel portrays loss and grief within a narrative that has a speculative attitude towards history. As a result, the fact that past is unreliable makes grief more puzzling and incomprehensible, not only for the readers but also for Braithwaite/the narrator himself.

Furthermore, in *Levels of Life*, Barnes specifies the differences between grief and mourning by first indicating that the traditional idea that goes as "grief is a state while mourning is a process" is an illusion as "they inevitably overlap. Is the state diminishing? Is the process progressing?" (2013, p. 87). This is similar to Roland Barthes' view of the structure of mourning: "mourning is immobile, not subject to a process" (Barthes, 2010b). In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes reflects upon mourning through the loss of his mother: "It is said that mourning, by its gradual labor, slowly erases pain; […] I cannot believe this […] Time eliminates the emotion of loss (I do not weep), that is all. For the rest, everything has remained motionless" (2010a, p. 75). This deconstructs the Freudian approach to mourning as a process that progresses and somehow, eventually, finalizes itself. Instead, both for Barnes and Barthes, mourning is a static line in which there is no progress, to quote T.S. Eliot, "neither from nor towards," and the griefstruck is "at the still point of the turning world" in a state of "neither arrest nor movement" (Eliot, 2018, p. 394). While comparing grief and mourning from a Freudian perspective, Darian Leader states that "Grief is our reaction to a loss, but mourning is how we process this grief. Each memory and expectation linked to the person we have lost must be revived and met with the judgement that they are gone forever" (2009, p. 26). In this respect, until the chapter of "Pure Story," the whole narrative of Braithwaite can be taken as a postponement of this meeting with the judgement that Ellen is gone forever, and this is not only because Braithwaite does not want to meet with it, but also because he is simply unable to do so.

In "Pure Story," Braithwaite makes an analogy about lovers: "Lovers are like Siamese twins, two bodies with a single soul; but if one dies before the other, the survivor has a corpse to lug around" (2012, p. 169). Braithwaite, within the whole narrative of the novel, can be viewed as the surviving party of the twins, wandering around Rouen with the deceased other half, occupying his mind and time with *petite* details about the life of Flaubert. The analogy of the twins is another indication of how mourning is pictured in the narrative, as the Siamese twins, if the deceased is to be detached from the survivor, both end up dying. Whereas according to the Freudian sense of detachment in mourning, mourning is completed as "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (Freud, 1981, p. 245). The Freudian work of mourning is accomplished with a sense of detachment and disengagement with the object of loss. However, the Siamese twins example Braithwaite depicts is the perfect opposite of the Freudian approach, and their propositions do not correspond with each other. This is similar to Gordon Livingstone's portrayal of mourning: "Perhaps that's how it is with a permanent loss: you examine it from every angle you can think of and then just carry it like a weight" (qtd in Leader, 2009, p. 30).

Braithwaite further depicts his grief by stating that "And still you think about her every day. Sometimes, weary of loving her dead, you imagine her back to life again" (2012, p. 161). The fact that Braithwaite thinks about Ellen everyday demonstrates that the Freudian sense of 'free and uninhibited ego' does not work for Braithwaite, and his ego is still captivated by Ellen's loss. Braithwaite gives an example from Flaubert's mourning of his mother:

> After his mother's death, Flaubert used to get his housekeeper to dress up in her old check dress […] It worked, and it didn't work: seven years after the funeral he would still burst into tears at the sight of that old dress moving about the house. Is this success or failure? (2012, p. 161).

The narrator presents another example about whether one really does come out of grief, if one ever can, through connecting his story with that of Flaubert's. Braithwaite tries to comprehend the extend of grief through the loss Flaubert himself lived, and the fact that Flaubert did not recover and still can shed tears would be a failed mourning for Freud, whereas for Braithwaite it can be taken as a successful one. The successful mourning for Freud is the one in which there is motion, progress and, in the end, resolution accompanied with the detachment. However, the

examples Braithwaite has do not fit this description. The chapter also makes readers see how puzzling the condition of grief is, as to succeed or to fail are relative and vague results. About the interconnection between the surface layer and the infrastructure of the novel, Cox suggests that "the most important thing that Braithwaite reveals about himself from his accounts of various characters in the novel is that his interest in Gustave Flaubert is intimately connected to the traumas of his marriage, [and] his wife's infidelity" (2010, p. 61). In this sense, even within his "Pure Story," Flaubert is still there to be used as a reference point for Braithwaite's representation of his own story of love and loss.

In *Levels of Life*, Barnes indicates that "Perhaps grief, which destroys all patterns, destroys even more: the belief that any pattern exists" (2013, p. 85). To view life as an entity that lacks any pattern is seen as one of the post-effects of grief, and as grief is a loss of depth, it is also a loss of pattern. The fragmented narrative structure of *Flaubert's Parrot* – a characteristic that is generally attached to postmodern fictional tendencies – gains another layer with Barnes' views on grief and its relation to the loss of pattern. Thus, it can be said that by fragmenting the traditional plot structure, Braithwaite somehow imitates/inserts the structure of grief in/to the novel. What is seen as fragmentation in the narrative, then, derives from the reflection of grief in the mind of the grief-struck. In this regard, not only the biography writing, but also grieving is a collection of huge holes tied together with string. The novel employs the characteristics of postmodern 'depthlessness' in its treatment to past, history, biography, multiplicities and/of truth. However, it can be said that the depthlessness of the narrative derives from 'the loss of depth' that Ellen's death caused. Braithwaite fell from 'the level' and lost his sense of depth towards all other entities/phenomenon.

Past and history are two other concepts that the novel puts at stake. Throughout the narrative, Braithwaite repeatedly asks a question:

> How do we seize the past? Can we ever do so? When I was a medical student some pranksters at an end-of-term dance released into the hall a piglet which had been smeared with grease […] People fell over trying to grasp it, and were made to look ridiculous in the process. The past often seems to behave like that piglet (2012, p. 14).

Like the piglet, the past is out of control and the ones who try to grasp it eventually look ridiculous for Braithwaite. Mourning resembles to Braithwaite's analogy of past acting like the piglet "smeared with grease" in the end-of-term dance. The tarred and feathered mourner turns his/her mind to the past and realises that it is not possible to seize it. The novel represents past and history both on a public and on a personal level, and not being able to grasp the public history in the novel is simultaneously related with not being able to seize the private past. In this sense, Braithwaite toils to reach truth in both layers and they are interconnected as one inevitably influences the other. Seeing contradictory details about the true biography and past of Flaubert and his inauthentic parrots wound Braithwaite more about his own personal autobiography. The more he is alienated to Flaubert's past the more he is positioned far away from Ellen's past at the same time. The relation between the two layers in the novel are also tied with Emma Bovary, one of Flaubert's characters, as Cornelia Stott states that Braithwaite's Ellen draws "obvious parallels to Emma Bovary (in addition to her initials): both commit adultery because they are unhappily married, both reach a point where they cannot carry on living, and both leave behind husbands who did not understand them in life" (2010, p. 95). In this sense, by trying to escape from his own grief, Braithwaite plunges himself deeper into his own sorrow by searching more and more about Flaubert and his parrots. In this sense, finding multiple and inauthentic parrots is equal to not being able to access the authentic and private past that Braithwaite's grief is rooted in. For Cox, although Braithwaite chooses to 'chase the writer,' "his Flaubertian world cannot successfully function as a means of avoiding difficult issues" Ellen being the central one that it cannot avoid (2010, p. 59). Braithwaite knows that a

tiny detail in history can totally alter one's perspective about the past: "How do we seize the foreign past? We read, we learn, we ask, we remember, we are humble; and then a casual detail shifts everything" (2012, p. 90). This is valid not only for Flaubert's but also for Braithwaite's personal history. Braithwaite executes these ideas in the creation of Flaubert's biography as he clearly asserts that his reading of records on a specific event Flaubert had experienced does not comply with Flaubert's own writings in his journals. Details shift the history; truths are blurred. In his life, Braithwaite arrives at a point where he realises that both the (hi)story of Flaubert and Ellen are foreign pasts that he cannot seize.

The peculiar aspect of the narrative of Braithwaite is that all the evidence about Flaubert and his parrots are lost, blurred or denied. While questioning the past, Braithwaite states that "history is merely another literary genre: the past is autobiographical fiction pretending to be a parliamentary report" (2012, p. 90). This claim of Braithwaite is applied in his narrative: the history about Flaubert is treated as a literary work, and Braithwaite's own past, which is squeezed into the narrative, is included as an autobiography. The more one keeps reading his narrative, the more s/he is positioned far away from certain things such as the (would-be) facts about Flaubert's life, whether there is still an authentic parrot, and whether one, eventually, can seize the past. Within the narrative, these questions simultaneously serve for both layers since Braithwaite cannot seize both the private and the public history. While the narrative presents the fluidity of Flaubert's past, it simultaneously implies the fact that Ellen's past also cannot be fully seized. As a result, Braithwaite, as a grief-stricken man, receives another damage when he figures out that history is simply another literary genre. This demolishes the trust that a mourner has for the past memories shared with the deceased. For Braithwaite,

> The past is a distant, receding coastline, and we are all in the same boat. Along the stern rail there is a line of telescopes; each brings the shore into focus at a given distance. If the boat is becalmed, one of the telescopes will be in continual use; it will seem to tell the whole, the unchanging truth. But this is an illusion; and as the boat sets off again, we return to our normal activity: scurrying from one telescope to another, seeing the sharpness fade in one, waiting for the blur to clear in another (Barnes, 2012, p. 101).

Braithwaite situates past on a mobile platform on which the possessors are always in the process of receding instead of approaching, and the proximity, approach and clearness of the past changes as the telescopes zoom in and out. In *Levels of Life*, Barnes speculates that the griefstruck, in order to search for the lost one, has two spheres to explore: dreams and memory. These are two distinct yet interrelated phenomenon that still lack a certain pattern. The surviving party either sees the deceased in the dream world, within different/similar *mise-en-scenes,* or tries to recall the past memories shared with that person, as for Barnes, the survivor is the "principal rememberer" (2013, p. 90). Both Barnes and Freud elaborate on the function of memory in the work of mourning. Yet, Freud suggests that after the loss is experienced "Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and the detachment of the libido is accomplished in respect to it" (1981, p. 245). Whereas for Barnes, memory is used not to disengage the griefstruck from the object of loss but it is used to commemorate the loss by re-enacting the memories in mind, yet past acting like a receding coastline is a challenge for the memory of the mourner. Barnes indicates that the deceased "exists not really in the present, not wholly in the past, but in some intermediate tense, the past-present" (2013, p. 108). This makes it harder for the griefstruck to grasp the lost person as the person's existence is not specific to one tense only, and as a result, the strings cannot always tie the hole, the hole being the deceased. In this regard, the fact that in *Flaubert's Parrot* past is a receding coastline and acts like that piglet smeared with grease in the party, is among the factors that puzzle the question of grieving.

Conclusion

Flaubert's Parrot ends with the possibility of multiplicities related with the parrots: "Perhaps it was one of them" is the last sentence of the novel (2012, p. 190). While the closure clearly implies the impossibility of reaching the original parrot, or the authentic history of Flaubert, in the narration, Braithwaite also tries to catch the story of Ellen with a net, and she is also a huge hole tied together with string. The novel poses these problems and questions with a colourful symbol of parrot, a bird whose existence is solely dependent on parody and imitation. The interplay between the experimental parts and Braithwaite's grief in the novel can also be the result of the novel's resistance to categorisation, since the narrative is an elastic one. As a grief-stricken man, Braithwaite searches for the biography of Flaubert while his own autobiography is an open-wound. In *Flaubert's Parrot*, truths are spoiled, parrots are indefinite, and history is biased and all these issues are narrated by a man who has lost his sense of depth after the loss of his wife. The loss of depth that comes with grief is treated as the formula for the structure of the novel, functioning both for the surface layer which deals with tricky multiplicities, and for the infrastructure that views grief as an experience that tars and feathers the griefstruck without promising a closure. Apart from Flaubert's biographical information, the narrative of Braithwaite provides its own sense and structure of grief and mourning which, in the end, are associated with the surface layer of the narrative which lacks a pattern. The infrastructure of the narrative proposes that grief is not a process that one can achieve to overcome in a certain period of time. Braithwaite's desire to reach truth is finalised with failures, and it can be deduced that Ellen's past is as inaccessible as of Flaubert's. While trying to postpone the story of Ellen by telling the life of Flaubert instead, Braithwaite sinks more and more into the oil-slick like that tarred and feathered gull.

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