

УДК 821.111

UNDESTANDING JULIAN BARNES

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Описание: В статье рассматриваются известные романы Дж. Барнса как постмодернистские тексты. Интерпретация текстов основана на идее деконструкции.

Description: The article observes famous Julian Barnes' works as postmodern texts. The interpretation of the texts is based on the idea of deconstruction.

Область применения разработки: История английской литературы, стилистика английского языка.

Внедрение разработки: МГУ имени А.А. Кулешова, 2015/2016 уч. год.

Основные преимущества разработки: Отсутствуют аналоги в отечественном (белорусском) литературоведении.

Julian Barnes was born in 1946. His parents were teachers of French; perhaps, Barnes' interest in France and French literature was sparked by this fact. His family spent their holidays in France. Barnes studied modern languages at Oxford; he also took up law but never practiced. He worked as a lexicographer for the Oxford Dictionary, a teacher in English in France, a teacher of creative writing in the USA, a journalist, an editor, a television critic, a translator from English and German. Julian Barnes is one of the most admitted British writers of his generation. He wrote with distinction across a wide range of genres and styles. His fiction and non-fiction were published under his own name and pseudonyms. Barnes has been awarded with numerous literary prizes in the UK and abroad – the Geoffrey Faber prize, the E.M. Foster award, the Prix Medicis award, the Pix Femina award, the Shakespeare prize, the Booker prize. In 1988 he was made Chevalier of the Order of Arts and Letters in France. His works have been translated into more than thirty languages.

A great majority of Barnes' books belong to postmodern movement. It means that his works are not "straight" novels, that is, works with a traditional coherent narrative. His texts are characterized with some intrinsic postmodern features. To understand Julian Barnes we should take into consideration the idea of the deconstructionist approach to literature, which was described in the works of Barthes, Derrida. Barnes' texts can be destructed into different styles, genres, meanings, and a new kind of collage, a mix. His scepticism and re-evaluating resulted in using of doubt, in constant dialogue. In his works the truth is not something fixed. It is begetting arguments and counterarguments. Distrust means a sceptical attitude towards classical books about man and society whose ideas seemed to be disproved by the realities of the XXth century. The strategies of intertextuality are widely used in Barnes' texts. Borrowed plots, images, characters are exploited for creating new literature works with new ideas, approaches to eternal and topical problems. His postmodern texts abound in allusions and quotations. The works of predecessors are transformed via parody and irony. Barnes' texts can be used in teaching Literature, Language, Stylistics, Oral Practice, and other disciplines.

The theme of the novel "Flaubert's Parrot" (1984) is subjectivism in opinions. The following problems are posed in the text: interpretation of a great personality via facts of his biography, his books, evaluation of man's own life via fictional characters. The central character of the novel Braithwaite, a retired British doctor, widowed. So, he has plenty of time. Braithwaite becomes obsessed with seeking to investigate the nature of Gustave Flaubert. He begins his quest by trying to find the genuine parrot which Flaubert borrowed for a model while writing "A Simple Heart". In Rouen, Flaubert's home city, Braithwaite found two stuffed parrots each said to have set on Flaubert's table. During his search he is collecting all possible information about Flaubert. The major personages are historical figures long dead: Flaubert's lover, Flaubert's best friend, Flaubert's mother. In the novel there are three contradictory chronologies of Flaubert's life, which describe the great French writer from different points. The enigma of Flaubert's personality gets lost in the flood of information, opinions, and speculation. Braithwaite is reflecting through

the literary analyses on his own unhappy family. His wife committed a suicide like the heroine of the novel "Madam Bovary". Braithwaite is a kind of parrot himself, whose life repeated the plot of this Flaubert's novel.

"Braithwaite's digressions on animal imagery in Flaubert, his strained relationship with other Flaubert obsessive, and his increasingly guilty musings on his wife's suicide make Flaubert a ciper as well as the focal point of the novel. As Braithwaite makes clear at the outset, a life can be told a thousand ways..." [1, p. 68]. It means that many facts can be painted in dark or bright colours. The novel leaves us with the sense, that history is not something we can possess or know, it is only a process of deconstruction.

There is not a traditional, more or less straight plot in "Flaubert's Parrot". We can not find the culmination, for example. The novel contributes to shaping high postmodernism. The main question of postmodernism is man (the reader) lost in the world of endless contradictory information. The intertext of the novel includes quotations and allusions to Flaubert's works: "Madam Bovary", "Salamambo", "Sentimental Education", "A Simple Heart", etc. In class this work can be used to demonstrate a high postmodern text.

"Porcupine" (1992) is a political short novel. The setting is a post-communist fictional country likely based on Bulgaria after the fall of the Communist regime. In the letter to his Bulgarian translator and friend Dimitrina Kondeva Barnes wrote: "It's about the trial of a deposed Communist leader in Eastern Europe, seen largely from the accused's point of view... at least, I think so. Now it's not set in Bulgaria, but obviously the trial of Zhivkov is a very useful to me, as none of the other Communist leaders has come up for trial" [2, p. 84]. The novel's plot is based on a trial of a deposed Communist leader Stoyo Petkanov. Petkanov is partly modeled on Todor Zhivkov, and partly is a fictional character. The newly appointed Prosecutor Peter Solinsky, a new democrat, at first, intends the trial to be honest and fair. But only a verdict of guilty is acceptable to the new authority. So, the trial degenerates, turns into a TV-show, the real evidence and facts do not play any role. Stoyo Petkanov is found guilty, in a way he is the winner. Barnes tries to see arguments on both sides. Frederick M. Holmes states: "Barnes's treatment of the conflict emphasizes the absence of absolute standards for adjudicating these debates. The old political system was tyrannical and corrupt, but its successor is inept and, perhaps, equally corrupt" [3, p.132]. For Barnes there is not one truth, he explores different, competing opinions, the clash of ideas. "Barnes is interested in individuals' 'inner voices' and their own truths rather than the ultimate Truth" [4, p. 7].

This novel deals with exploring different ideological dogmas. We can trace the features of different genres and styles in the novel: the detective story, psychological story, essay, document. There are clichés of newspapers of different times (soviet period, post soviet period). For example, we can find the following expressions: "anti-socialist influence", "elimination of political opponents" [5, p.110], "denounced their bourgeois justice", "helmsman of the nation" [5, p.81], "expression of solidarity, good will and intent", "Mother Russia" [5, p.89], "neutralize the dangerous figures" [5, p.80], "co-operation with other nations" [5, p.123], "a time of great hope" [5, p.79].

The initial letters of the characters are "S. P." (Stoyo Petkanov) and "P. S." (Peter Solinsky). The letters are the same. It can mean the consciousness of one man who is hesitating during the period of the "Change". "S" and "P" can be interpreted as "swine" and "pig". Porcupine is a kind of a pig. So, the title can refer to the both characters. They are not extreme antagonists. [6, p. 102]. This novel can be interesting not only for students, who study English and Literature, but for those, who take up History.

The story "The Revival" is from the collection "The Lemon Table" (2004). The protagonist is the great Russian writer Ivan Sergeyevich Turgenev. It has already been mentioned that Julian

Barnes studied modern languages. He also took up Russian. The figure of Ivan Sergeyevich is very renowned at Oxford. He received honorary doctorate in 1879. "The Revival" deals with Turgenev's last love, with a young actress who was thirty five years his junior, and who played Verochka in his play "A Month in the Country". The strange relationship between Turgenev and Verochka are revealed through the fragments of letters and some facts of the biography.

At the very beginning Barnes plays with the reader. The Russian writer is called "T". The intertext of the story includes many quotations from Turgenev's works, and there are some hints on his life. "Abroad, they hung gowns and ribbons on him. He was sixty old by choice as well as fact" [7, p. 89]. It is a hint on his degree. Turgenev is called Turgenev only at the end of the story.

As concerning his love affair there is also some kind of uncertainty. It is a well-known fact that Ivan Sergeyevich and his lady spent a short time in the compartment. They were together for thirty miles. He got off the train at Oryol, and she continued her tour towards Odessa. All we have are his subsequent letters. Their correspondence lasted till the end of Turgenev's life. In one of his letters he wrote: "I kiss your little hands, your little feet, kiss everything you will allow me to kiss and even that which you will not" [7, p. 92]. So, what does it mean? Were they lovers? These questions appear in the story. Some years before this letter Turgenev wrote: "After the age of forty there is only one word to sum up the basis of life: Renunciation" [7, p. 90]. Barnes reflects on emotional and rational approach. He draws a contrast between the mystery and imaginings of love in the nineteenth century and the consummation of sex now [8, p.106]. Barnes sympathy is with the world of renunciation, romantic feelings and dreams. The question which can be put for students: can the feeling of love be distorted in the world of consumption?

The novel "England, England" (1998) tackles the very important themes of contemporary Literature: national identity, national memory, emotional mythology of Englishness, authenticity in the society of consumption. "England, England" is a fantastic novel, but it has many references to real life. It shows how England is losing its identity and history. A fictional park "England, England" represents national images and sights. It is situated on the Isle of Weight and run by a group of entrepreneurs. The island is remade to be fit for tourist consumption. The history has to be rewritten and simplified. The park becomes a replica, a fake of the best known historical places. It abounds in supposedly various icons of Englishness. In one place tourists can see Buckingham palace, Big Ben, the Tower of London, Princess Di's Grave, Stonehenge, Harrods, and so on. A large group of actors plays roles of historical and legendary figures. The visitors are fascinated by artificially recreated Battle of Britain, adventures of Robin Hood and his merry outlaws, jokes of Doctor Johnson. Tourists do not want to take up history, read books, and think. They want to be entertained by this show.

This novel carries reflections on contemporary philosophical concepts and ideas. For example, the theory of simulacrum of Jean Baudrillard finds its embodiment in Barnes's text. According to Baudrillard the contemporary world consists of fakes (simulacra). The creator of the Park Sir Jack Pitman reflects on reality and simulacra "What is real? This is sometimes how I put the question to myself. Are you real, for instance- you and you?And you will forgive me for my candour, but I could have you replaced with substitutes, with...simulacra, more quickly than I could sell my beloved Brancusi" [9, p.33]. Other personage says: "...nowadays we prefer the replica to the original. We prefer the reproduction of the work of art to the work of art itself, the perfect sound and solitude of the compact disc to the symphony concert..." [9, p. 55].

The intertext of the novel carries numerous borrowings from English history, literature, folklore. While being used in class "England, England" is very illustrative to outline main points in English history, culture, and contemporary philosophy.

Julian Barnes is the author of various intellectual texts. He explores and revisits biography and fiction, history and individual visions, culture and literature, national and personal identity, and so on. In his works we can find distinct features of postmodernism. Barnes reworks classical narratives and tackles intertextual engagement with various pretexts. The intertext can include works of different genres and styles. Barnes' works can draw students' interest while studying different disciplines.

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