Self-Negotiation between Past and Present: Bildungsroman and Character Narration in Julian Barnes's *Metroland* and *The Only Story*

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Abstract: Julian Barnes's debut novel *Metroland* and his latest novel *The Only Story* deal with the same subject matter of Bildungsroman, in both of which the "I" is the narrator in the discourse world on the one hand and the character in the storyworld on the other. With the affordance of dual focalization, the narrator, at the time of the telling, perceives his former self's perception at the time of his action. This article proposes the term "Barnesian Bildungsroman" to designate the narrative mode in which Barnes assimilates the narrative form of Bildungsroman to define the elusive selfhood in the crisis of self-development. It argues that Barnes invites his audiences to witness character narrators Chris's and Paul's changes and conflicts between their current selves and their past selves. As autobiographical authors, character narrators aim to construct stories of themselves, in the process of which they provide a glimpse of the past self and the current life with a purposeful and dynamic sense of self-continuity, which is emphasized by the account of change instead of stability.

Key words: Bildungsroman; character narration; Julian Barnes; *Metroland*; *The Only Story*

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标题：过去与当下的自我协商：成长小说与巴恩斯《伦敦郊区》和《唯一的故事》的人物叙述

内容摘要：巴恩斯新作《唯一的故事》再次回到了其处女作《伦敦郊区》所探讨的成长主题。本文提出"巴氏成长小说"这一概念，旨在分析该文类对成长小说的吸纳与包容，进而在此基础上考察小说人物如何在危机中重新定义自我。在人物叙述层面上，"我"既是话语世界的叙述者也是故事世界的人物；在双重聚焦层面上，叙述者在讲述的同时看到了过去的自己。作为自传式作者，克里斯和保罗建构自身的故事，在过去自我与现在自我之间建立起一种动态连续性，

其意义正在于这种建构的变化性，而非对某种稳定性的维护。从修辞设计的层面来说，巴恩斯通过人物叙述的笔法，有效地改写了成长小说，在叙述进程中揭示了人物叙述者在现在与过去之间的自我拉锯。

关键词：成长小说；人物叙述；朱利安·巴恩斯；《伦敦郊区》；《唯一的故事》

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Introduction

In a recent article in *The Guardian,* Julian Barnes raises such a question: are writers “traditionally supposed to have a sense of place?” (Barnes, “Julian Barnes on Suburbia”). To answer this question, we might turn our attention to his debut novel, *Metroland* (1980), and his most recent work, *The Only Story* (2018). Metroland is a name that the author gives to an area of suburbia north of London. Barnes admits that suburbia is his kind of place. In *The Only Story*, Barnes returns to the milieu of *Metroland*, the beginning of his career. A veteran Barnesian reader will recognize the familiar landscape in *The Only Story*, where the story deals with restrained emotion, told by a not-wholly-reliable narrator, Paul Roberts, and youth is recollected in certain stages. Both set in the suburban “stockbroker belt”, Barnes’s first novel is narrated in the first person; while his latest novel employs different voices, shifting from the first, the second, to the third person. The “I” in these two novels is both the narrator in the discourse world and the character in the storyworld. Narrated from the perspectives of adults looking back on their lives, the first parts of two novels follow character narrators from their rebellious adolescence against bourgeois values and middle-class life. It is interesting that, after almost four decades, Barnes spends much of his career turning back to his first novel through parallel themes and settings.

In *Metroland* and *The Only Story*, Barnes deals with the subject matter of Bildungsroman and employs character narration. As a refinement of “first-person narration”, character narration enjoys the advantage of excluding a narrator who is not a character but speaks in first person strategically. James Phelan creatively coins this new and accessible term to map a rigorous and systematic picture of I-narration. It is “an art of indirection” that the author uses one text appropriate for two audiences (the narrator’s and the author’s) and two purposes (Phelan 1).

Metroland and *The Only Story* are mainly about character narrators involved in an intensive interior quest for self-development, which can be effectively

interpreted as a useful metaphor for what happens to the protagonists when they grow up. Therefore, detailed combined analysis of the two novels might offer some fresh insights and assessments. This article aims to pursue four goals. First, through examining critically the debate on the character narrators' retrospection, it argues that critics' discussions are ultimately about the inner dialogue between the current self and the past self. Second, it tries to decode features of Barnes's application of the generic frame of Bildungsroman, in the name of "Barnesian Bildungsroman". Third, when analyzing the narrative logic of "Barnesian Bildungsroman," it focuses on two elements of their narration: self-consciousness and focalization. It points out that Barnes uses dual focalization to reveal the dynamic relation between the experiencing-I and the narrating-I by the act of narrating the past, and in doing so he ties the protagonist's transformation to his experience in the realm of art and love. Fourth, it tries to illuminate the most salient feature in "Barnesian Bildungsroman": circularity.

Self-Deception or Self-Correction? The Inner Dialogue between Two "Selves"

The theme of growing up, is quite a stale topic. It is, however, enlivened in *Metroland* and *The Only Story*, both of which are triptychs with an ambiguous ending. *Metroland* is written in three parts called "Metroland (1963)," "Paris (1968)," and "Metroland II (1977)." Chris's life journey ends in Metroland where he starts his journey. In the third part, *Metroland* comes full circle as Chris, aged 30, returns to Metroland with his wife into the bourgeois life that he repudiated as a teenager. *The Only Story* starts off in the first-person narration of the 19-year-old character narrator Paul, falling in love with 48-year-old housewife Susan at the tennis club. As Susan descends into addiction and depression in the second part, the voice segues beautifully from the first person to the second person. In the third part, Paul's narrative switches to the distant third person which covers the years after leaving Susan. Where *Metroland* and *The Only Story* are especially adept are in the way that they depict the lives of their protagonists from adolescence to maturity in an idiosyncratic manner.

In terms of Chris's and Paul's life paths through a weaving of narrative and structure ploys, critics suggest two different interpretations of character narrators' retrospection: self-deception and self-correction. On the one hand, those who see the narrator's return to the character's mind as a betrayal of previous feeling or ideas are more inclined to regard the return as self-deception. The self-deceivers engage in a form of mental struggle: their motivation to avoid the recognition of betrayal leads them to escape the past real world mentally or emotionally, and then

to intermittently inhabit an imaginary environment which protects them from the guilt of inner lies. On the other hand, some critics view Chris's retrospection as the ironic correction of his past self. Rather than betraying his young self, the old self still evolves his subjectivity. It is worth noting that when analyzing Chris's and Paul's retrospection, critics on different sides of the debate put the same emphasis on the tone of Chris's and Paul's retrospective narration. They primarily salute the apt descriptions of the wiser and distanced view over one's life.

In terms of *Metroland*, critics point out the irony and praise the way in which Barnes presents adult Chris's interpretation and judgement of his younger self. According to Merritt Moseley, one of the main achievements of this novel is the management of tone as the mind of adult Chris always inhabits the mind of adolescent Chris, which allows for irony and sharpness (Moseley 19). With critical hindsight, Frederick Holmes further clarifies this irony even though it undermines the positions of both the young and the adult. He argues that "what makes the irony doubly directed is the fact that the younger Chris's comments point ahead in judgment at the very bourgeois way of life that his older self has adopted, just as the older Chris's comments point backward critically at the naivety of his younger self" (Holmes 42). We see that Chris as a teenager versus an adult has contradicting ideals and realities when the character narrator's perspectives shift. What matters here is that how the narrator treats the difference between the past self and the present self.

Holmes avers that "overtly recognizing the irony inherent in the transformation that he has undergone as an adult does not make him any less an apostate" (Holmes 43). Rather than viewing Chris's choice as a positive exemplum, Holmes reminds us that we could read him as being negative. According to Holmes, we could conclude that Barnes wants us to reject Chris, instead of identifying with him, since Chris's return should be viewed as a betrayal of the youthful ideals that he has formed with his friend Toni. However, according to Matthew Taunton, Chris is aware of this paradox and even enjoys it. His self-consciousness of suburban life lies in his acceptance of inconsistency and irony. Having embraced a more contradictory reality where the youthful idealism is replaced by the ironic acceptance, Chris learns to live this kind of contradiction, which is considered as an important part of the character's development (Taunton 15). In his analysis of the ending in *Metroland*, Moseley seems to be reserved: "Does this happiness arises from willingness to settle for less? Yes, to an extent" (Moseley 30). Recording his progressive rejection of the environment, Chris gradually receives his home as the representative of convention or orthodoxy. Chris's impossibility of reaching any

lasting personal belief or faith leads to his acceptance of betrayal. His wit seems to go along with a Bechettian conviction that he simply must go on. All considered, those critics who insist that Chris has not betrayed his youthful idealism tend to justify his mature acceptance of the ordinary satisfactions and compromises. His self-consciousness of bourgeoisie life also marks the truth of contradictory reality that the important part of the process of growth lies in its ironic acceptance. In this respect, the novel portrays the consolations of maturity and the disturbing aspects of adulthood, and thus Chris's retrospection is the ironic correction of his adolescent self.

Compared with those critics who hold opposite views on Chris's attitude towards the difference, most critics claim that Paul's retrospection in *The Only Story* is tainted by self-delusion. Alex Preston argues that Susan and Paul's affair is "presented to the reader from dual perspectives: both the 19-year-old's hot, naive experience of it and then the sour reflections of the older man looking back half a century later" (Preston). Whereas the story in the first part is told in a relatively cheerful tone, the second part changes to a bleaker period in Paul's life with the narrative voice segueing from first person to second person as if to place readers in the story. Preston addresses it as "a kind of accusation" (Preston). Kate Clanchy makes the point more deeply, noting that rather than allowing readers to exult in his romance, the old narrator is dry about everything: "his revolutionary impulses, his rebellion against his parents, his expulsion from the tennis club, even the sex" (Clanchy). In this regard, the background of the novel is evoked precisely, tenderly and ironically. The narrator's method of contemplating truths about love in his retrospective narrative is to question readers and himself with hindsight. What critics pay attention to is the way in which Paul uses the first-person narration to describe his memories of the love affair. Jon Day suggests that Paul's retrospection may not be "a straightforward reckoning with the past at all, but an attempt to distance himself from it" (Day). One can therefore concur with Day that the effective use of focalization and voice highlights the increasing affective distance between the narrator and the character. This certainly explains why Kate Clanchy claims that the exquisite moments in the novel come from "its psychological acuity, especially about how we remember" (Clanchy). In Paul's narration, his experiences deconstruct themselves. The effect of a dissolution of stable narrative perspectives creates a readerly engagement of Paul's "real" emotion. In the process of recapturing Paul's feelings, Barnes implies the egotism and illusions that Paul harbor.

The discussion on tone actually is about Barnes's treatment of focalization.

Critics have already recognized Barnes's use of dual focalization but have not elaborated it theoretically. As the above-mentioned analysis on the tone suggests, the inner conversation between the current self and the past self constantly goes on Chris's and Paul's minds, which serves as the key to a central Barnesian concern about how people can change. In terms of Chris, most critics recognize the irony in his tone when facing the young self's naivety. In terms of Paul, critics care more about his affective response in the retelling of his love affair. The question is that how Chris and Paul treat the difference or conflicts between the past self and the present self. The attribute of this inner dialogue resides in the existence of paradox since it is more like the schizoid act of directly getting oneself to disbelieve what one believes, or believes what one disbelieves. The main indication of their inner conversations consists exactly in taking opposing points when they both believe and disbelieve in the "lie" about themselves. In their active attempts made to persuade themselves or make sense of their past, they pay attention to their problems and failures, criticize themselves and search for ways to change themselves. Such confrontation could be seen as a defensive inner conversation between the defending voice and the opposing voice. The former represents a subjective self-perception, while the latter demands an objective self-evaluation, even though it may contradict an ideal self-image. The difference between self-deception and self-correction lies in the present self's attitude towards this confrontation, with negative or positive manner to treat their changes. It is significant to note that, despite the varying opposing attitude, the voice of truth is still being experienced by the present self as a potential threat. Their retrospection depends on the exercise of their ethical authority in the judgment of their life. Thus, their acts are ethically charged, facing self-deception, cowardice, uncertainty and other challenges. In this sense, Barnes adapts the genre of Bildungsroman in a fresh and profound way.

"Barnesian Bildungsroman": Presentness, Autobiographical Narrative and Ambiguous Ending

It might be a cliché to consider the genre of Bildungsroman in the fictional world, as noted above. When talking about his first novel, Barnes concludes what *Metroland* has brought him:

> First, because it existed, and still exists; it started me off, and it gave me confidence. Secondly, because I think I succeeded in what I was trying to do: take the traditional Bildungsroman a stage further, ending not with the young protagonist gazing Balzacianly down on the city where he is to seek

> and perhaps make his fortune, but continuing on until a kind of defeat (if an ambiguous one) is reached. (Barnes, "Julian Barnes: Why I Wrote")

Barnes's self-analysis without any doubt contains remarks that he tries to adapt this genre by complicating the trajectory of protagonist's development. This is significant because it leads readers to greater personal engagement along with the protagonist's journey from youth to intellectual, psychological or emotional maturity.

To figure out how Barnes takes the traditional Bildungsroman a stage further, this article proposes the term "Barnesian Bildungsroman," which refers to Barnes's fiction that successfully adapts the narrative form of Bildungsroman to explore the issue of defining the elusive selfhood in the danger posed by the self-development crisis. Broadly speaking, "Barnesian Bildungsroman" possesses such characteristics. First, it uses the pattern of Bildungsroman, but focuses on the protagonist who can be defined by his/her experience of the past and the growing self. He uses the frame to describe the protagonist's current situation much more fully than other Bildungsroman. Second, "Barnesian Bildungsroman" has stronger autobiographical ties, with the circular trajectory of autobiographical narrative, in which the present is both the end and the beginning of its narration. The formation of a mature self is also provided by the symbolical return to the basic values of the experience of youth in the cyclical structuring of their autobiographical narrative. Third, it forms itself by refusing classical tangible optimistic or tragic ending of Bildungsroman. Instead, Barnes records the failure of development as a strong leitmotif of Bildungsroman representation in Chris's and Paul's stories with a question of the psychic fulfillment and spiritual stability or completeness. Thus, their acts are ethically charged, facing self-deception, cowardice, uncertainty and other challenges.

Chris's and Paul's developmental process begins in a provincial background, the vast suburban area. The adolescent protagonists are in conflict with their parents living in Bourgeois routines, though the description of Paul's rebellion against his parents are less vivid than Chris's. In *Metroland*, both Chris and Toni sneer at the suburban middle-class life of the old generation whose morality is to be rejected. From Chris's point of view, parenthood is "a crime of strict liability" (*Metroland* 40). Their life is an unendurably empty existence. The same holds for Paul, who offers such an account of his parents: "[m]y parents' marriage, to my unforgiving nineteen-year-old eye, was a car crash of cliché. Though I would I have to admit, as the one making the judgement, that a 'car crash of cliché' is itself a cliché" (*The*

Only Story 11). Therefore, to break away from the middle-class and suburban home of their parents, Chris and Paul leave home to enter a larger society, namely Paris and London. Their departures are determined by external and inner stimuli. To Chris, Metroland is associated with the conformity and family: "wife, baby, reliable job, mortgage, flower garden" (*Metroland* 202); while Paris is the city infused with such traits like freedom, exoticism, excitement, and non-conformity that Chris and Toni regard as desirable. As for Paul's departure, it seems to be triggered by the scandal in the small town, whereas the stimulus lies in Paul's eagerness to challenge and to be "different." After leaving a brief letter to his parents, Paul says excitedly that "I thought the 'as' and 'when' sounded properly grown-up. Well, so I was. Twenty-one. And ready to full indulge, fully express, fully live my life. 'I'm alive! I'm living!'" (*The Only Story* 83). In the process of development, they have to undergo the ordeal by love, living through moments of spiritual or emotional suffering and pain. Rather than in the larger social realm, including the change to the current political climate, the maturing of Chris and Paul is largely tied to their experience in the realm of love. After indulging in a love affair, now in their manhood, they experience the process of self-discovering that leads to their final initiation, though the final stage of this process implies an ambiguous meaning. Using the general structure of Bildungsroman, Barnes makes thematic issues of identity and understanding of one's place in his life central to the fiction.

Barnes's *Bildung*-element, however, also marks it off as different from general or traditional Bildungsroman. He emphasizes the features of English Bildungsroman, in which the rendering of experience of youth is an important factor. Generally speaking, it focuses on the protagonist who can be defined by his/her experience of the past and the growing self. Therefore, it creates the fictional complexity which involves both thematic and narrative contexts. Barnes uses the frame to describe the protagonist's current situation much more fully than other Bildungsroman. The essential mode of his operation of the protagonist's mind is memory. And in doing so, he decreases the reader's suspense regarding the protagonist's fate, even though it is such an important part of our experience of "Barnesian Bildungsroman." Instead, readers focus less on what their fates are and more on how their fates come to be: how Chris returns to Metroland and how Paul comes to be living alone, how they think about their development and how they measure their youth.

To achieve these effects, Barnes adapts the generic frames of Bildungsroman and autobiography. Bearing the subtitle "autobiographical fiction," both *Metroland* and *The Only Story* have stronger autobiographical ties. Notoriously hard to define,

autobiography, according to Helga Schwalm, signifies "a retrospective narrative that undertakes to tell the author's own life, or a substantial part of it, seeking (at least in its classic version) to reconstruct his/her personal development within a given historical, social and cultural framework" (Schwalm 14). Another way of putting the point is that autobiography renders a story of "personality formation, a *Bildungsgeschichte*" (Schwalm 14). Instead of simple stories about one's past, Chris's and Paul's autobiographies are representations of their past, or the telling and reflections of themselves. The acts begin with particular motives. The crucial point to acknowledge is that, rather than an innocent quest for self-discovery, Chris's and Paul's autobiographies contain specific motives. When encountering uncomfortable truths about their past, their telling of past is served as a challenge to the present, and makes it a persistent existence. Therefore, it is the motive that influences their presentation of the past. From the point of narrative, specific interest will be dedicated to the use of the narrator. At the heart of its narrative logic is the duality of the autobiographical person, "divided into 'narrating I' and 'narrated I', marking the distance between the experiencing and the narrating subject" (Schwalm 15). The dual direction of character narrators' telling reflects their views of life as they have come to understand it many years before at the age of 30 or 60. Thus, the trajectory of their autobiographical narrative is circular, with the present is both the end and the beginning of its narration. The formation of a mature self is also provided by the symbolical return to the basic values of and the experience of youth in the cyclical structuring of their autobiographical narrative. The implication of this point lies in the ethical challenges posed by autobiography. Well positioned to tell and to observe the life of oneself, autobiography promises an ethical judgement on Chris's and Paul's life fruition. With the role of the autobiographer in "Barnesian Bildungsroman" elaborated, readers thus need to attend to methods of introspection, self-examination, and remembering encoded in texts through generic conventions.

Furthermore, "Barnesian Bildungsroman" forms itself by refusing classical tangible optimistic or tragic ending of Bildungsroman. The genre of Bildungsroman offers only two contrasting endings both embracing the world of adulthood. It can be epitomized in, if we adopt Barnesian way, the adultery and the marriage representing two directions of the protagonist's life. The former symbolizes the rejection of rules of external circumstances; while the latter conforms to them. In the case of *Metroland* and *The Only Story*, the former implies both directions; while the latter denies them. Barnes records the failure of development as a strong leitmotif of Bildungsroman representation in Chris's and Paul's stories

with a question of the psychic fulfillment and spiritual stability or completeness. Though drawing on the pattern of the traditional Bildungsroman, Barnes also attempts to subvert its traditional feature by focusing on the beginning, the provincial environment, as opposed to the place of fulfilment of the larger society. In this respect, despite the same dealing with the transformation of an adolescent into an adult, the understanding and the perception of its process in "Barensian Bildungsroman" and traditional Bildungsroman differ, thus challenging and rediscovering the generic frame of Bildungsroman. In short, Barnes's treatment of autobiographical acts and the ending play crucial roles in his adaptation of the generic frames of Bildungsroman, yet in the meanwhile copiously follow them.

Autobiographical Acts: Dual Focalization and Retrospective Narration

As mentioned previously, what critics mainly salute in their reviews of *Metroland* and *The Only Story* is the effective tone in Chris's and Paul's retrospection. To put it more clearly, Barnes uses dual focalization as a key element in retrospective character narration. Theoretically, Gérard Genette coins the concept focalization in his groundbreaking work *Narrative Discourse*: *An Essay in Method* ([1972]1980), referring to the modes of selection and restriction of the information conveyed by a narrative. As a replacement for "point of view" or "perspective", Genette's account of focalization broadens the scope of the traditional terms and formula. His major achievements can be encompassed by two aspects. First, the term tries to dispel the confusion of the vision (who sees? later amended to who perceives?) and voice (who speaks?). Second, with the vision, Genette proposed three major focalization types (zero, internal, and external). Coming from another direction, James Phelan emphasizes the capacity of narrators, pointing out that "[a] human narrator… cannot report a coherent sequence of events without also revealing not just a set of attitudes (or slant) but also his or her angle of perception" (57). To put it bluntly, when the narrator performs the function of reporting, he can also control a set of lenses through which the audience perceives the storyworld. Whether in character narration or non-character narration, it is possible for narrators to be forcalizers, because "determining focalization is just a matter of answering the question *who perceives*?" (Phelan 116; italics in original)

In the course of revising our understanding of focalization, Phelan points out a situation where the narrator's focalization is juxtaposed to the character's focalization. Character narration can display such technique that shows a narrator at the time of the telling perceiving his former self's perceptions at the time of the action. He then takes the novel *Lolita*, especially chapter 30, as an example

to illustrate the phenomenon of dual focalization. In the case of *Lolita*, story and discourse overlap: "Humbert the narrator is perceiving the sobbing Lolita and his own former self-through the eyes of that self" (Phelan 119). Inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "double-voicing," Phelan's concept of "dual focalization" is different from Genette's term "double focalization" and Booth's "dual focus." To be more exactly, Phelan's concept is closely related to Bal's. They both assume that characters and narrators can be focalizers. However, Bal's concept of "levels of focalization" only refers to the character's focalization, while Phelan's embraces both the character's and the narrator's focalization. Phelan's concept of dual focalization serves as a more fitting term for the analysis of "Barnesian Bildungsroman." in which the narrator appears as a principal agent. The overlapping of the narrator's focalization and the character's focalization can be an indicator of Chris's and Paul's self-consciousness, who are aware of the relationship between the present self and the former self.

Metroland presents attractive youths of Chris and Toni, who are wittier than other adolescents. Compared with ordinary people, they realize "more symbolism" (*Metroland* 13). At the same time, however, they are more immature than they assume to be. Their education and rendering of the outer circumstance are mostly located on their discourse on art:

> And then, I also dreamed about finding the key to some vital synthesis of art and life. How naïve it sounds, put like that. Still, the larger question, the more naïve it always sounds. It was the only subject I'd been seriously interested in, from my early experiments with Toni in the National Gallery…Could a life be a work of art; or a work of art higher form of life? Was art merely posh entertainment, on to which a fake spiritual side had been foisted by the non-religious? Life ended; but didn't art end too? (*Metroland* 128)

The focalization in the first sentence belongs to Chris the character who tries to balance art and life. Then the focalization shifts to Chris the narrator with a direct comment on the youth's naïve belief on art and life. The narrator here has confronted the gap between art and life that might be insurmountable. When Chris the character expresses the questions and their fear that the passion "for art was the result of the emptiness of" their "lives" (*Metroland* 128), Chris the narrator's focalization does not drop away. Instead, the narrator's focalization contains the character's. Chris the narrator perceives and feels the fear during his adolescence. The rethinking of the relationship between art and life by Chris the narrator as he

grows up has brought him to the point of judgment. In the absence of absolutes, Chris the narrator has questioned the status of art that sense-making is much in doubt. When he re-sees his youth's faith on art, he jeers against the youth's naivety and innocence who regards art as a form of compensation for vicarious living. The point of dual focalization seems to show what it means to be grown up. Much of the contrast between what the youth has believed and what he currently thinks and reassesses is now framed in the conversation between the past and the present self. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the narrator's self-recognition as a bourgeois also puzzles Chris the narrator, who currently gives up aspirations to reconcile art and life. On the one hand, he recognizes his betrayal of his juvenile belief, and reveals his regret and helplessness. On the other hand, he tries to convince his audience and himself, including the past and the current self, that his actions are not freely chosen, but constrained by many factors.

And this struggle remains unclear in the following conversation:

> "One thing about parents. They fug you up."
> "Do you think they mean to?"
> "They may not. But they do, don't they?"
> "Yeah, but it's not really their fault, is it?"
> "You mean like in Zola-because they were fugged up in their turn by their parents."
> "Good point. But you've got to blame them a bit, haven't you? I mean, for not releasing they were being fugged up, and going on and doing it to us as well" (*Metroland* 39).

This passage is about a conversation between Chris and Toni on parenthood. The narrator reports the adolescents' blame on their parents. However, what matters here is the intertextuality. Childs observes shrewdly that the reference to Philip Larkin is made when they discuss in terms of his poem "This Be the Verse" (Childs 21). To further his observation, the poem was written around 1971 while the conversation obviously happened earlier than the birth of the poem. Therefore, the reference is retrospective on the part of Chris the narrator. As far as "This Be the Verse" is concerned, it is not a paean to parenthood. Instead, the poem opens with straightforward lines that "[t]hey fuck you up, your mum and dad," "[b]ut they were fucked up in their turn" (Larkin 120). Here, parents pass their failings or miseries to children, and even inspire them within the next generation. Whereas, this isn't their fault, because they are also damaged by their parents. In this way, the

failures transfer over generations. As for the advice, Larkin suggests us to "get out as early as you can" and "don't have any kids yourself" (Larkin 120).

Though Chris goes out at an early age, finally he goes against Larkin's advice by going back home and having a kid. In this respect, the conversation conveys both Chris the character's essence of their rebellion against their roots and Chris the narrator's awareness of its failure. As mentioned above, his parents' bourgeois routines and their outlook are rejected by the young Chris. Hence, the "failing" that Chris inherits from his parents is influenced by his bourgeois of suburbia upbringing. Consequently, the effect of irony is enhanced by the fact that adult Chris becomes the epitome of bourgeois who will continue the cycle of passing his "failings" to his child. The ironic remove from the youth escapade signals Chris's struggle with the narration as he perceives his former self and the change. To put it bluntly, Chris has always been middle-class. Though trying to pretend to be rebellious during his adolescence, he has to learn to come to terms with the fact that he lives the bourgeois life like his parents, while remaining ironically detached from it to some extent.

It is interesting that young Chris finds that travelling between two identities makes life at sixteen wonderfully balanced and enclosed. With the journey of "a time of twice-daily metamorphosis", he travels from his home self, house-trained adolescent, to his school self, anti-social *flâneur*, in order to deconstruct a unified sense of self. Here he talks about those changes in his life:

> Those daily journeys were, I now realise, the only times when I was safely alone. Perhaps that was why I never found them tiring or boring, despite sitting for years with the same chalk striped men and watching out of the same window the same tunnel walls, their sides corrugated with dusty black cables. (*Metroland* 59)

Chris the narrator's focalization contains the character's ("I now realise"), which indicates that everything in this passage is what current Chris and young Chris have realized. For all his cynicism, Chris readily comes to appreciate his daily journeys to school. Chris the narrator defines his younger self in terms of this "daily journey", which serves as the belief in both adulthood and adolescence. In some sense, Chris the narrator is defined by his journey from Paris to London. According to Taunton, "[t]he *flâneur* is without roots, moving freely through the boulevards, while the suburban — like Chris and his parents before him — is a freeholder…" (Taunton 15). Whereas in the rootlessness of *Metroland*, Chris is always crossing

channel in the oscillation between the *flâneur* and freeholder. Herein, we stand in a hall of mirrors where the older Chris can claim in the guise of his younger self.

However, Paul the narrator is much franker about his principal significance. He admits that he perhaps does not understand the young when he was young (*The Only Story* 17). Just as suggested by Barnes, Paul attempts to tell the truth, "but it can, as with any of us, only be the truth as he sees it" (Cooke). Our new narrator is aware of the danger of retrospection. In this regard, the motive of Paul's retelling lies in the truth-claim. The questions of concern are what kind of truth, and what is the best way of truth-telling. In the case of Paul, his autobiographical narrative empowers him to experience his emotional past and present:

> We wear each other's second lover: quasi-virgins, in effect. I had had my sexual induction—the usual bout of tender, anxious scuffle-and-blunder-with a girl at university, towards the end of my third term; while Susan, despite having two children and being married for a quarter of a century, was no more experienced than me. In retrospect, perhaps it would have been different if one of us had known more. But who, in love, looks forward to retrospect? And anyway, do I mean "more experienced in sex" or "more experienced in love"? (*The Only Story* 14).

The phrase like "In retrospect" and the question asked in the present tense signal dual focalization, when Paul the narrator perceives what Paul the character perceived and felt about his love affair with Sarah. The rethinking of their lack of experience by Paul the narrator has brought him to the point of reevaluating his relationship. Consequently, Paul cordons off the past, to keep it pure and to protect himself from the effect of their adultery. The hesitant sexual liaison between Paul and Susan is never quite incarnated in Paul the narrator's recollection. Furthermore, Paul purifies their liaison in the name of love.

However, the more Paul allows himself to see, the more regretful and bitter he becomes, which finally makes the motive for his telling appear. Young Paul assumes that Susan and his affair defies the stereotype, though the sadder narrator realizes that it is his "illusion" that they can escape both category and description. In the retrospection, Paul is faced with re-evaluation of his theories about life and love:

> Joan was demanding that I be grown-up. I was prepared to try if it helped Susan; but I still regarded adulthood with some horror. First, I wasn't sure that it was attainable. Secondly, even if desirable, then only by comparison with

> childhood and adolescence. What did I dislike and distrust about adulthood? Well, to put it briefly: the sense of entitlement, the sense of superiority, the assumption of knowing better if not best…Oh, and another thing. The way, doubtless through some atavistic terror of admitting to real feelings, they ironised the emotional life… (*The Only Story* 69-70).

The above passage reveals Paul the character's understanding of adulthood. The effect of autobiographical narrative lies in that the list of the things above mentioned could also refer to the narrator's current self. Thus, although it is only the experiencing-I who criticizes the adulthood, it is both the narrating-I and the experiencing-I who value the meaning of growth. The irony has been made that the young Paul makes judgments at the dislike of adulthood that his older self has possessed, just as Paul the narrator comments critically at the naivety of his younger self. Though the narrator enjoys the superiority of knowing more than Paul the character, he also has the terror of admitting the real feelings. He creates an adolescent's fantasy about love and life, that one can use "I was only nineteen" as an excuse to escape the horror of adulthood. Therefore, he uses character narration that he can experience the youth fearlessness and joy.

However, when facing the horror of Susan's growth and resilience, the confident first person yields to the anguished second. The "I" of Paul's adolescent self becomes the "You" of Paul's early adult self. In this part, "you" discover the harsh realities that Susan has buried his damaged free spirit and misery underneath a breezy mask. Susan's descent tests Paul's belief in love and life, which is proved to be an "illusion" of Paul the narrator:

> So I can't not continue. Even if this is the hardest part to remember. No, not the remember — to describe. It was the moment when I lost some of innocence. That may sound like a good thing. Isn't growing up a necessary process of losing one's innocence?...Now I was growing up and she seemed boring. But that was a loss of innocence I could handle. (*The Only Story* 98)

Compared with Chris's understanding that "[i]sn't part of growing up being able to ride irony without being thrown?" (*Metroland* 135), Paul's comprehension is more pessimistic and painful. His narration then shifts to dual focalization. Paul the narrator feels what Paul the character felt at the hardest period in his life: the ordeal of caring for his lover inflicted psychological suffering with his loss of innocence. The retelling of the feeling by Paul the character as he experiences the wasteland

of the love bruised beyond repair, has brought him to the point where he could start re-feeling it. Consequently, Paul cannot face his real feelings in this process, and he believes that narrating in shifting voices will absolve him of their repercussions.

To wear himself away, Paul the narrator uses the second person pronoun in the present tense to achieve a sense of drama. This is because in these passages Paul the character's all-consuming passion for love and life frays into anger and pity. Hence, the narrator estranges himself from the character and past to a generalized "you" and at the end, a conventionalized "he" to distance himself even further who can only shift back to his "I" at moments of extreme guilt. The "carefree" Paul, who throws himself headfirst into the life-long love affair, finally finds himself being painfully and guiltily drawn-out, and he attempts to distance himself from his story. However indirectly, he still has a new willingness to admit the real feelings and emotional life. In both *Metroland* and *The Only Story*, with the affordance of their dual focalization, the autobiographical character narrators stand in the overall position from which the narration or story is rendered. The narrator, at the time of the telling, perceives his former self's perception at the time of his action. Therefore, the distance between the narrator and the character implies the distance between the current self and the past self. They view the events associated with the memory through their own eyes. On the one hand, they may temporarily move back to adopt the focalization of the younger self. On the other hand, they personify the agent of focalization. When the "I" looks at the "Me," the form of self-understanding is built into the structure of their autobiographical acts. The autobiographical self is the fusion of the present self and past self, underwritten by the present self's recognition and negotiation with the past self.

The Circularity in Self and Life: Negotiating the Self between Past and Present

A salient feature of the autobiographical act in "Barnesian Bildungsroman" is its inherent circularity. Indeed, such circularity seems to be an inescapable feature of Barnes's treatment of character narration because of its introspectiveness. The narrator-I embarks upon a task of narrating the growth of the character-I. Accordingly, they bring themselves from the present to the past in such a way that the narrator and the protagonist finally fuse and become the one sharing the same consciousness. It is notable that, in order to bring the narrator and the protagonist together, one needs a dual movement: the protagonist moves forward and the narrator steps backwards. Or, to put the matter somewhat differently, their stories bring the protagonist up to the present, and at the same time take the narrator to the past to converge at some point between. The present point of narration as the

ultimate end of their writing thus implies the trajectory of narrative circularity, as the present is both the end and the condition of their narration. Furthermore, Barnes grants the circularity to the story structurally and thematically. He intentionally devises the circular structure as an arc as Chris and Paul set out the journey seemingly in one direction and then end up back where they restart their journey. In other words, Barnesian A-B-A structure, with the third part returning somehow to the first part, implies the circularity of Metroland (hometown)-Paris (London)-Metroland (hometown), youth-adulthood-youth and beginning-ending-beginning. In order to show how people can change, Barnes provides closures through a return to the starting point when the current self faces the similar challenge and carries the same task in their youth. In this respect, the ending of *Metroland* and *The Only Story* coalesces with the beginning to form the literary circularity. Here, the circularity illustrates that we always revolve around the present self and the past self. The current state of self affects how we treat and represent the past, which in turn affects the way it relates to us. It is important to notice that in the circularity, the internal dialectical process makes possible a space within the self.

In this sense, "Barnesian Bildungsroman" combines the rhetoric of self-justification and self-understanding, in which the present self and its agentive power occupy the central position. Barnes engages with and constructs the self of his character narrators through memories, thoughts, emotions, and fictive possibilities that constitute identity. As a psychological term rooted in the work of Erik Erikson (7), the concept of identity actually describes the process and the way of the young adult organizing his/her life. When we settle into the theater of Chris's and Paul's stories, we are encouraged to see the mediation of the past by the present, which governs the enterprise. In this process, when the self functions as the autobiographical author, he aims to construct the story of himself to provide the past and present life with a purpose and a dynamic sense of self-continuity. Given that the relationship between the past self and the present self always moves, I try to explore the concept of "change as return," whose essence lies in Chris's and Paul's self-continuity. Furthermore, in "Barnesian Bildungsroman," the autobiographical narrative by its nature explores character narrators' journeys that have not yet reached the end. The continuity in narrative logic and self leads to the destabilization of the present self as Chris the narrator and Paul the narrator continue to live in the process of their projects.

Following the logic of "transformation" in "Barnesian Bildungsroman," Barnes invites his audience to witness Chris's and Paul's changes and their conflicts between the present self and the past self. Regarding their past selves

both Chris and Paul constitute varying degrees of dissociation. This feeling of being disconnected with their past selves has been elaborated in their retrospection. Barnes displays the sense of personal discontinuity in their narration through focalization. Like other adolescents, young Chris and Paul take on the transitory identities, confronting the question of what kind of life they want to have. The two young men's rebellion against the suburbia, bourgeois values and their precocious fascination with romantic love in a seemingly rootless life lead to a series of escapades. However, what happens in their developmental process is the distress experienced when they become aware of their engagement in the youthful rebellion. The desire to initiate change stems from love in their value system and self-image. As one of the ideals venerated in the fantasy by Chris and Paul in their adolescence, love becomes the embodied ideal and identity. Compared with them who build on the world on intellectual snobbery, Annick (Chris's ex-girlfriend), Marion (Chris's wife) and Susan are aware that life could be observed itself. Chris's and Paul's sentimental education occur when Chris learns from Marion's infidelity and Paul learns what has happened to Susan after he abandoning her. Whereas, the idea of "change as a return" is presented herein, with a departure from the traditional transformation as growth toward a new and improved self. In "Barnesian Bildungsroman," self-discontinuity between the past self and present self promotes a longing to return to the past self. Starting in the adolescent life, layered over both the motivated agent is the narrator, the self-as-storyteller, who aims to synthesize episodic meaning about the self into a coherent life story. Consistently structured by a dialectical relationship between the narrator in the present and the character in the past, the reminiscence also contains the narrator's identification with his earlier self. Rather than through sameness or stability, the sense of continuity in self is created through the explanation of the change.

Located squarely in *Metroland*, Chris's adolescence embraces the pondering on love, truth and "the purity of the language, the perfectibility of self, the function of art" (*Metroland* 15). Despite all his cynicism, Chris the character readily acquiesces the concept of railway (Metroland): "[f]rom then on. I was not only interested in my journey, but proud of it…They were all, in some way, relevant, fulfilling, sensibility-sharpening. And what was life about if not that?" (*Metroland* 61). For Chris the narrator, he has always been convinced of the value of his journey, and thought about grander journeys. In Barnes's collection of short stories, *Cross Channel* (1996), the closing story "Tunnel" is served as a response to Chris' mind, in which the main protagonist aged 69 in 2015, returns from France on the Eurotunnel train to his home London. In the story, "tunnel" is set in 2015 recording

what is likely to be the future path of journeys to France. The symbolic meaning of "tunnel" in *Metroland* also lies in Chris the narrator's future path of journeys. Moving from mentally sticking labels to being labelled himself, Chris's sense of continuous identity with his earlier self is the unformed sense of the identity. In such places, Barnes allows the present self less to judge than to understand his past self, making sense of his relationship with his own past and future.

As much as anything else, *The Only Story* also contains a sense of self-continuity. Narrated retrospectively by Paul, his story shifts perspectives as his vision of love and life veers between moments of delusion and reality. The autobiographical "I," in Paul's story, serves as the ideal "other," the audience and the sympathetic witness of his emotional past. As suggested above, Paul the narrator depicts an idealist, cynical and fearless younger self, unlocking the treasure house of past consciousness in order to display his romantic love and youth. Despite his rebel streak and bourgeois horrors of family, the young Paul views his surrounding environment and peers with a touch of non-corrosive satire. Though conforming to the spirit of satire, Paul agrees to join the tennis club. Paul the narrator seems not to allow us to exult in his revolutionary impulses. In this regard, both the young and the old realize that they are essentially normal bourgeois whose stories are interchangeable. Compared with Chris's, Paul's imagined rebellion against the values of their class mostly lies in his relationship with Susan. It is notable that there is an intrinsic air of fantasy in the first part given the guilt ease with which the young Paul makes himself heroic.

In the naivety of youth and the prime of his life, Paul feels that his love for Susan is absolute and pure. Susan's husband Gordon is portrayed as a villain: an irascible, boorish, obese and bigoted man who is an exemplar of the kind of Englishman he most loathes. According to Paul, Susan is apparently bound in wedlock to Gordon. She waits for her hero to rescue her from mothering and marriage and to take her away to the place where they can live happily. Therefore, Paul is Susan's hero. He often forgets the fact that Susan is a wife and a mother of two children. It is significant that both Paul the narrator and the character seldom or never associate himself with the act of cuckolding: "[h]ere's something I need to explain. In all the time Susan and I were lovers, I never thought that we were 'deceiving' Gordon Macleod, Mr E.P. I never thought of him as being represented by that peculiar old word 'cuckold'" (*The Only Story* 59). When having supper with Susan's husband and children, he feels more disadvantageous rather than guilty:

I had never been before been in a household in which the male presence was

> so overbearing and yet so ambiguous. Perhaps this happens when there is only one man around: his understanding of the male role can expand unchallenged. Or perhaps this was just what Gordon Macleod was like…Still, my inability to grasp tone was a lesser matter that evening. The greater problem was that, at nineteen, I was unskilled at knowing how to behave socially at the table of a man whose life I was in love with. (*The Only Story* 56)

To Paul, Gordon is just like his parents and other middle-class English men who have the influence and power in his conservative community. Hence, Paul's deep yearning to challenge the authority and to be different makes him proud of the transgressive nature of his love affair with Susan, instead of feeling moral shame or guilt. Once touching upon the ethical taboo, both the character and the narrator attribute it to youthful innocence. This excuse appears when they are aware of their shame and pain. Herein, that the focalization is dual: in Paul's account of fantasy about his romantic love and imagined rebellion, the protagonist and the narrator try to focus on the positives, while averting from the guilt. They both regard themselves as heroes who can rescue others and each other, but unfortunately, they fail. Paul the character's youthful courage turns to the cowardice. The narrator shows the great understanding and sympathy of the protagonist's running away from adult's sense of responsibility.

Viewed in the light of Chris's and Paul's life paths, their motive for writing the autobiography lies in this rescue, not for the past but for the present self and his future. First, their retrospection is the parcel of the self's ongoing project of understanding and evaluating itself. Referring to his knowledge of the past self and their joint understanding of life, the narrator needs to go back to encounter the past self so that they can cooperate on this project. The narrative arc along the path of self-fulfillment, from weakness to power, is deconstructed here since the problems of the past protagonist still exist in the present, which triggers "I" to deal with them. Driven by a desire for a profound self-knowledge, Chris and Paul pursue the goal of telling a coherent story about their lives mainly in order to make sense of their own life. In this respect, their process is itself a slippery one. The representation of past is itself influenced by his current self-conception, yet it also influences his self-concepts. Their stories also function as co-construction of the current self with a set of past experiences and emotions. Even though they sometimes adopt slightly ironic perspective, nevertheless, it allows the audience to realize that they believe themselves to be far maturer than they actually are. This perception of the situation prepares the audience for part three, which presents them basically unchanged in

the essence and thus in the process of changing.

The continuity of their past self and present self leads to their change or transformation. Just as Paul writes, "[t]he emotional record was not like a history book; its truths were constantly changing, and true even when incompatible" (*The Only Story* 184). The essence of Chris and Paul's change lies in their self-continuity. The present point of narration is not only the static ultimate end to their writing, but also the beginning of their future. The continuity in narrative logic and self leads to the destabilization of the present self as Chris the narrator and Paul the narrator continue to live in the process of their project. The interplay of narrators, protagonists, and audiences contributes significantly to their narrative's ability to shape their past, present and future selves. Thus, the endings in *Metroland* and *The Only Story* are open to change, since their lives continue to progress carrying the continuous task or challenge in their adolescence. Barnes's novels work by recursion, with Chris's and Paul's ends are their beginnings. In this regard, the structural circularity traces or mirrors the narrative circularity, both of which reinforce the thematic circularity that the past self, the present self, and the future self infinitely overlap without discernible edges.

Conclusion

To those who complain that Bildungsroman is an old theme, one could counter that the originality of *Metroland* and *The Only Story* lies in the fact that they contain large allowances of reflections. Barnes draws our attention to Chris's and Paul's attitudes toward their changes or conflicts between the current self and the past self. Whether through self-deception or self-correction, Chris and Paul are involved in the inner dialogue between two "selves," and struggle to make sense of their development. Though these changes and their retrospection seem to imply that "Barnesian Bildungsroman" describes a failure to fulfill the promise of the genre, it should point out that Barnes actually celebrates the connotation of Bildungsroman with irony and uncertainty. Character narration can display such technique that the narrator, at the time of the telling, perceives his former self's perception at the time of his action. Therefore, the strategy of dual focalization in Chris's and Paul's retrospective character narration reveals the distance between the narrator and the character, which at the same time indicates significant changes or negotiations in the past self-present self-relations. Thus, the fluid shape of retrospective character narration in "Barnesian Bildungsroman" wraps itself into something more circular and ambiguous, which is mirrored by "A-B-A" structure. In this sense, Barnes thinks of the development as an arc, eliciting our exploration of the process in

which character narrators find their existence in a blended world of the past, the present and the future. Hence, "Barnesian Bildungsroman" is the philosophical excursion, meditating on the philosophical meaning of the past, of the present and of the self. This reflection of development and self dissolves back into Chris's and Paul's stories, which becomes Barnes' main focus.

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