



## Exploring Historiographic Metafiction and the Search for Meaning in Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters*

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### Abstract

Postmodern fiction often questions historical accuracy and representation. Postmodernists emphasize the subjective and constructed nature of historical narratives. Linda Hutcheon calls this 'historiographic metafiction,' which examines historical knowledge while combining genuine events into fiction. Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* (1989) exemplifies historiographic metafiction in modern British literature. Barnes shows that history is not a solid record of fact but a constructed narrative formed by interpretation, perspective, and imagination by mixing real events with made-up stories and art. This paper argues that Barnes employs historiographic metafiction in Chapter Five, "Shipwreck," and the half-chapter "Parenthesis," to question the authority of historical truth and to explore the relationships among history, art, and human meaning. Together, these sections reveal Barnes's central argument that history is not a fixed reality but a narrative constructed through multiple perspectives, artistic interpretations, and emotional responses.

**Key Words:** historiographic metafiction, Shipwreck, catastrophe, Parenthesis, love, truth, art

دراسة الميتاسرد التاريخي والبحث عن المعنى في رواية تاريخ العالم في عشرة فصول ونصف لـ جوليان  
بارنز

م.م. مروة علي الشرع

### المستخلص

غالبًا ما تسعى الرواية ما بعد الحداثوية إلى التشكيك في دقة التاريخ وطرائق تمثيله. إذ يؤكد رواد ما بعد الحداثة الطبيعية الذاتية والمصطنعة للسرديات التاريخية. وقد أطلقت الناقدة الأدبية Linda Hutcheon على هذا النمط من الكتابة مصطلح الميتاسرد التاريخي ((Historiographic Metafiction)، وهو نمط سردي يهدف إلى مساءلة المعرفة التاريخية وفحصها من خلال دمج أحداث تاريخية حقيقية ضمن بنية روائية تخيلية. وتعد رواية *تاريخ العالم في 10 فصول ونصف* الصادرة عام 1989 للكاتب البريطاني جوليان بارنز مثالًا بارزًا على هذا النوع من السرد في الأدب البريطاني المعاصر. يبين بارنز أن التاريخ ليس سجلًا ثابتًا للوقائع، بل هو بناء سردي يتشكل عبر التفسير وتعدّد وجهات النظر والخيال. وينطلق هذا البحث من فرضية مفادها أن بارنز يوظف تقنية الميتاسرد التاريخي في الفصل الخامس المعنون "Shipwreck" ونصف الفصل "Parenthesis" من أجل التشكيك في سلطة الحقيقة التاريخية، واستكشاف العلاقة المعقدة بين التاريخ والفن والمعنى الإنساني. وتكشف هاتان الوحدتان السرديتان معًا عن الفكرة المركزية التي يطرحها بارنز، ومفادها أن التاريخ ليس واقعًا



ثابتًا أو حقيقة مطلقة، بل سردية تُبنى من خلال تعدد وجهات النظر، والتأويلات الفنية، والاستجابات العاطفية للإنسان.

## Introduction

Bentley assumes that the effort to address and rewrite historical narratives is one of the most important movements in contemporary British fiction (2008, p. 128). History, according to The Random House Unabridged Dictionary (1993), is defined as “a continuous, systematic, narrative of past events as relating to a particular people, country, period, person, etc., usually written as a chronological account”. Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson argue that in postmodern historical novels, history is not presented as a single, stable truth; rather, it appears as multiple, fragmented, and often conflicting versions of the past (1993, p. 163).

Literature and history are inseparable, as they exert significant influence on one another and contribute to the interpretation of the other. McHale contends that postmodernists fictionalize history, suggesting that history itself may constitute a form of fiction (2004, p. 96). Doctorow posits that history resembles a form of fiction in which we exist and aspire to endure, while fiction serves as a speculative interpretation of history, revealing that the data available for its construction are more extensive and of more diverse origin than the historian assumes (1983, p. 25). History and fiction intertwine, with historiographic metafiction both establishing and obscuring the distinction between history and fiction, or fact and fiction (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 113).

The past undeniably existed; it can be comprehended solely through its textual fragments and frequently intricate, indirect representations in the present: papers, archives, as well as photographs, paintings, architecture, cinema, and literature (Hutcheon, 1988, p.78). Postmodern historicism is not, as Fredric Jameson contends, “the disappearance of a sense of history” (1998, p. 20), but rather a critique of the totalitarian dominance of grand-narrative history. It signifies the demise of ‘the’ history and the emergence of “a” history as an alternative narrative or numerous fragmented histories. Linda Hutcheon introduced the term “historiographic metafiction” to describe a novel genre that merges historical narrative with postmodernist characteristics in her work *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. This revised understanding of history, reflecting New Historicism, posits that historical writing seeks to “narrate past events in such a manner that the events appear to narrate themselves” (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 92).

Hutcheon refers to ‘historiographic metafiction’ as “those well-known and popular novels which are both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (1988, p. 5). It is impossible for history to tell both sides' stories because it is biased and doesn't show the final truth. Consequently,



historical narratives can be biased and subjective, varying between individuals, from victor to sufferer, and from success to failure. There is no way to separate fiction from history. This means that postmodern fiction is a type of history, and all historical texts are a type of fiction. It can't be talked about one big story like in ancient history; it has been talked about many stories. People can't be sure whether there is a single fact or truth about an event or a person in any story, just as in history. In a nutshell, all forms of fiction, particularly historical fiction, can be altered based on the narrator's perspective, and a historian who also writes fiction may not accurately represent reality by presenting a subjective or partial account of events (Moseley, 1997, p.109). Julian Barnes' *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* exemplifies historiographic metafiction.

### **Julian Barnes' *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters***

Julian Barnes's *A History of the World in 10 1/2 Chapters* is, as the title suggests, a fictitious representation of global history. However, it does not convey a comprehensive historical narrative but rather individual human anecdotes. In the novel, "there is no 'the' history—there are only histories" (Moseley, 1997, p. 109). The title is rather ironic, as no book could cover the entirety of world history inside approximately three hundred pages. Julian Barnes does not aim to compose "the History of the World," but rather one of its potential narratives. The British author has positioned the indefinite article 'a' at the very beginning of the title. He presents various digressions from the primary narrative of world history, positing that individuals require narratives to confront the challenges and adversities of life:

History isn't what happened. History is just what historians tell us. There was a pattern, a plan, a movement, expansion, the march of democracy, it is a tapestry, a flow of events, a complex narrative, connected, explicable. One good story leads to another. [...] We make up a story to cover the facts we don't know or can't accept; we keep a few true facts and spin a new story round them. Our panic and our pain are only eased by soothing fabulation, we call it history (Barnes, 1989, p.242).

Barnes asserts that history is defined by what we are informed occurred, rather than the actual events that transpired. Due to the lack of direct access to past events, history is subject to inquiry, resulting in an enduring disparity between fact and fiction. Barnes's novel consists of eleven loosely interconnected portions that interrogate the certainties of established, canonical history (Drag, 2014, p. 109). Barnes compiles these ten distinct narratives collectively, and his method implies that history is merely a succession of competing, possibly overlapping, narratives (Moseley, 1997, p. 135). In this regard, it can be asserted that the novel does not serve as a comprehensive account of world history; rather, Barnes' narratives significantly impart historical knowledge pertinent to actual historical events.

Moreover, New Historicism rejects the idea that historical events follow a clear causal pattern and instead views history as a sequence of coincidences. In this regard,



Buxton argues that Barnes presents world history as an ongoing chain of ironic coincidences and unfortunate accidents (2000, p. 60). Accordingly, the ten chapters of the novel offer different alternative versions of history rather than a single unified narrative. Barnes intentionally avoids establishing direct connections between the events, emphasizing that history itself lacks a coherent structure. The primary element that links the ten and a half chapters is the recurring presence of water—such as oceans, rivers, and streams—and the appearance of different types of vessels, which Moseley (1997, p. 134) describes as symbolic “voyages of salvation.” For instance, the novel repeatedly refers to Noah’s Ark and the woodworm, suggesting that history tends to repeat itself through a series of coincidences and unfortunate accidents. The image of Noah’s Ark functions as a recurring motif throughout the narrative, as many of the vessels that appear in the different chapters resemble ark-like structures symbolizing human survival. Examples include the ship in “The Visitors,” the Titanic and the St. Louis in “Three Stories,” the sailboat in “The Survivor,” and the raft of the Medusa in “Shipwreck.”

The novel explores two central themes: history and love, which are closely related to each other (Moseley, 1997, p.119). Barnes claims about this relationship:

You can think of this complicity between the reader of history and the historians: the reader of history wants to be told the whole story, wants to understand all the motivations, wants to know exactly what happened. And historians ought to say more often, “I don’t know, I don’t know why, I don’t know why he did that, it was completely out of character. We’ll never understand it. All the evidence has been lost (Guignery, 2000, p. 55).

The narrator comforts the reader by suggesting that belief remains essential for human existence. Without it, individuals would surrender to the authority of history and accept truths constructed by others. Consequently, faith in love, free will, and objective truth must be maintained. When love fails, the failure should not be attributed to love itself but rather to the overwhelming pressures imposed by the course of history.

Chapter Five, “Shipwreck,” explores how historical events are transformed into artistic representation and how later audiences interpret these representations. The chapter is divided into two sections, labeled I and II, and focuses on the sinking of the French naval frigate *Méduse* on July 5, 1816. The first section recounts the disaster and describes the tragic fate of the survivors who escaped on a raft. Through a first-person narration, the story presents the overall events surrounding the *Medusa*, including the shipwreck itself, the construction of the raft, and the suffering and failures experienced by the crew. The narrative also refers to Théodore Géricault’s famous painting, which depicts the eventual rescue of fifteen survivors who had drifted on the raft for fifteen days. Barnes explains that Géricault based his work on



various sources, including newspaper reports and interviews with several survivors, particularly the ship's carpenter, who even built a model of the raft to assist the artist (Martin, 2001, p. 44).

The second part of the chapter takes the form of an essay that examines how historical catastrophes are transformed into artistic representation, focusing particularly on Théodore Géricault's painting *The Raft of the Medusa*. It begins with the well-known question, "How do you turn catastrophe into art?" (Barnes, 1989, p.125), which introduces a discussion of the painting based on the historical shipwreck. The artwork portrays the desperate survivors standing on a fragile raft while signaling to a distant ship on the horizon. Barnes carefully analyzes the painting, demonstrating how one artistic medium can represent another. In doing so, he connects the real historical event with its different forms of representation, showing how history can be interpreted and reshaped through art (Martin, 2001, p. 45). Vanessa Guignery has examined the two kinds of artistic representation in striking terms:

In both cases interpretation is presented as multiple and unstable, and this is epitomized by the coexistence of two eyes, the ignorant eye mirroring the uninitiated reader, and the informed eye reflecting the ideal reader. The schizophrenic narrator thus shares his glance between his 'two eyes, ignorant and informed' (Guignery, 2006, p. 132).

Barnes first reflects on several scenes from the catastrophe that Géricault deliberately chose not to depict, such as the exact moment of rescue, the incidents of cannibalism that reportedly occurred, and the conflicts among the survivors. He then proceeds to offer different interpretations of the painting. Initially, he presents a formalist reading that focuses on the artistic composition of the work. This is followed by a historical interpretation that examines the painting in relation to the survivor narratives of Savigny and Corréard. Finally, Barnes brings these two approaches together, illustrating how Géricault altered certain historical details in order to achieve a more effective artistic composition. For example, in the painting the raft appears to float clearly above the water, whereas survivor testimonies describe it as being so heavily loaded that the passengers stood knee-deep in water. The number of people depicted on the raft is also inaccurate, since in reality some of the dead and those considered close to death were thrown overboard to reduce the weight and conserve limited supplies. Nevertheless, Géricault reintroduces some of these figures to strengthen the visual composition. By comparing the painted image with written accounts, Barnes highlights the gaps between visual and textual representations. As a result, the reader is left uncertain about whether to trust the historical narrative or the artistic depiction, as interpretation constantly shifts between different perspectives (Martin, 2001, p.45).



Guignery argues that the technique of bifocalization creates uncertainty regarding the meaning of the distant ship on the horizon. It can be interpreted either as a symbol of hope and rescue or as an indication that hope itself is being mocked, particularly because the vessel does not appear to move toward the shipwrecked survivors. This ambiguity results in a sense of indeterminacy, which the narrator acknowledges by questioning whether the audience is meant to accept both interpretations simultaneously (Guignery, 2006, 65). In his analysis of the painting, Barnes adopts an almost investigative approach, examining the details with a critical and questioning eye.

The second section of “Shipwreck” illustrates that complete accuracy is rarely central to the artistic representation of historical events or even to the process of remembering them. At the beginning of the essay, Barnes lists several possible scenes from the catastrophe that Géricault might have chosen to depict but ultimately rejected, emphasizing that the painter’s aim was not to produce an image that was symbolic, theatrical, political, thrilling, shocking, sentimental, documentary, or entirely unambiguous. Although the artist initially sought to remain faithful to reality, achieving complete objective truth in painting proves impossible. For example, depicting the moment when a butterfly reportedly appeared during the catastrophe might seem unrealistic, even though the event actually occurred. Barnes therefore suggests that the primary aim of art is not strict accuracy but credibility (Kumar Yadav, 2023, p. 2).

According to Barnes, the difficulty in remembering history lies in the fact that people often depend on artistic representations—such as paintings, songs, and novels—without recognizing that these forms must be modified in order to evoke similar emotions in audiences who did not directly experience the events. Barnes does not regard the alteration of history in art as problematic; rather, the real issue is that people frequently forget that such transformations take place. As he concludes, when catastrophe is transformed into art, the process does not diminish its significance but instead expands, clarifies, and reinterprets it (Jurankova, 2014, p.19).

The narrator shifts between different ways of depicting an event and questions whether the audience can accept both versions as true. He suggests that no medium—whether film, text, or otherwise—can fully capture the entirety of an event. Instead, it is the audience’s willing suspension of disbelief that ultimately gives art its power to be convincing. As an event is presented through various forms, its truth often becomes partial, altered, or even entirely transformed in the process of representation (Kumar Yadav, 2023, p.3-4). Once an event has taken place, its representation seems to shift from a direct reflection of reality toward an artistic reconstruction of that truth:



Truth to life, at the start, to be sure; yet once the process gets under way, truth to art is the greater allegiance. The incident never took place as depicted; the numbers are inaccurate; the cannibalism is reduced to a literary reference; the Father and Son group has the thinniest documentary justification, the barrel group none at all. The raft has been cleaned up as if for the state visit of some queasy-stomached monarch: the strips of human flesh have been housewifed away, and everyone's hair is as sleek as a painter's new bought brush. (Barnes, 1989, p.135)

On one hand, the historian is guided by the principle of "truth to life." With no room for invention, the historian must reconstruct the past as accurately as possible, relying on documents and material evidence, and is responsible for presenting events faithfully. On the other side, the novelist follows "truth to art." With significant creative freedom, the novelist chooses which stories to tell and how much they can be fictionalized to suit the narrative context, freely making changes as needed. In the case of the novel, there is a notable difference between Savigny and Correard's account and Gericault's painting. Here, fidelity to historical fact has been set aside in favor of artistic expression, prioritizing the impact of art over strict accuracy (Kumar Yadav, 2023, p.4). Painting looks as if to speak very honestly about history:

What has happened? The painting has slipped history's anchor. This is no longer 'Scene of Shipwreck', let alone 'The Raft of the Medusa'. We don't just imagine the ferocious miseries on that fatal machine; we don't just become the sufferers. They become us. (137)

Many people may struggle with this question, but Barnes not only raises it—he also seems to provide an answer. He suggests that if the painter had depicted the event too literally, the painting would have a direct, almost overwhelming effect on the viewer. Barnes implies that, unlike history, art presents events indirectly, leaving room for the audience to interpret and complete the gaps through their own imagination. He emphasizes that it is art, rather than history, that endures over time. The narrator feels uncertain about which version to trust and which to dismiss. As Gregory J. Rubinson observes, "Gericault's painting, like Barnes's history, is very informative: though it departs from documentary realism, it offers us a kind of knowledge about its subject unavailable in strictly realist modes of representation" (Rubinson, 2000, p.171). In this way, the painting starts with historical fact but transcends into the realm of art, touching upon religious and aesthetic dimensions. Besides explaining why artists alter historical events in their work, this chapter also highlights how the presentation of a story changes depending on its tone. Part I is conveyed in an impersonal tone, which makes it appear objective and factual. In Part II, as Géricault deliberates which scene of the catastrophe to depict, it becomes clear that each moment carries a different tone, evoking distinct emotions. For instance,



had he painted the Mutiny, viewers might have been misled into thinking the raft represented a triumph of virtue, whereas a more historically accurate depiction conveys brutality and relentless struggle (Jurankova, 2014, p.19).

Following the demonstration that history is fractured and conveyed through art, Barnes shifts to a broader philosophical inquiry: how can individuals derive meaning from such an ambiguous historical narrative? Barnes first shows how a historical disaster can be turned into art in The Chapter Five "Shipwreck", and then shifts his focus to the search for meaning in the half-chapter "Parenthesis". In this perspective, "Parenthesis" presents love as a potential remedy for the chaos and instability depicted in "Shipwreck". Between chapters eight and nine lies an unnumbered chapter titled "Parenthesis." This section, akin to the part on Géricault, distinguishes itself from the other chapters through its essayistic aspect. The tone is personal, indicating the voice of the implied author. The narrator is awake in the night, lying in bed beside his sleeping wife, reflecting on the essence and potential interrelation of love and history. The argument is subdued and intimate, resembling a dialogue with a kind friend rather than a guarded manifesto that preempts every conceivable criticism. The narrator adopts a relaxed liberty to express claims with minimal qualification, allowing the argument to progress from one point to another with merely implicit transitions (Drag, 2014, p.110).

The narrator starts the part by talking about El Greco's painting Burial of the Count of Orgaz. In this painting, the painter is thought to be looking right at the viewer. In the next sentence, the storyteller makes a suggestion that he is now El Greco in his picture. Guignery (2006, p. 64) says that Barnes drops "the mask of pseudonyms or narrators" at this point and "takes responsibility for his reflections on love and history.". Moseley (1997, p. 121) also says that in this half-chapter, "Barnes comes as close as possible, for a novelist, to speaking as himself," but he also says that this could just be a literary device and that "the 'Julian Barnes' speaking here is a mask behind which the 'real' Julian Barnes is smirking at the sentimentality of these ideas." Early in the chapter, Julian Barnes complicates the identity of the narrator by briefly discussing how the pronoun "I" functions differently in poetry and prose. He suggests that when a narrator says "I" in prose, readers usually expect to know quickly whether it refers to the author or to a fictional character. In poetry, however, the speaker can move more freely between the author and an invented voice, gaining recognition for both personal emotion and a sense of objectivity. So, it's not always true that every sentence in the section is exactly what Barnes thinks (Martin, 2001, p.46). But a lot of what is said here seems to summarize the historical problems that are the main focus of his work:

We all know objective truth is not obtainable, that when some event occurs we shall have a multiplicity of subjective truths which we assess and then fabulate into



history, into some God-eyed version of what “really” happened. (Barnes,1989, p. 243)

But this view of the nature of history doesn't keep us from seeking out meaning in history, nor should it: “And we, the readers of history, the sufferers from history, we scan the pattern [of events] for hopeful conclusions, for the way ahead” (Barnes, 1989, p.240). Recognizing the multiplicity and subjectivity of perspectives does not lead the speaker to nihilism; rather, it reinforces his commitment to pursuing forms of objectivity: “we must still believe that objective truth is obtainable; or we must believe that it is 99 per cent obtainable; or if we can't believe this we must believe that 43 per cent objective truth is better than 41 percent” (Barnes, 1989, p.243-4).

Love and its importance are explored in “Parenthesis”. Barnes seemed to feel compelled to explain the significance of progress and why it is persisted seeking the truth when it is unattainable and we are predisposed to repetition by the time the reader reaches this point of the book. He says love, but it's not. Love is not dynamic; the heart is not heart-shaped. Barnes claims that our reasoning is flawed by the heart's non-heart-shaped form. Everyone knows the organ's form, but we still call it the heart. It is preferred to think of history and memory as linear, but they don't work that way (Jurankova, 2014, p.24).

Barnes presents a photograph being processed in the second part of “Parenthesis”. Memory is like a vivid, unbroken snapshot. However, it never tells the complete narrative, changes, or develops. Photographs and memories are fragments. History is created from these bits without considering that it is incomplete—photographs can be destroyed if they don't stabilize, and we don't always have time to record everything, so those moments are lost forever. Barnes suggest that history often intimidates people; reducing complex events to a sequence of dates. History is remembered by dates, people, and chronology, which is problematic. People remember Columbus sailing the ocean blue in 1492, but they rarely consider why or what happened afterward. History becomes enumeration and rhymes. Focused on learning from the past by remembering major events and neglecting minutiae and missing bits, People rarely learn how to prevent the repetition of past mistakes. They search for the truth and uncover the Titanic and Médusa wrecks, but it doesn't stop history from repeating itself (Jurankova, 2014, p.24-25).

In “Parenthesis,” Julian Barnes presents a clear argument about the nature of history in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters*. He suggests that history is not simply what actually happened, but rather what historians choose to narrate. Although history is often presented as a coherent and meaningful sequence of events, it is in fact a collection of fragmented stories and memories connected in uncertain ways. People tend to fill these gaps with logical explanations because it provides comfort and stability. However, acknowledging that history is constructed from subjective



narratives does not diminish its value, just as understanding how a violin is made does not lessen the beauty of music. Nevertheless, belief in historical truth remains necessary, since without it there would be no hope, morality, or motivation to challenge dominant versions of the past (Jurankova, 2014, p.25).

A recurring motif throughout the novel is the idea of survival. Different chapters explore this theme in various ways: The First Chapter recounts the story of Noah and the Ark, the second describes a historian who survives a terrorist attack, “Shipwreck” narrates the fate of the castaways from the *Raft of the Medusa*, and a later Chapter is directly titled “The Survivor.” In “Parenthesis,” survival is connected to the concept of love. The narrator refers to the final line of Philip Larkin’s poem ‘An Arundel Tomb’: “What will survive of us is love” and questions whether this statement expresses a real truth or merely a poetic expression. He considers the appealing idea that love might continue to exist briefly after death, like the fading glow of an old television after it is turned off, but ultimately rejects this notion. According to the narrator, love ends with the death of the lovers themselves and cannot exist independently of them. What may endure instead are other forms of legacy, such as Larkin’s poetry rather than his personal love (Drag, 2014, p.110).

The connection between love, survival, and history appears repeatedly throughout the novel. In “Parenthesis,” the narrator closely examines the phrase “I love you,” questioning whether there might be cultures whose languages do not contain such words, or whether such societies have disappeared. Through this reflection, the narrator expresses uncertainty about whether love truly has the power to protect people from the difficulties of life and the inevitability of death. He says: “We must look at it as clearly as we should learn to look at death. Should love be taught in school? First term: friendship; second term: tenderness; third term: passion. Why not?” (Barnes, 1989, p.231). The narrator presents love as a renewing and inspiring force that provides a more stable sense of truth and prevents history from becoming meaningless. By examining different aspects of love, he reflects on its relationship with history. The narrator argues that without love, the history of the world becomes absurd and excessively self-important (Kumar Yadav, 2022, p.36). Although love cannot change historical events, it can perform a more significant role: it enables individuals to resist, question, and challenge the authority of history.

“Parenthesis” is not given a chapter number, which allows it to exist both inside and outside the structure of the novel. Its status as a half-chapter suggests incompleteness, as if another half is missing. This form may also imply the idea of a partial story or half-truth that is, as Peter Childs notes, “marginal but also central” (2011, p.74). Since the novel as a whole focus on the construction and deconstruction of history, Barnes likely includes this half-chapter as a reflective commentary or alternative perspective on the themes explored throughout the work. Guignery writes about this idea:



In the half-chapter, the narrator is countermanding what other narrators have been doing in preceding chapters by rehabilitating truth, not as a scientific and absolute truth, but as a goal and a safeguard against the dangers of ‘beguiling relativity’ and political passivity. (Guignery, 2006, p. 68)

Barnes uses satire to question the reliability of historical facts. The narrator criticizes historians’ focus on dates, arguing that they create the illusion of constant progress, while history actually moves back and forth and often repeats itself. To illustrate this idea, he refers to Christopher Columbus and the year 1492, commonly celebrated as the discovery of the New World. The narrator points out that the reward for first sighting land was actually earned by an ordinary sailor, but Columbus later claimed it for himself, showing how historical narratives can be shaped and manipulated by those in power.

### Conclusion

Barnes's work shows that history is a collection of conflicting stories molded by cultural, artistic, and personal interpretations. Barnes makes history alive and interpretive by combining fiction and philosophy. Historiographic metafiction in *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* challenges the distinction between history and fiction, emphasizing the impact of narrative, imagination, and emotion on our understanding of the past.

Barnes's core claim in “Shipwreck” and “Parenthesis” is that historical fact is fragile and shaped by representation, yet humans nonetheless seek meaning through art, memory, and love. The examination of “Shipwreck” reveals how Géricault's painting *The Raft of the Medusa* depicts a historical catastrophe, highlighting the inherent difference between historical truth and artistic representation. Barnes emphasizes that diverse narratives and perspectives affect history. The half-chapter “Parenthesis” contemplates memory, love, and the search for meaning in history. Barnes acknowledges the volatility and subjectivity of historical reality but does not support skepticism. Instead, he says that people examine the past for patterns, explanations, and emotional meaning despite its fragmentation. Love symbolizes humanity's ability to face historical uncertainty and absurdity.

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