

# THE LIST EFFECT IN JULIAN BARNES'S *FLAUBERT'S PARROT*: RECEDING MATERIAL REALITIES

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- **ABSTRACT:** The lists in Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* attract not only other fictional characters to scrutinize them and see what they signify but literary scholars as well. Critics drawn to investigate the significance of this ancient technique (lists are as old as the great epics of antiquity) have discussed the constellation of things, objects, and subjects drawn into them. I argue that in *Flaubert's Parrot* there are so many lists because the word kills the thing but does not annihilate it altogether. The novel is interred within (inter) textuality and covered by words caught up in enumerations and accumulations because the whole thing/scene is an interminable haunting, an inescapable afterlife, and an inexorable unknowability of the world.
- **KEYWORDS:** Lists. Flaubert's Parrot. Thing Theory. Julian Barnes. Material Realities.

*“no thats no way for him has he no manners nor no refinement nor no nothing in his nature slapping us behind like that on my bottom because I didnt call him Hugh the ignoramus that doesnt know poetry from a cabbage thats what you get for not keeping them in their proper place pulling off his shoes and trousers there on the chair before me so barefaced without even asking permission and standing out that vulgar way in the half of a shirt they wear to be admired like a priest or a butcher or those old hypocrites in the time of Julius Caesar of course hes right enough in his way to pass the time as a joke”*

James Joyce (1993, p. 726)

*“Do you really believe, goes the objection, that Mallarmé consciously parceled out his sentence so that it could*

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*be read two different ways, with each object capable of changing into a subject and vice versa, without our being able to arrest this movement? Without our being able, faced with this 'alternative sail,' to decide whether the text is 'listening to one side or the other'.*"

Jacques Derrida (1992, p. 179)

*"For example: (1) The 'yes' in question form: oui? Allo? as in "Yes? Buck Mulligan said. What did I say?" (14); (z) the 'yes' of rhythmic breathing in the form of monologic self-approbation, as in 'Two in the back bench whispered. Yes. They knew ...' (30), or 'yes, I must' (44); (3) the 'yes' of obedience, as in 'Yes, sir' (44); (4) the 'yes' marking agreement on a fact, as in 'O yes, but I prefer Q. Yes, but W is wonderful' (46); (5) the 'yes' of the passionate breathing of desire, as in 'Be near her ample bedwarmed flesh. Yes, yes' (63); (6) the 'yes' of calculatedly and precisely determined breathing, as in "yes, exactly" (8r); (7) the "yes" of absentminded politeness, as in 'Yes, yes' (88); (8) the 'yes' of emphatic confirmation, as in 'Indeed yes, Mr. Bloom agreed' (103); (9) the 'yes' of open approval, as in 'Yes, Red Murray agreed' (r19); (o) the 'yes' of insistent confidence, as in 'Yes, yes. They went under' (135). This list is in its essence open, and the distinction between explicit monologue and dialogue can also lend itself to all those parasitings and grafts which are the most difficult to systematize."*

Jacques Derrida (1992, p. 307)

## 1. A Catalogue of Reception

Most readers of Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) would probably hesitate to call it a novel, and one of the reasons for this reluctance is that it extrapolates anything that could unproblematically be called a narrative, something which even such exceptional texts as *Ulysses* (1922) and *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), for all their experimentation and oddity, can be said to possess. Yet narrative is hardly absent from Barnes's novel; indeed, in the words of the text itself, at one of its many self-reflexive moments, narrative may be likened to a net "as a jocular

lexicographer once did: he called it a collection of holes tied together with string.” (BARNES, 1984, p. 38) *Flaubert's Parrot* is a great mound of stories strung together; a gigantic accumulation of the world's narratives, but it seems that it is not one of them.

Geoffrey Braithwaite's many lists, the novel's narrator and his narrative technique, in the fifteen chapters that compose Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot*, attract not only other fictional characters<sup>1</sup> to scrutinize them and see what they signify but literary scholars as well.<sup>2</sup> Critics drawn to investigate the significance of this ancient technique (the list is as old as the great epics of antiquity) have discussed the constellation of things, objects, and subjects drawn into them. The lists in the novel include the following themes or passages: the chronology, the bestiary, the references to Emma Bovary's eyes, the Mauriac game, the train-spotter's guide to Flaubert, the Flaubert apocrypha, Flaubert's offences against humanity, Braithwaite's dictionary of accepted ideas, the examination paper, just to mention a few.<sup>3</sup> It is against this backdrop of a novel whose chapters build around accumulations and enumerations that the critical legacy on *Flaubert's Parrot* eventually emerged. The critical discourse surrounding this novel focuses on the ways in which it reinforces knowledge, textuality, language and I will re-examine, with respect to Thing Theory, the effects of the lists coming from Barnes and Braithwaite.

Eric Berlatsky, for example, refers to “Barnes's treatment of the status of knowledge [, which] is not separate from or ancillary to his treatment of male friendship and sexual infidelity.” (BERLATSKY, 2009, p. 202) As for Neil Brooks, “Braithwaite himself also becomes interred within textuality ... Postmodern intertextuality can itself suggest an ‘interring’ in a world of texts that cannot speak outside itself, or it can signal simply an awareness of factors governing all interpretation.” (BROOKS, 1999, p. 50-51) Whereas Charles Cullum states

*Flaubert's Parrot* takes the most completely postmodern stance, justifying R. B. Kershner's evaluation that it “is in some ways the paradigmatic poststructuralist novel” (76). Kershner's comment refers specifically to the novel's use of multiple sources and past forms, its intertextuality, and so his use of the term “poststructuralist,” rather than “postmodernist.” And Barnes uses the novel's

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<sup>1</sup> I refer to characters ranging from David Hockney (BARNES, 1984, p. 19) to “Perhaps, like Frédéric and Deslauriers, we should prefer the consolation of non-fulfilment: the planned visit to the brothel, the pleasure of anticipation, and then, years later, not the memory of deeds but the memory of past anticipations? Wouldn't that keep it all cleaner and less painful?” (BARNES, 1984, p. 22) Curiously enough, this passage also entertains an interesting dialogue with the first epigraph above.

<sup>2</sup> See, in relation to lists in general, Umberto Eco (2009), Madeleine Jay (2006), Sophie Milcent-Lawson, Michelle Lecolle, and Raymond Michel (2013) or Bernard Sève (2010).

<sup>3</sup> There are other lists in the novel, but the aim of this essay is not to pinpoint them all, it is rather to discuss a select few.

“intertextuality,” or “mixture of genres,” as a metaphor for the necessity of its postmodern protagonist to accept the multiplicity and ultimate unknowability of the world. (CULLUM, 2011, p. 15)

Keith Wilson proposes “What distinguishes Barnes is a propensity to create fictions of speculative personal discourse, not simply as an acknowledgment of the inevitability of the subjective voice, not as a gesture of submission ... but as a primary means of aesthetic enablement.” (WILSON, 2006, p. 371) I must emphasize that the relationship between Julian Barnes and Geoffrey Braithwaite depend on propinquity, on their being primarily aesthetes, and on their erudition or on memory, “if not the memory of deeds but the memory of past anticipations.” (BARNES, 1984, p. 22)

Emma Cox reads Barnes’s novel as ostensibly Braithwaite’s account of his meticulous research on Gustave Flaubert. Cox finishes her article with Braithwaite, who she says, “uses his Flaubertian world both to deal with and to understand his personal traumas and to avoid or escape them. However, more often than not, he follows a Flaubertian ethos, which states that one should ‘Abstain, and Hide’ from life.” (COX, 2004, p. 61) I will show, in the sections to come, that Braithwaite is a consummate professional at both abstaining from presenting his stories in traditional narrative forms and at hiding knowledge and himself on the lists that make up the novel. With respect to abstaining and hiding, Julien Bondaz focuses on The Flaubert Museum as a writer’s house and the Museum of the History of Medicine in Rouen as an institution promoting medical collections. Bondaz discloses to us that,

one of the objects that meet the greatest success is itself a conceptual hybrid: it’s a stuffed parrot exposed in the Flaubert’s native room ... the publication of the book by Julian Barnes, *Flaubert’s Parrot*, in 1984 transformed the status of the stuffed Parrot and the mode of visiting the Museum. The visitors do not only seek to discover the “atmosphere” in which grew Flaubert, they also question the authenticity of the Parrot, which thus steals the show from the writer. This reversal of things thus reveals the interference between literary fiction and the visit of the Museum, or between the paradigm of pilgrimage and of survey in the Flaubert’s display and the exhibition of his parrot. (BONDAZ, 2014, p. 155)

Curiously enough, Bondaz’s article, among other things, illuminates the grey areas associated with biographies of a parrot, medical collections and literary relics, authorial pilgrimage and critical inquiries, and, above all, transfigurations of things, objects, and subjects. Another important point to notice is that Bondaz’s article was published as part of a dossier dedicated to the return of things, in this case, to the return of the stuffed parrot.

A volume to add to this collection of critical reception turned to Barnes's *Flaubert's Parrot* is a compilation titled *Flaubert's Parrot de Julian Barnes: "Un Symbole du Logos?"* (2001) and edited by Aïssatou Sy-Wonyu, Philippe Romanski, and Antoine Capet. The book has diverse contributions that range from the impossible biographies of this post-modern or *post-mortem* novel (authored by Yvan Leclerc), to the mixing up of facts and pieces of fiction as history itself is made-up (penned by Michael Wetherill), and to the traces left by parrots and to the quests they stir up (written by Vanessa Guignery). Other contributors include Matthew Pateman with his "Precision and Uncertainty in *Flaubert's Parrot*", and Christelle Chaussinand with her study about lexicography and "ipsophagie", an enigmatic neologism created by Barnes himself (1984, p. 51). Catriona Seth's "Your Favourite Mode of Utterance: Italics in *Flaubert's Parrot*" focuses on repetition and repetition out of context, which is sometimes marked by italics. Seth argues that Barnes uses things that are not his, like foreign words, sayings or proverbs, and phrases he feels obliged to punctuate as coming from an unknown source, like received wisdom or a piece of sarcasm. In addition, Tony Williams's "A Train-Spotter's guide to Julian Barnes" detains on and close reads the different forms of transportation in Barnes's *oeuvre* and Lionel Archer's "Jeux de miroir(s) dans *Le Perroquet de Flaubert*" concentrates on the various reflections by mirrors and *trompe-l'oeil* reality effects they create. To end this list of contributors and contributions, Nicole Terrien's "Le psittacisme ou la parole de l'autre" reflects upon Barnes's uses of parody, pastiche, and citation in the novel by linking those techniques to the epistolary mode and to the realist novel genre that is being challenged by *Flaubert's Parrot*.

It will be some time before this collection is catalogued, so we must turn to Jackie Buxton, who claims the novel is the "account of an academic's rummage through the surviving trash of Flaubert's life in a vain attempt to string this detritus together into a meaningful whole. Hailed as a postmodern *tour de force* of 'parody and parrotry,' the novel treats literary form as playfully as it treats literary history." (BUXTON, 2000, p. 56) Mike Goode, on the other hand, seizes *Flaubert's Parrot* as an attempt to a new and seriously post-modernist/post-structuralist understanding, "by diagnosing the erotics of *The Family Idiot* (1971), Jean-Paul Sartre's mammoth biography of Flaubert, a project that Sartre billed as an attempt to 'know' the nineteenth-century French novelist's life in its historical 'totality.'" (GOODE, 2005, p. 150-151) Amidst so many things, objects, subjects, words piled on words, it is curious that Goode found room to point to the novel's paratextual surroundings.

So long as reviews of the novel are concerned, Jan Dalley intones a deliciously funny and ironic prophesy: "As Barnes runs where his brilliant ruminations lead him, the gabby but intellectually limited bird becomes "Pure Word" and all pretension is punctured: "Is the writer much more than a sophisticated parrot?" (DALLEY, 2008, p. 46) Christopher Lehmann-Haupt is another reviewer who clearly sees that "There is a list of critical fiats, ostensibly Dr. Braithwaite's, presumably Mr.

Barnes's" (LEHMANN-HAUPT, 1985, p. 20), and that the author astonishes us with his playful erudition, but he seems to be in doubt, "what is the point of this extraordinary tour de Flaubert?" (LEHMANN-HAUPT, 1985, p. 20) Of course, Lehmann-Haupt answers his own questions: "It is a novel unto itself, which cleverly tantalizes us with hints of its outcome... It is a biography of Flaubert's biography." (LEHMANN-HAUPT, 1985, p. 20)

What is it about those roll calls of names and things (as we see in the previous paragraphs) that tempt us to cross their thresholds, label them, and extrapolate, in this specific case, Barnes and Braithwaite's style from the contents of the lists? Nicola Evans's reading of *Flaubert's Parrot* alongside Michel Houellebecq's *La Carte et le Territoire* comes closer to my own approach in this essay as he begins his article with such words:

Intimacies between humans and objects tend as Diana Fuss once observed, to be pathologised. Terms such as "objectification", or "fetishism" advise human subjects and objects to keep their distance from one another; they tell us it is bad for a human to be like an object, and for humans to love objects may be worse. *Flaubert's Parrot* by Julian Barnes, however, opens on a scene of human to object ..." (EVANS, 2020, p. 949)

Evans's beginnings help me with my own views upon the lists in the novel and I argue that in the course of *Flaubert's Parrot*, there are so many lists because the word kills the thing but does not annihilate it altogether. As Peter Schwenger has proposed before me, this near murder of the thing by the word "only transposes it to the scene of an interminable haunting of language" (SCHWENGER, 2006, p. 33). In other words, the novel is interred within (inter)textuality and covered by words on many lists because the whole thing/scene is an interminable haunting, an inescapable afterlife, and an inexorable unknowability of the (material) world.

## 2. The Poetics of the list

Braithwaite's lists stage a soul-stirring and poignant atmosphere and we are left with yet another question: what do his stories tell us? An English doctor obsessed with Gustave Flaubert, Braithwaite has three stories to tell: Flaubert's, his own, and his wife Ellen's. The novel mixes supposed facts and fiction, a bit of criticism and a lot of literature itself; mystery (Braithwaite discovers that two museums containing items of Flaubert's claim to own the stuffed parrot that the French author once borrowed from the Museum of Natural History) and puzzle (each museum chooses one parrot from a collection of fifty, not knowing which parrot Flaubert had really borrowed). In his obsession with the French author, the narrator/author/protagonist follows the *ex negativo*: he learns about the lives that Flaubert did not lead, the

books that he did not write, and the faults he supposedly had. This thread of story has the purpose of shedding some light on Braithwaite's own life because he is hurt, confused, and pained over his wife's death and his past with her; questioning her faithfulness and her love for him. History and "her story" cross over, especially in Braithwaite's torment for mercy killing his terminally ill wife.

Told in an array of texts, the novel questions our assumptions about what history is and how we take hold of the supposed facts that make it up. The chronology chapter illustrates the technique of the list being used, with "factual" information selected for entries in years: beginning in 1821 and the birth of Gustave Flaubert and ending in 1880 with a "Shakespearean" question directed metafictionally at the novel itself: "When will the book be finished? That's the question. ... I haven't a minute to lose between now and then. But there are moments when I'm so tired that I feel I'm liquefying like an old Camembert." (BARNES, 1984, p.37) Having mixed supposed fact from Flaubert's life with his own anxiety about writing his story, Braithwaite liquefies (dissolves, melts, deliquesces), in many a list, like a cheesy thing.

Questions without immediate answers rage: can there be a single style in Barnes and Braithwaite's lists or to what extent do the lists cut the narrative/descriptive process and introduce an alternative or alternate fiction, such as the one above where author and narrator liquefy like an old Camembert? Lists ostensibly appear in *Flaubert's Parrot*; they meticulously disrupt the syntax, dissolve the all-important figure of author/narrator, and give a lot of freedom to words as well.

Another entry in the chronology-list for the year 1854 that liquefies cabinet of curiosities, things, and things in transit as well as out of order and place reads: "I pigeon-hole my life, and keep everything in its place; I'm as full of drawers and compartments as an old travelling trunk, all roped up and fastened with three big leather straps." (BARNES, 1984, p. 35) Bill Brown would say about such things that they "circulate through our lives, [that] we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature, or culture-above all, what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of things." (BROWN, 2001, p.4) Barnes and Braithwaite look to things and objects (Camembert, drawers, trunk, straps) because "there are codes by which our interpretive attention makes them meaningful, because there is a discourse of objectivity that allows us to use them as facts." (BROWN, 2001, p. 4) In other words, "The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation." (BROWN, 2001, p. 4) Again, Barnes and Braithwaite liquefy as authors and reveal themselves haunted by language-lists in an inexorable transit of things and in an unknowable world of objects, which tell them who they are.

Some generalizations about the lists seem to me to be true at first: every list tries to conjure up the "volume" of the world or the list is fundamentally under

tension, divided between the ordering of the now and the lack of order in the future. Even the argument that the list, especially in *Flaubert's Parrot*, is successful in presenting receding realities that are virtual, fictional spaces. Therefore, the propensity of the lists, in this novel, is to enter reactively and automatically into comical ventures of sabotage and parody of all institutionalized knowledge or any authority. Furthermore, the lists propose a renewed content when they call us to see anew a certain thing or state of things, they do not presuppose any previous synthesis, but they take shape in the process of constant updating. A sensitive and perceptive reader seems to apprehend realities that are not given, but whose characteristics gradually appear in and between lists.

The bestiary of Flaubert (BARNES, 1984, p. 49-65) is another list in *mise-en-abyme* (a list within a list within a different list) that shows its preference for the mutable, moving nature of objects or animals objectified and almost inventoried: the bear, the rat, the oxen, the whale, the sphinx, the mole, the camel, the sheep, the parrot, the monkey, *et cetera*. The lists' preferences for the illusions, or shall we say, delusions, of a world in constant flux and for the turbulence of human histories are united by a dogged and undeviating determination to compress the contents of an entire Zoo and library into a single volume. Barnes and Braithwaite play their part in this spectacular illusory disposition or delusional display of things, objects, and subjects in close relationships. Things as objects or animals as objects could be likened, in quasi-rhetorical fashion, to an analogy; as a means of drawing distinctions, of apportioning and accentuating secret affinities, it is this principle, which, *a priori*, gives the reader a sense of understanding of what lay before his/her gaze: an asymmetrical, confusing, almost all-encompassing list of an inescapable afterlife. This afterlife of taxidermy and death parodies the received idea, which could have been used by Barnes in the novel and in italics, of a *theatrum mundi*, *theatrum sapiente*: including *naturalia*, *mirabilia*, *artefacta*, *scientifica*, antiquities and exotica that haunt and deliquesce. The end of this *ad nauseam* list in a varied chapter is another syndetic series that iterates, with minor changes, "What happened to the truth is not recorded." (BARNES, 1984, p.65)

On the one hand, there is the temptation of totality (the inventory list as a census of properties or animals in a zoo) and, on the other hand, there is the protest against monumentality (including an almost imperceptible homogeneity that dictates that every animal listed should relate either to Flaubert or to Braithwaite) of form and structure. Between the encyclopedic ambition and the conjuration of any system, there is the con-fusing activism represented by the many lists in the novel. We come upon a phenomenological description of the list: this tangency (temptation of wholeness and protest against monumentality) indicates the way of coordination that is proper to it. The list is one of the ways to revitalize dead language as an active principle: it loosens the bonds of speech, it evokes the bondage of concatenations, and it even challenges the injunctions of meaning. Primarily, the

list had an organizing function, it responded to the orderly instinct of the mind. The lists in the novel, sometimes chaotic, simulate, through their expansion and their volume of space, an encyclopedic saturation, the writing of memories or taxonomic inventories, and they respond, even when they utterly fail, to the ambition of language to structure reality.

### **3. The list-effect and its (im)materiality**

“Ironies breed; realities recede” (BARNES, 1984, p. 70) and “if you don’t know what’s true, or what’s meant to be true, then the value of what isn’t true, or isn’t meant to be true, becomes diminished”. (BARNES, 1984, p. 77) How long can a novel or social connections be followed without objects taking the relay? The list related to the eyes of Madame (Emma) Bovary takes place among things and objects: lashes, lids, candle-lit balls, mirror. Emma’s eyes, on this list, are that which could be called the beyond-of-the-signified; they are characterized by their absence, by their strangeness. They resemble eyes beyond the grave when compared to Braithwaite’s own eyes: “they are far too discolored with rage”. (BARNES, 1984, p. 81) Actually, everything has to do with Braithwaite and every single situation is a “private list” (BARNES, 1984, p. 84) of his or should be gauged in terms of the signifier: “My list mentions *pharmacies*”. (BARNES, 1984, p. 84) Every single thing, at the simplest level, may become “a catalogue of clichés” (BARNES, 1984, p. 86), as the metafictional list of endings a novelist may use. (BARNES, 1984, p. 89) Repeatedly, ironies breed receding realities and cram together so many things and objects within such a confined space (a section, a chapter, a book). They (the ironies on the lists of things) have the effect of creating a dizzying foreshortening of perception or a bewildering protraction of apperception. When those lists draw attention to analogies of form and surface similarities and, most importantly, to clear-cut differences, this also has the even more striking effect of throwing into sharp relief the unique qualities of each piece of the wor(l)d and the marvelous variety of each thing recited as well as recorded.

The confusing and confessional accumulation rooted in the lists of *Flaubert's Parrot* is typical of an anti-encyclopedic stance. It is not designed for us to find ourselves or for us to discover more about Flaubert or Braithwaite or his wife, but for us to get lost. The structure, the order, the architecture, the taxonomy of the lists present a reality tailored to human reason – a domesticated but conspicuously limited, and registered, variegated, receding reality. The confusing effect of the lists in the novel, a disoriented exposure, presents a subsiding reality in terms of unreason. It is fundamentally anomie, a breakdown of order, a debacle of the intellect. In short, the always already incompleteness of the lists is what prevents them from taking shape, being finally built and erected. Their disordered accumulation or nonsensical enumeration always means they are a supplement and, therefore, a lack.

The Mauriac game is another list that stupefies us in terms of its incomplete accumulation and its Foucaultian or Borgean enumeration of things that may be non-existent, incoherent or come from the mind of an invented Chinese encyclopaedist. It is introduced as such:

I could play the Mauriac game, perhaps. Tell you how I brought myself up on Wells, Huxley and Shaw; how I prefer George Eliot and even Thackeray to Dickens; how I like Orwell, Hardy and Housman, and dislike the Auden-Spender-Isherwood crew ... (BARNES, 1984, p. 97)

The confusing and anomic list goes on with Braithwaite, the literary critic, enumerating why novels should be banned sporadically:

1. There shall be no more novels in which a group of people, isolated by circumstances, revert to the “natural condition” of man, become essential, poor, bare, forked creatures. ...
2. There should be no more novels about incest. ...
3. No novels set in abattoirs. ...
10. There should be an twenty-year ban on God; or rather, on the allegorical, metaphorical, allusive, offstage, imprecise, and ambiguous uses of God. ... (BARNES, 1984, p. 98-100)

One may wonder: where is the thing, the object, the material culture? The answer is not necessarily obvious: the thing is literary fads, the object is the ban itself (an official or legal prohibition) carried out by the critics parodied and turned into a pastiche of themselves as “dictators of literature, to regulate the past, and set out with quiet authority the future direction of the art.” (BARNES, 1984, p. 97-98) At this juncture, I must cite Bruno Latour:

Contrary to what the powerful etymology of their most cherished word should imply, their *res publica* does not seem to be loaded with too many things. Procedures to authorize and legitimize are important, but it is only half of what is needed to assemble. The other half lies in the issues themselves, in the matters that matter, in the *res* that creates a public around it. They need to be represented, authorized, legitimated and brought to bear inside the relevant assembly. (LATOURE, 2005, p. 5-6)

Barnes and Braithwaite now manage to liquefy literature itself, with its attendant arts of hermeneutics, exegesis, and phenomenology. The novel is interred within textuality, within the *res publica*; literature itself is naked in front of a supposed

assembly to be haunted in an afterlife of unknowable worldly materiality. How are the banned things going to be represented? To what extent are the banned things going to be authorized and legitimated for an assembly of authors and readers? How does the *res publica*, and that is what literature stands for, create a public around it?

The lists in *Flaubert's Parrot*, in general terms and according to Jack Goody (1979), can always be read as a generalized system of equivalences; The lists in and of the novel are a privileged form of what Dennis Hollier (1993) called epistemological charity in that they indiscriminately mix elements belonging to different orders in a fragmentary and anarchic space. Lists are a sense-form and they represent not only the absence of structure or its disintegration and disjunction (its liquefaction), but they translate the illusoriness of the referential field into an equalization of sense and matter.

Rhetorical questions have not been thoroughly answered, but they have been at least posed indirectly in *Flaubert's Parrot*, with great *savoir-faire*, parodic pomp, and circumstance in pastiche. Again, ironies seem to breed receding realities that take us to the reasons why Flaubert sold a property at Déville or to the train-spotter's guide to Flaubert. Beginning on page 107 and ending on page 114, the whole chapter is an enormous enumeration of houses, railway generations, book of poems, trains, adultery and penultimate sentence by Flaubert. Curiously enough, item 9 is related to how "Trains play little part in Flaubert's fiction. ... [and] There are several more railway journeys in the novel, and the passengers seem happy enough ..." (BARNES, 1984, p. 113) Bill Brown, in a completely different scenario, sheds some light on all the listed things above when he states

The relays between these object forms might finally disclose the life and longing of the constituent materials; the oscillation enchants [railway trains] into a thing that drifts in excess of any object form. It allows us to imagine, I think, a world where the material around us—the denim of your jeans, the glass of your watch crystal, the wood of your chair seat—has, as the object of its desire, perhaps, the desire to be some other object. It is as though [Barnes's] work begins to expose a newly animate world, a secret life of things that is irreducible to the object forms with which we have constructed and constricted our world. And it is the recognition of that life, I think, that holds some promise for transforming life as we know it. (BROWN, 2010, p. 217)

The promise is there from the beginning and so are the interminable haunting, the inescapable afterlife, and the inexorable unknowability of the material world. The desire of transformation of an unknowable world of things and objects into a fictional piece, like this novel itself, is definitely another form of ironies breeding receding realities and all that taking shape as if glimpsed from the seat of a train in motion.

The use of the lists in Barnes's novel is a sign that the narrative invests its margins by displaying them. The lists of the apocrypha are, again, an *ex negativo*: all of the things that did not happen in Flaubert's life. Moreover, rhetorical questions abound once again; Does the un-lived life tell us as much about a person as the things that they actually do? How might Flaubert's life have been different had some of his thoughts come into being? Would he have written the works he did? Would unwritten works have been more successful or better than the ones he did write? By examining what did not happen in Flaubert's life, Barnes and Braithwaite turn the author/narrator into a historian of fact-fictions or into a patristic father who only knows God, this almighty transcendental promise or absolute Other, through what God is not (*via negativa*). Here, Barnes and Braithwaite show us what did not happen to help illuminate the decisions and character of Flaubert, another fictionalized, objectified, and dead author figure. Braithwaite, as usual, is also looking back on his life and thinking about the lives that he did not lead or the things that he did not do. This list technique in this case in point looks like a kind of paneling. It is superimposed strata of fictional reality upon strata of fabricated reality, a doppelgänger of the cabinet of curiosities itself and a *jeu d'esprit* receding to the grave of the author, laying a monochrome veneer of dead, exotic woods over all the chaos of the material world.

Pushing the principles of the list to their extremes, the enumeration and accumulation from Barnes and Braithwaite appear as the place or scape for a diffraction of voices, their accumulations give way to infinite mazes as well as puzzles, and the lists, in general, become the liminal space, *par excellence*. In this sense, the list is liminal, not just liminary (placed at the beginning or at the entrance, previous, preliminary or transitional), and it is connected to liminality, that is, a limit or a transitional point in the crossing that is made between structural organizations and counter-structural phenomena. What is of immediate importance to me here is that the list is a relevant category to think about issues related to the materiality of things, to the political side of objects and to the extent to which all that makes up the subject in contemporary, make-believe or not, so-called, democracies (or "democrappies", as we will see below).

In the next chapter, "The Case Against", the list/enumeration addresses Flaubert's supposed faults and things for which he has been criticized. Braithwaite, as is the case, prefers to know both the good and the bad about people, including Flaubert and his wife, Ellen. Flaubert is accused of hating humanity, of hating democracy ("which do you prefer – democrappiness or democrassness? Democrappiness, perhaps?" [BARNES, 1984, p. 129]), progress, politics, the Commune, the nation, "7 that he shot wild-life in the desert ... 8 That he didn't involve himself in life ... 8 That he tried to live in an ivory tower ... 9 That he was a pessimist ... 10 That he teaches no positive virtues ... 11 That he was a sadist..." (BARNES, 1984, p. 131-134) The list goes on up to number 15 and includes: being

beastly to women, believing in Beauty, being obsessed with style, and believing art had no social purpose. Behind the mystery of each item of this enumeration, an object in itself – unique, fascinating, and marvelous –, there looms the shadow of an ancient body of learning. There looms a distant revelation of which the secret has been lost, and which, for it to be revealed once again, awaits only the meticulous, impassioned gaze of Braithwaite, as well as his obsession with Flaubert, to escape the reality of his life and its pain. Again with Latour (2005, p. 6): “What we call an ‘object-oriented democracy’ tries to redress this bias in much of political philosophy ... We simply want to pack loads of stuff into the empty arenas where naked people were supposed to assemble simply to talk.” Barnes and Braithwaite, with their interminable lists of this and that, finally teach us “*Literature includes politics, and not vice versa*” (BARNES, 1984, p. 129) or that Flaubert supposedly said that “‘You don’t make art out of good intentions.’ He also said: ‘The public wants works which flatter its illusions.’” (BARNES, 1984, p. 133) From platitude to truisms and insights, the ironies that breed receding worlds tell us the only paved road with good intentions is the one that leads to hell. Are we packing loads of stuff into the empty public arenas in this hell of democrappiness? Barnes and Braithwaite seem to answer this question with a resounding and intertextual (the Yes/no list coming from Molly Bloom in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and referred to in the first and third epigraphs) yes.

Flaubert’s life expressed as a dictionary appears in another chapter. The people, places, things, and objects that intersect with his life are briefly defined and tangentially discussed in a manner that is far from being explicit; it is rather obscure and indeterminate. This is yet another way of objectifying and transforming Flaubert’s life into a thing, again in an unexpected way. Barnes and Braithwaite make us aware that history and the past change when only some things are included. The entries are kept simple and short to seem to be objective descriptions, but we come to realize how much information the entries miss or obscure. Under the entry “Irony,” for example, we are stupefied and liquefied to know that: irony is “the modern mode: either the devil’s mark or the snorkel of sanity.” (BARNES, 1984, p. 155) Michel Serres would resist this state of things from the beginning, for “we exist as humans by means of something other than the word, indeed by the thing, irreducible to the word. The subject is born of the object.” (SERRES, 1987, p. 208) In the case of *Flaubert’s Parrot*, we are born of a snorkel that may or may not lead to the devil’s meltingly hot road or to promised and desired sanity. Serres continues, “The subject subjects itself to the dominion of that which forms and loses it ... Only the object exists and I am nothing: it lies before me and I disappear beneath it.” (SERRES, 1987, p. 209) In the end, Achilles and Louis Bouilhet (and the list continues, Louise Colet, Maxime Du Camp, epilepsy, Gustave Flaubert, Gouncourt, Juliet Herbert, Jean-Paul Sartre, Kuchuk Hanem, Letters, Mme Flaubert, Normandy, the orient, Prussians, Don Quixote, realism, George Sand, transvestism,

USA, Voltaire, whores, xylophone, Yvetot, Emile Zola) are all things interred in textuality, objects given an afterlife in intertextuality, and subjects subjected to be nothing much because they sink and disappear without the help of a snorkel.

As the novel ends, the final examination operates at several levels or depths without the snorkel: it may be simply an example of a test given to a student studying Flaubert or it is a test that Braithwaite gives to the reader or it may be some thing else completely. Braithwaite has been teaching the reader about Flaubert throughout the novel, he has also been concocting his and his wife's stories, and the test allows the reader to come to terms with what s/he has been told about Flaubert on this winding road of a novel. The snorkel is called for again for us to gauge if Barnes and Braithwaite learned enough to articulate their knowledge in an academic manner in terms of this thing called the life of Flaubert and the life of the narrator. The test serves another purpose, a reminder of the pitfalls of history and a signal that the book is ending. Flaubert once more subjects himself to the dominion and domain of that which forms and mislays him. Only the highly metafictional, theoretical, and intertextual object, the novel itself, exists, and Flaubert, Braithwaite, Barnes are almost forgotten, foreclosed, and forestalled. They lie before the reader and they all disappear in the ocean without a mere snorkel or are all terminally haunted by language in long, composite lists having blissful moments in a temporary and highly provisional afterlife, liquefied as never before in the unknowable world of materiality and of things gone awry.

On the left, there are things themselves, as alluded to in the second epigraph (who are we to decide whether the text is listing to one side or the other?). On the right, there is irony breeding receding worlds, sinking realities, and we do not even possess a functional snorkel. Everything happens in the middle, everything passes between the two, everything happens by way of mediation, porosity, and networking, but this space does not exist, it has no place. This scape, if you will, is the interminable, the inescapable, and the inexorable world of language, in its opacity, in its few moments of transparency, and in its frequent asymmetrical vortexes of incensed epiphanies and intoxicating, limiting, peremptory shafts of truncated knowledge. Perception and apperception, in *Flaubert's Parrot*, hand in hand and in their solitary way, take a step into the "real" and "factual" world of "thingly" appearances, object-(de)formation, and subject liquefaction.<sup>4</sup>

SÁ, L. F. F. O efeito das listas no *Papagaio de Flaubert* de Julian Barnes: realidades materiais em decesso. *Itinerários*, Araraquara, n. 53, p. 111-126, jul./dez. 2021.

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<sup>4</sup> Let us not forget that Barnes and Braithwaite claim that professional critics "act as if Flaubert, or Milton, or Wordsworth were some tedious old aunt in a rocking chair, who smelt of stale powder, was only interested in the past, and hadn't said anything new for years." (BARNES, 1984, p. 76).

- **RESUMO:** *As listas de Julian Barnes, nos quinze capítulos que compõem o Papagaio de Flaubert, atraem não apenas outros personagens fictícios para examiná-las e para ver o que significam, mas também estudiosos da literatura. Os críticos atraídos para investigar o significado dessa técnica antiga (a lista é tão antiga quanto as grandes epopeias da antiguidade) discutem a constelação de coisas, objetos e assuntos atraídos por ela. Eu argumento que no Papagaio de Flaubert existem tantas listas porque a palavra mata a coisa, mas não a aniquila completamente. O romance está enterrado na (inter) textualidade e coberto por palavras em acumulações e enumerações porque a coisa/cena inteira é uma assombração interminável, uma sobrevida inescapável e uma incognoscibilidade inexorável do mundo.*
- **PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** *Listas. Papagaio de Flaubert. Teoria da coisa. Julian Barnes. Realidades materiais.*

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