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THE IMAGE OF GOD IN A HISTORY OF THE WORLD IN 10½ CHAPTERS

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ОБРАЗ БОГА В «ИСТОРИИ МИРА В 10½ ГЛАВАХ»

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Abstract. This article examines the literary interpretation of the story of Noah in a postmodern novel *A History Of The World In 10½ Chapters* by Julian Barnes, an internationally acclaimed contemporary English novelist, and justifies the author's views on the reality of the story to realize the true image of God embodied in this work.

Аннотация. В этой статье рассматривается литературная интерпретация истории Ноя в постмодернистском романе «История мира в 10½ главах» Джулиана Барнса, всемирно известного современного английского писателя, и обосновываются взгляды автора на реальность истории, чтобы понять, истинный образ Бога, который воплощен в этой работе.

Keywords: postmodern literature, hyper irony, *A History Of The World in 10½ Chapters*, Julian Barnes, Noah, Genesis.

Ключевые слова: постмодернистская литература, гиперирония, «История мира в 10 ½ главах», Джулиан Барнс, Ной, Бытие.

No philosopher so far has ever been proved right

Every historical period has its own leading social, artistic, and literary trends principally oriented to enlighten the people, to protest the distorted truths, to challenge the conventional knowledge, to educate the illiterate community, to inform about the overridden corruption and even to heal bigoted comprehensions in some cultures. It has scientifically and philosophically been ascertained that every single epoch came with its privileges and ideas to lead the aspects of life to some conducts. It is indisputable that every new movement that emerged in some time in human history overweigh some controversial agenda against the preceding ones by challenging some of the apparent detriments. However, when the terms progress towards postmodernism, the world saw an ultimate rejection of any type of objective conception due to their faith-killing consequences and absurdity they had arisen. As far as “no philosopher so far has ever been proved right” [1, p. 26] how the ideologies driven by human minds even by greater than greater ones can deliver a complete truth. Furthermore, most of these theories generated from some theological principles and saw their implementations in a range of evil actions corresponding to the two world wars. Therefore, postmodernists are now entirely mature that they possess not only radical opposition to any subjective explanations of previous trends but also complete senses to prove that the miniature detriments of subjective inclinations that were given an objective profile might lead to a catastrophic ending. Postmodern writers are trying to get into its original root basis — a religious basis. Admittedly, a certain number of writers have interpreted the Bible differently for centuries. Yet, the postmodern approach to the Bible retains a new particular form of irony. Julian Barnes, a



distinguished English postmodern author, wittily starts his rejection of a universally conventional knowledge by Most in Genesis with the story of Noah in his postmodern novel “The History of The World in 10½ Chapters”, a novel acclaimed as “Stunning ... a flawless diamond” by Chicago Sun times. He sarcastically questions every aspect of the story that was not mentioned due to the overgeneralization and gives a true “fictional realistic behind the curtain” portrayal on how everything might have happened or might have been concealed for some unknown reasons. His irony is basically directed to find the truth behind the story. However, simply or initially he might have aimed to brainwash the society with his rational answer to the question “Who is God?” in Genesis. Although there are 10 chapters and a half, they are not classic chapters, they are the fictional fragments of several ranges of events in history that seem to have an inclination to share the same central idea owing to some religious connections. Nevertheless, our mere interest and literary investigation on the image of God is supposed to be restricted to the story of Noah in the 1st chapter – on the narrative story of the stowaway.

Julian Barnes' verity on God's villainy in “The Stowaway”

The villain character in literature was created in the greatest period of Renaissance by English playwright Christopher Marlowe in the XVI century, which started a new era for the world drama and centralized the plot of the main genre — tragedy around the villains. The paramount tragedies earned worldly acknowledged fame due to the devilry of human villain characters created by William Shakespeare. Though we are barred to see some apparent figure of a dazzling character of villainy in the first chapter of the novel “A History of The World in 10½ Chapters” by Julian Barnes, numerous specific questions when met their answers, they exposed God's villainy in the story of Noah in Genesis. Everything to the surprise of the creatures started with “God's wrath with his own creation” [2, p. 4] which threatened them to death if remaining on earth or survival “on the insulting terms offered by God and Noah [2, p. 5]”. From these lines, it is not difficult to figure out that, the case is not at all Noah, because “all he did was blindly obey [2, p. 7]” and God was all above “to choose a man as His protégé” [2, p. 12]. Rather he might have chosen some other animal candidate like “the gorilla” but not a man with “so much disobedience” [2, p. 12] and there would be “no need to have had the Flood” [2, p. 12]. Moreover, how can God choose a man of His preference for the one who is a heavy drunkard? God must be a true villain then and there who supported or ignored Noah's immorality and greed. There are surely some other lines that help us understand who the author hints to be the evil-monger. He reassures that “it wasn't altogether Noah's fault” [2, p. 15]. He did not disobey His Lord by being so inhuman to feed his stomach with every “clean animal” on the deck rather “God of his was a really oppressive role model” [2, p. 15]. From his oppressive role model, he learned how to humiliate other creatures so that today zebras have their stripes left from those oppressions. His hyper irony works in the following mode: God is a villain otherwise why he would send a flood to destruct every moving and living creature on Earth. Julian Barnes bitterly asserts his position by stating “but perhaps the animals had been naïve to trust Noah” who is portrayed controversially to the common concept of piety “and his God in the first place” [2, p. 6] that animals had no reason or choice but to believe them “until the day of their ritual slaughter” [2, p. 7]. The humans “ennobled as a species” [2, p. 20] due to their superseded greed devoured a number of gorgeous creatures including a unicorn — a true symbol of purity, miracles, playfulness, and love together with it.

Distorted image of the Creator

All these appear painful and agonizing but the humanist author merely challenges the universal truth, which is based on this story of Noah in Genesis, and which devotedly distorted the



real image of the Creator. Maybe that's why he makes us ponder over it again and again until the human mind realizes that it needs to change its absolute faith in it.

Nonetheless, it seems incomplete if we cease our analysis of the image of God in this novel in this manner. Since the probable response to all this controversial issue was given in "The Age of Reason" by Thomas Paine, an eighteenth-century English-American enlightener. "The Age of Reason", a long-established "Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology", which asserts "Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness" [3, p. 22] in Genesis, we can infer that "it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon, than the word of God" [3, p. 22].

And in final terms, we might willingly infer that the author in the first chapter of his "flawless diamond" is probably asking the readers one important question: Is it due to your faith in God you believe in this story, or does this story make you believe in God? In the former case, you have to start questioning your faith using your rational thinking to comprehend the evil policies being seized on earth, but in the latter case, you are probably among those who are involved in these vicious principles.

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