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## **TRACING POLITICS AND POSTMODERNISM IN *THE NOISE OF TIME***

With his 2016 novel *The Noise of Time*, Julian Barnes showed once again that he had not finished with postmodernist experimentations, nor with his interest in biography and history. This paper discusses the political and postmodernist elements of *The Noise of Time*. In *The Noise of Time* Barnes embarks on a journey of exploration of the strains political repression has on an artist living and working in Stalinist Russia where everything was conducted under the directives of the political regime. Barnes intertwines the characteristics of both postmodernism and political novel to render a fictional biography of Dimitri Shostakovich, a renowned Soviet composer who lived and worked through the oppression of Stalin's regime and in the years of his successors. In his portrayal of the workings and implications that ideological artistic doctrines and forms of political power can have on artists, Barnes uses primarily intertextuality and historiographic metafiction, and this paper will mostly focus on these two postmodernist elements of the novel.

**Keywords:** political novel; postmodernism; intertextuality; historiographic metafiction; Julian Barnes; *The Noise of Time*

### **NOVELS AND POLITICS**

The term *political novel* implies fiction that in some way comments on politics, political events, systems, or theories. According to *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, there are many different definitions of politics, and they range from the: "conciliatory ('the art of the possible' –Bismarck), through the cynical ('the art of governing mankind through deceiving them' – Isaac D 'Israeli), to the willfully

assertive (“the art of carrying out the life struggle of a nation for its earthly existence” – Hitler)” (Scruton 2007: 534-535). The author of the book, Roger Scruton, asserts further on that politics denotes an activity that is associated with government but points out that there are conflicting views as to what this activity amounts to. *Random House Webster’s College Dictionary* defines ‘politics’ as “political methods or maneuvers” (1009) or as “the use of strategy or intrigue in obtaining power, control, or status” (Ibid). Political scientists, on the other hand, focus on the element of power in politics. Harold Lasswell, a political scientist observes: “When we speak of the science of politics, we mean the science of power” (Lasswell 2011: 8). These definitions exclude the much broader context of political action, both by individuals, very specifically in the voting process, and by individuals or groups in political activism that can influence the course and outcomes of politics. Furthermore, the concept of politics has been made more complex by the broadening of the semantic field of the word itself to different contexts, so today there are concepts like green politics, sexual politics, gender politics, the politics of postmodernism, etc.

Separating political aspects from other elements of human existence is sometimes impossible, both in real life and in fiction. Being apolitical can be considered a political attitude or even a privilege because, in many arrangements, totalitarian, transitional, and democratic, to have or not to have a political stance and opinion has political ramifications. As George Orwell points out: “the opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is in itself a political attitude” (Orwell 1980: 101). And, one may add here, having nothing to do with politics can be a clear sign of white privilege. There has been a shift in this respect in recent years. The apolitical attitude of the privileged is being replaced with political activism and using one’s privilege to give a voice to the unvoiced. One such example is Hollywood or the film industry in general, where in recent years more and more actors have used their fame as a platform to promote the rights of women, minorities, the LGBTQ population, animal rights, etc. The latest example is the Oscar, Emmy, and BAFTA awards where actors winning awards use their acceptance speeches to criticize society and politics. But, as we move locally and globally to being more political – especially ordinary people using social media – and the word politics enters different semantic fields, we may ask ourselves – why has the political aspect of the novel become less visible or at least less researched? When one combines the word political with the word novel, specifically, in a simple Google search, the most extensive scholarly studies found, date back to the 1980s. In research on a similar topic, there are interesting findings on the use of the word politics and political in terms of literature. The research finds

that the 1960s and 1980s were the high points of discussions of politics in literature and 2008 is marked as the lowest point for scholarly exploration or for these terms appearing in analyses of literature.<sup>1</sup> The survey ends with the year 2008, but as already stated, the current situation is not very different, especially in the case of the more specific search terms ‘political novel’.<sup>2</sup> It is not because of the lack of such novels, for one could say that every major novel of contemporary fiction is either explicitly or implicitly political, pointing to this or that form of social injustice that is in some way related to the movements and rhythms of global politics. The whole body of postcolonial literature is political. The lives of exiled authors show that. Salman Rushdie with his *Satanic Verses* (1988) that can be seen as a monument to the *standing up to the regime* type of fiction is just one example. It could be stated the same for popular culture in general, film and television especially. One might argue that the political element of the novel has been absorbed by its other aspects, especially by extreme experimentation, and even go as far to say that the experimentation in writing is in itself political.

In his book *The Political Novel*, Nikola Kovač writes about the difficulty of precisely defining the political novel and starts by stating that it is much easier to say what is not a political novel: “It is neither a novel with a thesis in which fiction is subordinated to ideology nor a novel of ideas that treats moral and metaphysical questions”, and it is not a social-engagement novel, it is closer to a novel with a thesis since it “focuses on political views that secure stability and authority” (Kovač 2005: 7). Kovač further argues that the subject of the political novel is politics as a system of action rather than politics as an institution, that is, it is a synthesis of the system more than a description of the situation. “The political novel most often articulates the conflict between individual demands and collective repression” (8).

Julian Barnes explores the strains political repression has on an artist living and working in Stalinist Russia where everything was conducted under the directives of the political regime. In 1934 *Pravda* printed the section of the Writers’ Union Statute that defines Socialist Realism as “the basic method of Soviet artistic literature and literary criticism” in which “truthfulness and historical concreteness of artistic por-

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<sup>1</sup> See more on: <https://eve.gd/2015/07/04/he-doesnt-talk-politics-any-more-politics-and-postmodernism-morality-and-metafiction-nihilism-and-the-novel/>, last accessed 12. 02. 2020.

<sup>2</sup> It is important to mention, however, that with the occurrence of Brexit in 2016, a new term, Brexilit, also appeared with reference to British literature written since that event. It denotes literature of different genres that explore issues of national identity in relation to Britain leaving the European Union. Kristian Shaw’s *Brexilit. British Literature and the European Project* (2021) is the first in-depth study of how writers engaged with the issues before and after the referendum.

trayal ought to be combined with the task of the ideological remaking and education of laboring people in the spirit of socialism". (Brooks and Zhuk 2014: 3) Jeffrey Brooks and Sergei I. Zhuk in their article "The Distinctiveness of Soviet Culture" summarize the scope of themes of this period:

"Four themes predominated at the time of the 1934 Writers' Congress and exemplified key features of Socialist Realism: a shift in the writers' public role; new attitudes toward the culture of the West; an obligation to describe heroes and the positive in an accessible fashion; and finally a preference for works of grandeur that could rival in scope and scale the masterpieces of the pre-revolutionary era. Among these, the artist's public role was critical." (3)

The authors also note that Bolsheviks required artists before this period to accept the system, but not necessarily to follow orders. Shostakovich witnessed struggles in both periods and Barnes illustrates his life as an artist both inevitably accepting the system, following the orders, but also, in the end, joining the Party itself. It is therefore a full account of the artist's life under an oppressive political system, one questioning its paranoid operational techniques, psychological games, and the effect they have on an individual, but also on the individual's artistic expression. Julian Barnes's 2016 novel *The Noise of Time* is, therefore, what one would call by any definition a political novel, but also a postmodernist novel, because Barnes has steered clear from the contemporary literary trends of avoiding the experimentation of postmodernism and has remained true to the mode of writing his novels in the postmodernist style he pioneered and helped to define. Barnes intertwines the characteristics of both postmodernism and the political novel to render a fictional biography of Dimitri Shostakovich.

## INTERTEXTUALITY

As is the case with Barnes's previous novels *Flaubert's Parrot* and *The Sense of an Ending*, *The Noise of Time* heavily relies on the intertextual dialogue. Intertextuality as a term in literary theory appeared in the late 1960s and was introduced by Julia Kristeva through several papers published between 1966 and 1974. Kristeva explains the term intertextuality in her essay "Word, Dialogue and Novel" written in 1966 where she elaborates on Bakhtin's ideas of dialogue, ambivalence, and communication between texts: "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double" (Kristeva 1986: 37). Kristeva sees the text as production or as a transformation where any text is seen

as a permutation of other texts, any literary text inserts itself into the set of all texts. Julia Kristeva is considered to be the originator of the term intertextuality, as well as the theorists who offered its final definition, but the idea of dialogue, communication, and interaction of different texts has its roots in structuralist and poststructuralist theories, especially in Bakhtin's works and his emphasis on the dialogic character of human speech. In his essay "Epic and Novel" (1941), Bakhtin focuses on the mutual transformation of phenomena in contact, whether that be cultures, languages or literary genres. In his discussion on language, Bakhtin points out that the new cultural and creative consciousness lives in an actively polyglot world:

"The world becomes polyglot, once and for all and irreversibly. The period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other, comes to an end—that is there is no more peaceful co-existence between territorial dialects, social and professional dialects and jargons, literary language, generic languages within literary language, epoch in language and so forth." (Bakhtin 1985: 12)

It is precisely this polyglot nature of the world that brings to the fore the dialogical nature of speech, that is, language, and thus of text. Bakhtin's teachings influenced Kristeva, but also Roland Barthes who wrote extensively about it in his work. In the "Theory of the Text" he argues that "Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc., pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text" (Barthes 1981: 39) and in "The Pleasure of the Text" he writes that: "intertext is: the impossibility of living outside the infinite text—whether this text be Proust or the daily newspaper or the television screen: the book creates the meaning, the meaning creates life" (Barthes 1998: 36). It is evident, therefore, that Barthes excludes any absolute originality or autonomy of texts and sees them all as texts in some way interwoven with earlier texts which is a process that can arise on a conscious or unconscious level. The assumption is, therefore, that the author subconsciously leans on the accumulated knowledge, language, data, forms, themes, styles, and other categories acquired by reading other texts and works of art in his own works. In this case, one can see intertextuality as an inevitability, and the resulting intertext as an inevitable product.

In the context of intertextuality, it is important to mention the different classifications of intertextual relations. Gerard Genette, within his theory of textuality, points out five different types of intertextuality that seek to clarify the types of dialogic relationships between texts that are fully encompassed by the notion of transtextuality

and those are: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality. Genette defines these types as follows: intertextuality implies the literal and effective presence of one text in another (plagiarism, quotation, allusion) (Genette 1997: 1-2), paratextuality implies intratextual merging of heterogeneous segments such as titles, subtitles, epigraphs, etc., (3), metatextuality ‘the relationship most often labeled ‘commentary’ (4) is a transtextual relationship between the comment and the text being commented on; and hypertextuality a property of texts created by transformation or imitation of complete other texts, in which a hypertext encompasses and transmits a hypotext, but does not comment on it (5-6); and finally architextuality which refers to the genres and models of discourse. (1)

Given that Barnes mostly uses the first type of intertextuality laid out by Genette, namely citations and allusions, the paper will include here definitions of types of citations found in Oraić-Tolić. Dubravka Oraić-Tolić sees citations/quotations as metatextual signals and divides them into: “complete (complete transfer of one segment of the original text, i.e. prototext), incomplete (partial transfer of one segment of the prototext) and empty, i.e. vacant, which can further be discerned as pseudo-citations (the prototext exists, but the relationship between the citation and the prototext is false) or paracitations (when there is no prototext from which the citation is supposedly transmitted)” (Oraić-Tolić in Katnić-Bakaršić 1993:106). Another important division of citations is based on the type of prototext from which the quotations originate, namely: intrasemiotic which would be those where both the citation and the text that is using the said citation belong to the same field of art, intersemiotic are those where the prototext and the target text belong to two different fields of arts, and transsemiotic, where prototext does not belong to any field of art (106). According to these types of citations, Barnes uses intrasemiotic and transsemiotic forms of citations and also full and incomplete ones.

All of the three mentioned Barnes’s novels contain allusions in their very titles which sets a broader context for a full understanding of his works. *The Sense of an Ending* refers to Frank Kermode’s 1967 book on narrative theory, and *The Noise of Time* borrows its title from Osip Mandelstam’s memoir and collection of essays written in 1924. In *Flaubert’s Parrot*, the whole novel revolves around Flaubert’s life, but neither Kermode nor Mandelstam are ever mentioned again in the other two novels. Barnes uses the strong stylistic position that a title offers in the text to foreground the allusion itself and to compare the lives of the two artists. An allusion to Mandelstam in the novel’s title is quite sufficient for juxtaposing Shostakovich’s life to Mandelstam’s, to make Barnes’s story of the artist’s place in an oppressive regime

complete. The two Russian artists present two sides of the same coin. Barnes explores the artist's inability to remain true to himself, his esthetics, principles, and morals, his cracking down under the iron fist of Stalin's government, but ironically enough, his artistic thriving as well.

Russian poet Osip Mandelstam was Shostakovich's contemporary and was famous for his "Stalin Epigram", also known as "The Kremlin Highlander", which is a satirical poem written in 1933, during Stalin's life, that gives an account of the climate of fear in the Soviet Union. Being an outspoken critic of Stalin's regime, Mandelstam was persecuted and, in the end, banished into a transit camp in 1938, when he was only forty-seven along with his wife Nadezhda, a famous Russian poet herself. *The Noise of Time* is Mandelstam's autobiographical account of his life as a poet who openly criticized the regime or as he would later be charged, as a poet of "counter-revolutionary activities" (Shentalinsky 1991: 18). Barnes's *The Noise of Time* is a fictional-biographical account of the life and work of a Russian composer who is almost accused of the same counter-revolutionary activities but steers clear due to a series of twists of luck, but mostly because of his introverted nature and his innate inability to openly stand up for himself, whether that be his domineering mother, one of his wives or politics. The two artists behaved differently, reacted differently to the oppression in Stalinist Russia, one chose a life of political activism and embraced the life of constant fear, but also of heroism, while the other chose passivity, life in fear all the same, but also an internal struggle with himself, at least according to Barnes. In her biography of Shostakovich, Fairclough states that:

"Shostakovich might just conceivably have been many seemingly contradictory things: a believer in socialist principles; a loyal Stalinist; a composer who genuinely tried to write music for all ears; a man who loathed Stalin and Stalinism; a composer who was cruelly humiliated by being forced publicly to denigrate Stravinsky; a member of Communist Party; a man who would sign official statements without reading them, etc." (2007: 453-454)

Fairclough also characterized him as "one of the most mythologized composers of the twentieth century" (Ibid. 452). What Barnes tries to do in his novel is to bring to life the genuine moral and artistic struggle of the man behind that contradiction. In his work, Shostakovich was noted for the sharp contrast of the musical techniques he used, grotesque, ambivalence in tonality (Jones 1), the use of montage and defamiliarization (Fairclough 2007: 11), which are all characteristics of the modern movement in general in the arts. But, to be modern was not to be a good communist, which is what Barnes is trying to explore – how to play it safe but also retain artistic credi-

bility. Is Shostakovich's music loyal to the regime or does it contain hidden subversive messages? Barnes does not offer an answer, he does not want to be the judge of this. He intends to portray the struggle of a man under this kind of pressure.

Aside from the allusion to Mandelstam in the title of the novel, there are multiple examples of its use throughout the rest of the novel. Barnes divides the novel and Shostakovich's life into three parts and starts by using intertextuality, in the sense that he opens his novel with a Russian saying, "one to hear, one to remember and one to drink"<sup>3</sup>. The proverb parallels the structure of the novel, which readers will learn by the end of the novel, but it also tells the readers how they will be differently affected by it, not everyone will react in the same way to it. The epigraph is followed by a prelude which in a way both illustrates it and sets the metaphorical grounds for the rest of the novel. This story is separated both from the rest of the novel and its epigraph by being written in italics. It is a story of three men who meet by chance in a time of war at a railway station. Two men who are in their thirties travel together; they see a beggar on the platform singing in hopes of someone tossing him a coin. The beggar lost his legs in the war and is reduced to misery but keeps surviving, nevertheless. He becomes an embodiment of 'a technique of survival' of some sorts. They have vodka together, clink their glasses, and go their separate ways.

All three men in the prelude story are Shostakovich in his three stages of life as depicted in the three parts of the novel. The Prelude is a figurative summary of the novel. "The men were in their thirties. (...) The one who heard was a thin, nervous fellow with spectacles; around his neck and wrists he wore amulets of garlic. His travelling companion's name is lost to history, even though he was the one who remembered" (Barnes 2016: 8-9). When the novel starts, Shostakovich is in his early thirties, facing the Power for the first time. Until that point, he is the one who hears the noise of time, does not participate in it, is not broken by it, he is young, nervous, believing garlic bracelets would help him fight off the world's evils, however, he is not guilt-ridden, which corresponds to the 'one who hears'. From that point on he would face the regime, dangers, make difficult choices, and suffer guilt through the life of remembering, revealing itself to the readers as 'the one who remembers'. The two men are exactly at that crossroad – "By the time the two men were in their seats again, the one who heard had almost forgotten what he had said. But the one who re-

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<sup>3</sup> The old Russian folk proverb *Комуслушать, комунаусмотать, а кому и горькуюпить*, in the given context, translates into English as: some will simply read the story, some will find wisdom in it, and some will be so saddened by it that they will turn to strong drinks. The proverb couldn't be found in the *Russian-English Dictionary of Proverbs and Sayings* (2008) by Alexander Margulis, nor in any other source, and is translated by the author of this article, with the help and consultations provided by a native Russian speaker.

membered was only at the start of his remembering” (9). Shostakovich often wishes throughout the novel that he had died earlier. He sees his stubborn survival as a penance; he is forced to remember. The fact that the second man’s name is lost to history means that the world would not know of his private, inner struggles, he would be known to the world and Russia as the regime’s obedient composer. The third man, ‘One to drink’, the old one, the wounded drunk beggar is Shostakovich in his third phase of life, the one described in the part of the novel called “Three: In the Car”. The description of the beggar can serve for both the man from the prelude and Shostakovich in the third part of the novel: “He saw only fingers, coins, and coat sleeves, and was impervious to insult. This was the one who drank” (9). The comment one of the younger men makes to the other probably about the third one, the beggar, that makes them both laugh reminds the readers also of the ongoing self-ironic tone, a sort of coping mechanism Shostakovich has throughout the novel and tells the readers of the connection between Shostakovich and the three men. Barnes will remind his readers very carefully throughout the novel of the bond between these three men and of the nuanced metaphorical ground of the moments laid out in the prelude, one being this very laugh the two younger men share or at least look at their older self that happens in the third part of the novel: “He wondered what the young man with the skittering mind would have made of the old man staring out from the back seat of his chauffeured car” (97). This moment takes the reader back to the prelude and the moment of the intersection of Shostakovich’s three selves.

The prelude also serves to point to the major themes and explored issues in the novel – power, politics, and war. In the part about the third man, Barnes renders a very simple but insightful opinion on the state of war:

“His father had been a survivor of the previous war. Blessed by the village priest, he had set off to fight for his homeland and the Tsar. By the time he returned, priest and Tsar were gone, and his homeland was not the same. His wife had screamed when she saw what war had done to her husband. Now there was another war, and the same invader was back, except that the names had changed: names on both sides. But nothing else had changed: young men were still blown to bits by guns, then roughly sliced by surgeons. His own legs had been removed in a field hospital among broken trees. It was all in a great cause, as it had been the time before. He did not give a fuck. Let others argue about that; his only concern was to get to the end of each day. He had become a technique for survival. Below a certain point, that was what all men became: techniques for survival.” (9)

Here, Barnes portrays the state of countries without at least one generational pause between wars, but also the absurdity and horror of wars in general. Barnes will not treat the wars in specific in this novel, but he wants to be clear to point to the generational physical, psychological and societal scars they leave behind, the oppressive regimes being one of them. He goes right on to point to the blind submission of ordinary men to ruthless power in his metaphorical account of how a dictatorship works:

“The two men travelling in soft class were at a window, trying to guess where they were and how long they might be stopping for: minutes, hours, perhaps the whole day. No information was given out, and they knew not to ask. Enquiring about the movement of trains – even if you were a passenger on one – could mark you as a saboteur. The men were in their thirties, well old enough to have learnt such lessons.” (9)

This passage sums up the paranoid, fear-inducing government of Stalinist Russia and Shostakovich’s way of surviving it, at least physically. In his prelude, Barnes also sets the politically critical tone that he will maintain throughout the whole novel in his attempt to show the psychological strain politics can cause on an individual, but more importantly on an artist.

Barnes efficiently uses intertextuality to discuss ideas on life, love, power, and fiction. To explain Shostakovich’s opinion of love, for example, he uses Maupassant’s story: “He knew, in his mind, what his ideal of love was. It was fully expressed in that Maupassant short story about the young garrison commander of a fortress town on the Mediterranean coast” (29). One finds this at the very beginning of the novel, while the reader is still getting familiar with the main character, Dimitri Shostakovich. The narrator explains to the readers what the real love for Shostakovich is, or how he perceives it. To explain Shostakovich’s idea of love, Barnes borrows Guy de Maupassant’s short story which is about a young commander of a battalion in Antib. There he meets a married woman, with whom he falls in love. One night, the woman wants the commander to visit her in her house while her husband is absent. The commander then gives out an order to close the city gate, so he can enjoy one night with his mistress peacefully. This was also Shostakovich’s idea of love, loving without fear, and without thinking about the consequences. Art and love are here one in this story about love, but symbolically about art as well. Art should be to the artist what love is to the character in Maupassant’s story. Barnes describes Shostakovich as a person who thinks love should exclude worrying and thinking about the future and consequences. In the novel, he is portrayed as a person achieving this kind of persistence in love, but as one completely lacking the resolve when it comes to his music.

To talk about power, politics, and artistic integrity he reaches out to other authors as well, Russian poet Evtushenko, for instance:

“Each morning, instead of prayer, he would recite to himself two poems by Evtushenko. One was ‘Career’, which described how lives are led beneath the shadow of Power:

In Galileo’s day, a fellow scientist

Was no more stupid than Galileo.

He was well aware that the Earth revolved,

But he also had a large family to feed.

It was a poem about conscience and endurance:

But time has a way of demonstrating

The most stubborn are the most intelligent.

Was that true? He could never quite decide. The poem ended by marking the difference between ambition and artistic truthfulness:

I shall therefore pursue my career

By trying not to pursue one.

These verses both comforted and questioned him. He was, for all his anxieties and fearfulness and Leningrad civility, at base a stubborn man who had tried to pursue the truth in music as he had seen it.” (104, 105)

Here Barnes uses intrasemiotic citation, quotes Evtushenko’s poem interspersed with Shostakovich’s thoughts on it. Barnes uses Evtushenko’s poem to explain Shostakovich’s coping mechanism, a self-soothing mantra explaining and justifying the loss of artistic integrity that he has to live with. There is a similar instance in the book when Barnes shows the importance of intertextuality and art in his description of Pasternak’s reading of his own translation of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 66:

“When Pasternak read Sonnet 66 in public, the audience would wait keenly through the first eight lines, eager for the ninth:

And art made tongue-tied by authority

At which point they would join in – some under their breath, some whisperingly, the boldest among them fortissimo, but all giving the lie to that line, all refusing to be tongue-tied.” (64)

With this one moment of artistic juncture, Barnes portrays the workings of an oppressive political apparatus and the ways in which people cope under it. The full criticism of power lies in the fact the Sonnet was first banned by the “State Commission for Repertoire, and then unbanned by Stalin” (64). The Power always wants to present itself as art-loving and liberating. Furthermore, Barnes’s description of the audience

that expresses its disobedience through whispers and under their breaths, shows that people always find ways to make themselves believe they are somehow standing up to that power. Their gesture is both grand and small, both useful and useless, admired and mocked.

Through Shostakovich, Barnes explains deeper, more philosophical implications of writing and reading, and intertextuality, demonstrating the action of communicating one's ideas and aesthetic expressions through reference to or allusion to other people's works: "If it all began elsewhere, and in the minds of others, then perhaps he could blame Shakespeare, for having written *Macbeth*. Or Leskov for Russifying it into *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*" (19). But he goes on to explain that the problems start with politics rather than with the dialogue itself:

"No, none of that. It was, self-evidently, his own fault for having written the piece that offended. It was his opera's fault for being such a success – at home and abroad – it had aroused the curiosity of the Kremlin. It was Stalin's fault because he would have inspired and approved the *Pravda* editorial – perhaps even written it himself: there were enough grammatical errors to suggest the pen of one whose mistakes could never be corrected. It was also Stalin's fault for imagining himself a patron and connoisseur of the arts in the first place." (19)

Barnes wants his readers to be aware of the subversive power of art itself but also of intertextuality, of its cross-cultural importance and cross-genre nature. The link here surpasses centuries and connects three different artists and forms of art, drama, novel, and opera. One could say that Shostakovich's fame starts and ends with different texts, his life is torn apart between *Macbeth* and *Pravda*, between Shakespeare and Stalin, and is fully, but fictionally, rendered to us through Barnes's text. Barnes very well wants us to be aware of this complex intertextual bond. He continues to discuss the relation of power, love, and art using Shakespeare which creates a highly postmodernist moment, containing metafiction, intertextuality, and hybridity, where one writer uses the life and work of another author to render fictionalized contemplation on love, art, and the politics of another artist.

"How was it possible not to love Shakespeare? Shakespeare, after all, had loved music. His plays were full of it, even the tragedies. That moment when Lear awakes from madness to the sound of music ... And that moment in *The Merchant of Venice* where Shakespeare says that the man who doesn't like music isn't trustworthy; that such a man would be capable of a base act, even murder or treason. So of course tyrants hated music, however strenuously they pretended to love it. Although they hated poetry more. He wished he had been at that reading

by Leningrad poets when Akhmatova came on stage and the entire audience had risen instinctively to applaud her. A gesture which led Stalin to demand furiously: 'Who organised the standing up?' But, even more than poetry, tyrants hated and feared the theatre. Shakespeare held a mirror up to nature, and who could bear to see their own reflection? So *Hamlet* was banned for a long time; Stalin loathed the play almost as much as he loathed *Macbeth*." (65)

Barnes brings together the lives of four different artists; the dramatist and poet Shakespeare, the poet and novelist Boris Pasternak, the poet Anna Akhmatova, and the composer Dimitri Shostakovich, in an attempt to portray the workings and implications that ideological artistic doctrines and forms of political power had on artists in Stalinist Russia.

The three Russian artists knew each other very well. Akhmatova and Pasternak were friends, they all suffered different persecutions, but avoided imprisonment and execution and died in the post-Stalinist age. They are also the three most prominent Russian artists of the time. Akhmatova and Pasternak had already been published authors in the pre-revolutionary Russia, Akhmatova even acclaimed, and though Shostakovich was only eleven when the Revolution of 1917 happened, being a child prodigy, playing from a young age, his tastes in music and art had already been affected by Russia's rich cultural heritage. This cultural heritage normally came to clash with the strict political dictatorship of the Stalinist or Soviet age that held a strong belief that art and aesthetics should serve the Power, should be the tools for educating the masses of the proletariat in the spirit of socialism. However, the three artists behaved in the face of this power in different ways, which is also why Barnes brings them together in his discussion on the Soviet regime.

Anna Akhmatova, who was famous before the October Revolution, was a powerful female literary figure whose artistic principles clashed with the Soviet ones for which she was heavily restricted and persecuted, along with her family, her husband, and son being charged and imprisoned under fictitious charges, but managed to face her plight with dignity and what would be called passive resistance. Pasternak, was, on the other hand, at first lenient towards socialism, but never fully accepted it nor its belief that politics should be art's sovereign (Gifford 1977: 68). Even though he was Stalin's favorite writer and intervened on behalf of other poets and writers, Mandelstam included. After his disillusionment with the Party, Pasternak wrote *Dr. Zhivago* that showed disappointment with the revolution and had a protagonist who exercised individuality and detachment from politics. Pasternak never signed denunciations of his colleague writers, unlike Shostakovich who did, but in 1958 he figu-

ratively denounced himself, by turning down the Nobel Prize for literature under the Soviet government's pressure. Shostakovich never had the resolve the other two artists had. He signed denunciations of Stravinsky and Pasternak, denounced himself by changing his works, and ultimately under pressure joined the party, but he was privately deeply skeptical of the regime, kept a portrait of Akhmatova on the wall and Stravinsky's photograph in his desk drawer.

Barnes juxtaposes the actions of Akhmatova and Pasternak to Shostakovich's to share with the reader the full scope of Soviet political authority and alternative modes of surviving it and showing resistance. He does this to illustrate the full extent of Shostakovich's inner self-disgust with his passivity and political obedience.

Works of different artists, a composer, a writer, a poet, and a playwright, if Shakespeare is included, were banned and unbanned in Stalinist Russia. Here, in this novel, they testify to the importance of music and literature in oppressive regimes, the importance of the discussion being kept alive in the present, for even though Stalinist Russia is a regime now in the past, other oppressive politics and regimes are not, which is a political commentary Barnes is trying to make.

## **HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION**

Postmodernist writers see history as an integral part of human experience, but in their return to history, they do not approach history in a positivist and simple way, but from a highly critical position. Postmodern history novels take the *form* of a historical novel to critically address the very creation of a historical narrative. In this process, postmodern historical novels pay attention to the impact of the time we live in, how it shapes our way of understanding the past. In some ways, such novels create a new connection between the present and the past. Steven Connor notes that: "Historical narrative such as it is evidenced in the novels of history in the postwar period is not a matter of representing the truth of history but of constructing the terms of a conversation of structure of address between the past and the present" (Connor 1996: 164). The authors aim to question the overall understanding of historical knowledge. In this process history, itself is not intended to be discredited, but the ways and means of its transmission are. The postmodern historical novel compels us to re-examine our notion of history, exploring the cultural assumptions underlying historical events. What is changing in postmodernism is the way one sees or imagines history, all because of the awareness of the limitations that exist when trying to represent it. Postmodern writers, with their new writings of history, are driven by the desire to

emphasize the void that is impossible to fill, the void between the true past and the way it is presented in historical texts. Historiographical metafiction explores ways of representing both history and reality and questions the possibility of an absolutely reliable representation.

Contrary to the opinion of some critics, such as Frederic Jameson, who thinks that postmodernism is ahistorical, Linda Hutcheon believes that postmodernism behaves in two ways in terms of history; that it at the same time returns to the historical context as an important and even determining factor, but that it also problematizes the whole notion of historical knowledge (Hutcheon 1989). She considers this to be another of the paradoxes that characterize the whole of postmodern discourse. “The term postmodernism, when used in fiction, should, by analogy, best be reserved to describe fiction that is at once metafictional and historical in its echoes of the texts and contexts of the past. In order to distinguish this paradoxical beast from traditional historical fiction, I would like to label it “historiographic metafiction”” (3). According to Hutcheon, historiographical metafiction is a self-conscious work of fiction that is interested in writing about history. In her view, all critical work on postmodernism focuses on narrative, be it narrative in literature, history, or theory, and considers historiographic metafiction to contain all those domains: „Historiographic metafiction incorporates all three of these domains: that is, its theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs (historiographic metafiction) is made the grounds for its rethinking and reworking of the forms of and contents of the past” (Ibid.). *The Noise of Time* can be classified as a historical novel because it treats a historical figure and a period of history, but it does so from a critical standpoint and with textual self-awareness which makes it a novel of historiographic metafiction.

Fictional biography is a specific subtype of historiographic metafiction in the sense that it critically treats a certain historical period, but it also focuses on a particular person and their place in that historical context. Like the historical novel and the novel of historiographic metafiction, fictional biography is also a hybrid genre that plays with the boundaries between facts and fiction. Ina Schabert defines it in these words: „Fictional biography is engaged in the comprehension of real historical individuals by means of the sophisticated instruments of knowing and articulating knowledge that contemporary fiction offers”. In other words, it combines historical facts and fictionalized or pseudo factual constructs to fill the voids between those historical facts. Fictional elements breathe life into its historical or factual segment. Writing about *Flaubert's Parrot* in his essay „When Flaubert Took Wing“, Barnes writes that he wondered with excitement to see to what extent he would be able to stretch the

traditional narrative and to what extent he would be able to fragment it, while still keeping the reader's attention on the novel (Barnes 2016: 30). In *The Noise of Time*, he does not go that far to the extremes with experimentation nor fragmentation as he does in *Flaubert's Parrot*, here he doesn't want the seams between reality and fiction to be even seen.

In the case of *The Noise of Time*, this genre can be furthermore problematized because historical texts about Dimitri Shostakovich are ambiguous and not in agreement. So, there are two clashing narratives, to begin with. His personality has been widely problematized in research articles on his life and the popular domain, as well, because he is both presented as a dutiful communist and as a skeptical one and quite reserved. In his obituary, he is described as "A faithful son of the Communist Party, an eminent social and government figure, citizen artist" and a man who "devoted his entire life to the development of Soviet music, reaffirming the ideals of socialist humanism and internationalism..." (Volkov 1979: 16). This, however, does not describe the man who sat in front of the elevator waiting to be taken to prison by the secret police as he is depicted in *The Noise of Time*.

Pauline Fairclough in her study on Shostakovich's reception in the Anglophone world writes about its dual nature and uniqueness in biographical history for being: "divided into two parts: the 'old' and 'new', with the 'new' Shostakovich still popularly perceived in websites, chat lists and occasional articles as the 'real' composer and the 'old' allegedly perceived as a faithful Communist" (2007: 1). Fairclough and other researchers agree that the changing point in this view was Solomon Volkov's *Testimony*, which was supposedly Shostakovich's own dictated memoirs. She also notes that Ian Macdonald's book *The New Shostakovich* (1990) contributed to the change in perception of Shostakovich. In Fairclough's study she is questioning the 'new' image of Shostakovich and its credibility as an accurate image of "the aging composer" and poses a question – "who the 'old Shostakovich' really was – his pre-Testimony image in the West – has been largely forgotten" (3).

Barnes, on the contrary, is interested in the post-Testimony image of Shostakovich. He is trying to deconstruct the "old" Shostakovich and explain his actions by portraying the "new" one. *The Noise of Time* is a novel of historiographical metafiction because it opens a debate within fiction about how history is written and how it is understood. In his interweaving of history, literature, and theory, Barnes explores and deconstructs the traditional understanding of history and the reliability of knowledge of the past that traditional historiography offers us as an objective. Barnes invites the readers to question their knowledge of the past and their ways of acquiring that knowl-

edge, which Hutcheon singles out as a characteristic of historiographical metafiction: „The reader is forced to acknowledge not only the textuality of our knowledge of the past, but also both the value and the limitations of that inescapably discursive form of knowledge“ (Hutcheon 1989: 127). Barnes shares Lyotard’s distrust of meta-narratives, which means that he does not believe that there are definitive answers or absolute truth. *The Noise of Time* reflects on knowledge and truth and questions those categories as well as the human inability to fully know them, bringing the incompleteness of knowledge of the past into focus. Barnes combines the representation of history through fiction with philosophical discussions of knowledge, art, power, and politics. He does not openly and constantly question the two versions of Shostakovich’s life, as he does in *Flaubert’s Parrot*, but demonstrates the impossibility of representing the truth with absolute objectivity and accuracy.

In *The Noise of Time* Barnes is deconstructing the image Shostakovich had during his lifetime. Barnes is trying to portray how politics and power shaped Shostakovich’s public actions, the kind of a person he was privately, and the toll this pressure had on him. The existence of his public and private personas is reinforced throughout the novel by the repetition of the clause “those who did not know him, and who followed his music only from a distance”. This implies Shostakovich had two faces, one for the public and politics and the other only known to the small circle of his family and friends. Barnes’s repetition of the other clause, “all he knew was that this was the worst time” at the beginning of each of the three parts of the novel is there to show Shostakovich’s life long struggle with the imposed duality its suppression of his personality, and its impact on the life of an artist in a communist Russia.

Barnes is not interested in giving a linear and factual account of Shostakovich’s life because linearity implies objectivity and postmodernist reject any possibility of objectivity. Factuality is no longer a possibility once the facts enter the domain of history. By choosing a genre of fictional biography he is saying that his version of this man’s life is not the-true-to-the-life-version-of-the-story, but is one possible version of the story. He is saying that life once textualized is just that, a story.

The first thing that can be noticed is the non-linearity of narrated events. The reader follows Shostakovich’s life through three chapters, 1: On the Landing, 2: On the Plane, and 3: In the Car. Each of these situations or places in which Shostakovich finds himself is used as a framework, which provides the starting point for Shostakovich’s memories and reflections. All three places also imply movement and the passage of time and they stay in opposition to the static nature of the noise of time. Shostakovich’s fear and anxiety are caused by the political oppression that is

equally static in its horror – it never seems to cease and change, it is constantly and equally there.

Shostakovich does not remember events in the order in which they happened, rather they are brought to him by the associative links of the mind as they respond and contribute to the moment that he is in “right now”. This technique of storytelling accentuates the point that his “right now” is always the worst time and he is always fearful, anxious, and traumatized. Barnes wants to explore that state of trauma. He questions the possibility of a man like Shostakovich, who had near-fatal encounters with power, being capable of acting insincerely like a true Party-man. Barnes is interested in creating the personae of the man that must have existed underneath or in-between those two persons. Barnes is creating a subjective and biased narrative construct that is in line with the common understanding of postmodern historiography as not being an objective source of information. He is reimagining history precisely because of the awareness of the limitations that exist in trying to represent it. In that process, he is relativizing the notion of true representation of both past events and lives. Barnes wants to render a deeply personal and subjective view of a political system, which is why he writes a political novel using elements of historiographic metafiction. Traditional history or biography would use known facts and texts to stay objective, but Barnes disbelieves in that objectivity and favors subjectivity. He wants this account to be a personal criticism of an oppressive political system that uses art to promote its agenda. Barnes uses art to criticize how art can be applied in service of politics and portrays what artists are reduced to in such a political environment. Shostakovich is described as a man living his life in hopes that his contemporaries and generations to come will see his actions as done according to previously prepared texts. His speech in the United States is an example of that. It is a Party-made text, a politically prepared narrative, and Shostakovich hopes it will be seen as such by the audience.

“Anyone with an ounce of political understanding would know that he hadn’t written the speeches he gave: the short one on the Friday and the very long one on the Saturday. He was handed them in advance and instructed to prepare his delivery. Naturally, he didn’t. If they chose to rebuke him, he would point out that he was a composer, not a speech-maker. He read the Friday speech in a fast, uninflected gabble, reinforcing the fact that he was quite unfamiliar with the text. He carried straight on over punctuation marks as if they did not exist, pausing neither for effect nor reaction. This has absolutely nothing to do with me, his manner insisted.” (71)

Shostakovich is trying to point to the textuality of the speech with hopes of alienating himself from it, with hopes that his audience would see the gap between his private self and the Party man. He is not successful in this because Nicolai Nabokov, a fellow Russian composer in exile, is there to ask him questions. Nicolai's role here is double, he is there to disclose Shostakovich's attempt of distancing himself from the speech, but he also serves Barnes to disclose the possibility of ever truly escaping the oppressive regime, even in exile, because Barnes suggests that Nabokov has to succumb to the opposing political system. Nicolai has to play the part as well for, "Machiavelli said that you should never trust an exile" (71). Shostakovich is made by Stalinist Russia to parrot the values of the communist system, while Nabokov is there to parrot the capitalist questioning of that system. In this way, Barnes invites the readers to think critically about the origins and ways of constructing official historiographical versions of the past, while at the same time he is acknowledging the essential similarity between historiographical and literary narratives.

This is the reason why Barnes chooses third person close narration to render his protagonist's consciousness – he blends their voices and gives Shostakovich the credibility and objectivity that first-person narration would not. Shostakovich might not have been in charge of his own life, but Barnes makes sure to give him some semblance of *control* in the way of narrating the struggles of his life. Barnes makes clear this point; he doesn't want readers to miss it. When Shostakovich contemplates suicide, he realizes that even though it would mean exercising some sort of control over his life, it would mean the loss of control over the story of his life in a system like a Soviet Russia.

"This time, he was not threatening Tanya or Nita or his mother with suicide; he was threatening Power. He was saying to the Union of Composers, to the cats who sharpened their claws on his soul, to Tikhon Nikolayevich Khrennikov, and Stalin himself: Look what you have reduced me to, soon you will have my death on your hands and on your conscience. But he realized it was an empty threat, and Power's response hardly needed articulation. It would be this: Fine, go ahead, then we shall tell the world your story. The story of how you were up to your neck in the Tukhachevsky assassination plot, how for decades you schemed to undermine Soviet music, how you corrupted younger composers, sought to restore capitalism in the USSR, and were a leading element in the musicologists' plot which will soon be disclosed to the world. All of which is made plain in your suicide note. And that was why he could not kill himself: because then they would steal his story and rewrite it. He needed, if only in his own hopeless, hysterical way, to have some charge of his life, of his story." (70, 71)

Shostakovich imagines the alternate story of his life if he commits suicide and decides not to do it in the attempt to have some control of his life. The actual publication of Volkov's *Testimony* proves his "fictionalized" point right. In this process, the reader can enjoy the representation of the images of the past that the author skillfully creates in the novel, and at the same time be aware of their constructed, fictitious nature. Barnes intertwines history, politics, and fiction in his own Barnesian postmodernist style and comments on all three categories while at the same time presenting a beautifully written personal history of a young, middle-aged, and old artist trying to remain true to himself and his art and to just stay alive.

## CONCLUSION

*The Noise of Time* is a political and postmodernist novel that explores the anxieties and mental strains that political repressions have on artists and their works. The artist in question in this novel is Dimitri Shostakovich, a renowned Soviet composer who lived and worked during Stalin's regime and in the years of his successors. The novel is an account of the artist's life under an oppressive political system. It questions its paranoid operational techniques, psychological games, and the effect they have on an individual, but also on the individual's artistic expression. The research has shown that Barnes primarily applies intertextuality and historiographic metafiction in his portrayal of Shostakovich's life.

Barnes employs intertextuality as a backbone of the novel, and he uses it as a connecting point both in terms of the parts of the novel and traumatic moments in Shostakovich's life. Shostakovich's fame starts and ends with different texts, his life is torn apart between Macbeth and Pravda, between Shakespeare and Stalin, and is fully, but fictionally, rendered to us through Barnes's own text. Barnes discusses the relation of power, love, and art using Shakespeare, Akhmatova, Pasternak, Mandelstam and other authors and texts. In other words, Barnes, as an author, employs the lives and works of other authors to render fictionalized contemplation on love, art and the politics of another artist. This sets *The Noise of Time* both in the context of political and postmodernist novels.

*The Noise of Time* can also be classified as a historical novel because it treats a historical figure and a period of history, but it does so from a critical standpoint and with textual self-awareness which makes it a novel of historiographic metafiction. It is a postmodern history novel that takes on the *form* of a historical novel to critically address the very creation of a historical narrative. *The Noise of Time* reflects on

knowledge and truth and questions those categories as well as the human inability to fully know them, bringing the incompleteness of knowledge of the past into focus.

Barnes combines intertextuality and representation of history through fiction with philosophical discussions of knowledge, art, power, and politics. He deconstructs the image Shostakovich had during his lifetime to portray how politics and power shaped Shostakovich's public actions, the kind of person he was privately, and the toll this pressure had on him.

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## TRAGOM POLITIKE I POSTMODERNIZMA U ŠUMU VREMENA

### Sažetak

U svom romanu *Šum vremena*, objavljenom 2016. godine, Julian Barnes pokazao je iznova da nije završio s postmodernističkim eksperimentima, kao ni sa svojim zanimanjem za biografiju i povijest. Ovaj rad raspravlja o političkim i postmodernističkim elementima *Šuma vremena*. U romanu Barnes kreće na put istraživanja pritiska koji politička represija ima nad umjetnikom koji živi i radi u staljinističkoj Rusiji, gdje je sve provođeno prema direktivama političkog režima. Barnes isprepliće obilježja postmodernizma i političkog romana dajući fikcionaliziranu biografiju Dimitrija Šostakoviča, poznatog sovjetskog skladatelja, koji je živio i radio ugnjetavan od Staljinova režima i u godinama njegovih nasljednika. U svom prikazivanju djelovanja i implikacija koje ideološke doktrine i oblici političke moći mogu imati na umjetnike, Barnes koristi prvenstveno intertekstualnost i historiografsku metafikciju, i ovaj rad je uglavnom usredotočen na ta dva postmodernistička elementa romana.

**Ključne riječi:** politički roman; postmodernizam; intertekstualnost; historiografska metafikcija; Julian Barnes; *Šum vremena*

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