

Research Article

“The Shifting Light of History”: Addressing Philosophy of Memory in Julian Barnes’s *Elizabeth Finch*

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Abstract

This article discusses the narrative construction of various philosophical reflections on cultural memory in Julian Barnes’s novel *Elizabeth Finch*. It addresses the dichotomy between recollection and oblivion, presenting a memory process as a the “problem of forgotten evidence”, thoroughly discussed in today’s Cultural and Memory Studies. While contemporary scholars and philosophers aim at reflecting on the role of memory in metaphysics and epistemology, mainly relating the process of recollection either to personal identity, or the experience of time, space and epistemic rationale, the dimension of collective memory, and its foregrounding role in everyone’s self-perceptiveness, receives a considerably reduced critical attention. The literary analysis of *Elizabeth Finch* seeks to problematize this divisive understanding of functions of memory, proposing instead to consider the semantic complementarity of various processes of recollection/forgetting, connecting the narrative representation of events that one has personally experienced and the officially stated collective renderings of factual memory. It resists considering personal remembering and collective forgetting as ostensibly competing rationales, proposing to delve deeper into a tightly crafted relationship between the perception of one’s identity in time and epistemological framework of collective experience mostly focused on the officially stated dimension of memory. Revisiting discourses on religion associated with the narrative construction of borderlands in Julian Barnes’s *Elizabeth Finch*, this article contributes to reconsider collective memory and counter-memory not as mutually exclusive, but as synthesized and put into productive motion narrative dimensions. The intertextual articulation of discourses on religion fosters new theoretical perspectives for rethinking counter-memory not only as a mode of recovering silenced and contested versions of the European history, but also as a means of providing multidimensional and transcultural interpretation of the collective past. Perceived as a form of discursive resistance to any kind of political and social dominance, the narrative construction of “forgotten evidence” elucidates the complex post-dialectical relationship between official collective memory and marginalized counter-memory.

Keywords

Elizabeth Finch, Discourses on Religion, Collective Memory and Forgetting, Counter-Memory, ‘Forgotten Evidence’

1. Introduction

“He is capturing the evanescent, holding on to that moment before cut flowers begin to fade. By cutting them, we make

them die sooner; by painting them we preserve them long after they have been thrown out. At which point the art

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becomes the reality, and the original flowers merely brief, forgotten simulacra” (EF, 19).

This article discusses the narrative construction of a few philosophical reflections on cultural memory in Julian Barnes’s recently published novel *Elizabeth Finch* [4]. It investigates how Barnes’s narrative addresses the dichotomy between recollection and oblivion, presenting a memory process as the “problem of forgotten evidence”, thoroughly discussed in today’s Cultural and Memory Studies¹. While contemporary scholars and philosophers aim at reflecting on the role of memory in metaphysics and epistemology, mainly relating the process of recollection either to personal identity, or the experience of time, space and epistemic rationale, the dimension of collective memory, involved in its yet non-conceptual contents, receives a considerably reduced critical attention [7].

According to Bernecker, who concentrates on exploring various epistemological and metaphysical dimensions of memory in *Memory: A Philosophical Study* [7], a division between contemporary philosophers who discuss memory in relation to personal identity and those who consider other large-scale sociocultural issues mostly connected to factual, collectively organized, dimension of memory, has not yet been properly acknowledged and researched [19].

Bernecker’s point of view is also supported by Astrid Erll’s groundbreaking distinction between explicit and implicit dimensions of collective memory developed in her recently published research on hidden symbolic power of remembering, circulating within various processes of recollection/forgetting which remain unconscious on a collective level. In “The Hidden Power of Implicit Collective Memory”, Erll provides a dichotomy between explicitly presented contents of memory, addressed within official, conscious, commemorative and visible socio-cultural domain, and a tentatively invisible, hidden world of implicit collective memory, including narrative discourses, patterns of meaning and socio-historical stereotypes not explicitly known or addressed in memory culture [11]. Once again, she recognizes literature as one of the most effective critical approaches to systematic study of dialogism observed within explicit and implicit domains of collective memory.

The literary analysis of Barnes’s recently published novel *Elizabeth Finch* seeks to problematize this divisive understanding of functions of memory, proposing instead to consider the semantic complementarity of various processes of recollection/forgetting, connecting the narrative representation of events that one has personally experienced and the officially stated collective renderings of factual memory. Its narrative construction resists considering remembering and forgetting as ostensibly competing rationales [18], proposing to delve deeper into a tightly crafted relationship between the perception of one’s identity in time and epistemological framework of collective experience mostly focused on the

officially stated dimension of memory.

The Centre for Philosophy of Memory deals primarily with the issue of concealed memories [10]. It centers on employing a range of theoretical devices coming from analytical philosophy to readdress questions which might equally be considered relevant for the narrative representation of collective memory examined in *Elizabeth Finch*:

How exactly remembering and forgetting intersect? What is the nature of collective memory?

While philosophers of memory, in order to provide answers to the above stated questions, engage in a variety of epistemic, casual, and postcausal theories, the narrative construction of Barnes’s novel advocates the co-relational understanding of the nature of memory – be it personal or collective. Following Bassnett’s reflections on memory and literature [8], it claims that the process of remembering is essentially a process of forgetting, acknowledging strong conceptual intertwining between collective and individual forms of memory, memory and imagination, memory and counter-memory, discursive representation of remembering and the ontology of historical forgetting.

This article proposes to approach the narrative construction of memory displayed in *Elizabeth Finch* from the following perspectives: first, it will discuss the relationship between memory and forgetting in the depiction of a shared collective past. Although Elizabeth reflects upon the role of an apparently dichotomic discursive representation of remembering and forgetting, she provides strong semantic intertwining between constant and episodic, sequential and fragmented forms of personal and collective memory. The novel revises discourses on religion and their narrative function within the semantic scope of official historiography, proposing an attentive consideration of both dialectical and post-dialectical relation between memory and forgetting, memory and counter-memory [22].

Second, the article reflects on the ontology of collective memory from the perspective of epistemology, approaching the issue of “forgotten evidence” and its discursive role in the symbolic construction of European culture and civilization addressed in Barnes’s novel. As proposed by Lucy Bond in *Memory Unbound* [9], it examines the discursive significance of fluid borderlands between memory and counter-memory, approximating competing narratives around European collective past depicted in *Elizabeth Finch*. It also provides a brief reflection on Foucault’s conceptual understanding of counter-memory as a form of resistance to dominant historical narrative and social frameworks of thought [15]. Equally, Fairclough advocates the importance of agency in revising discursive representation of power in contemporary society [13].

2. Materials and Methods

“What’s so impressive in Barnes’s fiction is his ability to evoke the chaos and vulnerability that beleaguer our human

¹ Erll, Astrid. *The hidden power of implicit collective memory*. Memory, Mind, and Media. 2022

life, while remaining calm and lucid in the face of both. He seems a modern-day stoic" [24].

Elizabeth Finch might be considered as one of the most philosophically profound Barnes's writings examining the relationship between memory, history, fiction and religion. Exploring historical roots of collective remembering, it re-addresses the dimensions of fragmented silence and symbolical absence which have long been acknowledged as important elements within international research field of Cultural Memory Studies. Moreover, exploring silence in absence, and its constructive role in the relationship between remembering and forgetting, constitutes one of the central aspects of Barnes's work as a novelist. For instance, in *Nothing to Be Frightened Of* [6], the narrator curiously remarks:

"Because what you can't find out, and where that leaves you, is one of the places where the novelist starts. We (by which I mean "I") need a little, not a lot; a lot is too much. We begin with a silence, a mystery, an absence, a contradiction" (NF: 238).

In *A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters* [3], the motif of contradiction is subtly introduced within the narrative construction of silence related to relevant historical record dating back to the 16th century and featuring the official organization of ecclesiastical yards. In the novel's narrative structure, it constitutes one of the fictional acts of resistance against authority and oppression, exercised by religious discourses of the Renaissance on societal consciousness:

"Why are we always punishing animals? (...) Killing them and torturing them and throwing our guilt on them? (HW: 87).

Informed by Barnes's genuine interest in exploring histories of thinking about collective memory, *Elizabeth Finch* [4] inquires still deeper into various narrative locations and functions of discursive contradictions. Being recognized as one of the most relevant stylistic devices in this novel's narrative structure, the motif of contradiction followed by controversies of silence is strategically placed at the opening lines of the text:

"She stood before us, without notes, books or nerves. The lectern was occupied by her handbag. She looked around, smiled, was still, and began. (...). None of us had taken a note. We gazed back at her, some in awe, a few in puzzlement bordering on irritation, others already half in love" (EF: 4).

Considered as one of the most significant instruments in Memory Studies, the element of silence fulfils, in Barnes's texts, a narrative function of representational irresolvability of memory connected to processes of historical recollection. Subtly developed in *Nothing to Be Frightened of*, it has been gradually reintroduced in *Elizabeth Finch* by means of a motif of reticence, rhetorically circulating within the discursive combination of words "knew obscurely":

"I can't remember what she taught us in that first lesson. But I *knew obscurely* that, for once in my life, I had arrived at the right place" (EF: 4, my italics).

In Anthony Cummins perspective, *Elizabeth Finch* is a novel with a key that's hard to find, while in Sam Byer's view the problem with ambiguity fatally undermines this story about European history and civilization. Moreover, according to Molly Young, *Elizabeth Finch* is all about mental obsession with personal memory, featuring an adult student who becomes an inheritor of his teacher's intellectual work.

The question of what it means to address correctly "a deceptive lightness and at the same time "the kind of paradoxicality that generally distinguishes"² [25] Barnes's fiction has become prominent among scholars in the last few years. His novels reveal anxiety about literature and history, myth and religion, memory and counter-memory, frequently positioning fiction in the center of the still unresolved historical and political debates involving current discourses on collective memory. Additionally, most of his novels focus on revising various ways of thinking about cultural memory, addressing the question of who is entitled to speak for the past in the present. If, as Elizabeth subtly notices, "the task of the present is to correct our understanding of the past, that task becomes the more urgent when the past cannot be corrected". Re-addressing collective dimension of memory, *Elizabeth Finch* proposes, instead, to formulate questions about the present, and what the past might mean in the present. The intricate narrative process contributes to unlock the dimension of sociocultural anxiety, exploring key events in European Culture and Civilization. Furthermore, it advocates the recollection of silenced voices, cultural and political conception of historical justice, and readiness to hear and acknowledge hidden cultural narratives. In sum, Elizabeth's long reflections on history and memory reflect a sense of personal and collective responsibility over the present, directed towards its compelled attempts to accommodate constant critical revision of the past and of the constructed nature of official memory, doing justice to Jorgensen's arguments explored in *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method* [16].

It has recently been acknowledged that Barnes's fiction tends to merge explicit and implicit dimensions of memory within its various ontological functions³. His works focus on exploring English, French, and Russian cultural traditions, providing new critical insights, transcending structural and semantic shortcomings deriving from a single-angled perspective imposed on the narrative representation of collective memory. Exploring complex states of mind, related to personhood, self-consciousness, imagination and emotional aspects of personal memory, his fiction simultaneously centers on revising several collections of texts and histories of thinking about memory. Consequently, it addresses the issue of how effectively the narrative representation of individual recollections in literature might inform and revise a large-scale collective dimension of historical and cultural

2 The Yasnaya Polyana Book Award Winners in 2021 News / Literary Prize (yp-premia.ru)

3 Bollinger, Elena. *Cultures and Literatures in Dialogue: the Narrative Construction of Russian Cultural Memory*. Routledge, 2023.

memory constructs, providing further developments to Lachmann's conception of literature as cultural memory [17].

Elizabeth Finch might also be considered as one of the most complex fictional contributions to this author's lifelong reflections on the significance of religion in the narrative construction of European historiography. The novel approaches, critically, not only individual consciousness and the nature of faith, but also many epistemological precepts of collective belief system, relevant to both conceptual and theoretical foundation of Western Culture and Civilization. Examining the ideologically constructed, dominant discourses on religion by means of their constructive dialogue with the fragmented historical evidence of the deliberately silenced and obliterated voices, the novel provides alternative narratives on Christianity, proposing simultaneously to measure its impact on contemporary social consciousness and cultural frameworks of meaning, supporting Milevski's arguments on regarding literature as an important part of memory studies [20].

Elizabeth Finch tells a life story of an intellectual teacher, whose work on Culture and Civilization has inspired adult students to approach controversial historical issues from a predominantly unconventional, dialogical perspective. As occurs in most Barnes's works, the co-existence of opposing discourses on identity, collective memory and counter-memory has been reinforced by means of their post-dialectical confrontation, contemplated throughout the whole process of narration:

‘But are you suggesting’, Geoff continued, with a touch of aggression, ‘that we read Hitler?’

‘I am suggesting that we familiarize ourselves with those who oppose us and whom we oppose, whether it be a living being or a dead figure, whether it be a religious or political opponent, or even a daily newspaper or weekly magazine. (...) Also, as a great writer once put it, ‘These monsters explain history to us’” (*EF*: 27).

The idea of corroboration between memory and counter-memory is also emphatically stated in Elizabeth's first address to her students: “I shall teach you as the adults you undoubtedly are. The best form of education, as the Greeks knew, is collaborative”.

As previously mentioned, this idea of complementarity of discourses, being formerly reworked in other Barnes's texts, permeates the narrative construction of an alternative version of European cultural and historical past represented in the novel. Although the process of narration mostly comprises the recollections of Neil, Elizabeth's former student, it might also be perceived as a form of collaboration among memories, discourses, and writings. Neil accesses the fragments of Elizabeth's intellectual reflections about the Roman Empire after her death, trying to come to terms with his personal memories mostly related to Elizabeth's critical way of thinking about history. Paying a tribute to Elizabeth, Neil becomes a historiographer of his teacher's controversial fragments on collective history, providing his proper evaluation of the pieces left.

This idea of conceptual proximity between collective memory and counter-memory has been recently developed by several scholars working in the field of Memory Studies. To name but a few, John Land's contribution entitled “Synthesizing collective memory and counter-memory in urban space” [18], establishes collective memory and counter-memory as strictly co-dependent concepts, while Veronika Tello's argument provided in “Counter-memory and and-and: Aesthetics and temporalities of living together” [23], charts counter-memory as post-dialectical, not bound to the perspectives of either/or, us/them or self/other, but instead committed to the endless accumulation and proximities of historical experiences, events and discourses.

Like many other Barnes's novels, *Elizabeth Finch* builds upon a fragmented narrative structure revolving around an emphatically crafted temporal and contextual ambiguity. Moreover, the characters reveal both psychological and physical anxiety about a gradual loss of memory, including specific experiences, social contexts, people, and places. Thus, reevaluating Elizabeth's fragments, Neil tries to overcome a growing uncertainty related to his own interpretation of collective history formerly addressed by Elizabeth:

‘Beware of dreams, Elizabeth Finch replied. ‘Also, as a general rule, beware of what most people aspire to.’ (...). We were all silenced, taking this in. Most of us had had the average sexual and amatory experience of our generation: that's to say, far too much in the opinion of the preceding generation, and pathetically little in the view of the next, pressing generation. We were also wondering how much of what she said was based on personal experience, but none of us dared ask” (*EF*: 11).

The narrator's focus on constant dialogical revision of the past is very often not directed on conflicting accounts of what has factually happened. It is much a delicate and ambivalent tribute to philosophy, culture, and history, in line with a careful evaluation of collective memory and an invitation to gently explore each reader's own theories and patterns of knowledge. In *Elizabeth Finch*, the position that memory proceeds selectively is firmly stated. Its evasive narrative construction contributes to the notion that the abundance of historical events, narrative discourses, and fictional representations of the past give path to the selection of a very few elements which are ultimately organized into official historiography. For instance, Neil's internalization of Elizabeth's memories displays every act of remembering as mainly representational, creative, and constructive process. Instead of leaning on conventional accounts of collective history, the fragmented process of memory represented in Elizabeth's writings recollects, reorganizes, and revises discourses on religion and their historical significance for contemporaneity, creating a focused counter narrative set against collective accounts of the European historical past.

A detailed analysis of discourses on religion, operating within the novel, might provide additional reflection on the multilayered narrative functions of counter-memories ex-

plored in *Elizabeth Finch*. Applying theoretical device of “condensation” and “narration”, proposed in Erll’s study⁴, and Land’s conception of relationality between collective memory and counter-memory, we will now examine various discursive processes responsible for the creation and transmission of alternative ideas about European cultural and civilizational heritage portrayed in Barnes’s text. This reflection proposes to reconsider the significance of a deliberate substitution of historical facts with memorial discourse, bringing to the fore relevant semantic implications for the narrative development of the novel, emphasizing Erll’s former findings on the role of literature in the construction of collective memory.

Doing justice to the above-mentioned concept of “condensation”, *Elizabeth Finch* builds upon an intricate juxtaposition of various discursive representations of philosophy of memory reworked within its complex thematic. The narrative construction of the process of memory represented in the novel insists on *re-collecting*, re-organizing and re-analyzing manifold representational complementarity between historical and fictional discourses revolving around Christianity and paganism, advocating their semantic and etymological proximity. Portraying the story of Julian the Apostate as an intellectual challenger to institutional and monotheistic thinking foregrounding European Civilization, Elizabeth’s astute arguments privilege memory as a tool to revise the ideological coherence of collective history. An effort to uncover hidden archives containing historiographical accounts of a still fragmentary, elusive depiction of the Roman Emperor who contested monotheism, Elizabeth’s discourse tends to negotiate various ways in which statements of political authority may be subverted or contradicted, thus questioning taken-for-granted memory constructs and memory forms of European culture and civilization.

Elizabeth’s subtle suggestion to “familiarize ourselves with those who oppose us and whom we oppose, whether it be a living or a dead figure, whether it be a religious or political opponent” (EF, 27), provides fruitful theoretical background to discuss additional questions about social and individual dimensions of power relationships and of how those are engaged in the philosophy of memory, resting upon the analysis of narrative complementarity between its competing discourses.

4 In Astrid Erll’s view, such formative processes can primarily be found in literature. Developing on three central intersections between memory, history and literature, Erll emphasizes, first, “condensation”, which is important for the creation and transmission of ideas about the past. In *Memory in Culture* (2011), Erll defines condensation as the narrative merging of various complex ideas, images and thematic frameworks into a single composite object. In her view, many different renderings about the past converge in one condensed mnemonic memory dimension, lending itself to different complex interpretations (Erll, 145-146). Second, she refers to “narration” as a ubiquitous structure for the creation of meaning, arguing that cultural memory rests on narrative processes. Focusing on conceptual distance between the paradigmatic selection of narrative elements and their syntagmatic combination, she identifies their narrative complementarity in creating the meaning of the past in the present. Third, Erll considers the use of “genres”, perceived as culturally available forms to represent the past in the present, whose formats encode significant events and experiences, thus contributing to disclose conventionalized contents of collective memory.

3. Results

Intersecting history, literature and memory, *Elizabeth Finch* builds on ambiguous narrative processes which translate philosophical inconsistency of contemporary political and intellectual debates, representing discursive practices of memory as a constant reference point. It would be interesting to mention that Neil’s memory of Elizabeth’s talks about culture and civilization assumes rather different semantic renderings in its various contexts: before and after Elizabeth’s death, in the past and present, within early Christian hagiography and Roman history. Seeking meaning in the objectively stated recollections of contradictory Elizabeth’s discourses on religion and its epistemological weight in the process of construction of European culture and civilization, Neil the narrator tries to come to terms with the idealized fictionalization of his personal experiences related to the intellectual figure of Elizabeth Finch. The narrative effect of unresolved contradiction, constructed by means of a multilayered discursive representation of various versions of history, is mostly achieved through a masterful exploration of metaphorical contiguity between remembering and forgetting, memory and counter-memory, featuring non-linear textual renderings of both European collective past and Elizabeth’s personal life. In line with the previously mentioned evasive construction of competing discourses, emphasizing the narrative irresolvability of memory, acts of collective recollection depicted in the novel lean heavily on the synthesizing power of various stylistic and structural devices. Such consist mainly of metaphorical and metonymical intertextuality, interdiscursive symbolic references, double-voiced focalization and mixed literary chronotopoi (time-space relationship), accentuating an essentially condensed function of narration in the fictional representation of memory, history, as well as collective remembering and forgetting.

Following Erll’s principle of ‘condensed narration’, the novel’s first chapter rests upon a paradigmatic juxtaposition of several versions of European history and civilization, followed by their syntagmatic combination into an apparently coherent collective memory. While Elizabeth’s writings on Julian’s life revolve around a careful co-evaluation of discourses on Christianity and those related to Roman history and civilization, Neil deliberately accesses and revises her remarks on the significance of the lost, concealed and forgotten memories coming from a different narrative version of the past:

“Thou has conquered, o pale Galilean. The moment when history went wrong. Romans inclusive of local gods. Monotheism v Plurality. They say things are determined by genetics, parenting, heredity, time, nature. They fail to hear the elephant in the room, trumpeting away: history. And that any history further back is inert and has no chemical reaction with the present. Instead of looking at Hitler and Stalin, I suggest we look at Constantine and Theodosius. And if you want someone to admire, try Julian” (EF, 67-68).

The discursive construction of this passage illustrates Neil's attempts to engage with the parts of history which remain unnoticed or arbitrarily overlooked in collective renderings of official history. Interrogating the political function of constructed discourses on memory in contemporary culture, literature and history, it also reflects on competing trans-cultural frameworks of memory that are at the heart of Cultural and Memory Studies today.

In chapter 2, the narrator approaches critically the role of Elizabeth's writings on collective European history in various epistemological and academic debates taking place in contemporary Britain. In Neil's view, Elizabeth's writings recall the etymological importance of "forgotten evidence" and silent testimonies in the construction of an alternative, unconventional version of the European past, from both socio-cultural and historical perspectives. As evidence of a rather "failed reception" of Elizabeth's reflections on history, her perspectives on the collective past have not provoked much positive reaction from the audience. Moreover, those have incited a severe criticism from British intellectuals working in the field of culture and history.

The politics of reception, featuring Elizabeth's intellectual reflections on Christianity and Roman Empire, not only contribute to question the reliability of a dominant collective narrative, but also to reflect on various methodological ways in which official discourses on collective memory are elaborated, considering a rather arbitrary distinction between what seems insignificant for the present and what is considered important:

"There might have been more arson attacks on pagan temples, even attempts on the emperor's very life. Then, for the few remaining members of this increasingly marginalized sect, Julian's name would send a shiver down the centuries, his name ever more worthy of anathema" (EF 103).

Neil's process of narration leans heavily on the analysis of memory culture or, in Ricoeur terms, the experience of reality which is symbolically preformed in European cultural discourse. According to Ricoeur, cultures do create symbolic orders which include, among other aspects, value hierarchies and a comprehension of temporal/spatial dimensions. Thus, cultural practice usually dictates and establishes a "conceptual network" that makes discursive representation of collective remembering possible, as also becomes acknowledged by Neil in the process of narration:

"Instead, it was the Christians who came to write Julian's story. Theodoret of Cyrus had two main points to make. His wider point was about the nature of the pagan gods. Be they crafted in a German Forest or a Greek temple, the fact that they were just not very good at being gods" (EF, 97).

In Erll's critical perspective, literature fills a gap in memory culture, because it possesses an ability – and in Barnes's texts it might be, as well, a tendency – to refer to the forgotten and repressed, as well as unnoticed, unconscious, and unintentional aspects of history and collective memory.

Elizabeth Finch recollects, by means of metaphorical and

metonymical intertextuality, the ideologically scattered fragments of both historical and imaginative accounts of the collective past which previously have not been – or could not be – perceived, articulated, and remembered in dominant discourses. Establishing a constructive intertextual dialogue with the selected writings of Montaigne, Milton, Johnson, Montesquieu, Voltaire, Edward Gibbon, Goethe, Henrik Ibsen, James Joyce, among others, the novel readdresses the history of the Roman Empire, Christianity and Julian himself, in multidimensional semantic perspective. For instance, the written fragments from Gibbon demonstrate the discursive ambiguity of the relationship between memory and counter-memory, history and imagination, since Gibbon, in Elizabeth's words,

"allowed himself the pleasant fantasy of teleporting Julian into eighteenth-century Paris: If Julian could now revisit the capital of France, he might converse with men of science and genius, capable of understanding and of instructing a disciple of the Greeks. And he must applaud the perfection of that inestimable art which softens and refines and embellishes the intercourse of social life" (EF, 118).

Readdressing the structural discontinuity observable within the narrative representation of dominant collective memories, still another intertextual reference insists on emphasizing rich cultural legacy left by Julian's contributions to science and art, thus reflecting on the dialectics of memories in flux and transition:

"The book that contains the reflections of the emperor Julian should be circulated in millions. What wonderful intelligence, what discernment, all the wisdom of antiquity. It's extraordinary" (EF, 121).

From the theoretical point of view, this ability to disclose things remembered and forgotten by different writers brings to the fore the necessity to acknowledge cultural memory as a trans-cultural phenomenon, widely discussed in the field of Memory and Literary Studies today. Tea Andersen's *The Twentieth Century in European Memory* [1], addressing Transcultural Mediation and contemporary reception policies, provides a detailed discussion of the different ways in which mediation of memory in literature has a long-lasting impact on the field of Memory Studies. It contributes to elucidate the complex interconnectedness between Memory and Literary Studies, inviting scholars to reconsider the value of cross-cultural collaboration in the process of construction of memory narratives within Europe.

4. Discussion

As previously mentioned, *Elizabeth Finch's* narrative structure oscillates between individual and collective forms of engaging with memory, featuring symbolic construction of the European cultural past. Its semantic density arises mostly from a dialectical co-existence of discourses on religion, memory and counter-memory, history and fiction, fact and imagination.

Recovering the method of providing more by saying less, *Elizabeth Finch* aims at examining, in a highly ambiguous mode, the inconclusiveness of the concept of history, proposing instead to (re)-visit, critically, a variety of versions hidden beneath the apparently neat construction of European culture and civilization. The dimensions of undifferentiated arbitrariness of discourses on collective memory and transient essence of historical truth displayed in the narrative construction of this novel, also play an essential role in a complex system of contextual redistribution of meaning in Barnes's task as a writer, as he acknowledges in *Flaubert's Parrot* [5]:

"In a dazzling bustle of wit, the Prof put the well-polished boot into Yevtushenko (wrong about American nightingales), Nabokov (wrong about the phonetics of the name Lolita), Pushkin (wrong about military dress at balls), John Wain (wrong about the Hiroshima pilot), Coleridge, Yeats, Browning, Tennyson, Hugh Scanlon and William Golding (wrong about optics in *Lord of the Flies*: Piggy's specs were for myopia, and so couldn't have been used as burning glasses). There was, of course, a positive side to the argument – that irony and fantasy become unusable if the factual side of literature is unreliable" (Barnes: 492).

Besides inquiring about a conceptual reliability of the discourses on religion, *Elizabeth Finch* focuses on exploring multilayered borderlands concealed within the discursive perspectives and narrative accounts of history, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of the potential of literature to dialogically uncover the past in the present, as argued by A. Assmann in "Re-framing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past" [2]. Moreover, it aims to (re)-consider the literary text seriously as a subject/object of a transcultural research in the field of Memory Studies, bringing to the fore the existence of different acts of remembering, as proposed in "Relations between Literary Theory and Memory Studies" (Milevski and Wetenkamp [1]).

It is possible to argue that in *Elizabeth Finch* writing is defined as a ground-breaking process in which the dynamics of remembering and forgetting becomes inseparable. Additionally, it attempts to explore the way in which the narrative representation of competing memories is actively involved in the narrative process of contestation of the dominant narrative representing the European collective past. It also reflects, in a profound dialogical mode, on the loss of a sense of this contestation, depicted in the politics of reception of academic debates around historical reinterpretation of the past, doing justice to Andersen's idea that the ways in which communities react towards mediations of memory in discourse can largely vary [1]. While thematic arrangement of the novel displays memory as a constant reference point, challenging and subverting dominant accounts of history, its multilayered narrative structure adds to the ambiguity of temporal and contextual dimensions of collective politics of reception of memories, showing how contemporary political and intellectual debates may disguise and reinvent, cover up as well

as reveal the ontological (un)reliability of any ideological constructs associated with the contemporary discourses about the past:

"If she taught us one thing, it was that history is for the long haul; further, that it is not something inert or comatose, lying there and waiting for us to apply a spyglass or telescope to it; instead, it is active, effervescent, at times volcanic" (*EF*: 30).

Analyzing dominant memorial cultural forms, as well as historical and fictional discourses associated with the past, *Elizabeth Finch's* narrative construction displays an inter-discursive play of words embodied in memory-productive and memory-reflexive dimensions. In *Memory in Culture* [12], Erlil considers the reversible figure of production/reflection as a distinctive feature of literature in the process of construction of cultural memory. The symbolic form of literature is defined as being able to offer first- and second order observations of the world simultaneously. As stated by Erlil in *Memory in Culture*, the analysis of a discursive practice of a literary text, observable as much in the techniques of its narrative construction, the rhetoric of its reception and interpretation, has consequences for a broader analysis of social and cultural frameworks of contemporaneity. As demonstrated in *Elizabeth Finch*, a selection of the particular discursive features can influence both the process of writing (production) and the process of reception (interpretation), becoming suggestive of a deeper communicative practice occurring between competing narrative discourses.

Elizabeth's suggestion to become familiar with all the opposing discourses, mentioned in the first part of the present article, proposes to evaluate the process of writing (production) and reflection (interpretation) of vast cultural frameworks of meaning, simultaneously raising other complex questions about sociohistorical dimensions of remembering and forgetting. By transposing ideological borderlands in discourse, Barnes's novel brings together conflicting accounts of history, collective memory, and fiction, asking to reconsider them in a complementary, rather than antagonistic, way.

The narrative merging of borderlands, revealed in their semantic complementarity, contributes to reveal the existence of conflicting collective memories and counter-memories portrayed in the novel. It also supports A. Assmann's concern to outline the role of writing in memory studies, shedding light on various discursive processes by which literary works render the past in different mnemonic modes. The analysis of discourses on religion, undertaken in the first part of this essay, demonstrates that as a 'media of memory', literature not only permeates the constructed nature of the past, but also features negotiation of competing memories and fosters further reflections on the processes of cultural remembering and forgetting. Defined as the very condition for remembering, forgetting constitutes a symbolic form of cultural counter-memory in literature. Resting upon a multilayered superimposition of different images and differ-

ent meanings, the narrativization of experience oscillating between forgetting and remembering, in *Elizabeth Finch*, may constitute one of the most valuable (counter)-memory figures in memory culture. Focusing on a constant revision of culturally available constructive and creative processes responsible for the representation of the collective past, Barnes's novel actively contributes to reflect upon blurred borders between remembering and forgetting, memory and counter-memory, 'memory from below' and official narratives registered in historiographies. Evaluating both semantic and structural complexity of discourses on religion, which display highly ambiguous, non-linear representations of the process of memory, might add to current intellectual debates on the integration of politically controversial and socially contradictory elements into the narrative representation of European collective culture and civilization.

Developing further Erll's conception of production/reflection in literature and A. Assmann's consideration of the potential of literature to dialogically uncover the intricacies of the past in the present, Barnes's *Elizabeth Finch* proposes to reconsider the discursive function of multivocal counter-memories, to challenge Neil's attempt to provide neat thematic borderlands in the narrative construction of Elizabeth's dispersed fragments.

From its structural point of view, the narrative development of the novel builds upon various discursive confrontations between monotheism and polytheism, constituting a solid theoretical background for the analysis of the role of counter-memories and minor discourses present in the discursive representation of European collective memory. In Elizabeth's perspective, the recollection of minor discourses encourages semantic proliferation of polytheism and the consequent employment of narrative strategies aiming at disruption, difference, discontinuity, and playfulness with the consensual frameworks of meaning. Elizabeth's critical perspective on a severe censorship of Christianity, which has contributed to obliterate Roman polytheism together with its rich cultural and historical heritage, brings to the fore the importance of a post-dialectical evaluation of dominant and minor discourses on memory, elucidating their narrative co-existence and semantic complementarity. Pursuing ambiguous fluctuations of temporality and interdiscursive permeability of the semantically multilayered discourses, the recollection of Julian the Apostate represents a subtle revival of memory contents and memory forms addressing anew the polytheistic paganism. The narrative effect of aesthetic permeability of discourses is mostly achieved through a disruptive introduction of obliterated voices into the coherently built, dominant process of memory:

"This is not just a high-minded argument for the ages, but a political one of its time. Roman Catholicism: an oppressive papacy, a "tyrannous" Inquisition, censorship, the persecution of Galileo and many others. After all, the massive destruction of manuscripts and libraries and the consequent loss of learning was inflicted by the early

Christians on the heathens, not the other way round. Julian, as far as we know, did not order the destruction of a single Galilean text" (EF, 103).

By referring to the "forgotten evidence", disclosing a life course of the last Roman Emperor, *Elizabeth Finch* illustrates the legitimacy of counter-memory for a gradual revision of institutionalized collective memory and consensual structures of meaning. The analysis of a dialogic interplay between collective memory and counter-memory – and its symbolic borderlands – allows for deeper investigation into the sociocultural function of alternative memory narratives within European historiography, simultaneously evincing memory-productive and memory-reflexive dimensions of a literary text. Additionally, as demonstrated in the first part of the present article, *Elizabeth Finch* rests upon the narrative complementarity of different stylistic forms in which contemporary writing might negotiate the legitimacy of conventional narrative structures, providing a rich theoretical background to examine alternative discursive devices and patterns of meaning. In Elizabeth's view, the rewriting of memory and history should also contemplate gradual narrative reconstructions of a symbiosis between collective memory and counter-memory.

By focusing on the discursive intertwining of dominant memories and counter-memories, *Elizabeth Finch* expands on the analytical research on memory practices mostly concerned with a collective dimension of literary memory, thus developing further Assmann's notions of Cultural Working Memory, Cultural Reference Memory, and cultural memory constructs in contemporary literature. The critical approach to the role of counter-memories in literature also contributes to expand Erll's thesis that, by meticulously observing and cross-fertilizing discursive performances from various memory constructs, every literary text creates a new perception of otherwise inaccessible archives of cultural memory, as stated by Neumann:

"To the extent that many fictions of memory link the hegemonic discourse to the unrealized and inexpressible possibilities of the past, they can become a force of continual innovation and cultural self-renewal. Thus, far from merely perpetuating culturally pre-existing memories, fictions of memory have a considerable share in reinforcing new concepts of memory" [21].

Providing a constant critical revision of various discourses on memory, *Elizabeth Finch* actively contributes to reflect upon blurred borders between collective forms of remembering and forgetting. Displaying highly ambiguous, non-linear representations of the process of memory, constructed in response to semantic and structural complexity observable within dominant discourses on European history, it adds and assesses current reflections on the role of counter-memory in Memory and Literary Studies alike.

5. Conclusions

As Barnes's *Elizabeth Finch* demonstrates, the well-established, conventional discourse on Christianity still contributes in more ways than one to what Foucault defines as a dominant set of ideas, dictated by powerful groups and communities [14]. In his perspective, the discursive construction of collective memory actively sustains and informs Christianity, together with modern historiography. By intentionally removing any forms of political resistance and oppression, collective memory fosters to create a singular, conceptually unified social framework of memory, advocating highly idealized political constructs of the European past.

Foucault's reflections on collective memory have further explored ways in which counter-memory emerges to contest the monumental models of dominant history, bringing to the fore various narrative processes whereby the official, canonised, and mediated histories of the collective past have been critically revised and thus resisted and challenged.

This article has endeavoured to demonstrate that revising discourses on religion can contribute to reconsider collective memory as a methodological key to counter-memory. In turn, counter-memory, by providing theoretical and intertextual connections with collective memory, constitutes a firm methodological foundation to examine the "continuous internalization and externalization of memory contents and memory forms within social groups" [1]. Revisiting discourses on religion associated with the narrative construction of borderlands in Julian Barnes's *Elizabeth Finch*, this essay has contributed to reconsider collective memory and counter-memory not as mutually exclusive, but as synthesized and put into productive motion narrative dimensions.

Moreover, the intertextual articulation of discourses on religion fosters new theoretical perspectives for rethinking counter-memory not only as a mode of recovering silenced and contested versions of the European history, but also as a means of providing multidimensional and transcultural interpretation of the collective past. Perceived as a form of discursive resistance to Christianity, the narrative construction of "forgotten evidence" elucidates the complex post-dialectical relationship between official collective memory and marginalized counter-memory. Advocating conceptual and philosophical complementarity between memorial and historical discourses, *Elizabeth Finch* addresses the narrative labyrinth of European culture and civilization, doing justice to "an act of accumulation" (Tello, 391). A conception of memories in flux, theoretically supported by Verónica Tello's research on a post-dialectical essence of the concept of counter-memory, constitute valuable methodological background allowing to reconsider *Elizabeth Finch* as a critical attempt to focus on a predominantly dialogical dimension of collective memory and counter-memory.

In line with Erll's conception of literature, which proposes to synthesize productive and reflective dimensions of cultural

memory, this essay contributes to revise various semantic interactions between collective memory and counter-memory, providing additional insights into the narrative construction of philosophy of memory portrayed in *Elizabeth Finch*. While articulating discourses on Christianity as a symbolic form of collective memory, this novel incorporates several narrative devices, such as double-focalization and intertextuality, deconstructing a discursive coherence of official discourses. Moreover, it recollects and revises formerly dispersed and culturally forgotten fragments of historical resistance towards ideological oppression and political power.

As discussed in J. Land "Synthesizing collective memory and counter-memory in urban space" [18], collective memory and counter-memory are not inherently opposing concepts, they are conceptually and practically co-dependent and can interact with each other in many ways [18].

Abbreviations

EF	Elizabeth Finch
NF	Nothing to be Frightened of
HW	A History of the World in 10 and ½ Chapters

Author Contributions

Elena Bollinger is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Biography



Elena Bollinger holds a PhD in English and American Studies from the Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the University of Lisbon. She is Invited Assistant Professor of English Studies at the University of Madeira, Portugal. She is also a researcher at the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies, and a member of the interdisciplinary project entitled 'Shared Memories: Literatures and Cultures in English and Portuguese'. Close to both the Centre for Slavic Languages and Cultures and the Centre for Comparative Studies, she has been working on intercultural research involving memory, history and (trans)national identity within the scope of literary representations. She is also a member of Memory Studies Association. Her recent publications include several articles in International Academic Journals and a book entitled *Cultures and Literatures in Dialogue: The Narrative Construction of Russian Cultural Memory*. Routledge Studies in Nineteenth Century Literature (2022, Routledge).

Research Field

Elena Bollinger: English, American and Russian Literatures and Cultures of the 19th and 20th Centuries, Comparative Literary Studies, Transcultural Memory Studies, Reception and Reader-response criticism, Literature as a Medium of Cultural Memory