

**‘so not strictly
necessary is it?’
essay**



In this novel, Barnes makes little reference to love in any of the 'main' chapters of the novel, however he explores the concept in some depth in the 'parenthesis' chapter.

He seems to display very confused and contradictory views of love, his opinion oscillating wildly as the chapter progresses. Julian Barnes, at the beginning of the chapter, starts to ponder on the necessity of love. He begins by listing various languages' words for 'I love you', and muses upon the concept of tribes without words for the saying. 'Or have they all died out?' he wonders. This seems to be idle thought, in which Barnes merely hypothesises that, perhaps, without love humanity cannot survive.

However, he later expands upon and contradicts this idea. 'Our love does not help us survive... Yet it gives us our individuality, our purpose.' States Barnes.

It is perhaps worth noting the conclusive tone evident in this phrase; here, he doesn't pose a question, but instead offers an answer. This appears to imply that he has a certain confidence in his answer, that he has reached a personal conclusion in his mind. Therefore, one can read into it that Barnes decisively views love as being superfluous to survival in practical terms, but is necessary to make us 'human', and as a driving force. The idea that fulfilling 'human' lives requires love, in Barnes' view, is supported with the phrase 'if love didn't fuel our lives, then we may as well be dead.' That he says 'may as well be dead' shows that he views a life without love as no true life at all.

That it should 'fuel our lives' corroborates the idea of it giving us a drive, a 'purpose'. This seems to suggest that Barnes sees love as a driving force behind the will to survive, and as a justification of humanity. Barnes dwells on the necessity of love, or lack thereof, with the rumination 'Perhaps love is essential because it's unnecessary'; at first, this seems a most self-contradictory, paradoxical phrase. However, the view that Barnes is aiming to put across to the reader here is that love, although seemingly superfluous to human survival, is necessary because it makes life worth living. Barnes connects love to 'The History of the World'. He never states what he means by this broad, sweeping generalisation, this vague, irresolute term.

One must therefore deduce that Barnes refers to human history, and the actions of those people in the past, potentially containing an insight into human nature itself. He claims that 'The History of the World becomes brutally self-important without love'. This perhaps suggests that people's actions in the past seem most self-important, but when the concept of love is introduced and taken into consideration, the actions of the 'History' seem more justifiable. Barnes seems to view love here as being the vital element of humanity, its role in history being the driving force of people's actions, linking back to the idea that it gives 'purpose' and is a 'fuel.' Barnes is equally keen to connect love with truth; 'love and truth, that's the vital connection, love and truth.' The repetition here emphasises this apparent link, upon which Barnes later expands into 'History'; 'We must believe in it [love], or we're lost.

.. If we don't, then we merely surrender to the history of the world and to someone else's truth.' This seems a very confused statement, linking the

broad, vague concepts of love, history and truth without due clarity. This leaves it wide to interpretation, and indeed dismissal! Barnes here appears to encourage belief in love, and in one's own personal truths, over belief in historical records, ' someone else's truth.'The idea that history opposes love is displayed when Barnes states that ' when love fails, we should blame the history of the world.

' His clarity here is again severely lacking, and he fails to clarify, justify or support this statement. One can, however, draw interpretations from the phrase; Barnes seems to be suggesting that the imposing ' bully' that is the concept of history, the brutal realities and atrocities of the past, can cause a person to despair and lose hope. This loss of hope results in a loss of the hope of, and belief in, ' love', causing to ' fail'. Another interpretation is that history reveals human nature, hat ' things fuck up', to which the failure of love can be attributed; due to the human traits evident in history, the concept of love is liable to fail. In conclusion then, Barnes views love as a driving force, a ' fuel', giving people ' purpose'.

Although ' not strictly necessary', he views it as what makes us human, and gives us hope. He seems to present love as defying history, in whatever sense of the word, as opposing ' someone else's truth'. He ponders the necessity of love for survival, seeming to conclude that it gives us our essence, and our will to survive, not to be confused with our instinct to survive. He finishes the chapter by criminalizing history, blaming the idea of history, be it human nature or the cause for despair, for any failures of ' love'.