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**Exist-Less Nothingness the West Gives Birth to:
Examining Silence as Memory in J. Barnes's *The
Lemon Table***

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Abstract

This paper aims to address the narrative construction of silence, dominating a discursive interplay between memory and counter-memory in Julian Barnes's collection of short stories *The Lemon Table* (2004). A phenomenological approach to collective silence explored in Barnes's short stories focuses on a meticulous theoretical analysis of the role of literary writing in transcultural memory studies, revising it as a predominantly reflexive and productive medium of cultural memory (Erll, 2011). In Barnes's view, literature of the past not only creatively contributes to the imaginative creation of the present, but also provides a solid theoretical foundation for negotiation of competing memories and a reflection upon complex processes of transcultural remembering and forgetting, operating within contemporary social and political consciousness. Defined as "a creative form of silence" (Bindeman, 2017), the reiterative interplay between remembering and forgetting, examined in *The Lemon Table*, constitutes a symbolic form of transcultural counter-memory in this short story's representation of collective past, featuring both backward and forward modes of its discursive recollection. Focusing on the idea of a multilayered mirroring process situated between active remembering and passive forgetting, Barnes's collection of stories illustrates that the narrativization of silenced cultural dimensions may be considered as one of the most valuable (counter)-memory figures in transcultural memory studies. Barnes's *The Lemon Table* challenges many unmediated discourses on collective memory featuring dominant historiographies, thus revising ambiguous cultural processes responsible for the narrative representation of European past. It also contributes to reflect upon semantic thresholds of remembering and forgetting, memory and counter-memory, implicit memory sites and the explicit versions of collective European past registered in official archives (Erll, 2022). Taking into consideration many semantic and discursive roles silence plays in Barnes's short stories, this paper concentrates on examining semantically complex, non-linear representations of the process of transcultural counter-memory, approaching it either as a fundamental exist-less discourse to, or even as a necessary attribute of, official collective memory.

Keywords: Transcultural memory, counter-memory, silence, Julian Barnes, short story