

**Reinventing and Replicating National Identity. The Jigsaw Puzzle  
of Englishness in Julian Barnes' *England, England***

**Andreia Irina Suciu**

**Mihaela Culea**

**"Vasile Alecsandri" University of Bacău  
Romania**

**Abstract**

Julian Barnes' novel *England, England*, published in 1998 is an invitation to solving a puzzle. This perspective through which we are invited to read the novel is overlapped to the idea of memory and the manner in which the past is reconstructed via a subjective, flawed memory. When this is backgrounded against the context of the millennial consumerism, corporative profit-making and egomaniacal figures, the result is a farcical and satirical account of some aspects connected to one's personal history and a nation's history whose main paradigms are completeness and fitting, as this article seeks to uncover.

**Keywords:** *jigsaw puzzle, national/personal identity, cohesion vs fragmentation, to reconstruct/to reassemble/to reorder, corporate profit-making, theme park, historical regression*

**1. Introduction. Overview of existing literature**

Critical perspectives on Julian Barnes' novel have followed aspects of national identity and recreated realities (Navarro Romero 2011, Abootalebi & Hassan 2015), of hyperreality (through the motif of the theme park) (Greaney 2006), aspects concerning the satirizing of Englishness by foregrounding regressive consumerism and the preference for simulacrum and replica instead of the authentic and the real (MacSiniuc 2015, Culea & Suciuc 2018a), or the invention of cultural tradition (Nünning 2001). Other frequently debated upon topics that occur in postmodern criticism have also constituted filters through which the novel was viewed and analyzed: the social and cultural

make up of a nation, but also, projected against the background of fragmentariness, the making up of a personal story (Martha Cochrane's life story) (Mikecz 2014); the figure of the tourist seen through the process of (national and personal) identity construction (Style 1999); or even the rarer interpretations of a possible dystopian future presented in the book (Arargüç 2005). The authors of this article themselves have analyzed in two other articles such aspects as English national identity between authenticity and simulacrum and the commodification of quintessences of Englishness/Britishness by transferring/replicating them in a theme park. (Culea & Suciuc 2018a and b).

On the background of the existing literature, this article lays stress upon the puzzle motif and attempts to present its meanings and interpretations in connection with the national identity theme of the novel.

### 2. The jigsaw puzzle's significance

Barnes' novel looks like a bricolage, a pastiche putting together pieces of contemporary thought and action/behaviour. The cover of the book in several editions presents a *puzzle* with some loose pieces which the reader is invited to put together, to reassemble/rearrange/reorder according to a given image. The process is not easy as some pieces may be difficult to fit/place and, as children do, we might sometimes force one piece into a place: "you know what children are like with jigsaws, they just pick up any old piece and try to force it into the hole" (Barnes 2012: 4).

Holding a central place at the beginning of the novel, Martha Cochrane's favourite puzzle game, *Counties of England*, sends, in one major interpretation, both to ideas of reassembling/ reconstructing national identity and personal identity, but it also invites the reader to solving this puzzle-book. The main action to which a puzzle invites any potential addressee (from child to adult, in an act of playing or of reading) is that of putting things together from fragments, reordering parts, making pieces fit and, ultimately, retrieving the initial whole. From the first page of the novel, we are taken down the memory lane

(the use of the noun “memory” is almost obsessive) in an attempt to observe how memories are retrieved, how order is (re)established in our personal (and later national) history. But a double process is suggested by introducing the motif of the puzzle because finding and reassembling/fitting together pieces also involves imagining a potential end result. Therefore, as Julian Barnes himself stated in an interview (Nünning 2001: 8), there is a direct connection between personal memory and national traditions as the latter are reconstructed from one’s, most of the times, subjective memory: “Getting its history wrong is part of becoming a nation. And we do the same thing with our own lives. We invent, ransack and reorder our childhood”. Therefore, the novel introduces one main aspect of the postmodern period – authenticity of the past and of the essence of one’s person/nation vs. inventing a socially acceptable construct (both on a personal and national level). The explanation of the motif of the puzzle on the last but one page of the novel restates this problem of reconstructing from memory and being on the edge between remembering and inventing or imagining: “It was like that old puzzle from psychological tests: *is this a goblet or a pair of profiles facing one another?*” (Barnes 2012: 264)

The symbol of the jigsaw puzzle nicely allows a concrete mapping of the collection of English identity icons selected and reproduced in the shape of a theme park. Pitman reconstructs a medley of positive yet highly irregular features or markers of Englishness, which apparently fit together. The jigsaw puzzle also conveys the idea of irregularity and lack of symmetry (differences in economic development, in social and economic support from one area to another) and may also send to England’s inadequacy and anachronism in comparison with other European states.

### **3. The puzzle of personal/national identity**

In the personal life of the main female character, the puzzle suggests loss, suffering, separation, emotional rupture when the father takes away a piece of the puzzle and his love along with it, as opposed to wholeness, harmony, unity that she is searching for in a symbolic

### **Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...**

---

act of closure when asking her father where the Nottingham piece was. The puzzle may symbolically stand for her heart, which is torn when the emotional and affective equilibrium and the family unit are broken. When her father abandons his family her private identity is fractured and she launches into a life's searching of completeness/wholeness by another (a lover, a parent) or by something else (the success of a career, the glory of the past and its tradition, spirituality) but also a search of fitting into a place – towards the end of the novel Martha finds harmony in the space of the village (that “had recovered its wholeness”, Barnes 2012: 256) and she, the “migrant bird”, eventually “fitted into the village” (Barnes 2012: 257).

One other main coordinate of the novel, in a figurative sense, English national identity, can be seen as a jigsaw puzzle, and this is the second implication of the symbol. Dominic Head (2002: 120–121) observes that Barnes's novel introduces a meta-England and states that the novel is an “idea of England” rather than “state of England” novel. Thus, the author and the Pitman team for the Project embark on reassembling the puzzle of England's national identity making of the list of fifty quintessences the main pieces. In effect, the puzzle symbolizes the components of Englishness described by Smith (1991) and Paxman (2007) or Dinnie (2008) and exemplified, by collecting specific English characteristics in a simplified manner, by the list of quintessences. If the national identity components represent pieces of the puzzle, their cohesion suggests unity, although Barnes shows, by the end of the novel, that the unity is only illusory. In his own entrepreneurial way, Pitman selects only some profitable representative embodiments of these identity components and replicates them, confirming that the genuineness and validity of these elements and of the concepts of national identity and national unity are nothing but an illusion.

In accordance with the primary purpose of a puzzle – to educate [children] about geography, but also to assemble and complete (Danesi 2002: 193) – the jigsaw puzzle literally sketches the geographical composition of England in the form of a visual map that

suggestively transmits the idea of unity. Representing the geographical regions of England (thinly) united as one country, the puzzle has a double meaning. On the one hand, it symbolizes national identity and unity from an administrative and territorial perspective (the common historic territory). On the other hand, it also sends to more profound aspects of national identity: when rendered incomplete by a missing part, it sends to England's fissured and fractured identity similar to Great Britain's potential fragmentation, if we look at the future, and speaking of Great Britain's – and England's for that matter – loss of valuable components upholding its greatness in the world, if we look back to the past. Thus, the symbol of the jigsaw puzzle best summarizes or embodies the list of English features selected and reproduced in the theme park, alluding to both positive and negative features of Englishness as well as the condition of Englishness following the 90s, which presented difficulties stemming from ethnic diversity, economic problems or discrepancies, as well as political tensions, with the dictionary definitions of the term supporting our interpretation from this angle.

Another implication of the term suggests splitting and fragmentation – England – and, by extension, Britain – has been cut into pieces, perhaps by economic or political problems or interests, by immigration, or by decisions or events from internal or external politics. Likewise, it illustrates the common fondness of postmodernity for demystifying grand ideas and projects and for the fracturing of identities. The breaking of wholes and entities into pieces reveals a situation in which entireties cannot coalesce anymore on the background of ethnic diversification and economic globalization. In the face of these trends, the internal composition of traditional nation states becomes admixed (“diverse or unrelated”) and, therefore, fragmented. The variety and diversity phenomena result mainly from the high immigration levels, which add to ethnic dilution and weaken the sense of cohesion and communion. Moreover, from another stance, the upholding of a sense of difference (again “diverse and unrelated”) has been characteristic of both the British in their relation with the outside world and of the people ‘on the fringes’, the people of

### **Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...**

---

Scotland and Northern Ireland, the descendants of the Celts. From yet another perspective, the use of the map may suggest that Englishness as a concept has remained only an image (a picture puzzle) with its deeper structure elements having weakened or disappeared.

It may also be that the Isle of Wight itself is the missing piece of the puzzle as it “was once joined to the mainland” (Barnes 2012: 73), thus suggesting England’s incompleteness or fragmentation. And, why not, it may stand for England itself and its place in Europe since the novel foresees England’s separation from the EU along with or followed by its complete extinction – in its current state – or (historical, political and technological) regression. After Brexit, Scotland’s request to remain in the EU even by separating from Great Britain confirms Barnes’ anticipation before 2000 from two perspectives. Firstly, it envisages Britain’s separation from the EU, with England being the main vector of the divorce. Secondly, precisely because of the disunity in the kingdom, the novel refers to England’s separation from the EU only, with other constituent member states gradually ‘engulfing’ England since Wales expands into former English counties and perhaps remaining loyal to the Union, together with “a resurgent Scotland” (Barnes 2012: 251).

The jigsaw puzzle’s irregularly shaped interlocking pieces can also send to the cultural and historical mix Pitman sets into motion in the theme park. This mix of replicas is purposely imagined so as to blend past and present for various reasons. On the one hand, the past no longer seems to have the same degree of authority on its own. On the other hand, the past’s charm is enhanced if combined with the present. Further still, the mogul behind the project wanted to make sure that his profits are more significant if the two worked together rather than alone, given the attraction the past and traditions have for tourists nowadays. All these are wrapped up in the form of nice performances based on the process of replication, imitation and acting, which is both convenient and money-saving for the consumers of culture, namely, tourists.

Another aspect about puzzles and puzzle-solving as introduced by Danesi (2002: 211) – puzzle-solving “involves insight

thinking in tandem with accurate reckoning” opens a new line of interpretation in which the leitmotif of the work was considered “the difficulty of reassembling memories of the past into a consistent narrative of the present” (Funk 2015: 107). Thus, the book attempts to reshape a personal and collective memory of what once was – Martha struggles to reshape her personal past and the theme park project apparently strives to reshape England’s history and (re)create/reconstruct a portrait of the (past and) present state and idea of England. Through this combined perspective, Wolfgang Funk considers the jigsaw puzzle to be

the fundamental and ingenious metaphor for the understanding of the key topic of the novel: the interlinking of personal and collective memories and their roles in the construction of individual and national identity. (*ibid.*)

In other words, drawing the novel closer and closer to a “dystopian parable” (*ibid.*), the novel constructs by reconstructing the memory of a past time and an old territory. But from here onwards, the novel oscillates between two other major ideas – reconstruction and imitation. If Martha had struggled in her childhood to put back the pieces of her Counties of England puzzle, the theme park reconstructs by reshaping the pieces of an old England. If Martha can fall victim to subjectivity in her process of reviving personal history/memory (see the first two pages of the novel), the team behind designing the theme park willingly embarks on a conscious process of creating a simulacrum, an imitation which leads to one other pillar of the novel – the idea of authenticity. Perverted by the contemporary plethora of theories stemming from consumerism and corporate thinking/interest/profit making (after all, “man is a market-driven animal, [...] he swims in the market like a fish in the sea”, Barnes 2012: 184), the team is not interested in authenticity, but in convenience.

To further underline this duality (personal-national and authentic-recreated), the novelist makes Martha conceive the jigsaw as

### **Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...**

---

establishing an “anthropomorphic relationship” (Funk 2015: 108) making the landscapes symbolic:

And there was often someone else who had had the same jigsaw as a child, and a passage of soft competitiveness would ensue, about which piece they would do first – it usually was Cornwall, but sometimes it was Hampshire, because Hampshire had the Isle of Wight attached to it and stuck out into the sea and you could match the hole easily, and after Cornwall or Hampshire it might be East Anglia, because Norfolk and Suffolk sat on top of one another like brother and sister, or clutched one another like husband and wife, lying fatly coupled, or made the two halves of a walnut. (Barnes 2012: 4–5)

By extending meanings from personal to national and from human to spatial entities, the passage above reinforces a marker of national identity, that of (personal and collective) attachment to a given space/location. By symbolically attributing human characteristics or behaviour to the counties of England, the characters – and the nation as such – connect emotionally with those spaces and assign value to them. People’s familiarity with the place increases, the reckoning criterion increases, and so does people’s attachment to them. Because such a close bond between people and space is established, the fracturing of the relationship, because of numerous possible factors, is acutely felt.

In conclusion, the puzzle is a sign of England’s confusing situation in complex matters related to internal composition and nature, to its role and status in the Kingdom and Europe. Just as Martha can no longer recover or regain her emotional wholeness after the father’s departure, it seems to suggest that England’s completeness cannot be recuperated but only seemingly ‘glued’ together. Given the state of things at the turn of the millennium, a paradoxical state of ruptured unity, it seemed that Englishness in its traditional sense could no longer be assembled perfectly.



#### **4. The Isle of Wight, a corporatist theme park/puzzle**

The jigsaw Martha plays with in her childhood later takes the shape of a theme park, the map being now animated by major characters from English history along with the events they took part in and the spaces they populated. The counties Martha was piecing together in her childhood are brought to life by means of Jack Pitman's idea of impersonating Englishness through a collection of popular iconic places, people, myths and legends or practices in a scenario based on "invented symbols and metonymic linkages" (Holmes 2009: 97). The whole project soon reveals itself as a caricature and grotesque representation of England because characters themselves become pieces which can be easily removed. In this "potted toytown version of the country" (Childs 2011: 110) Nell 1 (the actress portraying King Charles II's mistress) is easily replaced by Nell 2 and then Nell 3.

The notions of leisure and amusement enable the profitable commercialization of national identity. Jack Pitman is very much aware of the tourists' liking for entertaining all-in-one experiences given the fast pace of their lives, which makes them prefer accessible places within their reach.

Pitman decides to create a replica of England's quintessential national identity icons on the Isle of Wight, in the form of a theme park. In a theme or amusement park<sup>1</sup> (in accordance with the postmodern ideas of compression of space and time but also in line with what Brian McHale identified as carnival(ized) literature, McHale 2003: 171-175) landscaping, buildings, and attractions are based on one or more specific themes, as jungle wildlife, fairy tales, or the Old West. The area is thus planned as a leisure attraction, in which all the displays, buildings, activities, are based on or relate to one particular subject. Its nature leads us to the idea that history has become nothing but amusement, offering entertaining activities in a condensed form. Or, it may imply that no one takes history seriously anymore; deprived of its grandeur (in pure postmodern spirit, heroes

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/theme-park?s=ts>, accessed July 03, 2018.

## **Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...**

---

have lost their grandeur and have changed their system of values and beliefs, events have diminished in significance), it is only something funny to experience, in a concrete form, by means of miniature replicas. Furthermore, the theme park experience responds to the postmodern tourists' taste for substitutes of original works and places, which is economically profitable but, at the same time, "is not a very human thing. It marks a moment when the people, via treachery or other means, have been made to give up on themselves as consumers of their own heritage, believing they must accept cultural assembly line work, making reproductions of their heritage and culture for anonymous others" (MacCannell 2000).

In Barnes' novel, the choice of the island as a site for representing the quintessential English character is not random. Among the most important factors for choosing the island we may think of the very geographical nature of the place, being a mass of land surrounded by water, just like the UK is. It thus suits Jack Pitman's replication project: it is an island just like England, and this facilitates offering "the thing itself" (Barnes 2012: 61).

From the perspective of touristic activity, the resorts on the Isle have been popular holiday destinations since Victorian times. Queen Victoria's annual holidays at Osborne House on the Isle boosted the reputation of the place in the nineteenth century and still does, contributing to its status of "the UK's Holiday Island", as the island's official tourism website boasts.<sup>2</sup> The association of the place with an iconic figure of English history resonating English character is one perspective that makes the place a label of Englishness, while a quick look at the variety of activities offered for tourists according to the island's official website comes to confirm that the place was indeed the best spot for Pitman to put in place the profitable 'selling' of Englishness to rich consumers of history, culture and amusement. The critical note that stems from here refers to the fact that the development of tourism and commercialization dismissed traditional and unspoilt ways of life and practices (such as those related to the

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.visitisleofwight.co.uk/>, accessed July 01, 2018.

maritime industries) and changed the cultural face of the place. This testifies to the fact that

as tourism becomes the central drive, the unifying trait, in urban and regional development, it transforms itself and the world around it in ways that undermine and subvert the original motive for cultural travel – and even the original basis for culture. (MacCannell 2000)

As elsewhere, when tourism comes in, the authenticity of the place is diminished as it involves intervention in and interference with local customs and “everywhere we look, local practices and traditions are hallowed out to make a place for the culture of tourism” (*ibid.*).

As an island and county off the southern coast of England, the place’s size – it is the largest island in England but smaller than it – may also have recommended it for Barnes’ fictional miniaturization of England or the creation of a “fast-forward version” of England (Barnes 2012: 164).

The historical importance and the past glory of the island may have also contributed to the choice of the location. During a certain period of the long Anglo-Saxon times, the Isle was a kingdom in its own right. From another angle, its history reveals the existence of a sense of separateness as, for instance, between 544–661, “the island’s Jutish inhabitants enjoy a period of peace and isolation from the mainland”.<sup>3</sup> The connection of the place with a direct ancestor of Alfred the Great in the 7<sup>th</sup> century<sup>4</sup> also represents an important detail concerning the choice of the island, this time regarding its links with great heroes of the past. If we add to this Alfred the Great’s (871–899) achievements in attempting to unify England, as recorded by Henshall (2008), then we come to understand even better that the role of certain

---

<sup>3</sup><http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsBritain/EnglandWight.htm>, accessed July 07, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> The sister of the island’s ruler Arwald (685 – 686) is believed to have been a direct ancestor of Alfred the Great – in *ibid.*

## Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...

---

past heroes and places cannot be downplayed when it comes to discussions about Englishness. Alfred paved the way for the unification from the tenth century, although this union was not complete. Part of Wessex, which “during the tenth century (...) was sufficiently dominant to provide the kings of a reasonably united England” (*ibid.*: 82), the Isle of Wight thus belonged to a space that was crucial in the forging of the nation.

The etymology of the name gives us further proof that it was just the right choice given the author’s intentions. The etymology of the name goes back to the Latin Vectis (around 150), originally Celtic, with the meaning of “place of the division”.<sup>5</sup> The idea of division permeates the entire novel, whether it stems from one of the possible interpretations of the jigsaw puzzle symbol, the separation of England from the EU from the end of the novel, the deepening of the sense of difference between England and Wales or England and Scotland, or the idea that the authenticity of the past is divorced from its present valorization. What better place then could the author have found than an island, which allows the suggestion that it could be separated from its mother country both denotatively and connotatively, especially in matters of central control?

However, returning to the newly conferred theme park status of the island in the novel, it becomes apparent that this is only a facet of how things really are and of Pitman’s intentions. Therefore, things go much further than this by transforming the theme park into a corporate-based state, thus allegorically creating a miniature state in its own right. The replication of Englishness, including its system of government, gradually gives way to substitution and replacement with a corporative state called England, England.

Exploited mainly as a touristic destination, this “tourist Mecca” (Barnes 2012: 178) becomes a corporative state. This involves the institution on the island of a statal organisation based on a *business* model - the state is organised into a corporation managed by a CEO, with the primacy of executive control often emphasized by Martha

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/wight?s=t>, accessed July 01, 2018.

Cochrane. With strict contractual provisions marking the boundaries of their relationships, the employees and the employers act having a sole objective, that of attracting (luring) more and more “top dollar and long yen” (Barnes 2012: 91, 92, 109, 145).

This entails a gradual renunciation of English allegiance especially regarding the political frame or form of representation. This is because the professional corporation based on managing the touristic experience of replicating Englishness serves as an organ “of political representation”<sup>6</sup>, so the power is handed to the business area and political representation in the traditional sense does not exist at all. The independent state England, England is then renamed simply as the Island, a sign of the discarding of some components of national identity, including its system of governing, its name and, in due time, its history altogether. The organization of the state on a corporative basis suggests that people are controlled by large interest groups, such as Pitman’s, whose economic motives are the main drives of the society.

Not only does Pitman design a statal model founded on a corporate system but, in postmodern style, he even employs research methods and tools from (cultural) marketing such as surveys in order to research the audience’s or participants’ thoughts, opinions, beliefs directly in order to identify the cultural meanings and values they attach to the list of typical English characteristics and, as a matter of consequence, their selling potential. Abiding by the logic of the market and creating a market state Pitman’s project depends and rests on economic policy in the absence of a proper government, with the aim of ensuring wealth and peace.

In his novel, Barnes satirizes the corporative system founded on the commercialization of national identity through tourism. The corporative system upholds the “needs of dominant corporate interests” (Durham & Kellner 2006: xx) and so it plays an important role in ideological reproduction and “enculturates the populace into

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/corporatism>, accessed June 25, 2018.

### Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...

---

the dominant system of needs, thought and behaviour" (*ibid.*). After all, "research indicated that the majority of vacationers enjoy the act of spending, and, just as importantly, that of being seen to spend" (explains Martha to Sir Jack Pitman when analysing the financial potential of the Project, Barnes 2012: 182).

It is in this "miniature state" (Barnes 2012: 183) that Martha is made to be the ultimate puzzle solver – in a modernized version of a puzzle, in her office, she is placed in front of a wall of television screens in which she follows what happens with each of her pieces of the puzzle theme-park:

From her office Martha could experience the whole Island. She could watch the feeding of the One Hundred and One Dalmatians, check throughput at Haworth Parsonage, eavesdrop on snug-bar camaraderie between straw-chewing yokel and Pacific Rim sophisticate. She could track the Battle of Britain, the Last Night of the Proms, the Trial of Oscar Wilde, and the Execution of Charles I. On one screen King Harold would glance fatally towards the sky; on another posh ladies in Sissinghurst hats pricked out seedlings and counted the varieties of butterfly perching on the buddleia; on a third hackers were pock-marking the fairway of the Alfred, Lord Tennyson Golf Course. There were sights on the Island Martha knew so intimately from a hundred camera angles that she could no longer remember whether or not she had ever seen them in reality. (Barnes 2012: 185)

This scene reminds of dystopian novels in which people are monitored/surveilled by means of these technological devices, but Martha's purpose and personal desire is that of simply making things fit and give structure to a person's and a nation's life (see pages 237–238 of the novel for reference to these concepts).

### **5. The return to 'innocence': from corporatist theme park simulation to agricultural existence – solving the puzzle**

Most of the actors impersonating historical personages along with the events they are part of comply with the rules of the corporative business state so their successful simulation and acting generate profit for all parties concerned. However, though the project seems to be working well and continues to do so even after Martha Cochrane's resignation, Barnes chooses to indicate that the project designed by Pitman cannot be allowed to fully destroy authenticity. The first instance of the return to 'innocence', authenticity and past lifestyles is exemplified by those who refuse the acting representation and the contractually pre-set ways of living. Robin Hood's merry men or Dr Johnson suggest that authenticity must remain unspoilt and that the fusion between old and new, culture and commerce, tradition and its invention or the modernization of tradition poses some irreconcilable difficulties.

Among this medley of English "brand names and performances" (Bradford 2007: 183) some of the characters start taking a nostalgic look at "an England that is at once imperfect but compelling. In a period dominated by postcolonial guilt or sceptical indifference to nationality this novel, peculiarly, offers a kindly, quirkily patriotic view of Englishness" (*ibid.*), be it present or past related.

It is through the examples of the rebels from the Project's established system that this is suggested and the caricature weakened. Dr Johnson the actor breaks the provisions of the contract when he, too, closely resembles the original, and the band are also in breach of contract and seem anachronistic when they start real hunting and refuse to live on vegetables in the vegan way. Dr Johnson's or Robin Hood Band's behaviour bring to the surface qualities that can neither be denied nor mocked: wit and spirituality, resistance to suppression and domination, valiance, pristine ways of living, firm principles and unyielding beliefs, all of them are proposed as better alternatives to the present times of commercialization, consumerism, ideological liberalism and deconstruction trends. What is all the more important,

### Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...

---

it denies the falseness and forgery of contemporaneity with its insistence on reproduction and recuperates the importance of genuineness and authenticity. The rebellion of some iconic figures works in the direction of demising the postmodern practices and of rehabilitating genuine and valuable English characteristics. By turning around the situation, Barnes suggests that the past still lies powerfully under the surface of the present and can erupt at any time, showing that “emptiness, confusion and despair” (Bradford 2007: 183) can be rebuffed by “moments of certainty, all the more powerful for their brevity” (*ibid.*).

Additionally, the recuperation of the past reaches an even more radical note in the ending part of the novel. Here, Barnes proposes a counter model to the corporatist system and to the contemporary nature of national identity by picturing Anglia, a country divested of centuries of history, one returning to a rural, agricultural, pre-industrial and pre-technological condition, a place of “yokeldom and willed antiquarianism” (Barnes 2012: 254).

Perhaps Barnes’ dissatisfaction with the destruction of the island’s traditional ways of life is mirrored in this progressive yet innocent return to a former or less developed state by spurning off the accumulated layers of evolution in most human areas. In the last part of the novel, disappointed with the mechanism of the Project paralleling her own private failure, Martha rediscovers ‘Anglia’, the Latin name of England used back in Anglo-Saxon times, living an agricultural existence. The proposal of this primeval way of life as a solution to the corporatist living imagined on the island may look ironic, if not paradoxical, for those who witness the contemporary trend of states or organisations being controlled by influential interest groups with an obvious interest in economic benefits. It is Barnes’ solution as a form of opposition and resistance to a corporatist future that may annul any form of allegiance to typical traditional mores, customs and ways of life that resonate authenticity, genuineness and, ultimately, independence specific to ‘Old England’. Her return to a historical rural community life style is a signal that the evolution of



the society may be, in many ways, nothing but a step on the path of involution.

Old England becomes Anglia through a process of historical regression. Anglia is the Third Millennium new name after Old England's fall caused by having "progressively shed power, territory, wealth, influence and population" (Barnes 2012: 251). Willingly discarding its strongest pillars of national identity, the jigsaw puzzle of Englishness is helplessly split and the pieces of the puzzle are severed.

The paradoxical state of both evolution and involution can also be viewed from another perspective. Chronologically, the country enters the third millennium but, at the same time, it loses precisely those components that make up its national identity; in the absence of these markers, the country is dispossessed of its identity. Old England turns into Anglia after losing or deleting its history and identity. After having "lost its history and, therefore – since memory is identity – had lost all sense of itself" (*ibid.*), the place plunges back to the Anglo-Saxon times of the heptarchy (the seven kingdoms) with a marked sense of difference and separation, thus falling back to a state of regression and disunity. Instituting a statal form belonging to Anglo-Saxon times, the country falls back to an embryonic condition of nationhood given that the first Kingdom of England was created in A.D. 954, in the 10th century. Childs (2005: 84–85) observes how the place "is itself transformed into 'Anglia', a backward nation which gradually regresses into its own past, finally becoming a rural country dominated by Celtic culture and pagan ceremonies."

To expand on the concept of nationhood, we return to Henshall's study on early British history (2008) to track some nuances regarding national identity and unity associated with the Anglo-Saxon period that could shed more light on Barnes' choice of making England return to its Anglo-Saxon life. The Anglo-Saxon invasion helped delineating the area that was to become England, thus setting the foundation of a central marker of national identity, namely, the geographical location or the territory of a nation. The English language originated in those times, too, thus establishing another important

### Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...

---

identity marker, a nation's language. If at the beginning, at the end of the sixth century, Christianity – yet another key marker of national identity – could not unite them to such an extent as to discard the tension and conflict between the kingdoms, “we should also recognise that (...) English unity and national consciousness would seem to have been developing steadily through the Anglo-Saxon period” (Henshall 2008: 158). Moreover, it appears that

the external threat posed by the Vikings in the latter half of the period would very probably have helped that unification – the end-product being a unified England that could absorb the Viking threat (*ibid.*).

No matter which exact period belonging to the Anglo-Saxon times Barnes ‘throws’ England into, the more conflictual early part dominated by the independent kingdoms or the more unified latter one whose climax is the creation of England as a political entity, what is clear is that he chooses to historically reposition England at a time when its origins as a unified nation took shape and the people were beginning to feel an increasing sense of unity and Englishness.

Overall, Barnes may have had several targets through the depiction of Anglia. The first one is England's – and, by extension, the UK's – isolationism from the rest of the world which is most of the times much criticized. It is all the more the case of England given that Scotland swerved from the UK and toward Europe. The second argument refers to recuperating the importance of simplicity, genuineness and authenticity, especially when it comes to national character and history. A third target refers to the rejection of the corporative charade and the preference for the display of a genuine devoted love of one's country in its unspoiled, authentic and valuable, though flawed in certain respects, characteristics of national identity originating in the distant past. Fourthly, Barnes expresses his dissatisfaction with the destruction of the island's traditional ways of life, the excessive development of tourism at the expense of losing the importance its manufacturing importance in Britain and the world, by

imagining the innocent return to a former or less developed state. All in all, the place seems to go through a process of purification – although it involves severe losses – by spurning off the accumulated layers of technologisation and excessive mercantilism/profit-making mindsets and by annulling misconceived, unsubstantiated or vague notions of identity.

### Conclusions

To conclude, Englishness sends to ideas related to origins, forging the nation, common and typical identity features, especially coming from the past, with three different approaches, as follows.

Barnes builds the entire plot on the idea of replicating the past, in particular, and national identity, in general, for the purpose of making a profit, with the aim of showing that national identity has become a marketable construct or product that is immensely profitable. Therefore, the copying, imitation and reproduction of identity features and components apparently offer authentic experiences in the theme park, while they constitute nothing but the engine of the leisure business and manage to offer only counterfeits of genuine realities depicting national identity.

The trend of building on the past is also related to the major issues of the novel. If the greatness of the past cannot be prolonged, the contemporary people can at least build on the past. The fusion of old and new allows the past not to be forgotten, while the present has a chance of gaining some advantage. The modernization and commodification of national identity seem to be some solutions of this type, and Pitman's Island is a reinvented microcosmic version of England flourishing as a market state that sustains itself economically on a sham cultural experience. While Pitman's construction expands and thrives, Old England gradually loses all "sense of itself" (Barnes 2012: 251), compresses and ebbs to a primitive status.

The third idea dominating the last part of the novel refers to renouncing the past altogether. National identity is obliterated through historical regression to Anglo-Saxon times, before the English started thinking of themselves as a nation, suggesting dissolution, loss,

## Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...

---

cutting into pieces or perhaps the path to (re)constructing a new identity. In the face of so many losses, challenges and tensions, paralleled by public neglect of national identity and the slippery nature of memory, perhaps England needs to rebuild its history. The continuity with the past is broken indeed, with centuries of accumulated history being discarded. We are witnessing the decline of a once great nation, but the novel does not negate the possibility of envisioning a new identity.

### Bibliography

#### A. Literary works

Barnes, Julian (1998/2012): *England, England*, London: Vintage.

#### B. Critical works

Abootalebi, Hassan; Niazi, N. (2015): "Simulated National Identity and Ascendant Hyperreality in Julian Barnes's *England, England*" in *K@ta: A Biannual Publication in the Study of Language and Literature*, vol. 17, no. 1, available online at <http://puslit2.petra.ac.id/ejournal/index.php/ing/article/view/19435>, accessed November 27, 2018.

Arargüç, Fikret (2005): "A Dystopic Vision of the Future: Julian Barnes' *England, England*" in Tharaud, Barry; Pallitto, Elizabeth (eds.) (2005): *The Endangered Planet in Literature*, Selected Proceedings of an International Conference at Doğuş University, Istanbul, pp. 141-152.

Bradford, Richard (2007): *The Novel Now. Contemporary British Fiction*, Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Childs, Peter (2005): *Contemporary Novelists. British Fiction since 1970*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Childs, Peter (2011): *Julian Barnes*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Culea, Mihaela; Suci, Andreia (2018a): "Re-enacting Being Authentic. Englishness and Its Simulacra" in *Interstudia. Discursive Forms. Being and Acting in Language, Literature and Communication*, no. 23/2018, pp. 185-196.

Culea, Mihaela; Suci, Andreia (2018b): "Replicating the Quintessential Features of English National Identity in Julian Barnes' *England, England*, pending publication in *Interstudia* no. 24/2018.

- Danesi, Marcel (2002): *The Puzzle Instinct. The Meaning of Puzzles in Human Life*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana, USA: Indiana University Press.
- Dinnie, Keith (2008): *Nation Branding. Concepts Issues, Practice*, Oxford: Elsevier.
- Durham, Meenakshi Gigi; Kellner, Douglas M. (2006): "Adventures in Media and Cultural Studies: Introducing the KeyWorks", in Durham, Meenakshi Gigi; Kellner, Douglas M. (eds.) (2006): *Media and Cultural Studies: KeyWorks*, rev. ed., Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, pp. ix-xxxviii.
- Funk, Wolfgang (2015): *The Literature of Reconstruction. Authentic Fiction in the New Millennium*, London & New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Greaney, Michael (2006): "The Novel in Hyperreality" in *Contemporary Fiction and the Uses of Theory. The Novel from Structuralism to Postmodernism*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Head, Dominic (2002): *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Fiction. 1950 – 2000*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Henshall, Kenneth (2008): *Folly and Fortune in Early British History: From Caesar to the Normans*, Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Holmes, Frederick M. (2009): *Julian Barnes*, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- MacCannell, Dean (2000), "Cultural Tourism", Newsletter, Vol. 15, no.1, Spring 2000, The Getty Conservation Institute, [www.getty.edu/conservation/publications\\_resources/newsletters/15\\_1/index.html](http://www.getty.edu/conservation/publications_resources/newsletters/15_1/index.html), accessed July 10, 2018.
- Macsiniuc, Cornelia (2015): "Post-tourism and the Motif of Regression in Julian Barnes's *England, England*" in *Messages, Sages and Ages*, vol. 2, no 2, available at <http://msa.usv.ro/index.php/2017/03/15/post-tourism-and-the-motif-of-regression-in-julian-barnes-s-england-england-2/>, accessed November 27, 2018.
- McHale, Brian (2003): *Postmodernist Fiction*, London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.
- Mikecz, Micklós (2014): "Personal as National/National as Personal: Interactions between Narrative Strands in Julian Barnes's *England, England*", in Tory, Eszter; Vesztergom, Janina (eds.) (2014): *Stunned into Uncertainty: Essays on Julian Barnes's Fiction*, Budapest: Pátia Nyomda Zrt., pp. 129-144.
- Navarro Romero, Betsabé (2011): "Playing with Collective Memories. Julian Barnes's *England, England* and New Labour's Rebranding of Britain",

## Reinventing and Replicating National Identity...

---

- in *ES: Revista de filología inglesa*, no. 32, pp. 241–261, available at <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=3790583>, accessed November 27, 2018.
- Nünning, Vera (2001): “The Invention of Cultural Traditions: The Construction and Destruction of Englishness in Julian Barnes’ *England, England*” in *Anglia* (119/2001), pp. 58–76, also available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20060324151403/http://www.julianbarnes.com/docs/nunning.pdf>, accessed July 27, 2018.
- Paxman, Jeremy (2007): *The English: A Portrait of a People*, London: Penguin Books.
- Smith, A. D. (1991): *National Identity*, London: Penguin Books.
- Style, John (1999): “Julian Barnes and Bauman’s Tourist: Superficiality and Postmodernism” in *Philologia Hispalensis*, vol. 13, issue 2, pp. 219–226, available at [http://institucional.us.es/revistas/philologia/13\\_2/art\\_24.pdf](http://institucional.us.es/revistas/philologia/13_2/art_24.pdf), accessed November 27, 2018.
- <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/theme-park?s=ts>, accessed July 03, 2018.
- <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/wight?s=t>, accessed July 01, 2018.
- <https://www.visitisleofwight.co.uk/>, accessed July 01, 2018.
- <http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsBritain/EnglandWight.htm>, accessed July 07, 2018.
- <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/corporatism>, accessed June 25, 2018.

### Andreia Irina Suci

**affiliation:** “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău

**position:** PhD lecturer

**email:** [suciu.irina@ub.ro](mailto:suciu.irina@ub.ro)

**research interests:** contemporary English drama and novel

**selected publications:**

- (2016): “The Discourse of the Paratext in Malcolm Bradbury’s *My Strange for Mensonge: Structuralism’s Hidden Hero*” (Suci, Andreia), in *Interstudia. Discursive Forms. New Perspectives – Language, Literature, Communication*, vol. 1, no. 19/2016, pp. 78–88.
- (2014): *Literary Readings: Key Terms from Theory to Practice* (Suci, Andreia; Culea, Mihaela), Hartung-Gorre Publishing House, Konstanz.

## Andreia Irina Suciu & Mihaela Culea

---

(2011): *Malcolm Bradbury between Modernism and Postmodernism* (Suciu, Andreia), „Alma Mater” Publishing House, Bacău.

### Mihaela Culea

**affiliation:** “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău

**position:** PhD lecturer

**email:** culea.mihaela@ub.ro

**research interests:** English literature, British cultural history, cultural studies, discourse analysis

**selected publications:**

(2015): “The Risk of Losing National Identity in the Twenty-First Century Romania, or National Identity from Adaptation to Self-censorship”, (Suciu, Andreia; Culea, Mihaela) in *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 18, no. 1/2015, Khazar University Press, Baku, Azerbaijan.

(2014): *Introduction to Literary Interpretation. From Theory to Practice (Narrative Strategies, Discourse Presentation and Tropes)*, (Culea, Mihaela & Suciu, Andreia-Irina) Hartung-Gorre Publishing House, Konstanz, 2014.

(2011): *Cultural Types and Spaces in Eighteenth-Century English Narratives. Interdisciplinary Readings*, (Culea, Mihaela) VDM Verlag Dr Muller, Saarbrücken.