TENDENCIA THATCHERITIS OR ENGLISHNESS REMADE
The Fictions of Julian Barnes, Hanif Kureishi and Pat Barker

by

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Abstract

Julian Barnes, Pat Barker, and Hanif Kureishi are all canonical authors whose fictions are widely believed to reflect the cultural and political state of a nation that is post-war, post-imperial and post-modern. While much has been written on how Barker’s and Kureishi’s early works in particular respond to and intervene in the presiding political narrative of the 1980s – Thatcherism – treatment of how revenants of Thatcherism have shaped these writers’ works from 1990 on has remained cursory. Thatcherism is more than an obvious historical reference point for Barker, Barnes, and Kureishi; their works demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of how Thatcher’s reworkings of the repertoires of Englishness – a representational as well as political and cultural endeavour – persist beyond her time in office. Barnes, Barker, and Kureishi seem to have reached the same conclusion as political and cultural critics: Thatcher and Thatcherism have remade not only the contemporary political and cultural landscapes but also the electorate and consequently the English themselves. Tony Blair’s conception of the New Britain proved less than satisfactory because contemporary repertoires of Englishness repeat and rework historical and not incidentally imperial formulations of England and Englishness rather than envision civic and populist formulations of renewal. Barnes’s *England, England* and *Arthur & George* confront the discourse of inevitability that has come to be attached to contemporary formulations of both political and cultural Englishness – both in terms of its predictable demise and its belated celebration. Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and “The Body” speak to an alteration that has taken place in which historical Englishness and Thatcherism have become complementary rather than contrasting discourses. What Barker’s *Border Crossing* and *Double Vision* offer against this backdrop is a subtle interrogation of how renewal itself comes to be a presiding mode of cultural reflection that absorbs revolutionary possibility.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1979, Labour Leader and Prime Minister Jim Callaghan proclaimed in his New Year’s message, would be the year “‘of decision and advance’” in which “the British people ‘will be asked to choose the path they intend to follow in the 1980s’” (“Callaghan” 3). His declaration was surprisingly prescient although it is unlikely that anyone would have predicted Thatcher’s dominance in the decade that followed. The previous year had lived up to his prediction that it would be “‘the year of recovery’” (3). Consequently, the people would make their electoral decisions in the coming months “‘in a calmer atmosphere and against a background of greater stability than seemed possible only a few years ago’” (3). In addition to accomplishing the decrease in inflation and accompanying rise in living standards, Britain had also made gains as a nation in the past year: “‘our steadiness and our recovery’” he affirmed “‘has [sic] won a renewal of respect for the British people among the other nations of the world’” (3). Cultivating national unity would nevertheless be of the greatest necessity in the upcoming years: “‘We in Britain have no one to fear but ourselves. We are capable of doing anything that we set our hands to. And as we prepare for the coming decade, let us resolve to act and to work together as one people’” (3).

Callaghan’s optimistic message, which strategically highlighted Labour’s achievements in the past year, was no doubt crafted with the upcoming election in mind. His speech was more suited to that of a leader addressing a nation that was on the verge of being under siege from within than to a nation notable for its regained internal stability.

The reality facing Britain, which Callaghan sought to skirt in his address, could not be contained. Whether or not the existing government should declare a state of emergency to deal
with widespread strikes and shortages became a hotly contested issue that had to do not only with Britain’s socio-economic condition but with its cultural well-being as well. The “industrial and social chaos of 1978-9,” as Andrew Marr observes, “stuck in the people’s memories, as few political events do – the schools closed, the ports blockaded, the rubbish rotting in the streets, the dead unburied” (History 373). Conservative backbencher William Whitelaw’s argument for declaring a state of emergency was typical of Tory rhetoric which emphasized national vulnerability and which sought to gain political favour by confronting the crisis that Callaghan refused to acknowledge: “an emergency is declared when the life of the community is threatened. We believe it is threatened” (White and Aitken 20). Although “Callaghan himself” would come to describe 1978-9 as the “‘winter of discontent’” (Marr, History 373), his response to the electorate’s growing anxieties regarding the cumulative effects of unemployment and successive and widespread strikes was tame: “Please don’t run down your own country by talking about mounting chaos. If you look at it from the outside you can see that you are taking a rather parochial view” (Aitken and White 1). In the lead-up to the election a few months later, his attitude was similarly dismissive. “Although the undeniable unemployment figures and the findings of the opinion pollsters, had put him on the defensive,” according to political correspondent for the Times, George Clark, “there was no sign of lost confidence” early in the campaign. In fact, “in the first week he was so ebullient that he made up a campaign song . . . to the jingle of a television advertisement: ‘Labour shows the better way! Vote Labour on the third of May!’” (Clark 2).

Despite Callaghan’s optimism, a Tory victory was thought to be likely but it was far from certain who would prevail in the days leading up to the May 1979 decision. In the immediate run up to the election, polls indicated that Margaret Thatcher had been able to capture the confidence
of the public which had been lacking just a few months before. In October 1978, a poll had shown that “the Conservative party would be fourteen points ahead” if Heath were still leader (Jenkins 52-3). Still, as late as May 1 newspapers reported that after “recording a 6% lead for the Tories” in the preceding two weeks, the Daily Mail’s NDP poll indicated that Labour had “a 0.7% edge over the Conservatives” (Aitken 1). Two days later, a modest Tory victory, if not the strong majority that the Conservatives expected, again seemed possible and this would in fact prove to be the case.

The election results that led to Thatcher’s tenancy of No. 10 Downing Street had the distinction of being “the most diverse . . . of any British election since 1945” (McKie 1). They had “a distinct smack of ‘two nations’ about them” (McKie 1), one political commentator observed, and it seemed as though Thatcher would be “faced with ruling a divided nation” (Aitken 1). The strong division between North and South that the election results at first appeared to indicate drew the strength of Thatcher’s mandate into question. A more complicated picture unfolded, however, when political analyses in the days following the election revealed Thatcher to have made surprising inroads into large towns in the North West and in rural Wales (“Callaghan” 3). This trend had been anticipated by Stuart Hall in his January 1979 article, “The Great Moving Right Show”: “When, in a crisis, the traditional alignments are disrupted, it is possible, on the very ground of this break, to construct the people into a populist political subject: with, not against, the power bloc; in alliance with new political forces in a great national crusade to ‘make Britain “Great” once more’. . . . It brings into existence a new ‘historic bloc’ between certain sections of the dominant and dominated classes” (49). The election results were reflective of Thatcher’s ability to cut across traditional divisions, an ability which she would hone in her
coming terms in office to an extent that even Hall did not predict. They also signalled, however, the divide between us and them that would be a constant feature of her time in power.

The Guardian’s report that “a significant increase in the turn-out of black and coloured voters cut substantially the national swing to the Tories in a number of constituencies, including the Leicester seats, Bradford, Southall and Brent, South London” (“Callaghan”), seemed poised to fuel anxieties that the changing makeup of the very heartland of Britain was beginning to be felt politically and culturally. The wider tendency for “[o]p-ed columnists and state-of-the-nation chroniclers” to invoke “blacks and Asians” to “show how, along with deindustrialization, devolution and globalization, Englishness has changed since the end of the war” can be traced to the years immediately following the war (Sandhu xviii). Images of Caribbean emigration, the most iconic of which was that of the arrival of the Empire Windrush in 1948, came to overshadow a longer history of immigration to Britain. Twenty years later, staunch conservative Enoch Powell would feel justified in arguing that “the sense of being a persecuted minority” was “growing among ordinary English people”: “as I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see “the River Tiber foaming with much blood” (“Enoch Powell’s”), he said. Despite official disapproval of Powell’s message, virulent demonstrations in support of Powell and his speech seemed to forcefully indicate that he had voiced what a considerable portion of the nation was thinking: “that England can no longer take its essence for granted, that a black population is promising to fundamentally alter England and what it means to be English” (Baucom 23). Hall’s sense that “the direct interpellation of the race issue into the crisis of British civil and political life” was one of “four principal aspects of the 1972-6 conjuncture, [and] set the stage for the dénouement of Thatcherism” echoes this view (“Living with the Crisis” 19). In this respect, it seems a peculiar irony that the results of the “Racial harmony poster competition” that
the *Guardian* ran in the lead-up to the election appeared in the same issue that announced Thatcher’s electoral victory, especially given the fierce riots that would mark her first years in office.

Despite gaining power from the biggest swing since 1945 (just beating that of 1970 – though the number of seats was fewer than in that election), Thatcher was considered to be one of the most unpopular prime ministers in British history in the early years of her first term in government. Her aggressive monetarist policies, adopted as a means of reining in inflation, virtually guaranteed the public’s dislike of her. While her predecessor Callaghan would “forever” be “associated with failure” in the “national memory” (Marr, *History* 364), the decisive events of 1983 are widely believed to have rescued Thatcher from a similar fate.

Thatcher’s handling of the Argentinian invasion of the Falklands was perceived to be both a “throwback and throw-forward” (Marr, *History* 403). “For millions,” Marr explained, “it seemed utterly out of time, a Victorian gunboat war in a nuclear age. Yet for more millions still (it was a popular war) it was a wholly unexpected and almost mythic symbol of rebirth” (*History* 403). Thatcher herself “lost no time in telling the country what she thought the war had meant”: Britain had “‘ceased to be a nation in retreat,’” she said (Marr, *History* 403). The renewal that Thatcher argued the Falklands conflict could be taken to signify came to be closely associated with Thatcher herself in no small part due to her adeptness at handling the media. The latter had been exemplified four years earlier in her achievement in “taking the election to the living room” (Langdon 3).

The Falklands crisis, then, played an important role in revealing a cultural and political conjuncture that Hall argued was made even clearer by Thatcher’s third electoral victory. When “[a]sked what policies they supported, significant majorities consistently preferred Labour on
unemployment, health, housing, education – the ‘welfare’ issues; when ‘asked about image – who was ‘doing a good job’, ‘giving the country a lead’, making people ‘feel good to be British again’ – a majority consistently said ‘Maggie’” (“Blue Election” 30-1). “One way of interpreting this trend,” he explained, was that electorates in “advanced class democracies” were “thinking politically, not in terms of policies but of image” (“Blue Election” 31).

This trend was exemplified by the election poster for the Conservatives that appeared in the ethnic minority press during May 1983. Paul Gilroy suggests that the poster’s slogan – “‘Labour says he’s black. Tories say he’s British’” (qtd. in Gilroy, There Ain’t No Black 57) – appeared to indicate that “the category of citizen and the formal belonging which it bestows on its black holders are essentially colourless, or at least colour-blind” (59). As Gilroy makes clear, the poster exposes the gap between “formal belonging” and “Britishness,” which is “being defined beyond these legal definitions in the sphere of culture” (59). “Populist racism” (59), in Gilroy’s terms, depends on this gap to dismiss black citizens’ claim to membership in the national community. In the poster, the suit that the young man wears allows him to conform to Thatcher’s economic and entrepreneurial vision which just happens to be the image of middle class Englishness. The fantasy of inclusion on offer here, and the subtlety of the slippage that occurs between political and cultural membership, belie the far-reaching implications Thatcher’s constructions of these majorities would have, particularly the threat they came to pose to the category which had traditionally organized the nation: class. As David Cannadine has argued, Thatcher’s “policies and her rhetoric” “went a long way toward achieving her ambition of banishing the language of class from public discussion and political debate about the structure and nature of British society” (14). Even more disturbingly, Cannadine asserts, “[t]he fact that Tony Blair has no wish to resurrect this language is a measure of her achievement in changing the
way people think about social structures, social relations and social identities in today’s Britain” (14).

In November 1990, the continuation of Thatcher’s political legacy seemed to be assured when the Left failed to capitalize on the opportunity presented by Thatcher’s unexpected departure from office. The day after deputy prime minister Geoffrey Howe’s “devastating attack on the prime minister in the Commons” over her handling of the Europe issue (Jenkins 144), Michael Heseltine announced his intention to stand as leader against the prime minister. Falling just short of the number of votes needed to thwart Heseltine’s bid after the first round of voting – she received “204 votes to Heseltine’s 152” (Jenkins 145) – Thatcher announced her intention to continue her campaign. Dismayed by the lack of confidence expressed by her cabinet members when she consulted them, Thatcher was persuaded to resign her leadership and back a newcomer against Heseltine: John Major.

What was surprising in the wake of this change of leadership was that “[o]n 9 April 1992 Major’s Conservatives won 14 million votes, more than any party in British political history” (Marr, History 486). Major, a man widely considered to be unremarkable and a surprising choice to be Thatcher’s successor, appeared to guarantee the political continuation of Thatcherism into the 1990s. Even more disconcerting was the discernible persistence of the cultural effects of Thatcherism even though Hall had predicted this continuation in the introduction to his Hard Road to Renewal: “Ideologically” he said, Thatcherism “has made itself, to some degree, not only one of ‘Them’, but, more disconcertingly, part of ‘Us’” (6).

The stalwart brand of Englishness that came to be associated with Major obviously resonated with Thatcher’s more defensive version. His speech delivered 22 April 1993 is held to be the defining moment of a largely uneventful time in office: “Fifty years from now . . . Britain
will still be the country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and – as George Orwell said – “old maids cycling to holy communion through the morning mist”’” (Major qtd. in Paxman 142). While “the speech was manna from heaven for the satirists, who seized with metropolitan disdain on the antediluvian imagery as another sign of the Prime Minister’s fading hold on reality” (Paxman 143), it nonetheless spoke to the electorate: “John Major’s audience did recognize” the England of his speech (Paxman 144, italics in orig.). One explanation for this was that Major’s speech – though accidentally – picked up on the mood that accompanied a growing sense that the English had become “exiles from their own country” (Paxman 144). This could be traced, according to Krishan Kumar, to England’s being suddenly confronted with a crisis of national identity which it had not previously faced – conceiving of itself as a nation distinct from Britain in the heyday of Empire. The opening line of Paxman’s *The English: A Portrait of the People* – “once upon a time the English knew who they were” (1) – itself captured the nostalgic idealization and lament for Englishness that had gained currency in the proliferation of academic works in the late 1990s that obsessively tackled the idea of Englishness. Roger Scruton stands as testament to this body of work; in the preface to *England: An Elegy* (2000), he acknowledges that his own study continues the project of an overwhelming number of writers of the decade before who “documented, whether in anger, in sorrow, or in secret or not so secret satisfaction, the passing of some aspect of our culture” (viii). The proliferation of works toward the end of the 1990s in particular seemed to speak to the particular urgency the endeavour seemed to take on, even into Blair’s time in office.

Against this backdrop, Blair and New Labour appeared to offer the possibility not only of political but also of cultural renewal – an alternative to the defensive formulations of Englishness that came to be associated with Thatcher and Major in turn. It would be wrong to attribute the
reinvention of Labour solely to Blair. Prior to his rise to the position of party leader with the death of John Smith in 1994, the party had already set in motion reforms with the aim of becoming electable once more. Blair, nonetheless, seemed to offer the “Labour Party its likeliest chance since 1979 of a return to power” (Barnes, “Left, Right” 341). In the lead-up to Blair’s 1997 election, journalists and political cartoonists expressed unease that he would in fact come to be a repetition of Thatcher and Thatcherism, a prediction that would to some extent be borne out by his time in office. Journalist Simon Jenkins’s aptly titled *Thatcher & Sons* (2006) which describes Thatcher’s influence on her successors Major, Blair, and Gordon Brown makes just this point. The appeal Blair’s optimistic rebranding of party and nation held for the electorate at the time is nonetheless demonstrated by the overwhelming mandate Blair and his party received in the 1997 general election. Not only was the majority Labour achieved in the Commons “a modern record” but “[t]he swing of 10 per cent from the Conservatives was . . . roughly double that which the Thatcher victory of 1979 had produced in the other direction” (Marr, *History* 509). In subsequent elections, Blair did not receive the same endorsement and much would come to be made of the early signs of apathy that accompanied even Blair’s first election based on the recorded low voter turn-out.

Still, at the time, Blair’s rebranding of the ‘New Britain’ was seized upon by political supporters and detractors alike eager to discern whether this notion would counter the obsessive and melancholic preoccupation with Englishness that gripped the nation in the 1990s or simply come to offer a new variation on an all too familiar theme. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, a journalist and cultural critic, offers one of the most direct evaluations of the “New Britain” in *Imagining the New Britain* (2001). Her verdict, like those of other political commentators and cultural critics, was that the first term of Blair’s time in office could be summed up as being one of unfulfilled
promise. New Labour’s victory in the 1997 election was perhaps the “first indication” of the “final passing away of old, irrelevant structures, relationships and ideologies” (35). Even though it was difficult to assess “whether the voters who supported New Labour were doing so for reasons of disillusionment or hope; whether they found the Tories irrelevant to their needs or Labour better able to meet them” (35-6), Alibhai-Brown maintained that “there can be little doubt that Tony Blair skilfully tapped into the angst and the expectations” of the public (36). Even if “one now tires of his use of ‘New’” she explained, “it captured the imagination of the public. It is obvious too that the deconstruction and reconstruction of the nation is part of the Blairite project and that this is in part a response to the national unease, although the way this is mapping out leaves much to be desired” (36).

Alibhai-Brown’s dissatisfaction is expressive of a shared sense that the national identity Blair offered was in fact not that far removed from Thatcher’s. Thatcher and Thatcherism obviously offered the electorate an exclusive and populist version of national identity that Blair’s civic based nationalism – signalled by the moniker ‘New Britain’ – appeared to counter. Bhikhu Parekh, in his 2000 Report on Multi-Ethnic Britain, published the year before Alibhai-Brown’s assessment, suggested that “[d]iversity was integral to Blair’s project to ‘modernize’ Britain and to his agenda to establish Britain as a leading multicultural nation on the international stage” (Fortier 17); in fact, the version of the nation Blair appeared to offer his electorate, for him, seemed to live up to Parekh’s own sense that national identity in the UK “should be as inclusive as possible and open to revision, acknowledging its history not for the purpose of nostalgia but for the purpose of imagination” and further that “[i]t should not inspire collective loyalty alone but also inspire critical reflection on that loyalty and it should encourage a solidarity which links different social groups even if this solidarity was political – an association of citizens – rather
than cultural – a nation of patriots [2000: 7-8]” (qtd. in Aughey 115). The realities of Blair’s formulation of Britain instead came uncomfortably close to the vision of one nation that is at the heart of Thatcherism. The “vision for a ‘new Britain’” that Blair offered privileged “the transcendence of differences and dilution of oppositional politics in favour of an anonymized and universalized notion of ‘diversity’” (Fortier 17). In other words, Anne-Marie Fortier suggests, under Blair and New Labour, the nation was held to be expressive of “an assumed bond where ‘differences’ are obliterated under a veneer of universal diversity – ‘we are all different,’ ‘we are all ethnics’, ‘we are all migrants’ hence, ‘we’ are all the same” (17).

Blair’s reformulation of Britain not only failed to please commentators on the Left but also failed to reassure his electorate, a fact that Blair himself acknowledged as late as 2004: “[t]hey [the electorate] want us [Britain] to be strong, but they sense we are losing an old identity without finding or developing a new one” (New Britain ix). The hesitancy that Blair sensed on the part of the electorate to participate in “making Britain a ‘young country’” – in becoming “masters of change rather than victims of it” (New Britain x) – could be attributed, according to him, to their lack of conviction: “They know that the riskier but ultimately more satisfying search for a new future is necessary; but they want to be convinced that we can keep the best of the past as we move forward” (New Britain ix). The use which Thatcher made of the past meant that, surprisingly, the post-imperial version of nationhood that had come to be closely associated with her and her policies was becoming an object of nostalgia.

Alibhai-Brown’s argument that “a positive English (not synonymous with British) identity needs to be encouraged if only to give the English an equal (not better, not worse) place among the firmament of identities which are now defined as British” (39) –was perhaps surprising coming from the Left, though it is notably consonant with Tom Nairn’s prescient
diagnosis, set forth in 1977, that “hope in the British political future” in fact “depends mainly on the English people” (Break-Up 304). In his discussion of the inevitabilities of devolution Nairn boldly argues for the possibilities of “nationalist revival” within a specifically English context, although he notably stipulates that in order to be valuable any such project must be directed toward discovering “a better, more democratic future” (Break-Up 304). His prescription that nationalist revival would have to entail “re-examining” and “(on occasion re-inventing) a mythic past” predicts how both Thatcher’s and Blair’s failure to confront Britain’s post-imperial legacies could be deemed to be responsible for the intensification of uncertainties regarding Englishness that marked both politicians’ political reigns (Break-Up 304).

The preoccupation with Englishness that defines the late twentieth century post-Thatcher landscape speaks to the political and cultural successes of Thatcherism at authorizing and directing a prevailing post-war narrative of crisis toward Englishness; this becomes clear in Hall and Gilroy’s attempts to determine not only how the nation has arrived at the contemporary moment but to read the prevailing narrative of lost Englishness symptomatically. Thatcher’s “reworking of . . . different repertoires of ‘Englishness’” had taken place, according to Hall, “against the background of a crisis of national identity and culture precipitated by the unresolved psychic trauma of the ‘end of empire’” (“Introduction” 2). The “repertoires” that Thatcherism produces emerge through the strategic discursive articulations it forges “between the liberal discourses of the ‘free market’” and the “organic conservative themes of tradition, family and nation, respectability, patriarchalism and order” (“Introduction” 2). Hall’s sense that Thatcher forges plural repertoires of national identity gets at the process whereby Thatcherism strategically moves, to use Homi Bhabha’s terms, between performative and pedagogical scripts of the nation with the result of producing multiple formulations of Englishness in which civic and populist
narratives are prone to slippage; Hall recognizes that what Gilroy would call “distinctive English idioms of cultural reflection” (*Black Atlantic* 9)– cultural and aesthetic markers that denote intractable difference and which underlie imperial formulations of Englishness – are at work in these repertoires which continually redraw divisions between us and them but always in the cultural and political interest of Thatcherism.

Writing as late as 2005, Gilroy argued that the crisis against which Thatcher’s formulations of Englishness took place, according to Hall, had become pathological. As he observes, “a refusal to think about racism as something that structures the life of the postimperial polity is associated with what has become a morbid fixation with the fluctuating substance of national culture and identity” (*Postcolonial* 12). In part this had occurred because, as he had earlier argued, Britain’s imperial understanding of itself is already morbid (“A land”). What he was describing in *Postcolonial Melancholia*, then, was how the relentless repetition of these imperial fantasies of cultural Englishness, provoked by anxieties produced by its newly forged post-imperial status, had produced melancholia.

One of the symptoms of the melancholic nation, according to Gilroy, is the turn toward cultural biology that has taken place in which “race, nationality, and ethnicity” are held to be “invariant” (*Postcolonial* 6). This turn, which mirrors the “defensive exclusivism” (Hall, “The Local and the Global” 25) that informed the construction of the nation under Thatcher, suggests that melancholia is a defensive operation. Rather than shoring up Britain and Britishness which was an effect, according to Hall, of the intensification of “defensive exclusivism” when “a nation-state is bowing off the stage of history” (“The Local and the Global” 25), the end of British particularism has given rise to English particularism, which manifests in how England and Englishness have come to dominate discussions of the melancholic British nation. Given that the
narrative of English exceptionalism underwrites imperial formulations of the English nation, it is unsurprising that Gilroy argues that the melancholic nation turns toward the comfort of cultural biology – the surety of cultural and aesthetic markers that define Englishness in relation to otherness. Within this context, if “the entities we know as races” are shown to be “derived from the very racial discourse that appeared to be their scientific product” (Gilroy, Postcolonial 8), then, an “alternative analysis that could grasp the ways in which race worked to limit and effectively reconstitute politics” becomes possible (Gilroy, Postcolonial 7-8). That is, if the prioritization of the cultural is shown to be a self-justifying political narrative, this redirects attention to the political and reshapes the very terms in which the relationship between the cultural and political is perceived to be forged in the public life of the nation. Rather than attending to the politics of Englishness, the prioritization of the cultural insists on the legitimacy of the melancholic character of the contemporary nation or on its correlative: its revival (though notably not in Nairn’s – or even Alibhai-Brown’s terms). In part, Gilroy intimates, this occurs because imperial formulations of Englishness are already morbid. The frustration of the treatment that would alleviate melancholia and which, from Gilroy’s perspective occurs from the ground up – namely, through the people’s revival of the nation – is unsurprising given that morbidity by its very definition “complicat[es]” the “therapeutic procedure” applied to “illness, injury, or incapacity” (“morbidity”).

The significance of Gilroy’s cultural-political diagnosis of morbidity for literary interpretation is signalled by Gilroy himself when he argues for the importance of becoming “interested in how the literary and cultural as well as governmental dynamics of the country have responded” to the emergence of the post-imperial nation because such works are able to reveal “the place of racism in contemporary political culture” (Postcolonial 12). This dissertation
explores the literary-cultural dimension of the “dynamics” Gilroy makes his abiding concern (Postcolonial 12), and does so in and through the writings of Julian Barnes, Hanif Kureishi and Pat Barker. All three writers engage in a scrutiny of Englishness that casts new light on post-imperial melancholia, while remaining cautious of treating their literary interventions as either wholly therapeutic or curative.

Barnes and Kureishi, in their non-fictional political commentaries, offer forthright assessments of the state of the nation from the mid 1980s on based, in part, on their visits to constituencies that in their essays stand in for the wider nation. Through their first person accounts, both writers echo and extend cultural theorists’ assessments of Thatcher and Thatcherism: namely, that Thatcher’s political successes have cultural implications that are most clearly identifiable in how Thatcherism has remade the electorate. While Marr, Hall and Gilroy persuasively catalogue Thatcher’s achievements, they make her predominance inevitable; Barnes’s and Kureishi’s essays reinforce, on the contrary, the remarkable and singular nature of this predominance. Barnes and Kureishi show that Thatcher expanded the parameters of the electorate’s symbolic identification with Englishness while remaining careful about preserving the integrity of historical Englishness itself: that is, Thatcherism strategically navigates between the electorate’s demand for stability – for the conception of the synchronic, enduring nation and change – the diachronic vision of the nation. Both modes of national consciousness are always in articulation and underlie both civic and populist formulations of Englishness. What Barnes and Kureishi confront, then, is the means by which an imperial mode of national consciousness has taken hold of both civic and populist conceptions of the contemporary nation.

Barnes’s position as London correspondent for the New Yorker between the years 1989 and 1995 meant that he was uniquely positioned to comment on the political and cultural
transition of his nation to the post-Thatcher era. In performing the work of decoding Englishness as “foreign correspondent in [his] own country” (“Preface” x) Barnes claimed that the contemporary moment was in fact largely devoid of the possibility of drama although Thatcher’s departure from office seemed to augur a precipitous political and cultural alteration.

In January 1991, Barnes offered his assessment of party machinations that “hustled” Thatcher “into suburban exile” and brought “to an end the longest Premiership since the second Earl of Liverpool’s unappealing stint of power from 1812 to 1827” (“Mrs Thatcher” 45). For Barnes, the end of Thatcher’s time in office was not a political inevitability; that is, it was not attributable to a discernible shift in the political mood of the nation. As he went on to explain, “[f]or much of last year, there was a tangy smell to British political life, though whether it was just the whiff of well-hung game – a mature government becoming more mature – wasn’t clear” (45). Although Thatcher’s departure from office presaged the end of the Thatcher era, what is striking in Barnes’s account is his sense that John Major’s “accession was eclipsed by her departure” (76). After a string of rhetorical possibilities that answer the wider question – “How do politicians leave office?” (76) – Barnes affirms that Thatcher, “who after all had been dismissed from the highest public office by her own closest supporters and in full public view, left not just bullishly but in a mood of rampant self-congratulation” (76). In fact, he says, “she took History by the lapels and slapped it around the face in case it was planning to give her less than her due” (76). In other words, Thatcher’s departure from office was consistent with her time in office. Thatcher had offered both succour and new beginnings to the nation, a point that she reaffirmed in her final speech to her constituents: “‘We are very happy,’” she said, “‘that we leave the United Kingdom in a very, very much better state than when we came here’” (Thatcher qtd. in Barnes 77). That her farewell was “temporary” (77), as Barnes notes, presaged the
continuation of the transformation that she had begun to effect. Rather than representing an ideological break from the nation or from the conservative platform, the continuation of Thatcher’s influence was assured, Barnes explained. A domestic metaphor, he suggested, painted an apt picture of the contemporary political landscape. Her relation with her party was like a “marriage that runs out of steam and hits the divorce court” (78): “The divorce had its acrimonious moments, but the Conservative Party retains some gentlemanly instincts, and the couple will go on seeing quite a lot of one another despite the decree absolute” (79).

Barnes’s depiction of the nation’s amicable if resigned relation to Thatcher humorously conceals his more sobering explanation for the Conservative victory: “the British themselves – or an electorally significant percentage of them – have changed. Surveys of social attitudes tend to show that the Thatcher years have not much altered what people claim they want and expect from society. But people’s behaviour has changed” (“Vote Glenda!” 142). He concludes that “a significant portion of the voting public has been altered by Thatcherism” (142). Barnes recognizes the subtleties of Thatcher’s reworkings of the repertoires of Englishness; if English behaviour had changed, the fantasy of Englishness had not.

In a later column on Blair’s ascent to leadership of the Labour Party Barnes observed that Blair seemed to “offer[] the Labour Party its likeliest chance since 1979 of a return to power” (“Left, Right” 341). “You would have to be cruel – or Conservative – not to wish him well: few countries benefit from extended periods of single-party rule,” he argued (342), and, in doing so, advocated for the national benefits of political diversity. At the same time, however, his prescient sense that “Labour’s long-term strategy” seemed to be “actively modelled on Mrs Thatcher’s 1979 game-plan” (342) – specifically “enunciating principles and general themes rather than detailed, priceable policy” (342) – suggested that the party had changed in-line with the
electorate. Blair could not be endorsed with certainty. Though he inspired “optimism in many for his youth, his intelligence, his expressions of idealism, his promise to cleanse, and his electability” and he “may very well be the British Prime Minister as the century turns . . . millenarians would be premature in renting space on mountaintops” (344), Barnes concluded.

While Barnes’s essays take up the subject of the manifestly political nation – the everyday legislating and legislated nation – his fictions have been taken to stand in more ambivalent relation to it. Publication of his early works Flaubert’s Parrot and A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters meant that Barnes was perceived to be “as much a European as a specifically English writer, at times virtually a Frenchman manqué that journalistic whimsy has on occasion tried to make of him” (Wilson 153). This perspective has changed in criticism devoted to his more recent fictions, England, England and Arthur & George, which proclaim his engagement with the contemporary national landscape. Critics such as Dominic Head and Nick Bentley have offered persuasive readings of these novels’ perspectives on contemporary formulations of Englishness, but their assessments ignore how the legislative and cultural scripts of Thatcherite and Blairite Englishness inform the version of nationhood that Barnes takes up in his fictions.

Andrzej Gasiorek detects what is at stake in Barnes’s historiographic metafictions when he directs the reader’s attention to their response to and intervention in the legislative present. Because Gasiorek’s canvas is much broader, encompassing British post-war fiction, the “present” in his argument remains a generic political category rather than an explicit account of how Barnes’s fictions register and write back to the authored political mechanisms by which post-imperial national identity is forged in the legislative present. Focusing his attention on Flaubert’s Parrot and A History of the World in 10 ½ Chapters, which established Barnes’s reputation as a
postmodern, cosmopolitan writer, Gasiorek suggests that Barnes offers a “far more critical reading of certain postmodern claims about the unrepresentability of the historically ‘real’ than might initially be thought to be the case” (149). His argument that these novels reveal “[h]ow the past is understood and how that understanding is passed on” to be “matters of conflict that need to be arbitrated” accords with the bulk of Barnes scholarship (Gasiorek 193), but his emphasis on Paul Ricoeur’s claim that “the ‘contemporary search for some narrative continuity with the past is not just nostalgic escapism but a contestation of the legislative and planificatory discourse which tends to predominate in bureaucratic societies’” paves the way for conceiving of the local relevance of Barnes’s fictions (Ricoeur qtd. in Gasiorek 193). Gasiorek believes that Barnes counters rather than concedes to “the postmodernist emphasis on the radical contingency of knowledge, the inescapability of multiple language games against which it is impossible to adjudicate, and the consequent inaccessibility of history’s referent” (193) by refusing “perspectives that deny the possibility of reliable historical knowledge and see the present as beyond redemption” (193). This interpretation intriguingly exonerates Barnes of the charge of “political quietism” (193).

Like Gasiorek, Gregory J Rubinson argues for the importance of reading postmodern works with an awareness that the “way a text makes use of its constituent genres can tell us a great deal about the ideological histories of those genres and its own historical scene” (23). Rubinson also infers the politics of Barnes’s historiographic novels but importantly argues that, when read alongside Salman Rushdie’s works in particular, Barnes’s works “might be generally characterized as more ‘local’” because “[h]e writes about characters who are trying to grapple with the ‘knowability’ of history” but whose “experiences are more grounded in the mundane realities of contemporary life” (77). Rubinson too makes use of Barnes’s columns to demonstrate
how Barnes’s postmodern fictions speak to the political state of late twentieth-century Britain. According to him, this political dimension can be extrapolated from Barnes’s assessment of Thatcher’s autobiography, included in *Letters from London*. Specifically, what Barnes finds Thatcher guilty of in her autobiography parallels what “writers of contemporary historical fictions like Barnes find potentially dangerous about historical narratives – they’re [sic] proclivity for serving oppressive ideological interests” (108).

In a recent monograph on Barnes, Frederick M. Holmes acknowledges Barnes’s reputation as a “cosmopolitan, intellectually and culturally sophisticated fictional experimenter” before insisting that he is also “a quintessentially English author” whose oeuvre reflects his upbringing and education in the 1950s and 1960s and his subsequent experiences as a professional writer based in London” (*Julian Barnes* 12). Holmes neatly reconciles these contending aims when he suggests Barnes’s particular interest in – and perhaps suitability for – “exploring different models of English identity that have come under pressure during an era dominated by global capitalism and what Fredric Jameson calls its postmodernist cultural logic” (*Julian Barnes* 12). While noting that Barnes’s “orientation is international, not exclusively British” (*Julian Barnes* 16), Holmes importantly points to how Barnes “has also written in response to particular political and social changes that have taken place within Britain over the four decades” – the “most notable” of which is Thatcherism (*Julian Barnes* 19). Despite Holmes’s acknowledgment of the socio-historical context to which Barnes’s novels respond, however, the precise nature of Barnes’s intervention in the legislative present has to be inferred from his pairing of *Metroland* with *Arthur & George* in his study of Barnes. He observes strong similarities between the works that are generic – he reads both as *Bildungsromane* – but also
thematic because “the personal identities of the protagonists are formed in and from the cultural environment in which they are situated” (Julian Barnes 48).

While Holmes’s sense that Barnes’s England, England “registers the loss of depth and authenticity suffered by English national identity in an era of ‘junk’ culture and postmodernist simulation” (Julian Barnes 21) is consistent with the bulk of criticism on the novel which maps onto England, England the larger question of the simulacrum nation, Gasiorek’s argument that “Barnes’s preoccupation with the inaccessibility of the past leads him to focus less on the past itself – the object of historical enquiry – than on the modes by which it is apprehended” (158) generated analyses which reconcile this aspect of Barnes’s early fictions with the subject matter of England, England and Arthur & George—England and Englishness. For both Head and Bentley, Barnes’s England novels exemplify a similar preoccupation with how Englishness is assembled or constructed rather than with the question of Englishness itself; this necessarily and significantly entails reading Barnes’s novels as works that register and seek to intervene in a version of nationhood authored by Thatcher and Thatcherism.

In Metroland, Barnes depicts the landscape of suburbia and the ambiguities that it enfolds within itself as being a repository for the discontent of the post-war years and paves the way for reading it as the landscape out of which Thatcherism not only emerges but to which Thatcherism continually and inevitably returns. A logical extension of the objectless protest that the works of the Anger generation registered, it also stands for a complacent and more ambivalent experience of Englishness that contrasts with the prevailing national narrative. The overarching narrative of political and social crisis and of the besieged nation of the 1970s not only provides the historic backdrop for Barnes’s novel but importantly becomes the subject of contestation in the novel itself. Christopher’s positioning of himself in relation to the Anger generation becomes the
means by which the prevailing narrative of crisis is contested. It is shown to be derivative of the Anger Generation’s mode of protest and continuous with the interests of a political nation well equipped to create and absorb such rebellious posturings. Barnes’s own emphasis on how Thatcher is deposed to suburbia in his later columns remakes the space of his first novel into an obvious if anticipatory correlative of Thatcherism. In England, England suburbia has in fact become Thatcherland, but Barnes insists on providing a double view of Englishness in his novels. They provide a view of Englishness that is both forward-looking, in tracing the political narratives of Englishness to their logical conclusions, and backward-looking in intimating that the desires around which Englishness is structured are the same even if their organization has changed. The “knowing nostalgia” that Barnes’s England, England exudes is not a benign belief in the inevitability of Englishness but an excoriating account of what Thatcher’s symbolic interventions have malignantly set in motion (Bentley, “Re-writing” 495).

Barnes interrogates the use to which crisis narratives are put and what this means for populist and civic conceptions of Englishness which forge complementary visions of the post-imperial nation. Kureishi adds to Barnes’s discussion a precise sense of how race and class both reveal and are implicated in a populist and deeply unsettling struggle to understand the nation, a struggle in which the civic nation takes part. This work is begun in Kureishi’s non-fictional essays which helped to establish his reputation for “changing monocultural definitions of British national identity” (Thomas 2). Although Kureishi’s autobiographical “The Rainbow Sign” has come to be taken as a kind of manifesto for his early works, it is his 1986 essay, “Bradford,” that maps the immediate political landscape onto the wider nation. Kureishi begins his essay by describing his need to “see” Bradford “for [him]self” because of how the city “seemed to be a microcosm of a larger British society that was struggling to find a sense of itself, even as it was
undergoing radical change” (“Bradford” 58). For Kureishi, Bradford raised the “whole notion of what it was to be British and what that would mean in the future” (58), a question that was deeply connected to the “important issues, of race, culture, nationalism and education” (58). Kureishi’s sense that Bradford “was everything [he] imagined a Bradford working-class community would be like except for one thing,” that “he had yet to see a white face” (60), trenchantly lays bare his own assumptions about parochial, Northern Englishness. His own experiential encounter with Bradford is in some measure meant to convey that the nation’s attempt to “find a sense of itself” in fact “was a struggle not seen by the people governing the country, who after all had been brought up in a world far different from today’s” (58), or more specifically a world in which “in 1945 England” still “ruled over six hundred million people” and “there were few black faces on its streets” (58). Kureishi’s account is singular because of its powerful intuition that the lenses through which Britishness has come routinely to be perceived are proscribed for a generation that emerges out of a specific historical and political conjuncture. The challenge that Kureishi poses to the domestic conception of the nation, when he argues that it is not “one large solid community with a shared outlook, common beliefs and an established form of life, not Orwell’s ‘one family with the wrong members in control’” (64), introduces the possibility that what Bradford synecdochically represents – the nation – is a “diverse, disparate, strikingly various” political body (64). His reading of Bradford not only acts as a riposte to Thatcher’s one nation narrative but also intimates that the broad changes altering Englishness are not attributable to political taste alone. Instead, he begins to get at how Thatcherism is part of a longer post-war narrative within which, he recognizes, not only he himself but also writers of his generation are implicated.

Reviewers read his first novel The Buddha of Suburbia (1990) against his state-of-the-nation films, My Beautiful Laundrette and Sammy and Rosie Get Laid because it ends on the
night of the 1979 General Election. The latter confront the political and cultural conditions out of which Thatcherism emerged but also to which Thatcherism gave rise. Clark Blaise, in a *New York Times* book review, viewed the novel unfavourably when compared to Kureishi’s previous accomplishments, saying, “[i]t is difficult to turn from screenwriting, especially Hanif Kureishi’s form of writing, in which competing subplots and quick cuts establish their own daring rhythm, to the conventional *Bildungsroman*, in which nothing exists without a textured, modulated, layered consciousness.” For him, in “*The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim’s emerging consciousness is not spacious enough to contain the worlds of Haroon and Eva, his mother and her new boyfriend, Jamila and Changez, or his own growing understanding of acting and theater” (Blaise). Blaise’s assessment of Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* to some extent repeats unfavourable reviews of Barnes’s first novel *Metroland* based on the limitations of the *Bildungsroman* and the conventions of the first novel to which both appeared to succumb; critics were quicker to read Kureishi’s use of this convention as being compatible with his ostensible depiction of Karim’s coming into Englishness while Barnes’s use of the convention was simply taken to underscore Christopher’s coming into suburbia.

Given Kureishi’s warning that “if contemporary writing which emerges from oppressed groups ignores the central concerns and major conflicts of the larger society, it will automatically designate itself as minor, as a sub-genre” (qtd. in Thomas 5), it is unsurprising that his works themselves have been taken to rework the grounds on which issues of Englishness and race converge. Indeed, for Jago Morrison *The Buddha of Suburbia* importantly “lays the groundwork for a move beyond the politics of ‘race’” (183). Certainly a provocative statement, based on his sense that “[e]thnic disjunctions are an important piece of the jigsaw, but certainly not the whole” (Morrison 183), but his reading of Kureishi’s first novel does not develop his own fine insight,
treat the novel as Kureishi’s forthright assessment of the centrality of race to the political and cultural life of the nation. His meditation on how The Buddha of Suburbia offers a more subtle exploration of the “grey area where race-thinking shades into the manufacture and exploitation of ‘oriental’ ethnicities” confirms my claim (185-6).

In this respect, Morrison’s reading of The Buddha of Suburbia is consistent with the overwhelming tendency for critics of Kureishi’s first novel to interpret it as responding to rather than emerging from England and Englishness in trite postcolonial formulations. Peter Childs’s reading of The Buddha of Suburbia in particular speaks to how critics have read it as a work that models hybridity. He explains that the novel defines “hybridity [as] doubleness not homelessness” (148). Though Karim is constantly denying and denied a position as English or Indian Childs argues, he comes to “realize that these are not mutually exclusive and he can be part of an ethnicity that is both English and Indian” (149). Kenneth Kaleta similarly negotiates these categories in relation to Kureishi himself in his book-length monograph on Kureishi, in which he argues that Kureishi calls for the reformulation of Englishness; his title establishes Kureishi’s claim to being a “postcolonial storyteller” and makes Kureishi predictably and exclusively a writer who suggests that “the dogma of nationalism is in conflict with the reality of today’s multicultural England” and demands that “we accept the inherent contradictions of a pluralistic society within England” (3).

Clive Bloom’s argument that “hybrid cultures are still consensual cultures in their relations with the larger community” explains in part why such interpretations of Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia seem to fall short (32). According to Bloom, “[h]ybridity in its belief in vital change within conformity does not redraw the boundaries of the philosophy of identity per se but merely points out that identity is always changing in history and in social contexts. It does not
alter those factors because it is essentially *descriptive* not dynamic. It cannot fully address dissent as dissent which is essentially *no longer a negotiation except on accepted terms*” (Bloom 32). Kureishi recognizes and confronts the reader’s desire to read Karim as being exemplar of this mode of hybridity, which insists on the value of difference but only if it remains other, instead of ceding to it. Karim, he makes clear, is a subject of and subject to the ‘one nation’ rhetoric of Thatcher and Thatcherism; rather than confronting how imperial scripts continue to inhabit the legislative present, hybridity in Kureishi’s novel is political but only insofar as it is shown to be in the interests of the legislating nation. In part this is due to how attention to Karim’s hybridity deflects from Kureishi’s more radical interrogation of class, a narrative that David Cannadine among others has argued Thatcher sought to deliberately exclude from public debate.

*The Buddha of Suburbia* is valued for its postcoloniality; however, critics have nonetheless recognized the Englishness of Kureishi’s fictions. According to Bart Moore-Gilbert, “Kureishi belongs to a tradition of inquiry into the ‘state of the nation’ and the meanings of ‘Englishness’ which reaches back well into the nineteenth century” (3). From this perspective, *The Buddha of Suburbia* comes out of and responds to the same tradition as Barnes’s *Metroland*.

James Procter has offered the most sustained and convincing treatment of the historical and political conjuncture to which Kureishi responds. In his reading of Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* he attends to the socio-cultural significance of the representational politics of the novel and also takes up the larger implications of the novel’s setting by situating it within a longer history of the geographies of black British writing in post-war Britain. His interrogation of Kureishi’s novel as a work that tackles ethnicity owes an obvious debt to Hall’s discussion of the new ethnicities to which the 1980s gave rise. His treatment of the novel in relation to the contemporary legislative formulation of Englishness is limited because his sense that *The Buddha*
of Suburbia responds to Thatcherite discourses has to be inferred, thus obscuring the specifically legislative as well as broader political implications that Kureishi takes up in his novel. The Buddha of Suburbia confronts the extent to which Thatcher’s symbolic formulations emerge out of and produce the socio-cultural context that informs Procter’s interpretation; thus, Kureishi’s confrontation of class in particular is an urgent political rather than merely cultural question.

That The Buddha of Suburbia concludes on the night of the 1979 General Election has meant that critics address Thatcherism as a socio-historic context that informs Kureishi’s novel. Childs broaches Kureishi’s broad confrontation of the conditions that made Thatcherism possible when he argues that the fact that “Karim is constantly asked to ‘be Indian’: by his schoolteachers; by racist abuse in the streets; by radical theatre directors” can “to a degree be characterized as the positions of the political left and right” (149). Bradley Buchanan similarly points out how Kureishi’s works set him in ambivalent relation to Thatcherism and discourage easy identification of his political orientation based on his mistrust of both right and left. In fact, Buchanan’s sense that Kureishi has “created characters who embody some of what he sees as the positive aspects of Thatcher’s influence on an otherwise moribund British culture” notably echoes Kirk’s and Holmes’s readings of The Buddha of Suburbia and speaks to the complexities of Kureishi’s conception of Englishness (24) – in part because he is implicated in the post-war narratives out of which Thatcherism emerges. For Buchanan, and Holmes especially, Karim himself comes to be emblematic of the successful Thatcherite subject because his trajectory remains within the confines of the individualist and economic scripts central to Thatcher’s rhetoric. For Kirk, this means he is a repetition of Kureishi’s earlier depiction of Omar in My Beautiful Laundrette.

Despite acknowledging that “Thatcherism is the single most important political ideology in his characters’ lives, having outlived Marxism, racial solidarity and feminism” (24), Buchanan
insists that “Kureishi comes close to making youth into its own cultural ideology, albeit a provisional and self-consciously superficial one” which raises the question of “[w]hether this is a satisfactory position for a writer whose work has been invested with such social and political significance” (30). For Morrison, it is precisely Kureishi’s role as “literary chronicler of British society from the 1970s onwards” that enables him to “show[] better than almost any other writer the importance of youth culture in this period” (180). References to pop culture “work to sustain and fill out his texts in relation to their contemporary milieu” (Morrison 181). Both overlook the extent to which youth culture is intimately connected with national identity for Kureishi. According to Kureishi himself, “‘Britain couldn’t be entirely Americanised while it continued to generate its own identity through music and fashion and the political culture and activism of its youth’ [Kureishi, 1992, p.xii]” (qtd. in Morrison 181).

Kureishi’s apparent movement away from the thematic treatment of race and class central to The Buddha of Suburbia and The Black Album has meant that his later works have been largely overshadowed by his work prior to Love in a Blue Time (1997) which Susie Thomas points out has “engaged with issues of racism and new forms of Britishness” (3). Buchanan also refers to a growing “critical consensus that has emerged” regarding “Kureishi’s apparent decline from relevance to obscurity” and suggests that this might explain why Gabriel’s Gift and “The Body” have not met with much critical attention (158). He remarks that few critics “have applauded Kureishi’s decision to bracket the issue of race in his later work” (158). Driscoll offers another possibility in his reading of Kureishi’s “The Body.” For him, Adam’s “final desire” which seems to be “for the stability, comfort and safety of the grand narrative of his white middle class life and a desire to return to the lost Elysium of bourgeois culture and society” (Driscoll 131), proves “embarrassing to the parameters of postmodern liberal criticism that always desires to appear
‘classless’” (131). Kureishi’s “The Body,” however, is an extension of *The Buddha of Suburbia* in some respects because his interrogation of class is intimately connected with a wider national narrative of Englishness; his novel in fact exposes how the fantasies of class structure the legislative nation and are at work in post-imperial formulations of Englishness. According to Kureishi, in a post-imperial context, a middle class conception of the nation becomes the locus of nostalgic formulations of Englishness; the class inflection of this vision of nationhood, however, is overwritten by the mechanisms of symbolic identification that characterize Thatcher’s time in office. What Kureishi intimates is that recognizing that Thatcher became one of us has implications beyond explaining her political and cultural successes; instead, it speaks to how these successes are traceable to her understanding that Englishness itself is profoundly bound up with the class consciousness that imperial narratives legitimate. The need to attend to Britain’s imperial legacies is a directive that entails understanding why Thatcher’s successes became possible and what they mean for contemporary formulations of Englishness and also Britishness.

Often, the value of Pat Barker’s early fictions is located in how they function as works of documentary realism that describe the socio-cultural and political climate of the years surrounding Thatcher’s first term in office. In this sense, her early and overtly political fictions overlap with the work that critics have taken Barnes’s *Metroland* and Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* to accomplish. “Despite the wealth of allusive and figurative devices which point up its literariness, *Union Street* has acquired something of a documentary status” (25), Mark Rawlinson explains. While Childs, for example, argues that in her early novels, “Barker . . . puts forward a positive image of community and social networks struggling against an ineffective public welfare system that treats her characters as second-class individuals” (65), more recently critics have tended to argue that Barker instead challenges simple recourse to working class community even
as she locates possibility within it. In part, this reevaluation was a consequence of the publication of *Regeneration* which appeared to signal a departure from her earlier novels; the separation of Barker’s work into two oeuvres has since been almost consistently challenged, however.

Rawlinson explicitly confronts the emergence of Thatcherism in Barker’s early works by yoking their thematic aspects to the specific political context of their production. Barker’s fictions reveal the historical contingencies of social and historical understanding. For him, then, the contribution that Barker makes “to the contemporary historical novel is less a matter of metafictional narrative experiment than an engagement with the doubly contingent status of our historical consciousness” (15). He explains, “we understand and re-present the past in terms of concepts which are themselves historically contingent and shaped by our historical situation” (15). *Union Street*, in his view, is “not explicitly a 1980s novel . . . the accident of its publication would help to focus attention on the book’s political function as an indictment of the political ideology of Thatcherism as a cause of the further social immiseration of economically marginal urban communities” (Rawlinson 20); *Liza’s England* similarly functions as a commentary on “the callow appeals to historical continuity made during the period of Thatcher’s premiership, notably in relation to the Falklands war and unemployment” (47).

David James expresses a similar view in his book *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space*, when he argues that Pat Barker’s realism in part retreats from “what Roland Barthes considered traditionally to be realism’s most rudimentary services: its blank exhibition of domestic routine” (61); instead, for him, “her work . . . spotlights the uniqueness of provinces that seem ‘bounded, enclosed, and self-reliant’” but also “explores burgeoning kinships with places attuned to those circumstances under which local landscapes might productively evolve” (61). That is, it “creates a network between the social world and its latent potential” (James 61).
David Waterman offers the most comprehensive appraisal of what he argues is the question of “how social representations are created and maintained” to which Barker returns throughout her oeuvre (169). Waterman’s acceptance of the idea that “[s]ocial ‘reality’ is created through representations” (169) and that “those who control representational forms . . . control the social contract” (170), means that for him, the value of Barker’s work rests in the challenge that it poses to these formulations. As he suggests, “Pat Barker asks us to make progress precisely by being skeptical toward the representations of normative social control, and to recognize that, while representations are a necessary and even desirable means of maintaining relations with one another, we need to be able to make intelligent choices” (170).

Similarly, for Peter Hitchcock, the questions of social representation that he takes Barker’s works to raise have specific implications within a capitalist context. Taking the notion that “capital effaces labor’s self representation” as a commonplace, he turns to Barker’s trilogy in order to explore “whether the ruse of representation itself blocks capital’s desire to produce, in this case, a working-class male subject consonant with its domination” (par. 3). In other words, for Hitchcock, representation offers a means of intervening in the domination that capital seeks to effect by upholding normative social positions. While the possibility that he finds in Barker’s realism is not straightforward due to his sense that the “imaginative reach” (par. 5) of this mode may be limited, like Gasiorek who argues for the urgent politics of Barnes’s realism, Hitchcock ultimately concedes that Barker’s realism crucially contributes to our “understanding” of “what makes up social identities in history” (par. 5).

These interpretations of Barker’s works which insist on how Barker’s realism is compatible with depicting social realities, when coupled with the turn in Barker criticism which has seen critics insist on the postmodernist elements of her fictions, establish her novels as works
which are able to decode and intervene in the historic-political context in which she is writing. More specifically, the manifest realism of her novels enfold a latent reflective and predictive model that creates a complex temporality evocative of that which Thatcher effected in bringing together synchronic and diachronic versions of the nation in order to produce a desirable mode of post-imperial national identity. In this way, the mode of the *Regeneration* trilogy, as well as her later novels, sharply mirrors Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* which simultaneously registers the discourses that led to Thatcherism and comments on the implications of a decade of Thatcher’s time in office; the realism of Barker’s fiction also comes close to his later work “The Body,” the mode of which proclaims but simultaneously resists its status as a speculative fiction.

Despite Barnes’s predictable postmodernist prevarications, the overwhelming and insistent realism of Barnes’s *Metroland* and, more surprisingly, *England, England* and *Arthur & George* is that of the social novel; by claiming the properties of realism, these writers seek to reinscribe Thatcher’s own narrative coherence in her imagination of nation.

Barker’s acknowledgment of how past and future narratives of Englishness are enfolded into the legislative narrative of the present nation means that the thematic centrality of trauma and recovery in Barker’s works obviously speaks to the pathological formulations of the nation that Hall and Gilroy have described in their assessments of late twentieth-century Britain. Rawlinson draws attention to Barker’s own attempts to address this dimension of her fiction:

> I think my work comes very close to therapy in that there is a preoccupation with darkness and trauma. But there is also a preoccupation about not letting that be the final word – by surrounding it with enough that is positive about life for it to take its place. And I think this must surely have a therapeutic equivalent. You don’t want the client or the patient to ignore the traumatic event – you want them to remember it. But equally you don’t want to go to the other extreme so that the trauma becomes the truth about them, and the entire narrative of their life is the narrative of trauma. That is close to the balance I want to strike in my books [Garland 199]. (Barker qtd. in Rawlinson 17)
Barker’s coupling of trauma and recovery means that although she shares with Barnes and Kureishi an interest in mapping the narrative of recovery that Britain’s status as post-imperial nation appears to have demanded and which is at least partly responsible for Thatcher’s political hegemony, she does so with an awareness that this narrative of recovery is not separable from trauma; from this perspective, Thatcherism in her fictions is part of a wider traumatic narrative that is to some extent a repetition of the means by which historical Englishness came into being, a point that Eluned Summers-Bremner makes in her argument that Barker’s treatment of Englishness is historical. Notably, she does not connect the version of nationhood that she finds in Barker’s works specifically with Thatcherism.

According to Summers-Bremner, Barker’s “singular project of opening received accounts of history up to the space of the intimate workings of their terms” (273) derives from post-Enlightenment formulations of historical Englishness. She writes, “history, in English post-Enlightenment tradition, absorbs revolutionary fervour by first using it to create, and then forgetting that it has created, a parallel story of the past, named English history or heritage” (273). For Summers-Bremner, childhood and adulthood (at least to some extent) become tropes for negotiating the relation between past and present that can be extrapolated to the level of the nation. Thus, “one way to read the project of the novels under discussion is as a demonstration of the dream work that childhood so often performs for adulthood, or fantasies of English history for the English nation: a looking back that is a means of managing anxiety about the future in the present but one that, if unchecked, can threaten to overturn or annihilate all meanings” (275). This insight obviously resonates with the political post-Thatcher landscape. In Border Crossing, remembering Danny’s childhood entails recovering and making sense of Thatcherism’s effects on people; it also entails a nostalgic recovery of Thatcherism as an explanatory framework that to
some extent enables the construction of a coherent narrative of Danny’s past which effaces trauma.

Ankhi Mukherjee’s reading of *Regeneration* stands out for its consideration of *Regeneration* as “an allegory of the failure of the narrative project” based in part on her understanding of how Bhabha’s conception of the nation applies to Barker’s own (51). She argues that “if what can or should be read in *Regeneration* is the story of the loss of the story, we can also identify at the heart of this (writerly and readerly) process a residual, if negatively expressed, need for meaning” (51). The difficulty that characters in Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy have speaking is a synecdoche for the problems of the “interrupted address” that Bhabha argues affects the Nation in his influential essay, “DissemiNation” (59). Using Bhabha’s theories she argues that the trilogy collectively “participates” in what she argues is the “performative hysterization or dissemi nation of the nation” (59). That is, Barker’s trilogy reveals the nation to be “‘a liminal form of social representation, a space that is internally marked by cultural difference’” (Bhabha qtd. in Mukherjee 59) largely because of how ‘the people’ are unable to reconcile the simultaneous demands they face as pedagogical and performative objects.

Julian Barnes, Hanif Kureishi and Pat Barker have predictably shared space in collections of works that seek to map the fictional contours of British and, more particularly, English fiction of the 1980s and 1990s. Barnes’s and Barker’s inclusion on *Granta*’s 1981 “best of young English novelists list” has in part been a benchmark for critics to group these writers together; even though Kureishi was not included on the list because his first novel was not published until 1990, he is obviously ‘of’ this generation as well.

Julian Barnes and Hanif Kureishi are included in Brian Finney’s discussion of eleven writers who are “representative of a new form of fiction writing that has come to dominate the
two decades since 1984” (1). He argues that what makes these writers unique is their shared sense of “the difference between their work and that of their immediate predecessors which seemed to them an inadequate response to the modern world they grew up in” (2). His logic for grouping this generation of writers together is based on his sense that despite a “bewildering variety of narrative modes, voices and tones” (2), “all of them place their narratives within a context, not of one class on a small island, but of a world which is threatened by the very success of the project of modernity” (2). His endorsement of their escape from parochialism is perhaps too limiting given how Thatcherism is bound up with this narrative of modernity as cultural theorist Stuart Hall has argued. For Hall, Thatcherism is a “defensive operation” whose treatment of Englishness directly emerges out of and adapts to the successes that Finney describes (“Emergence” 21).

According to Suzanne Moore “by the late 1980s culture was ‘the only space that true opposition to Thatcherism could come from’ [Moore 1998: 17]” (qtd. in Luckhurst 79). In this respect, it is logical that writers like Barker, Barnes and Kureishi are almost overwhelmingly taken to occupy a position outside of the “English culture industry” of the 1980s (Bernard 174). “Even as the English culture industry was polishing its strategy – an astute combination of glamour and nostalgia based on the sepia exaltation of everlasting Englishness,” Catherine Bernard explains, this generation of writers was turning its attention to the “simulacrum such a culturally manufactured sense of identity had become and on the plural memories it placed under erasure” (Bernard 174).

Rather than read Barnes’s, Kureishi’s and Barker’s works of the 1980s and early 1990s as sops to either documentary realism or historiographic metafiction, I hope to emphasize how their interrogations of Englishness are bound up with representational politics, with the disturbing
political and cultural successes of Thatcher’s symbolic formulations beyond her time in office. In addition to forming a Thatcher-receptive electorate, Thatcher alarmingly mobilized colonial scripts of Englishness in order to make the English public over in their image and hers. Kureishi’s and Barker’s works of the early 1990s seek to make sense of more than a decade of Thatcherism; at the threshold of Thatcher’s departure in office they accordingly register how Thatcher’s remaking of the nation is based on her strategic reinforcement of existing imperial desires. Kureishi, like Barnes, traces how political narratives of crisis infiltrate not only populist but also civic formulations of English nationhood, and in fact are central to propagating and sustaining the symbolic majority that makes up the Thatcherite and eventually the British nation. Although critics have found his early works appealing for what they say about race and Englishness and hybridity and Englishness, Kureishi exposes the remarkable hold that Thatcher’s symbolic majorities continue to exert despite the much altered demographics of the nation-space. On Thatcher’s election, the changing make-up of Britain was felt to check the scope of her electoral success. Kureishi shows that this has not continued to be the case.

All three writers return relentlessly to the question of Englishness – both its demise and resurgence – as the dominant feature of the critical landscape of late twentieth-century British fiction. Indeed in his introduction to a collection of essays that explores British fiction of the 1990s, Bentley observes that “English identity . . . attracted increasing attention over the decade, fuelled by nostalgic reconstructions of the myths of Englishness in the political rhetoric of the Conservative Prime Minister John Major, as well as in the continuing influence on the English psyche of devolution, post-colonialism, the end of empire, and the emergence of multiculturalism and difference as an alternative model of the nation” (“Introduction” 10). Head, for example, argues that Barnes proffers a civic formulation of Englishness as a remedy to the stagnation of
Englishness, but all three writers show that cultural and political formulations of Englishness are intimately connected; Englishness is primarily a defensive construct and, despite its post-imperial status, the fantasy that continues to structure the nation. They explore how the same desires that mobilize imperial Englishness – the Englishness of the historic nation – are recast under Thatcher. None of the writers is sanguine about culture or civility as an antidote to hegemonic forms of nostalgia; their aim is to ambush rather than skirt the lure of Englishness.

Writing in 2005, Kureishi argued that “[q]uestions of race, immigration, identity have been absent from the work of my contemporaries even as a new generation of writers has developed, following the lead of V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie” (“The Word and the Bomb” 3). He explains, “a curious sort of literary apartheid has developed, with the latest ‘post-colonial’ generation exploring the racial and religious transformation of post-war Britain while the rest leave the subject alone. When British television, cinema and theatre saw it as their duty to explore these issues and the strangeness of the silence which often surrounded it – British writers of the generation following Graham Greene seemed scared of getting it wrong, of not understanding, even as they complained of having nothing important to write about, envying American writers for having more compelling subjects” (4). Kureishi draws attention to how his generation is implicated within the pathology of melancholia to which Gilroy alludes. This melancholia is traceable to a widespread failure on the part of the English to recognize the role race plays in both the legislative and consequently everyday life of the nation. Writers of the subsequent generation such as Zadie Smith, Andrea Levy, and Gautam Malkani, whom Kureishi identifies as the successors of Rushdie and Naipaul, have been able to confront race in part because postcolonialism has come to be marketable and hybridity fashionable as Kureishi himself recognizes in his novella “The Body.” Their direct and assertive confrontations of race are timely
and do succeed in showing the problems in Blair’s formulations of multiculturalism; these narratives also at least appear to signal that they stand in straightforward relation to a political and cultural conjuncture in which the public is receptive to articulations of difference – albeit within very proscribed limits.

The silence of Kureishi’s generation in comparison speaks to a more fraught conception of how race operates covertly as well as overtly in the public life of the nation. Against the energetic politics of the fictions of the new generation of writers and the utopias of change that hitherto neglected popular forms of literature like science fiction have been taken to envision (Luckhurst 78), it is the writers of the Thatcher generation who exhibit signs of being able to enact the therapeutic procedure that Gilroy recommends as a means of curing the melancholic nation. At the same time, however, these novelists experience a discomfort with what these political narratives mean for cultural Englishness and are in fact implicated in the political and cultural conjuncture in which these morbidities became pathological. In other words, though their works collectively reveal how an English predilection for historical morbidity continues to shape the contemporary nation, their fictions are not innocent of the nostalgia that accompanies this pathology.

Kureishi’s castigation of his generation is most obviously directed toward Barnes, given the latter’s infamous response when asked about his choice of the Eastern European setting of his 1990 novella “The Porcupine” – “There’s no point in doing a little-England version of the American novel – the Empire is long dead. What is London the centre of in the world?” (Moseley 147). Heralded as a belated but timely interrogation of race, Barnes’s Arthur & George has been favourably interpreted by Head to offer a formulation of civic Englishness. Most critics find in Arthur & George an important confrontation of imperial Englishness that has relevance to

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the question of the vision of the multicultural nation central to Blair’s politics, though they
overlook the extent to which this novel, like *Metroland* and *England, England*, treats Blair’s
formulations as revenants of Thatcher’s rehearsal of imperial scripts in her symbolic
formulations. Readings of Barnes’s novel have also been more misguided. Vera Nünning, for
example, falls into the temptation to read the novel as a work that models otherness. She writes,
“[s]eeing the world ‘through the eyes’ of George” “is certainly a strange experience for those
readers who have never encountered racism at first hand” (223), overlooking the extent to which
Barnes undercuts the knowability of what George sees because the historical Edalji insisted that
what he experienced was not the first-hand racism Nünning describes. Her reading, then, is
importantly consistent with the desire of critics like Head to read the work as a novel that asserts
the value of difference.

Barnes’s interrogation of Englishness reveals it to be an aesthetic construction that is
authored by and authorizing of the legislative nation. What is more intriguing is the central role
that the interrogation of representation has come to play in both Kureishi’s and Barker’s works.
The emphases of the trajectories they chart might differ, but these three writers have come to a
similar place in their later fictions. In some respects, their focus on the middle class returns to the
terrain of post-war Britain; ironically, however, they are of the generation that was taken to break
with the social realist fictions of these years. Indeed, editor of *Granta* Bill Buford could claim
that the generation of 1980s’ writers in Britain emerged not only out of the post-war years but
more specifically out of the crisis-laden 1970s and were thus writing works that had been “freed
from the middle-class monologue” and were “exploiting traditions and not being wasted by them.
. . ” (qtd. in Finney 3). This declaration has become a benchmark for literary and cultural critics
who attribute the enervation of the novel form in England to the writers of Kureishi’s generation.
Philip Tew broaches this issue in his forthright assessment of the effects of Thatcherism on the literary production of the late twentieth century. According to Tew, “[i]n terms of culture, politics, world affairs, identity politics, and creativity the 1970s represent both a watershed and period of fundamental change for Britain, one that in retrospect, can be seen to rival and not be simply an extension of the changes brought about by the end of the Second World War” (15-6). For him, this “shift solidif[ies] around the emergence and election of Thatcher” and in fact “offers a point of transformation in the literary-critical field” (16). He explains, “ideologically and culturally the election of the ‘Iron Lady’ crystallized a mood swing and endorsement of a culturally and economically divided society” that continues into the present (Tew 48).

Of particular interest to Tew is how the “discontent of the merging and traditional middle classes, and their innate conservatism, has its clear parallels within the novel” (43). He adds, “[t]he literary field prior to the mid-1970s offers a sense of a number of crises that centre and in a curious fashion limit the fictional world-view of many writers. Themes include the loss of authority, and a larger sense of a lack of focus of the middle, the imperial, the intellectual and the political classes as well as that of the rest of the ‘establishment.’ These are not in the main radicalizing impulses” (46). As he elaborates,

post 1970s authors who persist with the notion of re legitimizing any efficaciousness of or priority within a middle-class voice can find themselves almost paradoxically echoing an earlier unease about liberal-intellectual identity and self-image that appeared after the end of the Second World War, a period when the middle classes in particular reacted often with variously [sic] bemusement or an underlying hostility to the perceived collapse of empire and the supposed loss of privileges ushered in by what appeared to be fundamental social changes epitomized by the growth of both trades union power and the Welfare State. (49)

He argues that “[a]s time has progressed the newcomers stress through their incredulities the distance achieved culturally and technologically since the war” (58), a stance which is resonant
with the sense expressed by writers like Barnes, Kureishi and Barker that Thatcherism has remade the English electorate, but fails to recognize that it is also these authors who have perhaps unexpectedly come to repeat the post-war narratives and thematic concerns that Tew identifies. While Barnes’s focus on the middle class was more predictable than Barker’s and Kureishi’s interrogation of middle class formations in Britain, the preoccupation of all three writers’ later fictions with this constituency of Englishness speaks to the symbolic weight that it carries. The literal and notably domestic landscapes of Barnes’s, Kureishi’s and Barker’s works which represent the metaphorical socio-cultural and political landscapes of the post-Thatcher nation are also obviously evocative of the conventions of social realism.

These writers’ works from the year which saw Thatcher depart from office – 1990 – into Blair’s third term in office – 2005 – interrogate the viability of political and cultural Englishness by demonstrating how Thatcher remade the nation. Their recent works, especially, have to do with the larger questions of the feasibility of the nation form in a contemporary context but also pose an important challenge to the simple recourse to the cultural that has come to be a defining feature not only of literary culture but also of the public imaginaries from 1979 on despite the divergent forms – celebration or lamentation – that they take. As cultural critics like Stuart Hall were starting to make sense of the long view of Thatcherism from about 1987 on, Barker, Barnes and Kureishi were demonstrating an already sophisticated understanding of the “repertoires of Englishness” that underlie Thatcherism and that have persisted beyond Thatcher’s time in office (Hall, “Introduction” 2). This has meant that they are perhaps surprisingly well-poised to enact the interventions that critics such as Paul Gilroy have argued are necessary in order to work through the historical morbidities that have come to define Englishness. The recognition that Thatcherism remade the electorate but not the aims of the people is most directly articulated in
Barnes’s critical writings. All three writers’ confrontations of how Thatcherism has remade the electorate’s (to use Bhabha’s terms) “frame of reference/frame of mind” (“Signs” 114) take place through their exposition of the mechanisms by which the prioritization of culture in the public life of the nation has led to a self-perpetuating and self-justifying and perhaps most importantly pathological national consciousness. The question of what a desirable relation between the political and cultural might entail is beside the point for these writers. Instead, they are invested in mapping the complex terrain of a historical and cultural conjuncture which bespeaks how the questions of contemporary Englishness – of crisis and renewal – are revenants of the pervasive hold that imperial formulations of Englishness continue to have on the nation’s sense of its political and cultural character; they agree that the prioritization of the culture in a contemporary context is not benign but in the interest of the political. Thatcher’s recourse to deeply embedded imperial formulations at once incarnates and preserves the nation’s political as well as cultural character and dangerously means that difference cannot be adequately accounted for in the public life of the nation. These writers do not let their readers off the hook. Hope does not rest with the people’s reformation of the civic nation: Thatcher has made sure of this. The extent to which these authors acknowledge themselves to be implicated in this conjuncture – and in which their critics show themselves also to be implicated – leads to a perhaps politically unsatisfying but sound conclusion. Discerning how politics inscribes and is inscribed by the cultural is an urgent first step in interrupting contemporary formulations of Englishness that have complacently been accepted to be political and cultural inevitabilities in recent years.
Chapter 2

Anger and After: Crisis and Possibility in the England Novels of Julian Barnes

In his first novel, Metroland (1980), Julian Barnes maps the political and cultural contours of the England of 1977 which is the present of his first-person, retrospective narrator, Christopher. The first section of the novel, “Metroland, 1963,” is devoted to Christopher’s account of the “coruscating idealism” of his adolescence which takes the form of his desire to protect the integrity of concepts like “the purity of the language, the perfectibility of the self, the function of art, plus a clutch of capitalised intangibles like Love, Truth, Authenticity” from meddling bureaucrats (15). His sense of the threat the bureaucrats pose derives from the thinking of his predecessors – the members of the Anger generation. By juxtaposing the cultural unrest of England portrayed in section one of the novel with the revolutionary fervour of les événements in section two of the novel, “Paris, 1968,” Barnes underscores how complacency rather than revolution has a hold over the English nation. The suburban space that Christopher comes to inhabit in section three of the novel is continuous with the Metroland of his youth and the concealed anxieties are those which previously plagued the nation.

The trajectory that Barnes pursues in Metroland, as well as the obvious thematic resonance of his depiction of Christopher’s adolescent development with a tradition of post-war social realism in Britain, demonstrates his awareness that he himself is an inheritor of the literary-political tradition in relation to which Christopher seeks to place himself. The belatedness that characterizes Christopher’s relation to the Anger generation even in his youth speaks to the difficulty of political and consequently cultural change in a nation that absorbs revolutionary
possibility; it also identifies the capacity of the literary to shape the political nation in retrospect even as it attests to the possibility that even the literary might be absorbed into a larger national narrative by the nation’s legislators. By revealing the subtle backdrop of imperial nostalgia that underlies inhabitation of suburbia, Barnes locates “Metroland II, 1977” within a longer historical narrative. Suburbia, in this respect, synecdochically stands for a nation whose obsession with its own contraction means that it is prone to succumbing to the myth of intractable political and cultural inevitabilities. The temptation to read “the rapid rise of suburbia and the slow but steady decline of empire” as “intimately linked and mutually articulated historical trajectories” (5), as Todd Kuchta does, for example, casts the nation in a familiar and comforting, if parochial, light. What Barnes shows instead is how suburbia equally proclaims itself to be a revenant of imperial accomplishment. It exists because of economic and political imperial successes that demand the expansion of metropolitan spaces.

While Metroland is not without its consolations for Christopher, the danger of the political and cultural ambivalence that distinguishes the final portion of the novel and which seems to inflect Barnes’s own work in the 1990s comes to the fore in Barnes’s return to the national narrative that he had begun to sketch out in Metroland in England, England (1998) almost twenty years later. This return occurs well after his reputation as a postmodernist writer had been established, if not frequently apologized for, by critics who temper the epithet by defending the role realism plays in his works. This does not mean that in the intervening years Barnes had ignored England and Englishness; the focus of his treatment of Englishness is largely comparative, as his collection of short stories Cross Channel (1996) demonstrates. Nevertheless, Barnes’s discussion of the English political and cultural nation found sustained expression in his columns of the late 1980s, early 1990s, and must be taken seriously in any attempt to trace his
allegiance to the England question. His confrontation of the political life of the nation can be
taken to be indicative of a desire to correct the belief in inevitability that Blair and his conception
of the New Britain seemed to be reinforcing with a vengeance. In England, England, it becomes
clear that the suburban nation Christopher inhabited has given rise to Thatcherism, a political
ideology that Barnes intimates cemented the political and cultural morbidity that Metroland
began to register. England, England, then, responds to the contemporary mood of a nation that
has lost hope after four conservative governments have given way to a Labour party that closely
resembles Thatcherism at its height. The contemporary political and cultural landscape,
meanwhile, has come to resemble the landscape of postwar consensus politics in terms of how
Left and Right converge around a collective vision of the social nation that is decidedly
Thatcherite. This political predicament confirms that the problems Thatcherism seemed poised to
solve remain.

Barnes’s publication of Arthur & George in 2005 appeared to signal the end of his
reluctance to confront the political implications of the imperial script of Englishness that he
skirted in Metroland and which forms a covert narrative in England, England. In this sense,
Arthur & George, unlike England, England, is a “throw-back” not only in terms of Barnes’s
return to the historical and cultural centre of Englishness but also in his return to the project of
mapping what had led to the contemporary moment (Marr, History 403). Barnes returns to the
question of whether or not the nation will be able to move beyond what Martha, the protagonist of
England, England, describes in terms of a “fretful, psoriatic self-consciousness” that is provoked
by “economic collapse, depopulation and European revenge” (257). Even more pointed,
however, is his deployment of the Edalji case to reveal the effects of the prioritization of cultural
life over the political: namely, the formulation of a civic narrative that, paradoxically and
simultaneously, insists on and rejects the contemporary nation’s continuity with a longer historical narrative. Barnes’s novel ostensibly retrieves George’s case from its incorporation into the “‘absorptive patria’” he depicts in *Metroland* (Grainger qtd. in Aughey 27); in this way, it functions as an object of a mode of consciousness that Nick Bentley describes as a “knowing nostalgia” (495). What Barnes challenges, however, is whether this mode can serve as a corrective to the civic and cultural nation; the shifting terrain of Barnes’s social realism attributes the emergence of this mode of national consciousness to the political realm’s intervention in the symbolic identifications of the people.

*Metroland* takes place against a backdrop of cultural and political crisis that prefigures and provides the very conditions that give rise to the version of nationhood that Barnes explores in *England, England* and *Arthur & George*. Told from the first-person perspective by Christopher who looks back on his adolescence from a remove of 14 years, *Metroland* is a *Bildungsroman* that contains within it the socio-cultural history of post-war Britain. In the first section of Barnes’s *Metroland*, deconditioning or “[d]econning” (41), Christopher asserts, is the “duty of every self-respecting adolescent” (41). Key to gaining independence, it is a two stage process: “Scorched Earth” (41) followed by “Reconstruction” (42). The first stage, as envisioned by Christopher and his close adolescent friend and character foil Toni, entails “systematic rejection, wilful contradiction, a wide-ranging, anarchic slate-wipe” (41). The adolescent rebellion that Christopher retrospectively relates is also a historical inevitability. It follows on the wider discontent of 1950s Britain, the cause of which was largely political. The pervasive sense that the “two major parties in Britain seemed to be gradually moving together” had the effect of “disillusioning many who had formerly been active in politics. . . . There was no obvious focus for resentment on the political scene, or for that matter any real hope to set against present
dissatisfactions” (Taylor 13). This meant that the dissatisfaction that came to characterize the Anger generation was notable because “curiously aimless” (Taylor 13). This trait manifests itself in Christopher’s and Toni’s own doctrine. Though Christopher asserts that there is “no ambiguity” about who the “‘they’” the boys seek to resist are – namely, the “legislators, moralists, social luminaries and parents of outer suburbia” and “their inner London equivalents” (Barnes, *Metroland* 14) – he acknowledges at the same time that they are largely “unidentified” (14).

When compared to the vehement exhortation against the socio-cultural status quo advanced by the protagonist of John Osborne’s *Look Back In Anger* (1956) or Jim Dixon’s satiric self-positioning in Kingsley Amis’s *Lucky Jim* (1954), it becomes clear that Christopher’s and Toni’s actions are parodic. Toni quips, “[y]eah, I’m really cross about it” in response to Christopher’s question “‘[d]o you realise . . . that we’re part of the Anger generation?’” (Barnes, *Metroland* 41). In “Metroland, 1963,” the dissent of the 1950s has already been claimed by and incorporated into an “‘absorptive patria’” (Grainger qtd. in Aughey 27). Christopher is suspicious that “‘some sort of institutionalisation might be going on’” because they are “‘reading Osborne at school’” (Barnes, *Metroland* 41). Their rebellion lacks vigour because it is belated. Christopher confesses Scorched Earth “didn’t go the whole way, of course” (42). “With a perspicacity beyond our years,” he ruminates, “we appreciated that merely rejecting or reversing the outlook and morality of one’s parents was scarcely more than a coarse reflex response” (42). Their rebellion at this stage of the novel is programmatic – imitative and to some extent expected – and therefore proscribed. The retrospective point of view from which Christopher assesses their actions enables him to rationalize their curtailment of extreme action and, as critics such as Merritt Moseley and Frederick M. Holmes have argued, produces the irony of this portion of the
novel. Indeed, Christopher’s deferral of what this means until the next sentence – he says dryly, “without in any way compromising our principles, we agreed to carry on living at home” (42) – undercuts his assessment and sets him instead in ironic relation to the ostensible politics of his youth. As Holmes points out, “the adult Chris’s views are not more authoritative than those of his adolescent self by dint of his greater life experience, since they seem as much a product of complacency as of maturity and wisdom” (52). The strategy of undercutting in evidence here, however, reveals the politics of their youth to be curtailed by a pragmatism that is at least in part a product of his Englishness.

The obvious historical and political foil of the Great Anger in Part II of the novel, *les événements*, underscores the lack of socio-cultural change that takes place between Part I and Part III of the novel. Acknowledged by Christopher to be a subtext of his experiences in Paris, the aims of the radical students who sparked the “greatest strike wave in French history” broadly echo those of Christopher and his friend Toni (Seidman 17): namely, the protestation of the “pleasure-denying restraints of bourgeois society” (Seidman 17). Against the effects of these events which have come to be regarded as “a rupture with the past” and to have led to lasting cultural change, key to the formulation of “a more emancipated society” (Seidman 1), the persistence of Metroland in section III of Barnes’s novel is notable for its lack of a clear socio-political context. This is attributable in part to the shift from a past tense retrospective to a present tense narrative point of view. Unlike the Great Anger or *les événements*, the historical implications of the age have yet to be neatly periodized by Christopher. The erasure of specific historical reference points also reinforces how, from his perspective, the Metroland of 1977 is continuous with the Metroland of 14 years earlier. This is unsurprising given the possibility of renewal that is advanced in Part I. While the first stage, Scorched Earth, is tempered by
pragmatism, the second, Reconstruction, is left almost entirely undefined not only for the boys but also, implicitly, for the Anger generation. The “good reasons, and good metaphors” that inform the boys’ “reluctance to look at that part of things too closely” (Barnes, *Metroland* 42) reveal their then unvoiced fear and suspicion that “[their] passion for art was the result of the emptiness of [their] ‘lives’” (128). It also seems likely that the fear and suspicion are results of a void that defines the wider nation.

Christopher’s mode of inhabiting suburbia, however, has changed even if suburbia itself has not. At the outset of the first chapter of Part I he reflects on how, when he was young, “everything seemed more open to analogy, to metaphor, than it does now. There were more meanings, more interpretations, a greater variety of available truths” (Barnes, *Metroland* 13). The temporal comparison between past and present relies on a spatial contrast between expansiveness and contraction, setting him in nostalgic relation to his youth. This is nonetheless a self-conscious move as his own incorporation of an antecedent narrative of nostalgia into his retrospective narration suggests. More specifically, his nostalgia for the past is prefigured by that of the “[o]ld sod” whom he encounters while “rolling home as usual on the 4.13 from Baker Street” (35). Cataloguing the stops that comprised the lines of the metropolitan railroad, the elderly man imaginatively maps not only the geographical history of the railway but also the socio-cultural history of the wider nation. The sense that the gentleman conveys, that the “‘[c]onfidence in ambition’” of the past (37), has been lost not only by the men “‘who built the railway and ran it’” but by “‘everyone else as well’” (38), enables Barnes to acknowledge the implicit connection that has been forged between the “rise of suburbia and the fall of empire” (Kuchta 16). “As the empire began to lose its footing,” Kuchta explains, “suburbia gained more ground than ever before, dominating the social and political landscape at the same time as it came
to represent Britain’s decline on the world stage” (8). In the gentleman’s account, the closure of and failure to complete intended railway lines leads to the contraction of space. Rather than lamenting the fact that railroads threaten “to open ever more of England’s spaces to the translat ive inscriptions of the metropolis” (Baucom 59), the gentleman identifies the curtailment of “the metropolitan principle of movement” as the greatest threat to the coherence and stability of the nation. In fact it is the naming of Metroland that marks “the beginning of the end” (Barnes, Metroland 38): “[c]osy homes for cosy heroes. Twenty-five minutes from Baker Street and a pension at the end of the line” (38). Metroland from this perspective is a synecdoche for the postwar, postimperial nation, and an anticipatory analogue of the post-modern nation.

For the gentleman as well as for Toni and Christopher, and the Anger generation itself, the nation is under siege by the rise of bourgeois culture. While for the elderly man the bourgeoisie are a threat to a conservative vision of the nation that is predicated on Victorian achievement, for Toni and Chris (and the generation), it is in fact the bourgeoisie who threaten to uphold an inherently conservative vision of community. Christopher’s depiction of Metroland mirrors the contraction identified by the “old sod” (Barnes, Metroland 35), thus aligning him with a conservative version of nationhood. His use of the word seemed, however, signals his awareness of the extent to which the version of the past to which he returns is not only filtered through but shaped by his present perspective. Christopher’s retrospective interpretation of suburbia, too, is bound up with the expansive signifying potential that he assigns to the past: “[e]veryone in this suburb of a couple of thousand people seemed to have come in from elsewhere” (33). Rather than being an imperial elegy for the contraction of lost “‘ambitions’” that contrasts past and present versions of nationhood (35) – an essentially conservative view – his depiction of Metroland betrays a nostalgia for an illusory openness represented by the paradox
of suburban space. Kuchta has persuasively argued against the commonplace distinction made between “localized, place bound Englishness” and “expansive, and imperial Britishness” in order to suggest that suburban space is British rather than only English space. This is true of suburbia not only because it “emerges with Empire but also because it remains inadequately anglicized” (16). For Christopher, on the contrary, suburbia is English for precisely this reason.

Christopher’s insistence that Metroland sounded “more like a concept in the mind than a place where you shopped” (33) reveals it to be a synecdoche for the English nation: the name imposed “both by estate agents and the railway itself” confers a “spurious integrity” on the “thin corridor of land . . . with no geographical or ideological unity” (34). Barnes’s protagonist’s sense that his “low-key English face” is suited to the “low-key sense of expatriation common to all who lived in Eastwick” means that his altered perception of suburbia informs his very sense of self (33).

This vision of the potential for community is disrupted by his simultaneous recognition of the persistence rather than the emergence of a contracted community. The continuous relation between the past and present life of the nation that emerges through his preoccupation with how things seemed in the past, and which dominates the first and second portion of the novel, infiltrates the present. He remarks, “I’m surprised how well camouflaged I seem” when itemizing his qualifications for being “‘adult’” by listing his membership in categories – “Married,” “Children,” “Job,” “House” (Barnes, Metroland 133) – that also easily identify him as both bourgeois and suburban. His claim to being “camouflaged” is an act of self-positioning that enables him to declaim his suburbanness (133). The ironic relationship to the past that is evident in the first section of the novel translates into his present habitation: he observes that “[i]t’s certainly ironic to be back in Metroland” and queries, “[b]ut isn’t part of growing up being able to ride irony without being thrown?” (135). His self-positioning, however, is a repetition of the
gentleman’s self-identification as bourgeois in Part I. The man’s description of Metroland as a “bourgeois dormitory” at the close of the history he relates surprises him (38). He queries “[a]ren’t you a bourgeois, then?” (38). Although the “tone” of the man’s response “reassured” him (38), the substance of it – “Ha. Of course I am” – “remained a puzzle” (38). His use of the past tense “remained” in his guise as retrospective narrator indicates that he has come to a similarly self-conscious mode of being ‘of’ suburbia which manifests itself formally in the novel through the continuation of his use of parenthetical insertions in part III of the narrative (38). These destabilize the narrative he sets forth in the early sections of the novel. His unease with being suburban prevents him from straightforwardly adopting the mode of inhabitation that is exemplified by the elderly gentleman he encounters.

This unease reappears in his identification of whiteness and Britishness as some of the “aggressive and muscular” categories of belonging that he turns to in order to “see off the shifting fears of the night” (133). This is not only a strategic act of self-identification that locates him within a wider community of belonging but also enacts a community predicated on a defensive exclusivism: the list soon “slopes off into negatives” (133), enabling him to claim identity by affirming what he is not.

Christopher in fact anticipates “the direct interpellation of the race issue into the crisis of British civil and political life” when he considers the effect the newly-added sodium lights will have on suburbia in part I of the novel (Hall, “Living with the Crisis” 19). His reflection that “[o]nly in suburbia” could “[o]range on red” produce “dark brown” immediately identifies the effect these lights will have on identity (Barnes, _Metroland_ 14). What “if they got at the colours?” he asks (14), “[w]e couldn’t even count on being ourselves any more” (14-5). His recognition that “Toni’s swarthy, thick-lipped Middle-European features would be completely
negrified” while his own “indeterminately English face” is “more immediately secure” attests to the paradoxical intensification of difference through homogenization (14). This offers no comfort for Christopher, however. His sense that “doubtless ‘they’” – the bourgeois – will “think up some satirical ploy” that will trouble even the stability of his own signification speaks to the profound instability and malleability of the borders that define Englishness in the hands of the political (15). Christopher’s own acknowledgment that he “can’t even remember” the “original colour” (176) of the stripes of his pyjamas at the end of the novel signals that the satiric ploy that he anticipates has worked itself out by incorporating him within the bourgeois life he resists in Section I.

The “orange sodium lighting” which was “wonderfully disturbing” in “the first months” has become “a trite occurrence nowadays” (Barnes, Metroland 14); this alteration in the landscape which speaks to the absorptive power of suburbia makes Toni’s cynical query predictable: “[w]hy does anything left-wing have to be trendy before it’s read, and by the time it’s trendy it’s already a force for conservatism?” (146). Christopher’s brisk conclusion that “there’s no point in trying to thrust false significances on to things” functions as evidence of his own absorption into this space (176). It is a pragmatism that also serves as an ethics. The sense of historical obligation that Christopher expresses in Part I of Barnes’s novel – “‘when we’re old and have . . . nephews and nieces, they’re going to ask us what we did in the Great Anger’” (41, ellipsis in orig.) – is notably absent in Part II. Instead, when asked, he is evasive about his presence in Paris in May 1968, aided by the fact that “increasingly . . . the year has little effect” (75). He confesses to the reader that although he “was there, all through May, through the burning of the Bourse, the occupation of the Odéon, the Billancourt lock-in, the rumours of tanks roaring back through the night from Germany” he “didn’t actually see anything” (76). His
hyperbolic rejection of his role as witness when he protests that he “can’t . . . remember even a smudge of smoke in the sky” draws this claim into question (76); even more damning is the existence of a letter in which he comments on the crisis. Christopher’s bracketing of his explanation – that the troubles occurred because “the students were too stupid to understand their courses, became mentally frustrated, and because of the lack of sports facilities had taken to fighting the riot police” (76) – with the phrase “it seems” (76) enables him to distance himself from his flippant interpretation of the troubles and ultimately from his unconscionable interpretation of the image of a student fleeing from the police. To Toni he writes, “[t]he student is turning sideways towards the camera. A touch of Lartigue about it. At least he got some exercise” (76); he acknowledges, however, that “[a]pparently, the student involved was drowned” (76). For Keith Wilson, “the disengaged marginality of his Paris experience . . . confirms what for his indignant friend Toni is an instinctive suburbanism” (161); yet, Wilson is not dismissive of Christopher because he also sees that “the formative tension between suburb and centre . . . informs Chris’s assessing and sardonic narrative voice” (162). Christopher from this perspective models a geographical hybridity (which anticipates that which Kureishi’s Karim has appeared to embody for critics such as James Procter), but his emphasis on semblance roots the politics of his gaze within suburbia and speaks to a conservatism that underlies the ostensibly liberal possibilities of his detachment.

Christopher’s rejection of the possibility that they were political as adolescents in part III of the novel is set forth in terms as hyperbolic as his rejection of the suggestion that he witnessed les événements. About politics he notes, “‘[w]e were totally passive about it as adolescents. Totally scornful and uninterested . . . It was art that counted wasn’t it?’” (Barnes, Metroland 145). His interpretation of this position is predicated on the opposition between us and them: he insists
“/w/e are the movers and shakers, don’t you remember that we emphasis?” (145, italics in orig.). In fact, Christopher’s own incorporation into suburbia suggests that the boundary is porous. Toni, the character who stands for the radical liberal point of view – a stance with not inconsiderable cachet– counters Christopher’s charge with an alternative extreme. For him they “were totally Tory” (145). “We had apathy and distaste,” he explains, “but they’re fundamental planks of the Tory platform” (145). Regardless of whether it is an effect of Christopher’s reading of him through an ostensibly conservative lens or not, it is clear that Toni fits comfortably within a culturally conservative vision of left politics. Although he sets himself in opposition to Christopher, the two in fact represent parallel political visions. Toni’s carefully cultivated appearance mirrors his style of political engagement, thus resonating with Christopher’s own incorporation into suburbia. While his “accent was the same,” Christopher observes, his “grammar and vocabulary had taken on a more demotic cast” (143).

Christopher’s turn to evocation rather than description – to generalization rather than particularity – in section III of his narrative – suggests that the ambivalent political position that he inhabits in the present emerges out of his conflation of the aesthetic with the political in the first section of the novel. His description of “the value of Kilburn” which he observes from the train on his daily journey in Section I of the novel anticipates his turn to this mode of seeing (Barnes, Metroland 60). He explains that its value “depended on not knowing particularities, because it changed to the eye and the brain according to yourself, your mood and the day” (61). While Holmes emphasizes Christopher’s statement that “Kilburn could suggest to you the pullulating mass of the working class, who any moment might swarm like termites up the viaduct and take the pinstripes apart” (Barnes, Metroland 60-1) in order to argue that Barnes’s protagonist “uses their [the working class’s] blighted living conditions as grist for his own private
aesthetic mill” (Holmes 55), Christopher himself asserts that “equally, it could be a comforting proof that so many people could live together quietly at close quarters” (Barnes, *Metroland* 61); it is “relevant, fulfilling, sensibility-sharpening” (61). His resolution of the interpretive dilemma that Kilburn poses – it is both poised on the verge of revolution and a symbol of happy complacency – very much echoes the reading of suburbia that Barnes’s novel itself supplies. The ambivalence which structures the novel, then, is a matter of perspective, one that is predicated upon the connections forged between past and present.

Christopher’s description of his adoption of a “reasonable-man cadence” in the conversation with Toni in which he rejects the value of the aesthetic outright implies that even in adopting an expected bourgeois identity he retains critical distance (Barnes, *Metroland* 145). When Toni asks, “‘why haven’t you done anything, you budding fat cat?’” (146), Christopher draws explicit attention to his purposeful concealment of his project of creating a social history of transport in London and, instead, replies with an affected and tongue-in-cheek response: “‘Oh, me, gee, shucks, I’m into life’” (146). Here, his mock-declaration strategically roots him in the bourgeois lifestyle that, as he acknowledges at the outset of Section III, constitutes life for him. The substitution that he makes is especially striking given how he swaps a covert admission of bourgeois subjectivity for a seemingly more overt one. His parenthetical modification of the reply that he gives Toni, however, enables him to deny the incorporation into suburbia that his parodic claim nonetheless implies. He queries, “[b]ut isn’t it true that I’m – not ‘into life’, I wouldn’t put it like that – I’m more serious?” (146). His prevarication seems to belie his erstwhile incorporation into suburbia. The twist here is that the ethics of stability that underlies his conservatism is one that he had rejected earlier. Christopher concludes, “[n]owadays I’m serious about different things; and I don’t fear my seriousness will collapse beneath me” (147). This
newfound acceptance is predicated on a rejection of the possibility of reconciling “life and art” (147). He suggests that his earlier faith in such reconciliation was more likely due to his habit of “attaching an inordinate, legitimating importance to unreflecting pleasure” (147). I want to suggest, however, that his attempt to articulate with precision the quality of his suburban sensibility undercuts rather than affirms serenity or complacency; that is, his awareness of the difference in what has constituted seriousness at discrete moments in his life ensures his wakefulness at the end of the novel. Instead of proffering Christopher’s sensibility as a possible basis for a desirable political or cultural mode, Barnes emphasizes how his awareness is deeply ambivalent and strikingly English. In fact, the mode of national consciousness that Christopher represents anticipates the fraught political position that Karim claims toward the end of Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* when he describes himself as a “walking stagnancy” (249).

The compensations of inhabiting the seemingly expansive but ultimately contracted space of suburbia appear to rest, for Christopher, in the “blue-green after-image[s]” left by the sodium lights (176). This reintroduction of colour into suburbia reveals that his awareness of the semblance that the convergence of past and present has produced is productive because it is mired in ambivalence. While Christopher’s own projected “social history of travel round London” is evidence of his acceptance of a bourgeois identity that views the socio-cultural life of the nation through the lens of nostalgia (153), the temporariness of the after image that he observes— it too, “in its quieter way, snaps off” (176) – implies that the very clarity of his gaze proscribes the space of political or cultural intervention.

Barnes’s attentiveness to the effects of periodization on England and Englishness came to the fore during his time as London correspondent for the New Yorker magazine in the early 1990s. In the preface to *Letters from London* (1994), he reveals his wariness of “zeitgeist
journalism” and “decade-summarizing” (xi). “Was there, in the first half of the Nineties, a
tiredness and repetition to public life, a sense of things unravelling?” he queries. To his response
— “[i]t seemed to be the case” — he adds, “if so, there are pleasures as well as despondencies to be
had” (xi). His depiction of Metroland anticipates the unravelling of the life of the nation that he
describes here, just as his depiction of Christopher’s habitation of suburbia captures the
oscillation between despondency and pleasure. This ambivalence, however, also persisted in his
explanation of the significance of the Eastern European setting of “The Porcupine.” Published
prior to England, England, Barnes’s novella appeared “almost pointedly to confound critics’
expectations” because it seemed “political, realist, and serious” (Childs 84). “The Porcupine”
obviously spoke to the contemporary political (and cultural) climate of Eastern Europe, a fact that
surprised reviewers who noted the close resemblance of the fictional trial of former leader Stoyo
Petkanov by prosecutor Peter Solinsky to the historical trial of Todor Zhivkov, a connection
prompted by Barnes himself in his decision to publish the novel first in Bulgaria. To a much
lesser extent, the novel was also perceived to register the political and cultural landscape closer to
home. A clue to Barnes’s apparent “change of subject matter,” can be found in the interview
William Leith conducted with Barnes shortly after the novel was published, Merritt Moseley
suggests (147). Barnes said, “[t]here’s no point in doing a little-England version of the
American novel – the Empire is long dead. What is London the centre of in the world?” (147).
His rejection of Britain as potential subject for his historico-political novel could be interpreted as
expressive of the prevailing public opinion in the early 1990s: “British politics ha[d] grown futile:
the electorate could not even manage to change the party in power, while in Eastern Europe
whole societies were moving from entrenched Marxism to something like western-style liberal
democracy, the market economy and civil freedoms” (148). “The Porcupine,” then, seemed to register the “tiredness and repetition” that Barnes described in *Letters from London*.

If “The Porcupine” implicitly registers the sense of ennui that had taken hold of Britain as some reviewers and even Barnes himself appeared to suggest, then *England, England* – the novel that Barnes had described alongside “The Porcupine” as the novel in which he “overtly treat[s] political matters” (Interview 74), represented a significant return for Barnes. Writing in 1994 in response to Blair’s rise to leadership of the Labour party, Barnes observes, “[y]ou would have to be cruel – or Conservative – not to wish him well: few countries benefit from extended periods of single-party rule” (“Left, Right” 342). Barnes’s objection is politic; he prefers Blair because he favours the vision of a dynamic nation over a static nation. His assessment of Thatcherism is nevertheless clear. In this respect, it is hardly surprising that *England, England* registers the disappointment of the hope of “something new” that appeared to be on the horizon and that seemed likely to overtake the Tories’ relentless perpetuation of Thatcherism in the next election (Barnes, “Introduction” xi). Rather than his implicit appeal to his reader, *England, England* serves as a corrective to the direction the contemporary nation seemed to be taking, a function he made clear by describing the novel as a “letter to my own country” in overt homage to the title of his collection of columns (Barnes qtd. in Guignery 105).

The first section of *England, England*, “England,” focuses on protagonist Martha’s childhood and early adulthood and relates her simultaneous acquisition of memory and Englishness. A jigsaw of the counties of England, possessed by Martha when she was a child, is the controlling metaphor of this section. When Martha is still a child, her father leaves her mother, accidentally taking a piece of her jigsaw puzzle with him. At the end of this section of the novel, when she reencounters her father and asks after the piece, he not only fails to
remember this detail of his departure but the game itself that they used to play in which he would hide a piece of her puzzle only to magically reproduce it later. This act of forgetting is, for Martha, an unforgivable dismissal of what she regards to be a “true memory” (Barnes, *England, England* 6). While Martha is still a prominent character in the second section of the novel, “England, England” focuses on business mogul Jack Pitman and his “‘one last great idea’” (33). Pitman hits on the idea of relocating the political and cultural essence of England to the Isle of Wight as part of a capitalist venture that will be supported by tourism; it is also ostensibly part of a philanthropic endeavour to provide England with the contemporary relevance that it lacks. The construction of *England, England* finds its parallel in the emergent relationship between Martha, hired by Pitman to be his “Appointed Cynic” and Paul, his “Ideas Catcher” (64). The disintegration of the relationship between Martha and Paul anticipates the failure of the *England, England* venture; if it fails, however, it fails in terms of its successes – in how it captures the imagination of its inhabitants who take on the roles they perform. The inhabitants in fact cease to refer to the nation as England, England and call it “The Island” instead, a name that surprisingly reveals this populist nation to be an iteration of the Isle of Wight’s pre-*England, England* identity: “the island” (202). By the end of this section, the project is under Pitman’s control and Martha and Paul’s relationship has disintegrated. The third and final section of *England, England*, which focuses again on Martha, describes her subsequent emigration to Anglia – formerly “Old England” (251).

Though critics have tended to focus on “England, England” as the section in which Barnes most overtly proclaims his interest in diagnosing the national malaise, cultural crisis, which is an effect of economic and political crisis, underlies the novel in its entirety. The encroachment of this pathological mode of national consciousness, Barnes’s novel shows, is not
only a logical extension of the post-war ethos of a nation defined by its lost imperial past – the narrative of crisis to which *Metroland* responds – but is also a result of the remedies meant to counter this decline. Pitman’s venture is the most obvious example of how the narrative of loss encoded within Thatcherism’s heritage narrative has come to take the form of a self-perpetuating narrative.

Pitman’s image consultant, Jerry, introduces the cosmopolitan version of nationhood that Pitman will use to counter the view held by “‘classic historical depressives . . . who think it’s our job, our particular geopolitical function, to act as an emblem of decline, a moral and economic scarecrow’” (Barnes, *England, England* 39). Renewal, he explains to Pitman, will entail the construction of a version of the past cultural imaginary that has global rather than parochial appeal: “‘[w]e must sell our past to other nations as their future!’” (40), he cries. Pitman’s turn to the “finest tax-deductible minds” to bring this plan to fruition appears to indicate that he has taken up the turn to a cosmopolitan version of nationhood that Jerry proffers as a means of reformulating the nation (52), notably by rewriting the relationship between past and future. Nowhere is this clearer than in his appeal to a French intellectual, whom many critics have argued embodies cosmopolitanism through his very dress, to legitimate his endeavour. The intellectual exhorts, “‘[w]e must demand the replica, since the reality, the truth, the authenticity of the replica is the one we can possess, colonise, reorder, find jouissance in’” (55). Framed in this way, England, England becomes the quintessential vision of a postmodern England. As Bentley notes, however, Barnes’s insertion of this postmodern view into his work is ironic: “Baudrillard’s critique of postmodern culture is recycled as a celebration of the market economy” (492). It is also ironic because this turn to the cosmopolitan narrative in order to formulate a replication nation is unnecessary; in describing an exhibition entitled “Fake? The Art of Deception” housed
in the British Museum Barnes declared: “[t]he British are good at tradition” but “they’re also good at the invention of tradition” (Barnes, “Fake!” 27). Pitman’s turn to the French intellectual mimics how Christopher and Toni turn to the continent in order to supplement a deeply unsatisfying politics that for them is intimately related with the pragmatic aesthetics that characterizes English literary production. While Bentley suggests that rather than being a conclusive endorsement or castigating rejection of this stance, the portrayal of the French critic “remains ambiguous” (492), what is more important in the context of the work is Pitman’s choice to “‘offer[] the thing itself’” rather than a straightforward replica (Barnes, England, England 59).

Given how, in Barnes’s novel, “part-fictionalized and emplotted narratives of the self and of the nation” are presented as being “inseparable indices in the formation of identity” (Bentley 490), it is unsurprising that the terminology that Pitman uses to describe his intent evokes the distinction between “a memory” and “memory” that emerges at the outset of the novel (Barnes, England, England 3). With Martha as focalizer, the narrator clarifies that “a memory was by definition not a thing, it was . . . a memory. A memory now of a memory a bit earlier of a memory before that of a memory way back when” (3, ellipses in orig.). Against this definition of a memory, the narrator sets another: that of an “innocent, authentic thing – yes, thing” that is called “a memory” that persists despite the individual’s recognition of “the impurity and corruption of the memory system” (7). Pitman’s England, England, then – based on his desire to construct the “thing itself” (59) – emerges through his recognition of the “impurity” of memory but equally through his insistence (7), nonetheless, on an authentic original version of nationhood. It is in effect a version of the English postmodern. Colin Hutchinson has argued that this is in part an effect of how “his professed patriotism is of a type which, like that of Reagan and Thatcher, has broken with notions of collective responsibility and provision and serves merely as
a selling point in a globalized market place” (122). For Pitman, he explains, “[t]he idea that nothing is natural or authentic . . . should not impede enjoyment or appreciation, because eventually the simulacrum of a thing ‘becomes the thing itself’ [61]” (Hutchinson 122). Barnes’s addition of the definite article the to Pitman’s phrase – it is ‘the thing’ to do – also betrays a self-conscious nod to the malleability of Pitman’s intent. This version of the future is based on the desirable version of post-imperial nationhood it appears to represent, especially against the backdrop of Old England, and ultimately Anglia.

Martha’s return to ‘Anglia,’ an agrarian version of the old England in which its inhabitants desperately seek to recover tradition, was largely felt to weaken substantially the overall effect of Barnes’s Booker-nominated novel. Andrew Marr memorably remarked that by the end of England, England, “satire had curdled into self-pity” (“England, England”). The interpretive conundrum that Anglia posed to critics and reviewers seemed to be generated by their readings of this space as an attempted solution to the problem Barnes poses through his depiction of ‘England, England’ in section II of the novel. For Arthur Aughey, both spaces revealed that Barnes, like other writers of his time, “take[s] pleasure in an anxiety that feeds English self-contempt” (95). While the choice Barnes seemed to offer contemporary England “between the vacuity of national heritage and the vacuity of backwardness” (95) was not an accurate reflection of “English possibilities,” according to Aughey, he argued that the novel itself was “an accurate reading of a self-indulgent English melancholy” (95). Aughey’s argument directs attention to how Barnes’s novel registers the contemporary national imaginary, but surprisingly overlooks how Barnes’s depiction of the splitting of England – and his advancement of ostensibly contending versions of nationhood – in fact takes the political possibilities of Englishness to their
logical extremes. Aughey’s promising argument thus becomes disappointingly consistent with the critical consensus.

Critics who contemplate the political implications of Barnes’s novel focus on the obvious Thatcherite overtones of entrepreneur Pitman and the heritage venture that England, England represents. For Bentley, Barnes’s depiction is tongue-in-cheek. Jack Pitman is a “parody of a Thatcherite entrepreneur” (489). England, England itself is also a Conservative nation. Though the legitimate political government gives way to corporate oligarchy when the nation is under the control of Martha and Paul and ultimately autocracy when Pitman regains control, the Conservatism of the public life of the nation is heralded by the relocation of the conservative daily and by extension the bastion of Englishness, The Times. In fact, the latter’s depiction of Old England as a nation that “had progressively shed power, territory, wealth, influence and population” – comes to form the basis for England, England’s own sense of identity. Ryan Trimm argues that in England, England “it is precisely the modernizing impulse in the form of enterprise that at once authorizes the construction of heritage and constructs this heritage as a break” (7). This move on Barnes’s part provocatively indicates the capitalist narrative underpinning this version of an Englishness that masquerades as essential –the nation comes to be the condensed essence of Englishness by virtue of the need that it fills. This fact is reinforced by the predication of the emergence of the ideal nation on the existence of a mirror image of nationhood that is marked by decline.

The success of England, England is based on its awareness that its appeal need only be temporary – it is a vision of nationhood directed at “‘Visitors’” rather than citizens (Barnes, England, England 120); its success is also predicated on appearing to represent duration even as it focuses on present experience. In the context of Barnes’s novel these dual aims converge in the
The language of the project obviously evokes the “mirrors set in parallel” that comprise “a memory” for Martha (6). This singular concept, which carries within itself its own plurality, produces a nation whose relation to the past redefines heritage even as it reinforces commonsensical perceptions of it. According to Andrew Higson, heritage “‘offers apparently more settled and visually splendid manifestations of an essentially pastoral national identity and authentic culture: ‘Englishness’ as an ancient and natural inheritance, Great Britain, The United Kingdom’” (Higson qtd. in Trimm 3).


In fact, if heritage is predicated on the “elision between a given object . . . and a larger entity . . . whose values are purported to reside within this icon” (Trimm 2), then the island itself functions as an object of heritage that is embedded within the historic nation. That the original title – the island – comes to be the title preferred by the current inhabitants in the third part of the second section of Barnes’s novel, with very little alteration (Island is now capitalized) implies continuity. The “idea of crisis” that Pitman’s assistant Mark strategically introduces in his
negotiations with the Isle of Wight further calls the wider sense of crisis (Barnes, *England*, *England* 126), to which the very venture England, England implicitly responds, into question. Even though no crisis exists, “no legislator . . . could be seen denying that there was a crisis if someone said there was one. It looked like idleness or incompetence” (126-7); consequently, “now, officially, on the island, there was a crisis” (127). The evidence that Mark evokes to support his proposition in this respect is significant. “In the modern world,” he explains, the possibility of “stability and longterm economic prosperity” is offered by the management of the nation by a “transnational corporation” rather than “by the old style-nation state” (128). To prove his point, according to Mark, “[y]ou only had to look at the difference between Pitco and the mainland” and ask “which was expanding, and which contracting?” (128). Rather than suggesting that the answer is a foregone conclusion, despite the rhetorical form that the question Mark poses takes, Barnes suggests that another answer is equally likely: Pitman’s construction of England, England occurs through processes of contraction and condensation that parallel the processes that ostensibly signal the “old style-nation state[‘s]” decline (128).

Nevertheless, in comparison to England, England, Anglia seems to be a preferable articulation of the postmodern. Trimm, for example, comes to this conclusion based on his sense that while “the English rump of Albion” also “trade[s] on heritage” there is a “difference” in terms of the “way those heritages are conceived” (7). Similarly, Head argues that rather than representing a turn away from postmodernism, as early critics and reviewers suggested, Anglia in fact proudly proclaims the fact that it is a “parody” of England’s “pre-industrial self” (18). Because it foregrounds its “artificiality” (Head 18), it offers a viable model of nationhood. What both readings have in common is a sense that Anglia in fact comes to follow very closely the model of nationhood that Parekh outlined in his report undertaken for the Commission on the
Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain. This becomes clear especially in Trimm’s reading of the work. He explains that “these self-consciously invented traditions are very much open and subject to intervention and extension at precisely the same moment they are presented as a weighty and monumental heritage to visitors” (Trimm 7). While Holmes offers another choice based on his acceptance of Head’s argument that Anglia does “offer its inhabitants some positive qualities . . . and is certainly preferable to the shrunken, corporate version of England built by Sir Jack Pitman on the Isle of Wight,” his outright dismissal of Anglia as a “bogus society whose manufactured ‘traditions’ reflect real ignorance of real English history” (24), is too pat. Rather than representing a preferable though perhaps still flawed alternative to England, England, Anglia, Barnes intimates, represents a political alternative that is in fact not really an alternative at all. The parallels that Barnes forges between the nations in fact reveal both formulations of nationhood to be political (and cultural) expediencies that announce themselves as political and cultural inevitabilities. The associational logic that underlies the parodic nation in fact reproduces rather than rewrites the mechanisms by which culture is inscribed in the fantasy of the continuous historic nation central to the legislative present. Barnes equally cautions against the temptation of turning to the correlative of the civic nation – the people – in order to recast Englishness because of the central role they play in fantasies of the nation in both scenarios.

The first period in the history of Anglia “began with the establishment of the Island Project” and “lasted for as long as Old England . . . had attempted to compete with England, England” (Barnes, England, England 251), the narrator explains. Characterized by hyperbolic expatriation and reverse reverse colonization, this period entails the fulfillment of the obligation for England to function as a symbol of decline felt by “‘historical depressives’” and the global community alike (39); it also notably returns Britain to a pre-immigration space. The predictable
political response to the socio-cultural crisis heightened by the creation of England, England is the election of “a Government of Renewal” that is perhaps unsurprisingly evocative of Blair’s New Labour government (252). In a move that in the context of the time of publication perhaps amounts to wish fulfillment on Barnes’s part, the nation apparently transcends this alternative, but this transcendence appears in the form of a “throw-back” (Marr, History 403) – Anglia. Despite functioning as an ostensible break from expected discourses of renewal, this version of the nation is nonetheless based on a communitarianism that in some respects reads, like Blairism, as “a direct riposte” to the “Thatcherian negative” (Barnes, “Left, Right” 338), namely her claim that “there is no such thing as society” (Thatcher qtd. in Nunn 126).

England, England and Anglia, from this perspective, stand for the contending nationalisms that are caused by devolution and the end of empire, and which in turn produce, in Aughey’s terms, the end of the “the legend of civic patriotism” that once accommodated (100), if not reconciled them. While England, England represents a “conservative version of the English ‘particular’ that, celebrates – if not unreservedly – a more populist idea of England,” Anglia comes to stand as the logical conclusion of a “left/liberal version of the English ‘particular’ that ostensibly celebrates a civic, liberal, multi-ethnic idea of Englishness” but in actuality comes to mirror the version of nationhood offered by a conservative populism (100). The ostensible return of the nation to the will of the people entails a rejection of “what had traditionally been understood as Renewal” (Barnes, England, England 252). The emergent nation, Anglia, is defined by a parochial cultural and political isolationism despite its apparent accord with the version of nationhood advocated by liberal critics like Parekh. What is clear is that a curious side effect of ‘crisis’ is the construction of resolutely middle-class nations in both cases.
Martha’s uncertainty when it comes to the issue of whether or not “Anglia could reverse its course and its habits” is predicated on the issue of character that she confronts earlier in the novel (Barnes, *England, England* 257). In part one she queries, “[h]ow could you build your own character?” (14). Her suggestion that the construction of the nation is an effect of “mere willed antiquarianism” implies Anglia’s adoption of an affected relation to the past (257); that this explanation is offered by *The Times*, which has become the official voice of England, *England*, however, calls this explanation into question. The alternative possibility that Martha entertains, that this “trait” might have “been part of its nature, its history, anyway” (257), offers an alternative conception of the nation’s character that accords with Patrick Parrinder’s argument, against the prevailing view, that “national character” is in fact “perpetually open to change” (21). The fear of loss” and the “unconcealed idealization and nostalgia” that have traditionally been associated with national character (21), then, are not effects of the idea of ‘national character’ itself but occur in “accounts of an achieved and settled national character” (21). That Anglia, like the Island comes to “achieve[] its own dynamic” (Barnes, *England, England* 194), intimates that spaces like Old England and the island are likely to evoke the fear of loss that Parrinder describes. At the same time, however, their Englishness rests in the unsettled formulation of national identity they come to represent. Rather than an insistence on national identity – associated with the rise of the twentieth century – Barnes’s novel reflects how the legislative present is based on character. Martha’s attempt to discern a cultural explanation for the contemporary state of the nation immediately precedes a set of parallel questions that map the nation through its political contours: “Was it a brave new venture, one of spiritual renewal and moral self-sufficiency, as political leaders maintained? Or was it simply inevitable, a forced response to economic collapse, depopulation and European revenge?” (257). The parallelism unexpectedly combines the
centrality of the past to the ‘nation’s character’ with the political and cultural inevitability of the narrative of decline.

Martha’s status as other in the third section of the novel – she holds the status of a “permitted immigrant” based on the fact that she holds an “Old English passport” and “secretly paid taxes” (250) – shows Anglia to be continuous with the historic nation. Her repatriation is regarded as a return by the customs officer. He greets her “as if she were a long-lost daughter” (250). Though Anglia proffers itself as a newly-formed nation, Martha’s right to Englishness is upheld by her ability to prove that she has continued to participate in the political rather than cultural nation. The grounds on which her return is made possible are obviously evocative of the provisions of the 1948 Nationality Act, a piece of legislation which is widely taken to have “conferred on colonial subjects rights of entry and settlement that did not previously exist” (Carter 23). Bob Carter, Clive Harris and Shirley Joshi have persuasively argued that, although the Nationality Act appeared to “facilitate the free movement of labour from the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent to meet Britain’s ‘labour shortage,’” it was in fact a thinly veiled attempt to “restructure in Britain’s interests the empire as an economic and political force” (Carter 23). Martha is greeted as a daughter – a relationship symbolic of her organic inheritance of Anglian-ness. Her legal status – which affirms that she is extrinsic to the revived historic nation that Anglia ostensibly represents – appears to come into conflict with her gradual absorption into the mid-Wessex village after she is “accepted . . . as a resident” (254). She recognizes that she “eventually . . . fitted into the village, because she herself no longer itched with her own private questions” (257); her citizenship in this regard is strikingly similar to the version of community that Blair articulates through his vision of the multicultural nation.
Martha’s sentimental relation to Anglia when she first arrives is to some extent consistent with her role in the novel. Though much has been made of the jigsaw which forms the basis of what slowly becomes her first memory, because it signals her awareness that England is quite literally a construct, it is also significant that in contrast to suburban characters Jack Pitman and her lover Paul she is considered to be a “country girl” (Barnes, *England, England* 136). Her sentimental response to the community which presumably is a semblance of the village of her youth is disrupted by Ray Stout’s anticipation of her interpretation of the community. “‘I suppose you find our little community rather amusing’” he says (256-7, italics in orig.); her disenchmtment is equally unsettled by his provocation on another occasion: “‘Missing the bright lights by now, I dare say?’” (257). The inhibition of Martha’s sentimental response to Anglia means that she instead comes to experience a “nostalgia of a truer kind” which is for what “you could never have known” rather than “for what you knew, or thought you had known, as a child” (260). This mode of nostalgia, which is elicited by Anglia, however, is the very mode of nationhood that is offered on the Island. What the Island’s version of nationalism elides, according to the *Times*, is largely “sentiment[]” (202). Instead, it offers “a bright and modern patriotism” that is instead “here” and “now” and “magic” (202). The Island in effect offers a mode of national consciousness that is predicated on the present to the exclusion of past and future and is intimately connected with the critical nostalgia that Martha describes in the last portion of the novel.

The “children’s faces” exhibit for Martha, their belief in “Queen Victoria and Ray Stout at the same time” (Barnes, *England, England* 264). The children thus serve as models of “the willing yet complex trust in reality” that represents a break from the parodic mode of national identity that defines even Anglia and risks a moment of authenticity (264). It exemplifies, Head
explains, “a form of duality in inhabiting the present: the capacity to make conscious use of the past in embracing the present” (19). This formulation, which is taken by Head among other critics to be a desirable form of national consciousness, is for Bentley, in part an effect of crisis.

Bentley agrees with Head that Barnes’s novel is not about “the content of Englishness” but about “how it is put together” (Head 19). What Martha comes to discover in the final portion of Barnes’s novel is that “if we desire to recover a lost past . . . . it is in fact not the original or authentic reality that we desire (because there is no original), rather, it is the artificial construction of these objects and signs that we want to reclaim” (Bentley 494). What is crucial here is that the desire for a “simpler, if naive version of Englishness, without the complexities of postmodern experience” (Bentley 495), for which Anglia appears to stand, is in fact evidence of “a contemporary cultural crisis in the meaning of Englishness” (495). Though Bentley does not explicitly trace how this desire is “filtered through a postmodern sensibility into a kind of knowing nostalgia” (495), Barnes’s emphasis on Martha’s gaze identifies her as the character who exemplifies this way of seeing: “the nostalgia is recognized for what it is, yet it still has the power to evoke longing for a lost Englishness whilst at the same time registering a suspicion towards the grand narrative on which that very nostalgia rests” (495). Barnes’s reworking of postmodernism’s incredulity towards grand narratives creates this necessary complexity. The children’s suspension of disbelief is coterminal with their recognition “that Queen Victoria was no more than Ray Stout” (Barnes, *England, England* 264).

The questions that Martha poses go beyond a lament for an Englishness that she recognizes is impossible to retrieve. Instead, her queries – “Could you reinvent innocence? Or was it always constructed, grafted onto the old disbelief? Were the children’s faces proof of this renewable innocence – or was that just sentimentality?” (Barnes, *England, England* 264) – are
directed toward whether or not a viable organic mode of national identity that is not “psoriatic” is possible (257). Martha’s recognition of the possibility that her desires are traceable to her sentimentality suggests that the formulation of national consciousness that the children represent reproduces the fashioning of historical Englishness itself; Martha’s perception recognizes that this desire for “renewable innocence” is in danger of becoming a prosthesis (264) – much like Anglia becomes both in terms of the role it fills for England, England but also for the appeal that it holds even for confirmed sceptics like herself.

Like *Metroland, England, England* does not simply register the effect of the intensification of the rhetoric of decline that has taken hold of the post-war cultural imaginary but also senses a crisis that has to do with how this narrative of decline shapes the legislative present. The issue that Barnes takes up in his depictions of England, England and Anglia is in fact the same one that Pheng Cheah confronts in *Spectral Nationality* when he asks whether or not the nation remains a viable cultural and political formulation when “nationalism has almost become the exemplary figure for death” (1). The context for Cheah’s interrogation is decolonization: emergent and revolutionary nationalisms contest diagnoses of the “nation-form’s imminent obsolescence” (1) that are provoked by globalization and espoused by proponents of cosmopolitanism. For him, the prioritization of organic models of nationhood in decolonizing discourses conjure up eighteenth and nineteenth-century German philosophies of the nation. The “concrete goals of political and economic freedom” and the “repeated representation of the people and their revolutionary culture” that are “features of decolonizing nationalist discourse” (2), he suggests, are compatible with a German philosophical idealism that holds freedom to be associated with “the causality of culture and organic life” (2). In this philosophical view, both culture and the organic nation emerge to counter the “dismemberment” of the “nation’s social
character” that the onset of modernity heralds. Both “philosophemes” Cheah explains “refer to processes of human cultivation” that are causal in how they organize a dynamic and “self-determining” and moreover self-recursive whole that is directed toward the ideal of freedom.

What this suggests, he argues, is that “rather than trying to “exorcise postcolonial nationalism” a more urgent endeavour involves interrogating the “actualization of freedom itself” that becomes possible through its articulation: the question at stake is “culture’s transformational capacity” (8).

Instead of predictably arguing that recourse to the cultural enables the revitalization of the nation, Cheah recognizes that the possibility for culture to exercise its “political vocation” and “articulate society into an organic community” is proscribed. “With the unfolding of its true nature as commodity” (236), Cheah argues, “culture loses its organicizing powers” (236) and becomes a “technique of domination” (236). Barnes too conveys his sense that such possibilities are proscribed when he interrogates what forms of nationhood are viable in a contemporary context. England, England, in Barnes’s novel, stands as the most obvious and extreme example of the commodified nation Cheah describes. Cultural quintessences of Englishness form a literal and pedagogical script for its inhabitants – mostly actors who play the role of iconic Englishmen and women. Robin Hood and his band’s performative deviations from these scripts suggest the emergence of an organic nation within this space. Martha’s wry statement that she will have to tell Dr Max – the Project’s historian – “about the behavior of pastoral communities in the modern world” underscores this reading (Barnes, England, England 224). The incorporation of the actor’s performative adaptations back into the script of England, England through the staging of a “cross-epoch extravaganza” which absorbs revolution seems to suggest that (227), in its modern context, an organic model of Englishness degenerates the moment it is posed.
What he, like Cheah, is interested in is the question of whether or not it is possible to reverse the “degeneration” of culture he describes (236). Cheah’s answer is a qualified yes. The haunted nation replaces the organic nation as a viable ideal because of its “susceptibility to a kind of death that cannot be unequivocally delimited and transcended” (383). Jacques Derrida’s spectre, he argues enacts the mode of haunting he envisions which is self-recursive. Spectrality, he argues with Derrida, is “the original opening up of any present being by or to alterity” and becomes “the condition of possibility of the incarnation of human ideals in external reality” (388).

While the contours of postcolonial nationalism that Cheah describes do not come to bear in a straightforward way on the devolutionary and post-imperial nationalism of the English nation, his framing of the possibility of revival in terms of the relation between culture and politics begins to get at the vicissitudes of contemporary Englishness. His warning against unquestioningly attributing political possibility to the “incarnational power of culture” is especially relevant to how Thatcher’s construction of symbolic blocs interrupt the division between the cultural and the political, the people and the state, that this solution suggests and which Barnes takes up in England, England (8). The Island and Anglia become the sites where Barnes interrogates the extent to which it is possible to revive a non-pathological mode of national consciousness, to arrive at the point where the people recognize that “political activity is a case of and finds its truth in culture” (Cheah 7). Anglia, more so than the Island, offers itself up as one such model based on how the people’s abandonment of “the long agreed goals of the nation – economic growth, political influence, military capacity and moral superiority” (253) forms the basis for its cultural alteration.
Barnes interrupts the temptation to read his portrayal of Anglia as modeling a self-recursive mode of national consciousness by revealing that “patriotic culture” in this context, as for Cheah, becomes “a form of self-recursive mediation” instead of “confrontation”; it is “an organic prosthesis of the living national body that aims to resurrect the national spirit through the formation of a critical public sphere that continually presses against the state in order to inspirit it and transfigure the degraded present” (11). In fact, Barnes anticipates the critique he sets forth in England, England in *Metroland*, through his depiction of Christopher who pointedly recognizes how semblance becomes a prosthesis – a mode of knowing – that promises to reinvigorate a “degraded” present that is resolutely post-war and post-imperial; what Barnes shows, however, is that the “self-recursive meditation” that Christopher exemplifies in fact derives from (if it is not dependent on) his very inhabitation of suburbia. Similarly, in *England, England*, the “critical public sphere[s]” (Cheah 11) that come into being in Anglia and England, England do so because of how the populist versions of national identity challenge easy distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ This mode of national consciousness is not incompatible with Cheah’s argument; indeed, the “knowing nostalgia” that Bentley finds in *England, England* comes close to Cheah’s conception of the haunted and self-recursive nation (495), although Bentley overlooks the political in his description of what for him comes to constitute the prevailing cultural mode. The populist versions of civic and cultural citizenship that take root on the Island and also in Anglia, Barnes takes care to emphasize, derive from England, England and Old England respectively. The lineage of these modes of national identity suggests that at the heart of both populist and civic formulations of the contemporary nation is a desire for renewal that is reiterative. These formulations of the nation are derivatives as Cheah suggests; far from being protheses which are self-recursive, which comes close to enabling the return of the organic nation, the patriotic
cultures that emerge on the Island and in Anglia are relentless repetitions that though directed toward renewal emerge as morbid formulations that contribute to an overarching melancholia.

The movement from the island to the Island that occurs within the space of England, England is a vision of the future that is as likely as the transformation of Old England to Anglia. That Martha’s interrogation of the possibility of renewable innocence remains unresolved at the end of *England, England* intimates that the issue of viability – both of a contemporary formulation of England and of the nation more generally – remains fraught. Even the ostensibly organic symbols of cultural nationhood that develop in each context are both haunted by and emblematic of the political conditions that induce them into being. Recourse to culture is not the means of intervening in a prevailing melancholia, but neither is simple recourse to the political as Cheah suggests. What his argument sheds light on is the intervening stage – the failure of cultural incarnation – whereby English morbidities give way to an obsessive and pathological, post-imperial Englishness. Gilroy, who, like Cheah, finds possibility in the populist nation, directly confronts the risk revenants run of reaffirming rather than interrupting the morbidities of Englishness. What troubles both Barnes and Cheah is how to make spectral return politically and culturally meaningful. This difficulty finds expression in *Arthur & George* where Barnes shows how the process of opening oneself up to “alterity” that spectrality engenders and which is the form that decolonizing nationalisms assume, goes awry in a post-imperial one.

Although continuous with his attentive tracing of the relations between the political and the cultural that populist and civic repertoires of Englishness demonstrate, *Arthur & George* embodies a radical shift in Barnes’s ongoing concern with “patriotic culture” (Cheah 11). It contains, instead, a forthright –and timely – confrontation of the “debate between Englishness and
multiculturalism” which, according to one critic, “reveals itself” only “through absence” in England, England (Bentley 485).

Barnes’s 2005 novel is based on events which took place in the South Staffordshire parish of Great Wyrley at the turn of the century. Distinguished from other parishes by the “ethnic origins of the vicar Shapurji Edalji” – a “Parsee-convert to Christianity” – racial prejudice was “undoubtedly a contributory factor in the conflict that raged in the parish over the three decades after” George’s father “took up the living at St Mark’s Parish Church in 1876” (Weaver 17). “The tribulations suffered by and causing so much anxiety to Reverend Edalji and his family” during these years, Gordon Weaver observes, “were eventually overshadowed,” however, “by the consequences of a cattle maiming scourge inflicted on the parish in 1903 that catapulted the Edalji family into national prominence” (17). As with “other agricultural areas,” Great Wyrley had “suffered from outbreaks of cattle maiming as a form of social protest, which usually represented expressions of group disputes or individual grievances” before (17); “the failure of the police to detect the maimer” in this case “caused widespread alarm amongst the residents” and produced an “environment described by one reporter as akin to a ‘reign of terror’” (18). A campaign launched against George Edalji, the vicar’s son, traceable to the intervention of a Justice of the Peace who identified him as a suspect, as well as a series of anonymous letters sent to the police denouncing Edalji, culminated in his arrest and eventual trial “at Stafford Quarter Sessions in October 1903” where he was “sentenced to seven years penal servitude” (19). His case, which had “attracted the attention of the national press” (19), led to a campaign to clear his name. “As there was no criminal court of appeal at the time, representations for a review of the case had to be made to the Home Office, which for a variety of reasons associated with the bureaucratic ethos of ‘closing ranks,’” rejected several of George Edalji’s petitions for a free
pardon” although “after three years and some misgivings by the Home Secretary over the severity of the sentence, Edalji was released under license” (19-20). His “release inspired the existing national campaign seeking redress for him and, significantly, added the name of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to the list of many prominent people already involved in the campaign” until “eventually, a reluctant and grudgingly qualified pardon was granted to Edalji but without any compensation for his three years imprisonment and loss of reputation and earnings” (20).

Barnes constructs parallel narratives recounting the lives of George Edalji and Arthur Conan Doyle from childhood in order to reveal the mutual imbrication of constructions of official and unofficial Englishness. His account of George closely follows the historical case. George’s childhood is marked by the persecution that his family experiences in the parish of Great Wyrley which his Parsee father – a Vicar of the Church of England – has inherited from his Scottish mother’s uncle. Though the disruptions to their daily life eventually cease, anonymous sources which implicate George in a series of livestock mutilations find enthusiastic support among the local constabulary and George is ultimately tried and convicted of these crimes. In the alternating chapters which take up Doyle’s story, Barnes draws on Doyle’s memoir, Memories and Adventures, to relate his boyhood and the trajectory which would make him the iconic creator of Sherlock Holmes. Focusing on Arthur’s gradual movement toward spiritism, Barnes draws parallels between George and Arthur based in part on their inability to understand metaphor. This shared trait implies that textual exegesis becomes a driving force behind both characters: George takes up the law and Arthur becomes increasingly involved in the spiritist movement, fascinated by the signs of return. Upon his release, George seeks to clear his name and calls upon the help of Doyle who enthusiastically champions his case. The parallel, alternating narratives converge when Doyle attempts to solve the Wyrley maimings and identify the source of the anonymous
letters in order to exonerate George. In doing so, he confronts the racial prejudices of George’s home parish but also exposes his own. The Home Office assesses George’s case, but the results of his appeal are unsatisfactory. George is granted a free pardon but the Home Office insists that the time already served was justified. In the final section of the novel, after a period of some years, George learns of Arthur’s death and meditates on how Arthur represented his case in his memoirs. While in attendance at a spiritist meeting held in Arthur’s memory, George further considers the extent to which Arthur’s brand of unofficial Englishness, which is closely tied to both his spiritism and his zeal for narrative invention, was responsible for his own sense of Englishness.

Barnes’s second ‘England’ novel is, in one sense, a predictable counter to the heritage narratives to which *England, England* responds, as even the marketing of *Arthur & George* made clear (Kemp). It was “[h]andsomely got up to resemble a volume from an Edwardian bookcase, with its dark mustard cloth binding embossed with what look[ed] like an illustration from Punch” (Kemp). The aesthetic affinities the novel shared with Edwardian fiction extended to the subject matter of the novel itself. Both together suggested that Barnes was out to rewrite the national narrative while acknowledging his novel’s implication in the very version of imperial nationhood it seeks to confront. In fact, the significance of the historical period he chose has not gone unnoticed by critics. Head draws on Krishan Kumar’s “contentious” argument that English cultural identity emerged in the 1890s to argue that Barnes’s depiction of the Edalji case represents a strategic interrogation of Englishness that extends the process begun in *England, England*: Great Wyrley, George’s home parish and the site of his persecution, is at “‘[t]he centre of England’” and “‘England is the beating heart of the Empire’” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 20). The recognition that Empire is central to the formulation of cultural Englishness means that
Barnes’s novel at least appears to have the potential to intervene in the morbid historical narrative that underlies “postimperial melancholia” (Gilroy, *Postcolonial* 90).

For Gilroy, the “morbid fixation” afflicting Britain is exposed when the instability of the cultural which Thatcher had sought to address itself becomes the focal point of national consciousness (*Postcolonial* 12). The cure for this neurosis rests in confronting how an imperial narrative of nationhood, which is itself pathological, has come to structure the legislative life of the nation. Writing in 2005, the same year that *Arthur & George* was published, Gilroy charged that “a refusal to think about racism as something that structures the life of the postimperial polity is associated with what has become a morbid fixation with the fluctuating substance of national culture and identity” (*Postcolonial* 12). This melancholy and morbidity are traceable to the failure of Blair’s promise of the New to which *England, England* responds. Barnes’s imaginative recovery of the Edalji case in *Arthur & George* even more obviously confronts the failed public acknowledgement of the role race plays in Blair’s vision of the multicultural nation. While “[h]is case had led to the setting-up of the Court of Criminal Appeal, whose decisions over the last two decades had elaborated the common law of crime to an extent widely recognized as revolutionary” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 398), George himself draws the reader’s attention to the lack of awareness regarding his “association . . . with this event” (398).

Barnes insists that this lack of awareness can be attributed to the habitual, relentless, and repetitive nature of imperial conceptions of Englishness; in *Arthur & George* this becomes clear in his depiction of the catechism through which Shapurji Edalji, George’s father, leads George each morning. The author of the catechism and the authority who calls for George to locate himself within the “‘beating heart of the Empire’” is himself a mimic (English)man (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 20). The liminal sphere in which the catechism commences – “in the early
morning, when dawn is beginning to show at the edges of the curtains” (20) – reveals ambivalence to be at the heart of Shapurji’s enunciation. He is a “reformed, recognizable Other” who signifies “as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, “Of mimicry” 86). Barnes signals that, for Shapurji, the catechism – and more broadly the articulation of cultural belonging – is first and foremost a defensive articulation when he shows how the exchange between father and son follows from the physical manifestation of Shapurji’s anxieties regarding his own and his son’s ability to signify as English. The narrator, focalizing through George, observes that “Father is not an easy sleeper, and has a tendency to groan and wheeze” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 20). The exchange that he depicts, then, reveals the anxieties that underlie the construction and transference of culture. According to Bhabha, hybridity enables us “to see the cultural not as the source of conflict – different cultures – but as the effect of discriminatory practices – the production of cultural differentiation as signs of authority” (“Signs” 114). This comes out forcefully later in the novel when Arthur pointedly asks Captain Anson – one of George’s chief detractors – to defend his claim that George’s guilt is signalled by his mixed blood and whether his own “‘mixed Scottish and Irish’” blood (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 328) would render him similarly guilty. Through the question he poses to Anson – if it is George’s “‘Scottish’” or his “‘Parsee blood’” that Anson holds “‘responsible for [his] barbarism’” (328) – Arthur draws an equivalence that directly reveals cultural differentiation to be an “effect” as Bhabha suggests (114). Furthermore, when Anson points out Arthur’s slippage in defining George as “‘a professional Englishman one moment and a Parsee the next’” in his defense of him (323), Barnes draws attention to how cultural difference is a product of liberal as well as conservative maneuvers.
Shapurji’s evocation of his Parsee subjectivity when his family faces “crisis” – he begins to give George “short lectures on how the Parsees have always been much favoured by the British” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 53) – directly exposes his awareness of the limitations that prevent him from signifying as English; as an overt substitution which replaces his claim to Englishness, it also suggests equivalence. Although he acknowledges that George’s claim that he is an Englishman is “‘true enough’” (50), he explains that “‘the centre of England – despite all God’s creatures being equally blessed – is still a little primitive’” (50). By proffering Parsee rather than English subjectivity he replaces the object of colonial desire. This shows how “[c]ulture, as a colonial space of intervention and agonism . . . can be transformed by the unpredictable and partial desire of hybridity” (Bhabha, “Signs” 115). In the case of Arthur, the same work is accomplished when his declarations of his “‘unofficial’” Englishness belie his ability to fully achieve his object of desire (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 259): the claim to being fully English; simultaneously, however, the qualified Englishness that he claims insists on his near equivalence but also, and more interestingly, becomes evidence of a disavowal of full signification that in fact makes him more rather than less English.

One possible explanation for the critical currency that Bhabha’s notion of hybridity has gained is that it appears to hold the promise of enacting the denaturalizing process that for Gilroy would enable the nation to overcome a pathological mode of consciousness and being. George’s insistence on his Englishness, his rejection of his Parsee self, as well as his sharp perception that “his father’s stratagem” is “more desperate than helpful” counter the predictable version of hybridity that his father embodies (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 54). The “harden[ing]” of the “outline of the curtain” at the close of the catechism symbolically reflects George’s rejection of the ambivalence that simultaneously underlies and makes possible his father’s enunciation of
Englishness (20). Despite his obvious affinity with Bhabha’s hybrid subject on the basis of his parentage, Barnes’s depiction of George reflecting on the catechism reveals his subjectivity to be more akin to that of the colonizer who becomes aware of his own partiality through mimicry but “disavows it” (Bhabha, “Of mimicry” 91). In fact, Head is right to suggest that “by sketching the sinister ideological project of mapmaking Barnes presents an analysis that is standard in postcolonial criticism” (23). His argument that George’s “naivete invites us to re-envision his traditional image of England as . . . a bloated parasite” (23), however, fails to attend to the nuances of George’s reinscription of the organic model of nationhood that is at the centre of the catechism.

According to Shapurji, “‘England is the beating heart of the Empire’” and it is “‘[t]he Church of England’” that is “‘the blood that flows through the arteries and veins of the Empire to reach even its farthest shore’” (Barnes, Arthur & George 20). Here, Shapurji locates England within a larger organic model of British nationhood. Given Cheah’s argument that this organic metaphor – the metaphor of the body – reveals “political activity” to be “modeled on the incarnational power of culture” (8), the formulation of Englishness that he seeks to impart to his son not only signals Barnes’s confrontation of the discriminatory subtext of Englishness but also intimates the slippage whereby an organic model of nationhood in an English context bears the characteristics of an imperial one. It is surprising that Cheah’s argument finds relevance here. Despite his interest in decolonizing nationalism, his argument gets at what is happening to Empire in the throes of devolution. What Barnes shows is that hybridity functions as a kind of haunting, in Cheah’s terms, that promises reinvigoration of the nation by engendering an experience with alterity. For Bhabha, “the power of this strange metonymy of presence” which he finds in hybridity is “to so disturb the systematic (and systemic) construction of discriminatory
knowledges that the cultural, once recognized as the medium of authority, becomes virtually unrecognizable” (“Signs” 115). What Barnes shows through his depictions of Shapurji and George is that this mode of self-recursivity is not outside imperial and pedagogical narratives of Englishness that recognize difference only to disavow it.

In conceiving of the “red lines on the map of the world” that connect “Britain to all the places coloured pink” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 20), George does however reinscribe his father’s organic model of Empire by evoking the conventional cartography that appears in geographical atlases; this empirical conception of Englishness translates into a more exact though unacknowledged description of the difference at the heart of Empire. The transformation of the “red lines” into “places coloured pink” (20) renders visual the production of colonial subjects who are “*the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha, “Of mimicry” 381). His use of the word “British” rather than English also alters the terms of Empire. By picturing the mechanics of transmission—“tubes being laid along the bed of the ocean like telegraph cables” and “blood bubbling through these tubes and emerging in Sydney, Bombay, Cape Town” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 20)—George denaturalizes the organic model of Empire central to the catechism and constitutive of his father’s colonial mimicry at the same time that he retains it. George’s dormant awareness of his otherness emerges at the end of the catechism when the narrator focalizing through George observes, “[b]loodlines, that is a word he has heard somewhere” (20). George’s inability to define the context in which he has encountered the word speaks to the disavowal that Bhabha argues is at the heart of Englishness; it is a disavowal in which George himself is implicated, however. At the close of the catechism, “[w]ith the pulse of blood in his ears, he begins to fall asleep again” (20).
Rather than being indicative of George’s naivete, the contrast that Barnes establishes exposes how theories of hybridity uphold the myth of otherness. Gilroy’s argument that “the infrahuman political body of the immigrant rather than the body of the sovereign . . . comes to represent all the discomforting ambiguities of the empire’s painful and shameful but apparently nonetheless exhilarating history” has bearing here (Postcolonial 100). Shapurji most obviously offers to facilitate the process of displacement that, in turn, ensures the continuation if not intensification of a pathological mode of national consciousness. Against this straightforward displacement, Barnes depicts George as a character whose right to Englishness, despite being endorsed by even the proscribed civic definitions of English citizenship, is always culturally in question. In Arthur & George, the civic model of citizenship that George for example locates in a mode of belonging sanctioned by the law is fraught because it produces the cultural narrative that continually tests and seeks to rewrite it. Setting forth a tacit claim to cultural belonging is, Barnes insinuates, in some respects at least a more viable possibility. As Nünning notes, George’s “childhood at the Vicarage, his pragmatism and his emotional reticence, even his thinking, which is inspired by his admiration for the law suggest that his self-image as Englishman is not far off the mark” (222).

If George’s disavowal of the possibility that he is not English represents an important contrast to his father’s subjectivity, his reaction to Arthur’s description of their shared “unofficial” Englishness is intriguing (Barnes, Arthur & George 259): he is “taken aback” because, as the third person narrator explains, “he regards Sir Arthur as a very official Englishman indeed” (259). His surprise and wonder turn Arthur into an “other” who forces George to acknowledge and confront that which “though known must be kept concealed” (Bhabha, “Of mimicry” 89): he reflects not on Arthur’s categorization of himself but on how he
himself may be “less than a full Englishman” (259). Arthur, then, a man who “wrote himself almost as closely into the heart of the empire as Kipling” (Adams), comes to inhabit the role of the hybrid subject.

Arthur’s claim to Englishness reveals national identity to be a construct rather than innate: “Irish by ancestry, Scottish by birth, instructed in the faith of Rome by Dutch Jesuits, Arthur became English” (Barnes, Arthur & George 27). Arthur’s orientation of himself in relation to an original past narrative closely mirrors the formulation of national consciousness that Barnes interrogates in England, England; in laying claim to “unofficial” Englishness he orients himself in relation to an original Englishness that is defined by the promise of full presence (259), even though he acknowledges its irretrievability and its dependence on successive narrative inventions. Barnes’s depiction of Arthur and George, in some respects, appears to register what Parrinder has argued is a movement that takes place from “national character” to “national identity”; from being “an unconscious inheritance” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the dominant mode of national consciousness becomes “a matter of choice” in the twentieth (24). This movement is complicated, however, by the fact that the root of Englishness for Arthur is located within the “long-gone, long-remembered, and long-invented world of chivalry” (27). His claim to this national identity then results in a tension that has to do with how this subjectivity “presumes dominion” (Head 24). For Head, this does not prevent Arthur from exemplifying a civic mode of national consciousness. In fact, he has argued, this claim to identity closely mirrors the “children’s dual reaction” to Ray Stout in England, England. His “self-conscious adoption of an English code of chivalric intervention” thus “supplies a way of attacking the iniquities of Edwardian self identity” (25). Head concludes that Barnes’s depiction of Doyle indicates “one
way in which” the “newborn civic nationalism” that Edalji’s suppressed history seemed to call for “might be embodied” (26).

In the context of Parrinder’s argument, Arthur’s claim to “unofficial” Englishness traces the movement from a settled to an unsettled mode of national identity (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 259). It is unsurprising, then, that his application of the label “unofficial Englishman” to both himself and George reveals him to privilege cultural over civic Englishness (259). His reading of George is a product of his skill in heraldry, an art or science that is based on the determination of “pedigrees” and “questions of precedence.” Heraldry thus becomes the strategy of recognition and the means by which Arthur reads and places the other (“heraldry”).

What underpins his ostensible civic Englishness, then, is a sentimental version of national identity. His sense of duty to his nation overlaps with his sense of duty to the woman who would become his second wife, Jean. Jean’s “interest changed matters” because it “made him determined to succeed for George, for the sake of justice, for – to put it higher still – the honour of his country; but also for his darling girl” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 286). Arthur in fact reveals how character in *Arthur & George* is bound up with the civic life of the nation. While France is “a country of extremes, of violent opinion, violent principles and long memories” (399), England is a quieter place, just as principled, but less keen on making a fuss about its principles; a place where the common law was trusted more than government statute; where people got on with their own business and did not seek to interfere with that of others; where great public eruptions took place from time to time, eruptions of feeling which might even tip over into violence and injustice, but which soon faded in the memory, and were rarely built into the history of the country. (399)
The reconstitution of a populist national character then becomes the basis of civic reform, as a means of countering the logic which constitutes “the English way”: “This has happened, now let us forget about it and carry on as before” (399).

The possibility of reviving a populist version of national identity in order to alter civic Englishness has proved alluring to critics. Head, for example, ultimately argues that Barnes’s novel productively proffers character as a sound basis for the future civic nation. Barnes’s novel, he explains, takes up the spirit of Kumar’s argument that “[The English] cannot any more protect [England] from the need to inquire more closely into its character as a nation, what it stands for and what face it wishes to display to the world” (26). Head’s sense that “the historical point” of Barnes’s novel has to do with how “the Edalji case reveals the full implications for English identity of the obligations of Empire” is well taken (25), but with the proviso that this formulation of nationhood enters the public life of the nation as an innate and enduring, rather than merely historical, notion. This problem becomes clearer in Head’s contention that the necessity of confronting narrations of nation entails living up to obligations – to a vision of Englishness – rather than interrogating the very tenets that lead to these obligations. He explains, “[w]hen these obligations are ignored prejudice runs rife, producing an oppression that is internalized in those who are oppressed” (25).

Head’s misreading of Barnes’s novel dangerously props up what both liberal and conservative perspectives endorse as a universal model. The very “nonchalance” of the English “towards nationhood and nationalism,” Kumar explains, means that “English nationalism, that enigmatic and elusive thing, so long conspicuous by its absence, might show what a truly civic nationalism can look like” (26). Englishness thus lays claim to an exceptionalism that is, in fact, a rearticulation of the foundational narrative of imperial nationhood.
The inquiry into character that Head and Kumar demand is directed by Barnes toward the incorporation of “public eruptions” into the memory and indeed into the very history of the country. George’s perception of his maid as a “coarse and clumsy girl” changes with his apprehension of the law; he comes to view her presence as indicating a “contract of employment and a duty of care” (Barnes, Arthur & George 78). George’s understanding that the relationship between signified and signifier is proscribed – “at the end there is not that further leap to be made. At the end you have an agreement, a decision to be obeyed, an understanding of what something means” (78) – aligns George with a populist civic nationalism. George’s close association with railway law in particular, though drawn from the historical narrative from which Barnes borrows, supports his claim to cultural as well as civic Englishness. He pronounces himself “an authority upon an aspect of the law which is of practical help to many people” upon publication of his handbook on railway law (82). As with Christopher’s pragmatism in Metroland, George’s bears traces of a conservatism that underlies the very symbol of English modernity: the railway. Aligned with an ostensibly modern Englishness, George’s explanation of railway law preserves the stratification of passengers into classes, for example. Like “[t]he riot on the streets around the Shandaar Café” in Salman Rushdie’s Satanic Verses that demands “not that England disband itself, but that it be faithful to its own good idea” (Baucom 213), the altered vision that George gains does not challenge the civic values that uphold existing relations but rather the way in which this signifying system is obscured: the narrator describes the “complicated and delicate tying together” that is “backed by centuries of case law” but is nonetheless “unfamiliar to the parties concerned” (Barnes, Arthur & George 78).

The neat signifying relationship that the law lays bare for George, however, is challenged by his own experience when arrested and interrogated on the suspicion that he has participated in
maiming livestock in the district of Great Wyrley. This portion of the novel draws the issue of George’s innocence and the issue of memory – and hence his claim to Englishness – together. It is impossible to ignore from the outset of the novel that while Arthur possesses a first memory – if carefully crafted – George does not and further, feels no need to make up for this lack. Instead, he possesses what is “‘almost’” a first memory (Barnes, Arthur & George 126): “‘When I was four, I was taken to see a cow. It soiled itself’” (126). In response to the detective Campbell’s question “‘[a]nd that is your first memory, you say?’” (126), George answers in the affirmative: “‘Yes,’” he says (126). George loses control and hence agency in this moment. His unpredictable response signals his participation in a process of repetition that he acknowledges makes the facts of his case more plausible: “It was just a story, George knew, something made up from scraps and coincidences and hypotheses; he knew too that he was innocent; but something about the repetition of the story by an authority in wig and gown made it take on extra plausibility” (144). While his own lack of a first memory is reminiscent of Martha’s, he does not possess the agency to “make good the lack” (4). Instead, George’s simultaneous awareness of his innocence and of how repetition makes the story “take on extra plausibility” (144) very closely echoes the mode of apprehension that Martha assigns the children in England, England – “even when they disbelieved, they also believed” (Barnes, England, England 264). The court, which represents the voice of political authority, interprets George’s case not only for the public but for him as well and, in so doing, exposes the role of domestic mimicry in producing everyday legislated subjects.

Despite his claim that, like George, he is an “unofficial English[man]” (Barnes, Arthur & George 259), Arthur’s Englishness is safeguarded by the legitimacy impressed upon him within the public life of the nation. Upon meeting him, the narrator focalizing through George observes,
“[i]f Sir Arthur had not appeared to be part of official England, George would probably not have written to him in the first place” (259). Arthur’s insistence on the legitimacy of his self-labelling has meant that he has been interpreted by critics to be a character poised to engineer the reformulation of Englishness. His claim to unofficial Englishness is a strategic disavowal through which he is able ostensibly to separate himself from the legislators of Englishness even as he inhabits a space at its cultural centre.

For Arthur, the advances of science perform the same work of disrupting the surface image of the real that legal exegesis does for George: it makes “[t]he invisible and the impalpable, which lie just below the surface of the real, just beneath the skin of things” both “visible and palpable” (Barnes, Arthur & George 238). Given that the language Arthur evokes here owes an overt debt to psychoanalysis and the return of the repressed it is unsurprising that Arthur’s scientific approach to spiritism (Arthur’s preferred term for spiritualism) becomes emblematic of that which will enable cultural reformulation. Spiritism counters the “complacency with which people went on with . . . with what they insouciantly called their lives, as if both the word and the thing made perfect sense to them” (86, ellipses in orig.).

In other words, for Arthur, spiritism challenges the proscribed pragmatism at the heart of Englishness which is most pronounced in their cultural “attitude to the eternal” (Barnes, Arthur & George 231): “Wait and see, cross that bridge when they come to it” (231). This approach for Arthur is presumably attributable to the “double curse” visited on “every . . . nation and civilization that came under the rule of a priesthood” that he identifies early in the novel: “[f]aith endorsed by materialism” (87). Against this materialism, spiritism accomplishes the expansion of what constitutes the real and as such carries with it the possibility of reshaping the public life of the nation. When Anson seeks to check Arthur’s defence of George he appeals to the real world,
a phrase that elicits Arthur’s musings on “[h]ow easily everyone understood what was real and what was not” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 317):

The world in which a benighted young solicitor was sentenced to penal servitude in Portland . . . the world in which Holmes unravelled another mystery beyond the powers of Lestrade and his colleagues . . . or the world beyond, the world behind the closed door, through which Touie had effortlessly slipped. Some people believed in only one of these worlds, some in two, a few in all three. Why did people imagine that progress consisted in believing in less, rather than believing in more, in opening yourself to more of the universe? (317, ellipses in orig.)

Arthur’s inclusion of the narrative world of Holmes in the worlds he lists among the real clearly recognizes the extent to which the nation is discursively forged.

Arthur’s conception of spiritism is demotic. Although Arthur objects to Jean’s characterization of spiritists as “‗common‘” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 229), and desires to “say that it is the splendid lower-middle-class folk who have always been the spiritual peers of the nation,” he instead “says none of this” (229). While spiritism represents an alternative to pragmatism, for Arthur its appeal – like the appeal that textual exegesis holds for George – is based on the certainty that it proffers: “‘We need only prove it once and it is proved for everybody and for all time’” (233). Though it promises increased knowledge, spiritualism threatens to become a fixed ideal.

The terminology that he evokes elsewhere to express the same sentiment, “‘[o]ne case and the whole thing is proven’” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 235), has obvious bearing on how Arthur’s apprehension of spiritism overlaps with the expectation that George’s legal case will establish precedent (this is perhaps a clumsy comparison on Barnes’s part). Connie’s sense that the basis of Arthur’s spiritism is “connected, though quite how she cannot work out, with his love of chivalry and romance and the belief in a golden age” (234) reveals his conception of Englishness to be sentimental. Arthur’s conception of spiritism is itself to some extent proscribed
because he too recognizes the possibility for repetition to turn “flexible paradox” into “iron certainty” (266); nonetheless, the spiritualist meeting at the end of Barnes’s novel appears to at least come close to enacting a remedy for the melancholia which has taken hold of the contemporary nation.

If “the entities we know as races” are shown to be “derived from the very racial discourse that appeared to be their scientific product” (Postcolonial 8), Gilroy explains, then, an “alternative analysis that could grasp the ways in which race worked to limit and effectively reconstitute politics” becomes possible (7-8). While the work that hybridity accomplishes in showing “the act of colonization” to be “the conditionality of colonial discourse” (Bhabha, “Signs” 114) has resonance with Gilroy’s call for racial discourse to be viewed as a conditionality of race, it is Bhabha’s conception of intersubjectivity that comes closest to countering a pathology of melancholia which is predicated on how the political underwrites the cultural.

George’s sense that what he observes is a “clever guessing game,” “a straightforward hoax” or perhaps a “clever mixture of the true and the false” (Barnes, Arthur & George 419), is challenged by the medium’s resurrection of signifiers that evoke “a very proper and distinguished gentleman” who could be George’s father (419). The signs simultaneously evoke a subject whose presence in India along with his anglicized name, “‘Stuart’” (421), is indicative of his status as colonizer, however. This return then might be understood as a haunting gone awry.

The experience of alterity that spiritualism makes possible suggests its revolutionary character in that it at least seems to provide a means to account for difference: the return of the other is a means by which to reconceive of the self. In Barnes’s novel, the shifting terms of recognition, in which George will be recognized not through Arthur’s authorization of him but through his father’s return – not as implicated in official Englishness but instead in official
otherness – , draws the politics of this return into question. George fears his father’s return:

“George is quite sure everyone is looking at him – and soon they will know exactly who he is. But now George shrinks from the recognition he wished for earlier” (Barnes, Arthur & George 420). His father’s reappearance will enable him to recognize his own spectral – and hybrid – qualities. Rather than inducing the formulation of a recursive and revitalizing mode of consciousness or agency, Shapurji’s return, which offers to reaffirm George’s hybridity rather than his Englishness, is an extension of the logic of cultural biology. The symptoms he recognizes in himself as his presence is claimed by another – George comes to realize that he is “chilled to the bone, sweaty, exhausted, threatened, utterly relieved and deeply ashamed” (Barnes, Arthur & George 421) – are evidence of his visceral rejection of the knowledge return offers. His credulousness is intimately connected with his recognition of Arthur’s rather than Shapurji’s authority which George locates in the “enviable, comforting sense of certainty” that Arthur projects and which is connected to his absolute assertion of George’s innocence: “I do not think, I do not believe, I know” (425, italics in orig.). At this moment in the text, the third person narrator observes that since “Sir Arthur, a man of the highest integrity and intelligence believed in events of the kind George has just been witnessing” it “would be impertinent for George in this moment to deny his saviour” (424); this construction of George’s relation to Sir Arthur belies his critical interpretation of Doyle prior to his experience with spiritualism. In the scene before he attends the séance, Barnes depicts him to be a careful reader and annotator of Doyle’s episodic retelling of the Edalji case in his autobiographical and real-life narrative Memories and Adventures. George objects to Arthur’s description of the family’s “[u]tter helplessness” because it obscures the fact that his Father “published his own analysis of the case before Sir Arthur had even appeared on the scene” and ignores the campaigns orchestrated by his Mother, Maud and Mr
Yelverton (402). More importantly, however, he takes issue with Arthur’s description of him as a “half-caste son” observing that “he no more thought of himself in those terms than he thought of Maud as his half-caste sister, or Horace as his half-caste brother” (402). George’s interrogation of whether or not his “father, who believed that the world’s future depended upon the harmonious commingling of the races, could have come up with a better expression” which emerges alongside his castigation of Arthur is telling (402); his doubt raises the possibility that even the most liberal of discourses are inadequate in the face of difference.

In concluding that “Sir Arthur was doubtless working from memory, from the version of events he had himself told and retold down the years” and further that “the constant recounting of events smoothed the edges of stories, rendered the speaker more self-important, made everything more certain than it had seemed at the time” (Barnes, Arthur & George 402) George leaves no doubt of his awareness that memory is a construct. The language that he uses to describe Arthur’s rendering of his case echoes that which the third person narrator uses at the outset of the novel when he rhetorically asks, “[h]ow many internal retellings had smoothed and adjusted the plain words” that Arthur “finally used” to describe his first memory (3)? The novel then has come full circle. Against Arthur’s absolute belief, George instead introduces the possibility that there is in the “proceedings that mixture of truth and lies he earlier identified” (424). Although George’s perspective is aligned with a perspective that is perhaps preferable to Arthur’s, George’s apprehension of what occurs at the spiritist meeting is far from straightforward. Arthur’s firm convictions in the novel lead him to defend George by proclaiming the guilt of another man in much the same terms as the case that is brought to bear against George and George alters the terms of their relationship by claiming Arthur as his saviour at the spiritist meeting. This indicates a shift in his subjectivity, his movement toward a more conventional hybrid subject position.
George’s valorization of Arthur is based in part on the desire for fixity that sanctions both characters’ mistrust of metaphor; the apparent appearance of Arthur himself at the séance more importantly causes George to recognize that “[t]he authority of others has always been important to him” and to question whether or not “he [has] any authority of his own” (425-6).

George’s sense that “he has gone through his life learning and waiting to be told” (Barnes, *Arthur & George* 425) closely echoes the English attitude that Arthur argues is embodied by his sister Connie’s approach to death. Arthur’s presence, then, comes to function in Bhabha’s terms as an “instance[] of metonymy” which reveals the ‘official’ form of national consciousness to be implicated in “the process of the fixation of the colonial as a form of cross-classificatory, discriminatory knowledge within an interdictory discourse” (“Of mimicry” 90). At the same time that his presence disavows the possibility of deferral that is central to the cultural character of Englishness, as understood by George and Connie, it simultaneously refuses to be fixed. In this way, it is tempting to read the spectral Arthur as being emblematic of a figure who “raises the question of the authorization of colonial representations” (“Of mimicry” 90). Barnes skirts this issue, however, by locating agency in George through his critical reading of Arthur’s *Memories and Adventures*, for example, at the same time that he depicts him as being susceptible to tempering if not deferring confrontation by justifying Arthur’s representations of his own case and by seeking to rationalize the implications of his return.

That the revenant authorization Arthur in particular appears to possess is anything but politically benign is signalled by Barnes who recognizes how Thatcher constantly and recursively positions her vision of the nation between the metaphoric axes of a synchronic Englishness and the metonymic axes of a version of historical or diachronic Englishness that appears to recognize
difference is at work in the everyday life of the nation. Her strategic and alternating prioritization of these narratives of Englishness ensures that the limits of the Thatcherite nation remain in flux.

While Barnes explicitly interrogates how the cultural and political intersect in an imperial narrative of nationhood in *Arthur and George*, the work that he performs here finds precedent in *England, England*. There his depictions of ostensibly contending formulations of renewed nationhood continue to be predicated on a process of disavowal which Bhabha has argued underlies Englishness itself. In *England, England*, Barnes literally depicts the agonistic versions of nationhood – the island/Island and England/Anglia as embodied “articulation[s] of displacement and dislocation” (Bhabha, “Signs” 114). While England, England is the most obvious example of such literalization, demonstrating how the signs or “quintessences” (Barnes, *England, England* 83) which make up England are displaced onto the Island, the construction of Anglia entails a subtler process of dislocation that is primarily temporal. The reforestation of the landscape, coupled with the narrator’s observation that the “split village” Martha comes to inhabit “had recovered its wholeness” (256), intimates that Anglia, like the Island, returns a diluted Englishness to its concentrated and ideal form. While the Island is forward-looking, and Anglia is backward-looking, both versions of nationhood not only entail but require the disavowal of partiality. These defensive formulations, then, which significantly occlude the present, and which Barnes’s novel shows to be political “mobil[izations]” of culture, work together to show how “the ‘cultural’ is a disposal of power, a negative transparency that comes to be agonistically constructed on the boundary between frame of reference/frame of mind” (Bhabha, “Signs” 114). That is, these enunciations of Englishness show the authoritative cultural narrative to be an effect of “splitting, denial” and “repetition”; these strategies “mobilize culture” toward articulating a preference for “continued agony” rather than “disappearance” (Bhabha, “Signs” 114).
Martha’s tentative introduction of the possibility that she might find salvation “[a]mong the remnants of a greater, discarded system of salvation” (Barnes, *England, England* 236), leads her to interrogate the appeal that this narrative holds, to attempt to define why there is “something enviable about” an “otherwise unenviable world” (237). Barnes’s portrayal of Martha’s searching inquiry into these questions prior to her return to Anglia frames her return in terms of the preference for “agony” that Bhabha describes (“Signs” 114). Specifically, her movement to Anglia seems to provide the answer to the question of whether or not she would “prefer to be broken on the wheel or have a nice little bungalow on the Isle of Wight” (Barnes, *England, England* 237). Her relocation to Anglia appears to recast the sentimentalism that serves as an antidote to the “[b]rittle cynicism” of postmodernism (237); her brand of sentimentalism enfolds within itself the value of the serious in a move that, like Christopher’s in Metroland, creates a political position that is not up to challenging injustice. With faith in the nation, Barnes suggests, “[l]ife is more serious, and better, and bearable, even if its context is arbitrary and cruel, even if its laws are false and unjust” (237). It is notable, however, that this is a recognition that comes with “hindsight” (237).

Both Anglia and the Island are physical manifestations of the “ironic compromise” between “the synchronic panoptical vision of domination – the demand for identity, stasis – and the counterpressure of the diachrony of history – change, difference” that mimicry represents (Bhabha, “Of mimicry” 85-6). In Anglia the village’s decision to “revive – or perhaps, since records were inexact, to institute – the village Fête” is a localized manifestation of this compromise, for example (Barnes, *England, England* 246). Although they “petition[]” Martha “for memories” (246), the “official delegation” organizing the Fête decides instead to “start from scratch” (247). The historical protocols that are carefully preserved during the Fête – it is, for
example, “the vicar’s right and duty to open the Fête” (262) – speak to the desire for stasis that takes hold of the collective population of the village; at the same time, Barnes acknowledges how this desire manifests itself in the tacit acknowledgement of the alteration that the village has undergone and that serves as the condition for this collective approval.

Through the parallels Barnes draws between Anglia’s and the Island’s assumption of collective and primarily populist identities, he emphasizes how this compromise is at work in the historical nation as well. According to Parrinder, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, English character, which he argues is distinct from English identity, develops “from the process of imitation and mutual conformity natural to a settled population” (21). Parrinder’s argument that the English national character is forged through a process of domestic mimicry is appealing because it suggests that the qualities of change and difference are central to Englishness. Barnes indicates that Parrinder’s understanding of the nation may pave the way for locating the possibility of reformulating civic Englishness in the revival of cultural characteristics but also lends itself to a lament for the lost ideal of the settled nation.

Martha’s abandonment of her attempt to discern what Anglia stands for becomes the precondition for her acceptance into a community which is no longer self-questioning of itself. Her narrative progress thus parallels “the country’s fretful, psoriatic self-consciousness” which has itself “finally come to an end” (257). The political and cultural machinery of mimicry makes mimicry and disavowal converge in the assertion of a settled or metaphorical vision of nationhood that must be continually defended and preserved but that is also deeply organic – that is rooted in the everyday or synchronous life of the people.

What Barnes offers through his depictions of Arthur and George is a more specific consideration of how the metaphorical and metonymical axes of cultural production in the
Thatcherite nation unfold as visions of official and unofficial Englishness respectively. Barnes shows how official Englishness – full presence – persists as a locus of desire and extrapolates this to warn of the possibility for the authorizing narrative of Englishness – Thatcherism – to become one such locus; as a metonymy, unofficial Englishness is a consolatory narrative. His reversal of George’s and Arthur’s national identifications shows how these axes come together to proscribe the possibility of intervening in the national narrative on offer.

As in England, England, when Barnes directs the reader’s attention to the implications of Martha’s gaze rather than what she sees, here he implies that George sees what is at stake in his novel when he “gazes through his succession of lenses, out into the air and beyond” (Arthur & George 427). In Arthur & George the issue of what he sees is more urgent but also more indeterminate. Barnes’s novel concludes with a series of three questions: “What does he see? What did he see? What will he see?” (427). The movement from present to past tense is a reminder to the reader that the narrative is historical; Barnes’s insistence on futurity, however, intimates that what is at stake in these questions is the extent to which the reformulation of a pragmatic cultural identity that is predicated on presentism is possible.

Given the wider concerns of the novel it is tempting to read the spectral vision of Arthur as a manifestation of the “partial vision of the colonizer’s presence” that (“Of mimicry” 88), for Bhabha, comes to light through mimicry; in this process, Bhabha explains, the “look of surveillance returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence” (“Of mimicry” 89). The slippage that occurs around the pronoun “he” in the questions with which the novel closes – “What does he see?” (Arthur & George 427) – exposes
the tension between performative, everyday articulations of the nation and the pedagogical scripts that circumscribe how membership in the nation is performed.

The questions not only pertain to the narrative present of the novel but can also be taken to be Barnes’s own acknowledgement of the limits of his historical recreation of the Edalji case. Like Barnes’s more well-known historiographic metafictions, *Flaubert’s Parrot* and *A History of the World in 101/2 Chapters*, *Arthur & George* enacts a “departure from realism” that results “on the one hand in complex examinations of its aporias and limitations” and leads “on the other hand to searching analyses of the political consequences of this departure” (Gasiorek 192). In this respect, it is fair to say that Barnes’s fictions come closest to the concern that Nick Bentley has argued characterizes British fiction of the 1990s. Bentley explains that, for him, the 1990s is “the decade of popular postmodernism in that its fascination with parody, pastiche, retroism, a knowing self-awareness of previous forms and its general scepticism toward the grand narratives seemed to become the prevailing attitude in the popular culture of the period” (Bentley 4) – a trend that he argues led to a predictable “academic backlash against postmodernism” attributable to “its wholesale incorporation into the institutional forms of popular culture” (4). *England, England* in part takes up this incorporation of the postmodern into the populist nation by describing how the simulacrum nation is made to cater to its market.

The political consequences of Barnes’s departure from realism in Gasiorek’s terms, however, are manifested primarily in how Barnes confronts simple recourse to cultural formulations of Englishness – specifically the appeal of a stable narrative of nationhood that pits renewal against decline. Barnes powerfully shows how even the most liberal and self-conscious formulations of Englishness are inflected by a conservatism at the heart of the nation. *England, England* problematizes both simple recourse to the cultural as a means of reformulating (civic)
Englishness and the possibility of political renewal. The double frustration that *England, England* sets forth instead discloses the morbidities at work in Englishness’s historical understanding of itself.

Barnes’s mapping of the nation onto suburbia in *Metroland* reveals a deep ambivalence in the prevailing narrative of crisis of the 1970s. Barnes is concerned with how Englishness is conceived of by a public who is also the electorate; citizenship in the English community emerges through the public’s strategic definition of itself in relation to the legislative and legislated other. The virulent succession of strikes and narratives of deprivation that have largely defined the 1970s are translated into Barnes’s *Metroland* in terms of a muted anxiety about the stability of Englishness. This becomes evident in how the lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’ – between the people and the state – that ostensibly define the post-war landscape are continually in flux.

Barnes’s *Metroland* also contains within it a covert politics: Christopher’s mode of inhabiting suburbia – predicated on his recognition that the literal semblance of suburbia translates into the semblance of the past – begins to decode how nostalgia inscribes the present. Suburbia itself literalizes semblance; Christopher’s mode of inhabiting suburbia, and hence his Englishness, comes close to the “knowing nostalgia” that Bentley argues Barnes’s *England, England* exposes (495).

When read alongside Philip Tew’s argument that novels of the 1970s are defined by their preoccupation with the middle classes, it is unsurprising that Barnes’s self-consciously remakes the nation as bourgeois space in *Metroland*. The working class hovers on the edges of the narrative, equally idealized as cause or remedy of crisis. Christopher’s and the elderly gentleman’s positioning of themselves in relation to this label as well as their claim to bourgeois status reveal that this class narrative has come to function as an agonistic fantasy of Englishness.
within the post-imperial, post-war context. It is both a locus of antagonism and desire. Rather than being a manifesto for Englishness, *Metroland* considers how Englishness and also the narrative of Englishness-in-crisis are put together in a post-imperial context in order to support a narrative of inevitability. Barnes stays true to form in refusing to reject or endorse this trend explicitly.

Barnes’s focus on semblance in *Metroland* anticipates his explicit confrontation of the simulacrum nation in *England, England*. While all three novels fall comfortably within the category of historiographic metafiction, *England, England* especially confronts how the reformulations of history that ostensibly become possible through the proliferation of narratives paradoxically gives rise to an overarching narrative that homogenizes difference. Though critics have tended to read in Barnes’s novel a manifesto for civic Englishness, Barnes’s *England, England* in fact challenges simple recourse to the cultural or political as a means of renewing the nation. Although it is tempting to read the end results of the “England, England’ experiment – Anglia and the Island – as an endorsement of populist conceptions of the nation, Barnes’s depiction reveals these conceptions to be bound up with the political formulations of Englishness on offer at the close of the twentieth century. It is clear in *England, England*, however, that rather than the nation being discontinuous with the historic nation – a dynamic formulation prone to political struggles over culture – what has altered is the public’s relation to the organizing principles of Englishness – the middle-class fantasies of nationhood. *England, England* functions as an obvious stand-in for the Thatcherite nation and Anglia – defined by its loss of both relevance and an essential Englishness as well as by its endurance and subsequent rejection of a government of renewal – offers itself as a picture of the nation post-Blair. Rather than championing Anglia (or the Island) as a populist conception of the nation that counters legislated
alternatives of renewal Barnes shows these conceptions to be iterations of an existent mode of national consciousness. *England, England* reveals a “knowing nostalgia” to be the prevailing cultural mode (Bentley 495), but also reveals how this mode feeds into a self-justificatory cultural and political narrative.

The ambivalence that configures suburbia in Barnes’s *Metroland* is replaced by Barnes’s close association of Thatcherism with suburbia in *England, England*; rather than offering the pastoral as that which counters a nation ostensibly remade through Thatcherism, Barnes’s treatment of this space in his depiction of Anglia reveals how Thatcherism has remade even this vision of England. While on one level the nations that Barnes represents speak to the emergence of a consensus politics – the nations follow the same trajectory – it is significant that the reformulation of the nation – the cause of renewal – is frustrated by a political and cultural script that seems to be inevitable. In part, this is because both visions of Englishness – which respond to crisis – are formulations of a middle class fantasy that has its roots in historical Englishness.

*Metroland* intimates that the narrative of crisis in Englishness makes the vision of a unified nation a locus of desire; this model of the nation comes about through the intensification of difference, however: it is built on the division between us and them. By taking up the issue of how Englishness is constructed as he does here, Barnes expresses a general awareness that Englishness is an ethnicity – a point that Bentley and Head both make. The remaking of Anglia through a process of reverse colonization which returns the nation to a hyperbolically exclusive entity intimates how the remade nation conceals the imperial discourses that lie at the heart of Englishness; although England, England incorporates otherness through laboured political correctness meant to conform to the expectations of its visitors, the insularity of Anglia leads to a covert construction in which membership is predicated not on being able to lay claim to being
'of' Anglia but to being ‘of’ Old England. Shapurji’s acknowledgement that Great Wyrley is at the center of England and Empire in *Arthur & George* similarly builds on how pastoral and imperial ideals continue to function as guarantors of the nation.

Gregory Rubinson argues that “the question of how art influences our experience of life and history . . . is one that runs through all of Barnes’s novels” (102); in *Flaubert’s Parrot*, for example, he argues, “Barnes denies the validity of aesthetic philosophies which ascribe a simple social or moral function to art; simultaneously he suggests that the arts can help us understand (if not resolve) the complexities of culture, society and history” (102). Rubinson offers an accurate assessment of the role Barnes ascribes to art. Certainly in his England novels, Barnes signals his eschewal of the functionality of art in the “simple” terms Rubinson describes through his refusal to model a desirable definition of Englishness. Rubinson’s argument that Barnes is invested instead in decoding the complexities of socio-historical and cultural narratives for his reader opens Barnes up to the charge that the politics of his fictions are prevaricating. It is precisely by tackling Englishness, by mapping the fraught relationship of the political and cultural in the post-war, post-imperial nation, that Barnes begins to unravel dominant narrations of nation. His works demonstrate how synchronous and diachronous visions of the nation are mobilized in relation to perceived crises; this continuous recycling of the decline and resurgence of Englishness, however, ensures that the preoccupations of the people – both crisis and renewal – enact similar versions of deferral. At the same time, he signals his awareness that his own fictions are not only consonant with the historical and cultural conjunctures he seeks to map, but thrive on the very dis-ease they aim to cure.
Chapter 3

Englishness Remade or the Thatcherism of the Soul: Hanif Kureishi and the New Britain

Barnes’s *England, England* and Kureishi’s “The Body” are most obviously compatible as works that deploy the genre of fantasy or speculative fiction, though the use Barnes makes of spiritism in *Arthur & George* is not to be discounted. In this respect, Roger Luckhurst argues that there is “an intrinsically cultural-political reason for the resurgence of ‘lowly’ genres in the 1990s, relating to the development of a new kind of cultural politics that has been called ‘cultural governance’” (78). This “reason” can be identified as Thatcherism and described as influencing these authors’ tendency to speak around rather than beyond prevailing cultural narratives.

Rather than depict the Thatcherite-present of his films or succumb to the temptation of decade-summarizing that might have been expected, given *The Buddha of Suburbia*’s publication date, Kureishi returns to the years immediately preceding Thatcher’s time in office in his 1990 first novel. Through the reflections of the protagonist and first person retrospective narrator, Karim Amir, who recounts the late 1970s – the years of his adolescence – Kureishi provocatively courts nostalgia for the pre-Thatcher nation. At the same time, he not only “maps . . . in advance the new contours that Conservatism would assume so successfully in the 1980s” but also the new political and cultural contours that Britain itself would assume under Thatcher (Sandhu 240). The “gentle drift and idleness” that define the spirit of the age for Karim are iterations of the post-war aimlessness that Barnes confronts in *Metroland* (94). Although the novels deal with overlapping historical and temporal conjunctures – Karim’s past is very much Christopher’s present –
Kureishi’s novel expresses a more pronounced sense of suburbia as a synecdoche not only for the cultural post-war nation but also for the political nation.

The suburbia from which Karim seeks to escape is not only the homeland of the “lower middle class” but is also on the threshold of becoming “Thatcherland” (Kureishi, “Finishing the Job” 88). In returning to the historical and cultural conjuncture in which Thatcherism became possible, Karim’s narrative disrupts the coherent narrative of nation that came to be closely associated with Thatcher in the popular national imaginary and also more formally in subsequent literary and cultural critics’ readings of Thatcherism. By revealing how “issues of race . . . appear historically in articulation . . . with other categories and divisions . . . and are constantly crossed and recrossed by the categories of class, of gender, and of ethnicity” (Hall, “New Ethnicities” 166), *The Buddha of Suburbia* also re-emplots the cultural, and therefore political, script of Englishness. Karim’s involvement in the productions of the late 1970s alternative theatre makes him the logical heir of the Anger generation in relation to which Christopher positions himself in *Metroland*. Alternative theatre served as a political and cultural alternative to Thatcher and Thatcherism in establishing oppositional “scenario[s] of representation” to the “symbolic blocs” that Thatcher forged (Hall, “New Ethnicities” 165). In other words, Karim’s narrative carries within it the implicit recognition that the “‘machineries’ and ‘regimes’ of representation in a culture” in fact “play a constitutive and not merely a reflexive, after-the-event role” (Hall, “New Ethnicities” 165).

While *The Buddha of Suburbia* confronts and seeks to intervene in the construction of these scenarios, “The Body,” published a little more than ten years later, represents the consequences of the subsequent aestheticization of the mood of decline that made the scenarios Thatcher offered desirable. Kureishi’s novella speaks to the widespread sense of the failure of the
promise that even liberal critics like Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, for example, had found in Blair’s conception of the New Britain. Moreover, it offers a more specific exploration of the danger that Kureishi had identified earlier: the spirit of the age is one in which “humans are reduced to zero” and “the achievements of culture rendered meaningless” (“Filming Intimacy” 229). In these circumstances, Kureishi recognized that politics operated as a kind of “fastidious despair,” “. . . an aesthetic pose, creating its own cultural privileges and becoming a kind of vanity” (“Filming Intimacy” 229). Irony, therefore, inflected Karim’s voice and perspective in The Buddha of Suburbia in accordance with Kureishi’s sense that it is the “modern mode” (Kureishi, “Introduction” 125); it has since been extrapolated into a desirable mode of national consciousness by cultural critics who would be tempted to read Kureishi’s deployment of irony as prescriptive rather than descriptive. This interpretation is contradicted by the protagonist’s narrative voice and perspective in “The Body.” Kureishi turns his gift for capturing the pulse of a nation into a pessimistic confrontation with the logical consequences of an intensifying cultural and political vanity. Writing in 2001, Kureishi argued that confession has replaced irony as the modern mode. While confession for Kureishi might appear to carry with it the promise of introspection, it in fact is a narrative that makes use of rather than confronts the past: it promises an absolution that is too simple. From Kureishi’s vantage point it is also representative of a move away from communalism to an individualism that is unEnglish. His latent recognition of how the character of Englishness that he thought would proscribe Thatcher’s endeavours has in fact been remade by it emerges through his awareness of the sway confession has come to exercise. When taken with his claim that suburbia is Thatcherland, his arrival at the conclusion that “English values are suburban values” makes it clear that his interrogation of Thatcherism is neither straightforward nor predictable (Kureishi, “Some Time” 170). His diagnosis also has obvious
resonance with Blair’s Britain, particularly because Kureishi’s assessment of the shift in cultural ‘modes’ came after Blair’s first term in office.

Karim’s father is the eponymous hero of The Buddha of Suburbia, but Karim is its focalizer and arguably its true protagonist. When his father assumes this role, Karim’s parents’ marriage dissolves, paving the way for both his father’s and his own relocation to London from Bromley. Here, Karim becomes an actor with the help of Eva, the woman for whom Haroon has left his wife, and his mother, Margaret, and who has in fact engineered their move. Karim embraces the possibility that London has come to represent for him, but realizes that his response to London is determined by his father’s narrative of colonial immigration which forms a backdrop for his own desire to escape the “steely regularity” of suburban life (Kureishi, Buddha 26), and by his attempts to translate his mother’s Englishness into his own brand of Englishness even after he has ostensibly escaped suburbia. Although initially enamoured with Eva’s son Charlie, a musician whose ability to shape-shift enables him to keep up with the latest trends in music, Karim embarks on a relationship with Eleanor, an actor in the second play in which he performs. With the demise of their relationship, Karim enters into a depression. He travels to New York to put on a production of the second play but quickly parts company with the director and his cast mates and seeks refuge with Charlie who has become a successful musician in America. Despite Charlie’s attempts to convince him to stay, Karim returns at the end of the novel to the decaying and stagnant nation of Charlie’s (and, to some extent, his own) imagination.

From the outset of the novel, Karim retrospectively returns to his adolescence to describe his habitation of and eventual departure from a suburbia that is recognizably post-war and pre-Thatcherite. Kureishi’s evocation of the Bildungsroman is resonant with Barnes’s Metroland; Karim’s retrospective narrative point of view also generates the irony that critics have argued is at
work in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and, as I have suggested, that Kureishi has elsewhere argued is the modern mode. If Christopher considers himself the equally disaffected heir to the Anger generation, Karim has also been read in similar terms by critics. While “critical reviews on the one hand put Karim in the category of picaresque heroes like those of Richard Wright, James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison (all of whom Kureishi read avidly), . . . others saw him in terms of English serio-comic heroes such as those of H.G. Wells, Angus Wilson or Kingsley Amis” (Childs 143).

Through his present-tense opening declaration that he is an “Englishman born and bred,” modified by his addition of the word “almost” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 3), Karim lays claim to a fraught identity born of the relationship between his narrative and historical pasts and presents. The novel, after all, ends on the night of the 1979 General Election. While Karim’s self-conscious declaration that he is “often considered to be a funny kind of Englishman, a new breed as it were, having emerged from two old histories” (3), is a predictable confrontation of the colonial subtext of the post-imperial version of nationhood Thatcher appeared to offer her electorate, the equal longevity of the histories to which he refers speaks to how the cultural conservatism of Thatcherism informs liberal versions of Englishness as well. From the outset then, Karim, like Christopher, confronts the porous boundary between right and left that is in part a legacy of the consensus politics of the post-war years.

Kureishi’s depiction of Karim is in fact a prescient critique of what has become a commonplace critical assumption that “postcolonial migrants are inherently, even biologically, destined to adopt antiessentialist, cosmopolitan identities” (Dawson 160). In his reading of *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Procter remarks that Karim’s “ordinariness makes him transgressive” not only at the time when the novel was published but “within the critical climate of the late 1990s
and early 2000s where detours and deviations from ‘normative’ ‘settled’ cultures inform the reader’s dominant horizon of expectations” (129). The juxtaposition of “new” and “old” in Karim’s description of himself as a “new breed” emerging from “old histories” reveals the convergence of left and right to be predicated on how race in post-war Britain has come to be bound up with the issue of political and cultural renewal (Kureishi, Buddha 3). His use of the present tense to indicate the possibility that what “makes [him] restless and easily bored” is the “odd mixture of continents and blood” (3), confirms the increased likelihood of this explanation within a Thatcherite context. The fact that the overtly colonial formulation that he proffers quickly gives way to the language of the third space, however, intimates that even the most liberal of discourses offer only the possibility of proscribed Englishness. What is at stake in Karim’s subtle confrontation of the convergence of left and right is the issue of difference. If the culture that Karim exists within appears to be “‘settled’” in Procter’s terms (129), it is only so because of the cultivation of a symptomatic division between us and them.

Karim’s hybridity has much in common with the version of difference that Stuart Hall argued had come into being with the second phase of black cultural politics (―New Ethnicities‖). Karim attributes his restlessness to the mixture “of here and there, of belonging and not” that characterizes his identity (Kureishi, Buddha 3), thus seemingly embodying both in-betweenness and the “radical and unbridgeable separation” that underlies racism according to Hall (―New Ethnicities‖ 169). He is exemplary of a version of difference that is “positional, conditional, and conjunctural” (Hall, “New Ethnicities” 169). Rather than enacting the ambivalence and in-betweenness that Bhabha has made synonymous with the postcolonial subject, his appeal to his suburban upbringing as an explanation for his restlessness instead intimates that his antiessentialist identity is, in a sly reversal on Kureishi’s part, wholly attributable to his
Englishness. Procter has convincingly argued that locating *The Buddha of Suburbia* within a continuum of black writing in postwar Britain reveals it to be a fictional cultural ethnography in which Karim is shown to be implicated in the native practices that are specific to the “locality” of the novel (128). *The Buddha of Suburbia*, he explains, is about “becoming local, about a turn away from cosmopolitan versions of migrancy” (Procter 126). The “unsettling” effect of *The Buddha of Suburbia* is an effect of temporality as well as locality, however. Kureishi’s depiction of suburbia does not simply “allow Karim . . . to provincialize Englishness” and in doing so critique “the ‘smallness,’ the *ethnicity* of working class Brummie or middle class South London life” (128), as Procter suggests, but instead poses a more specific challenge to the “hegemonic conception of ‘Englishness’” that “under Thatcherism stabilizes so much of the dominant political and cultural discourses” (Hall, “New Ethnicities” 169). The opening sentences of Karim’s narrative, from this perspective, begin to “decouple ethnicity as it functions in the dominant discourse, from its equivalence with nationalism, imperialism, racism and the state, which are the points of attachment around which a distinctive British or more accurately English ethnicity have been constructed” (Hall, “New Ethnicities” 169). Karim’s unconscious awareness of how the role of “history, language and culture in the construction of subjectivity and identity” comes to be determined by the political in fact comes to form the basis of a narrative which implicitly assesses the state of Britain after three terms with Thatcher at the helm (Hall, “New Ethnicities” 168).

Karim has been overwhelmingly taken by critics to be emblematic of an alternative version of Englishness. It is significant that his confrontation of the public gaze that constructs him as other occurs not from without but from within the conservative discourses that came to constitute cultural Englishness under Thatcher. He claims cultural Englishness through his identification of himself as an “Englishman” rather than as “English” but does so using
terminology that overtly evokes the genealogical basis of national identity that came into being with the 1981 citizenship act (Baucom 13) – he is “born” to Englishness. His declaration that he is “from the South London suburbs and going somewhere” (3), has similarly been taken to be emblematic of a productive commuter politics that is predicated on how “Karim presents suburbia as a point of departure in the novel, a ‘route’ on the way to the city” (Proctor 150).

Procter’s sense that “Karim’s zig-zag journeys throughout The Buddha of Suburbia have much in common with the back and forth trips of the suburban commuter” indicates that (150), like Christopher in Barnes’s Metroland, Karim occupies suburbia ambivalently: though he desires “to escape from the parochialism of the suburbs and to embrace a cosmopolitan position within his narrative” his movements between the center and suburbia indicate that “to commute . . . is to inaugurate a series of returns” (Procter 151). Englishness and suburbia are shown to be commensurate in each work while departure from suburbia – “getting on”– is encoded within the settled space of suburbia itself. The return that Christopher and Karim are compelled to reiteratively enact in this respect is simultaneously evocative of temporal return – return to the past – but also return to the fantasies that inscribe their suburban Englishness.

Social advancement is thus shown to be inscribed within Thatcher’s “one nation” rhetoric, to which Karim’s self-positionings at the outset of Kureishi’s novel reveal him to subscribe. In There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack Gilroy introduces his discussion of the “one nation” rhetoric central to Thatcherism by observing that “in contemporary Britain, statements about nation are invariably statements about race” (57). The Conservatives, according to Gilroy, especially demonstrated a “sophisticated grasp of the interface between ‘race’ and nation” (57). As I explained in the introduction, one example of this interface was the election poster for the Conservatives that appeared in the ethnic minority press during May 1983. The poster elucidates
how the prevailing fantasy that enabled Thatcher to construct new social blocs and to offer a compelling version of postimperial nationhood is one of class, a point Kureishi similarly makes through his depiction of Karim. While the poster’s slogan—“Labour says he’s black. Tories say he’s British” (57) – appeared to indicate that “the category of citizen and the formal belonging which it bestows on its black holders are essentially colourless, or at least colour-blind” (59), Gilroy argued that the circulating political rhetoric in fact reveals that even in this poster race is “being defined beyond these legal definitions in the sphere of culture” (59). The accompanying image of a man in a suit indicates that “Blacks are being invited to forsake all that marks them out as culturally distinct” in order to conform to a prescriptive and prohibitive vision of Englishness (59).

Gilroy’s description of participation in Thatcher’s entrepreneurial culture being sanctioned by assimilation makes it possible to interrogate Thatcherism as a version of domestic mimicry, transforming its colonial connotations into national configurations. This, as Barnes’s novels also reveal, is at the heart of the formulation of English national character. Colonial mimicry is a straightforward “strategy of reform, regulation and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (Bhabha, “Of mimicry” 86), but is also the “sign of the inappropriate . . . a difference which coheres the dominant strategic function of colonial power, intensifies surveillance, and poses an imminent threat to both ‘normalized’ knowledges and disciplinary powers” (“Of mimicry” 86). Karim himself holds his father up as one such example of threatening mimicry when he describes what his emigration to England shows about the English: “when Dad tried to discuss Byron in local pubs,” he observes, “no one warned him that not every Englishman could read or that they didn’t necessarily want tutoring by an Indian on the poetry of a pervert and a madman” (Kureishi, Buddha 24-5); in his father’s case, it is importantly
class – the fact that he’d never seen “the English in poverty” until his arrival in England (24) – that sends up “‘normalized knowledges’” of Englishness (Bhabha, “Of mimicry” 86). If, in this scheme, the construction of “colonial man as an object of regulatory power” is taken to be closely linked to the rendering of him as “a subject of racial, cultural, national representation” (“Of mimicry” 90), then Kureishi’s tactical creation of a character like Karim becomes illuminating. What Karim takes care to show in unpacking the trajectory by which his father came to inhabit suburbia is his transformation from colonial mimic to domestic mimic: this entails his adoption of the visible markers of cultural otherness as a means of placing himself within Englishness.

The management of the intersection of race and nation are traceable, for Hall, to Thatcherism as a response to the trauma of the end of empire that, as Gilroy’s argument for the solidification of trauma into pathology shows, has proved inadequate. While Kureishi’s portrayal of Haroon reveals him to be in some respects a self-made example of the “infrahuman” body of the immigrant that I have previously discussed, his depictions of the younger generation intimate how Thatcherism negotiates these traumas by offering class as that which bears the promise of participation in the nation. Karim and Changez, Jamila’s husband who has recently emigrated, function as obvious foils, based on the value they attribute to class, while Jamila occupies a less compromising position in Kureishi’s novel. Her exclusion from the final scene of the novel, when Karim hosts a dinner the same night Thatcher comes to office, suggests that her allegiance to feminist and race-based politics demands a recognition of how class is collectively forged that is at odds with the individualism Thatcher’s formulation of class necessitates.

Although Karim’s parenthetical remark that he is “not proud of” his Englishness sets him in obvious critical relation to the version of national identity that he claims as he announces, against others’ perceptions, “Englishman I am” (3), it is also a more subtle enunciation of his
“humility,” an English trait that Dominic Head in his analysis of Barnes has argued could form
the basis of a civic nationalism (15). Here it appears to function as an unconscious enunciation of
Englishness outside of legislated parameters that guarantees his ability to intervene in the
narrative of Englishness that underwrites Thatcherism. The syntactic reversal that prioritizes
recognition of his status as Englishman, however, demands recognition that he is not an object of
Englishness but a subject of it in both senses: his agency in part determines his Englishness at the
same time that his status as subject of the English nation appears more fraught.

Karim’s acknowledgment that “as a rule” he “cared fanatically about the way [he]
looked, and behaved as if the entire world had nothing better to do than constantly observe [him]
for slips in a very complicated and private etiquette” is intimately connected with the codified
behaviour of suburbia that enacts suburban values (Kureishi, Buddha 40). Karim’s mother’s
concern that “‘everyone can see’” Haroon’s yogic display exemplifies self-conscious
introspection and the DIY obsession of suburbia neatly maps onto his own obsession with his
appearance (4). For Sukhdev Sandhu, “Do It Yourself soon degenerates into Do It (Only For)
Yourself” – a phrase emblematic of “a celebration of self over society” that is traceable to when
society’s “existence was famously questioned by Margaret Thatcher” (241). What Kureishi’s
novel suggests is that this codification emerges in response to the “unsettled” post-1945 nation.
The codified subtext of suburbia – and of Englishness – persists despite the constantly changing
“style[s] of the age” (Kureishi, Buddha 75), a perception shared by Jamila who describes the pre-
Thatcher age as one of “crushed-velvet idealism” that in the guise of Charlie is about to give way
to “iron ambition” (75).

Karim’s mapping of the alterations in style demonstrates his awareness, as Hall has
argued, of how representation is “constitutive” of cultural life (“New Ethnicities” 165), a
realization central to Thatcher and Thatcherism’s political maneuvers. In the space of suburbia, the vestiges of alternative culture, as in *Metroland*, are belated. Karim realizes that he and Charlie would “never catch up” following his move to London (128). The “class of outrage” that he observes in London, he explains, provides him with a sense of “proportion” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 130); he is forced to recognize that the suburbs absorb revolutionary fervour and to confront what this means for him because he is deeply rooted in them.

The past tense that Karim evokes to describe the “rebellious and unconventional times” of his youth not only sets him in nostalgic relation to his past but also charts the rise of convention (Kureishi, *Buddha* 82). Not incidentally, it also sets *The Buddha of Suburbia* within a longer tradition of social realism in post-war Britain. For most critics, Kureishi’s first novel stands in ambivalent relation to this tradition. Alamgir Hashmi, for example, has argued for the importance of reading the humour of Kureishi’s novel against the backdrop of a wider body of post-war English fiction which focused on “the ennui, antics and struggles of the underclass seeking to find itself a personal paradise and contributing to the serio-comic mix in a fairly reasonable if ‘slow’ society which is willing to accommodate an odd relation but is decidedly unwilling to change itself” (55). Holmes similarly argues for the importance of attending to how Kureishi sends up bourgeois norms in his interpretation of the novel. He explains, “the novel’s comedy is heavily dependent on Karim’s flamboyant and vulgar rhetoric, which completely violates bourgeois canons of propriety and decency” (“Comedy” 647). For both critics, the political successes of Kureishi’s social realism are at least in part dependent on his successful parodic reiteration of its concerns. The ambivalent politics that comes through Kureishi’s novel is not incompatible with the wider tradition of which he is part and to which he writes back. As Holmes observes, “the ambiguity” of *The Buddha of Suburbia* and what he argues is its precursor
– Amis’s *Lucky Jim* – “should alert us to the fact that carnivalesque comedy is not necessarily a politically subversive mode” (“Comedy” 646). Ian Buruma similarly echoes Holmes when he argues that “Kureishi’s novel is . . . conventional . . . behind its radical pose . . .” because “the theme is essentially the same as the one that has exercised the minds of English novelists, and indeed the English people, for what seems like forever: the long and arduous climb up the slippery slope of society. In short, getting on” (34). Kureishi’s mocking iteration of Thatcherism, as he appears gleefully to turn the tables on its values in order to affirm the “black” Englishman, is what enables him to probe its internal inconsistencies: his portrayal of these successes is perhaps uncomfortably close to the model of citizenship held out by the one nation rhetoric of Thatcher and Thatcherism.

Rather than representing the “‘slow’ society” (55) that Hashmi describes, then, Karim’s narrative describes a society that has already altered: the age is defined by its “rebellious” and “wilful contrariness” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 82). The alternative cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s promise to perform the same work as the Second World War in forcing the nation to confront an alternative idealism that is predicated in part on a recognizable fracture that takes place along generational lines. Karim observes, “[s]uddenly the suburban street outside the school was blasted by an explosion louder than anything heard since the Luftwaffe bombed it in 1944” (69). Here, Kureishi answers the question regarding whether or not “making youth into its own cultural ideology, albeit a provisional and self-consciously superficial one” satisfactorily gets at the social and political questions of the day with a resounding yes (Buchanan 30). He does so by rejecting the separation that Buchanan implies and instead reveals youth movements to be tapped into the wider movements of the nation. His use of the past tense to describe the revolutionary mood intimates the failure of the promise embodied in the “pleasure seeking of the
1960s and 1970s”; it is on the verge of succumbing to the “1980s mélange of liberal economics and Thatcher’s prewar Methodist priggishness” that Kureishi has elsewhere described (“Eight Arms to Hold You” 116-7). The fact that the imminence of Thatcher is knowledge held not only by “Kureishi and his readers” (Kaleta 81) but by Kureishi’s narrator himself – the “narrator knows what the protagonist cannot yet see” (Finney 137), locates Thatcherism within a longer continuous narrative of nationhood. Though imminent, it is not inevitable.

_The Buddha of Suburbia_, like _Metroland_, treats suburbia as a synecdoche for the nation. Unlike the homogenous space of suburbia that defines Christopher’s present in Barnes’s novel and which is resolutely middle class, “the borders” of suburbia in Kureishi’s novel which stretch from “Chislehurst to the east and Penge to the west” represent not only geographical but also class diversity (Procter 172). Karim’s imaginative return to suburbia and Kureishi’s mapping of suburbia onto London chart how these discrete classes come to be assembled into the social blocs, the construction of which, according to Stuart Hall in assessing Thatcher’s third electoral victory, had been “the whole point of Thatcherism” (“Election Blues” 33). He explains, “[a] social bloc is by definition not homogenous. It does not consist of one whole class or even part of one class. It has to be constructed out of groups which are very different in terms of their material interests and social positions” (“Election Blues” 33). “In the second term” of office, especially, Hall explained, Thatcherism “took care, at every step, to harness new social constituencies to it, to ‘construct’ an image of the new, share-owning working class, and to expand the bloc, symbolically, around the image of ‘choice’” which was nonetheless directed toward the construction of a middle class ideal (33).

Karim’s claim to being of the lower middle class affirms his Englishness at the same time that it forms the basis of his differentiation of himself from the same ‘they’ that inhabits
Christopher’s novel – the middle class of London. As Rita Felski has argued, in her discussion of Kureishi’s Orwellian treatment of class, the lower-middle class conceives of “themselves as middle class” (41). For Felski, Karim is a “kind of class detective” who registers the “divisions between those who aspire upward and those whose status and cultural capital allow them to go slumming” (38); he is also a register of how these symbolic divisions map onto the landscape. London stands parallel to suburbia as an alternative synecdoche for the nation. His actual movement to London, however, is a transposition rather than dislocation. Filtered through Karim’s gaze, it is a condensed version of suburbia. While the area near Hammersmith houses “hollering middle-class voices,” the river along Lower Mall seems to Karim to be “like the country . . . with none of the disadvantages” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 126-7); London also thrusts the wealthy inhabitants of Kensington into contact with the whores of Earls Court (127). West Kensington, the area which he comes to inhabit, however, is, like Bromley, defined by its geographical and cultural in-betweenness. Karim explains it is “where people stayed before moving up, or remained only because they were stuck” (127). Though similarly stratified, its affirmation of disintegration nonetheless contrasts with the ‘surface’ life of the suburbs. Like Kilburn, which for Christopher comes to represent an ambivalent symbol of the working class other, “the slums of Herne Hill and Brixton” (43), which Karim views from a train, come to represent the “real” world which is that of post-war Britain, an area which not incidentally is home to vexed race relations. The “rows of disintegrating Victorian houses” that Karim observes symbolically depict how imperial decline and race relations in Britain have come to occupy the same space in the national imaginary (43); it is overwritten even in Karim’s account with an implicit nostalgia. He observes, “[t]hese houses were built for another era” (238). It is also a repetition of his father’s initial encounter with London. Karim explains, that “London, the Old
Kent Road, was a freezing shock to both” Anwar and his father (24); his father is both “amazed and heartened” by his encounter with an England that has been altered by the war – “‘I thought it would be roast beef and Yorkshire pudding all the way,’” he says (24). Karim adds, “But rationing was still on and the area was derelict after being bombed” (24). What becomes clear is that the London that Karim encounters is continuous with the London of the 1950s. When he enters Brixton to visit Terry before leaving to go to New York, Karim observes that these houses “were rotting as this part of the city was rotting even as it flourished in the cracks” (238).

The prospect of a cultural renewal born from wider decay rests in the theatre. Karim’s first role substitutes the theatrical respectability of suburbia with the theatre itself. Though he is cast in his first play after he moves to London, Karim’s first performance as an actor occurs in Shadwell’s theatre in “suburban North London” (Kureishi, Buddha 139). The theatre, Karim explains, “produced plays like French without Tears, the latest Ayckbourn or Frayn, or a panto. It was primarily an amateur place, but they did do three professional productions a year, mostly of plays on the school curriculum like The Royal Hunt of the Sun” (139). The performance of pieces by Ayckbourn, known for his depiction of the suburban middle class, and farces by Frayn, cater to bourgeois respectability. Shadwell’s staging of Kipling’s The Jungle Book, in which Karim is cast as Mowgli, obviously falls into the category of “plays on the school curriculum” and in this sense is an extension of the received narrative of Englishness sanctioned by the state. Shadwell’s surface dissent in this respect is predictable (139). Karim observes that the “writers he liked: Arden, Bond, Orton, Osborne, Wesker . . . suffocated just by being in his mouth for a minute” (137); echoing Christopher’s assessment of the dilution of the revolutionary impetus of the Anger generation, Karim recognizes that the artists of the Anger generation have become emblematic of an alternative version of Englishness that is inscribed within cultural and political
conservatism. When cast in another production, Karim also favourably compares the new
rehearsals to Shadwell’s which were, he has come to recognize, “essentially an imitation of how
Shadwell thought geniuses worked” (168). Shadwell’s productions are ‘imitative’ like suburbia
itself but also come to be subtexts of Karim’s own retrospective narration. Brian Finney makes
an important observation when he argues that Karim’s resistance to Shadwell’s desire to model
him as a “throw-back to the time of the Empire” is not simply humorous but has a social point.
He explains, “[u]sing a form of Brechtian alienation, Karim, by relapsing into his native cockney,
makes the audience aware of the inauthenticity of the stereotypical Indian accent he has been
forced to adopt” (133). Although Finney’s argument that social change becomes possible
because Karim puts to work Bhabha’s conception of mimicry is valid, he fails to take into
account how Bhabha’s vision of colonial mimicry is reinscribed here through Karim’s adoption
of markers which place him outside of rather than inscribe him within Englishness. In contrast to
how he sends up his depiction of the character of Mowgli in Shadwell’s production of Kipling,
his repetition of the role in his own narrative is less obviously subversive. Karim thus represents
the difficulties of transgression in the performative space of the nation rather than in the liberal
confines of the theatre. His mimicry inscribes him as an “object” of “regulatory power” in the
space of the nation but as a “subject of racial, cultural, national representation” in the sphere of
liberal arts (“Of mimicry” 90).

It is significant that Karim’s confrontation of his being considered a “new breed”
(Kureishi, Buddha 3) at the outset of the novel in fact foreshadows Shadwell’s surprise at the
“‘breed of people two hundred years of imperialism has given birth to’” (141). Similarly, his
allusion to Kipling’s The Jungle Book in characterizing himself as Mowgli precedes his
acceptance of the same role in Shadwell’s play in his retrospective narration. He observes, “I
watched Jamila, and pressed my nose to the glass and made a range of jungle noises. I was Mowgli threatening Shere Khan. But she didn’t hear me” (51). Through his characterization of himself as Mowgli, Karim exerts an agency over his performance in this role that he is unable to in Shadwell’s play, but next to Jamila, he acknowledges, his agency is inadequate.

Perhaps surprisingly, Jamila’s critique of Karim’s investment in Shadwell’s production occurs through her mimicry of him. She appropriates the accent he puts on as Mowgli when she critiques his performance, saying “‘[a]ctually, you’ve got no morality, have you? You’ll get it later, I expect, when you can afford it’” (Kureishi, Buddha 157). In Karim’s narrative Charlie appears at first to embody faithfully what for Jamila is an ironic inhabitation whereby improvement of character is coupled with the acquisition of wealth. With success, Karim, explains, “[h]e could set aside ambition and become human” (248). Although he counters Jamila’s argument that he is moving away from the real world with a plea for the curiosity the rich and successful evoke, Karim warns Charlie that “‘[m]oney can cut the cord between you and ordinary living’” (248-9). He explains, “‘[t]here you are, looking down on the world, thinking you understand it, that you’re just like them, when you’ve got no idea, none at all. Because at the centre of people’s lives are worries about money and how to deal with work’” (249). This proclamation is a reworking of Jamila’s castigation of his separation from the real world. For Jamila the “‘real world’” that Karim is “‘moving away from’” is “‘the world of ordinary people and the shit they have to deal with – unemployment, bad housing, boredom’” (195). It is also, for Karim, the world that his mother represents. “She reminded me of the real world” (18), he says at the outset of his narrative. This “real world” that she represents remains implicated in the post-war structures of feeling that Powell articulated when he expressed his sense of “‘foreboding’ regarding what would happen if immigration and the conferral of “the right to be a citizen of
Britain” were not strictly controlled in Birmingham on April 20, 1968” (Powell qtd. in Seawright 13). Although “The Times,” for example, “found it disgraceful and a deliberate appeal to racial prejudice,” his speech struck a resounding chord. That “dockers from Tilbury, the port to which the Windrush had sailed twenty years previously, along with Smithfield Market meat-traders, were among the most vociferous demonstrators to march to Westminster” in support of Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech reveals how the narrative of impending crisis makes use of the mythologies of post-war immigration (Sandhu 314). Karim’s mother’s attempts to differentiate Haroon from “the swarms of Indian peasants who came to Britain in the 1950s and 1960s” clearly emerge in response to Powell’s swamping rhetoric (Kureishi, Buddha 24). In legitimating Haroon’s claim to Englishness, her appeal to class is a strategy that is evocative of the ‘one nation’ rhetoric that Gilroy describes. Karim recalls, “[i]f Mum was irritated by Dad’s aristocratic uselessness, she was also proud of his family” (24). Her assertion that Karim is an “Englishman” is similarly interpretable as a defensive articulation (232). Although her insistence could be seen to be aligned with a version of English liberalism, she too comes to be implicated in a Thatcherite narrative in which the trappings of the middle class become objects of fantasy. At the close of the novel, her own participation in the suburban venture anticipates Karim’s. Her renewed attention to her own appearance finds its parallel in the “‘Georgian’ windows she’d had installed” (270).

Karim realizes that his assumption that “Charlie had been released by success was wrong” (Kureishi, Buddha 251). This realization is in some respects interpretable as an anticipatory proof of the failure of the Thatcherite social vision that is to come; nevertheless, it paves the way for his return to England. Charlie’s allusion to John Milton’s Samson Agonistes when he says, “‘O dark, dark, dark,’” implies the satisfaction he derives from his ostensible
imprisonment (251). Charlie’s theatrical depression is resonant, then, with the representations of London to which the alternative theatre of London gives rise. The productions that Karim attends with his girlfriend and fellow actor Eleanor depict spaces defined by “a plain of broken bottles and bomb-sites, a boiling world with dry ice floating over the choking audience” or, in other words, “London” (207). These spaces depict a nation “disintegrating into terminal class-struggle” (207). Paradoxically utopian in their dystopia, such visions of the nation, which Karim describes as “the science-fiction fantasies of Oxford-educated boys” that were deeply loved by the “middle class” (207), reproduce the version of nationhood that appeals to Terry, a character who exemplifies conventional Party politics. Terry’s eschewal of “left-wing politicians” and “gradual improvement” according to Karim is in part predicated on his sense that “for things to get better they had to get worse” (149). This fantasy of disintegration is surprisingly compatible with the narrative of (middle-class) exceptionalism that Karim at least values if not champions. Although “Terry’s passion for equality appealed to [his] purer mind, and his hatred of existing authority appealed to [his] resentments” (149), Karim finds difference to be a more desirable quality.

In Barnes’s *Metroland*, the working class appears solely as a “pullulating” body that exists on the periphery of middle-class consciousness but functions as a locus of desire for political and social change (61). Christopher perceives the working class to be “sensibility sharpening” (61). Similarly, in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, the working class appears as a trope in the political imaginary. For Terry, a member of the Party, the working class offers a coherent image of political resistance. Karim wryly reports Terry’s belief that “the working class – which he referred to as if it were a single-willed person – would do somewhat unlikely things” (149). Instead, Karim muses, “I wanted to tell him that the proletariat of the suburbs did have strong class feeling. It was virulent and hate-filled and directed entirely at the people beneath them”
Kureishi’s overdetermination of class and race disrupts the hope for political possibility that the working class appears to signify; his narrative presages the maneuvers that would enable Thatcher to construct symbolic majorities based on their reluctance to identify as and with the working class: “the ‘working class’ would have laughed in Terry’s face – those, that is, who wouldn’t have smacked him round the ear for calling them working class in the first place” (149). Heater, “the only working-class person” that the “left-wing” actors for which he becomes an icon would ever have met becomes representative not only of his class but also the real world (175): “After dinner, Heater would open the windows and let in the stench of the real world” (176); these “satisfactions” that Heater feels obliged to repeat expose the reason for a pervasive political stagnation (176): the trials of the working class are fodder for the left politics of the middle classes.

Though Pyke’s theatrical production stands for the theatrical radicalism of the late 1970s, it too is state sanctioned. Karim observes, “it was an odd set-up: this was the subsidized theatre, and these were radical people, but it was as if everyone . . . wanted the answer to only one question: Is this play going to be successful or not?” (Kureishi, Buddha 221). As Finney points out, Pyke’s “politics of national identity might be the reverse of Shadwell’s, but his readiness to sacrifice principles to succeed in the marketplace is identical” (134). Barnes reveals the limits of political liberalism by commodifying Englishness; Kureishi challenges the romance of radicalism by making it equally for sale. The idealization of postcolonial dislocation and ambivalence is also given short shrift. Much to his chagrin, Karim finds himself a “walking stagnancy” (Kureishi, Buddha 249), all too aware that his father would find his aimlessness incomprehensible. Karim is forced to acknowledge that what “held [him] together” is Haroon’s “survival instinct” (250). “Dad had always felt superior to the British: this was the legacy of his
Indian childhood – political anger turning into scorn and contempt” (250), he explains. Haroon’s improvisation and pragmatism make him resistant to nostalgic iterations of Englishness, but they also make him the obverse of Thatcherism.

Terry’s warning that Britain is “‘on its knees’” and “‘Callaghan can’t last’” anticipates Charlie’s assessment of it (Kureishi, Buddha 240): England is “‘decrepit’” and “‘a nice place if you’re rich, but otherwise . . . a fucking swamp of prejudice, class confusion, the whole thing’” (256). The Buddha of Suburbia responds to Kureishi’s sense that the transformation of Britain into “a disintegrating uncertain society” experiencing “economic depression” had provided a testing ground for the “much advertised tolerance in the British soul” to “manifest itself as more than vanity and self-congratulation.” Easily upheld in a “stable, confident wartime society with a massive Empire” (“The Rainbow Sign” 54), Kureishi argued that this characteristic had failed to materialize in the contemporary context. Instead, “Under real continuous strain it has failed” (Kureishi, “The Rainbow Sign” 54-5).

Renewal anticipates even Thatcher’s election. Upon his return, Karim observes, “the rotten was being replaced by the new, and the new was ugly. The gift of creating beauty had been lost somewhere. The ugliness was in the people, too” (Kureishi, Buddha 258). That news of her electoral victory is greeted positively by “everyone” (282), however, intimates the extent to which Thatcher and Thatcherism nonetheless embody possibility. Karim’s acquisition of the television role and Thatcher’s first electoral victory close the novel: “everyone in the place seemed to have been told I was going to be on television, and who was going to be the next Prime Minister. It was the latter that made them especially ecstatic” (282). Renewal for Karim appears to rest in his acquisition of a television role that is culturally dissatisfying and economically
pleasing: it is the promise of this role that teaches Karim the intimate connection between the “pleasure of pleasing others” and “money-power” (283).

Like Omar, the protagonist of Kureishi’s first film My Beautiful Laundrette, who represents an eager participant in Thatcher’s culture of ‘advancement’ and in fact comes to exemplify the ‘one nation’ subject advanced by Thatcher (Kirk 368), Karim appears to be “not so much intent upon changing society as succeeding in it” even as he “exposes social ills” (Holmes, “Comedy” 662). While, for Omar, entrepreneurialism represents an alternative subject position to that of his father’s – he is represented, according to Kirk as a “‘mimic man’” whose “condition is far from parodic or empowering” (Kirk 368) – Karim’s subscription to this cultural narrative is more conflicted. Although Kirk is willing to overlook “Omar’s . . . overt desire to make money” in light of how “the sense of ‘renewal’ associated with the laundrette’s re-opening and refurbishment” at the end of the film suggests the only possibility of change (370), Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia offers an alternative. Rather than the “idealistic and overtly symbolic resolution” of the film that Kirk argues seems to “recode” a central aspect of Thatcherism as entrepreneurialism comes to represent “a more communal good” (370), The Buddha of Suburbia offers a more fraught formulation of pleasure than critics like Finney who suggest that “the novel represents the pursuit of pleasure as itself a way of freeing the self from the constraints of a racist, materialist and tradition-bound society” acknowledge (125).

Karim’s contemplation of what he’d “been through” in the past (Kureishi, Buddha 283), as he “struggled to locate” (283–4) himself and “learn what the heart is” (284), is an iteration of his response to the fate of Gene, the boyfriend of his lover Eleanor: “I thought about Gene and what he’d been through; what they’d done to him; what he’d allowed to happen to himself” (201). The possibility that Karim will “live more deeply” in the future is predicated on his attachment to
others (284), but also on his recognition that his self-perception is commensurate with and
dependent on the perception of others. He thinks, “[b]efore, I’d done exactly what I wanted;
desire was my guide and I was inhibited by nothing but fear. But now, at the beginning of my
twenties, something was growing in me. Just as my body had changed at puberty, now I was
developing a sense of guilt, a sense not only of how I appeared to others, but of how I appeared to
myself, especially in violating self-imposed prohibitions” (186). In short, the conclusion that
Karim arrives at is a re-articulation of Christopher’s fraught claim that he is “‘into life’” (146).
In Kureishi’s novel, love – although an unfashionable and perhaps unexpected concept on which
to base what comes close to being a kind of politics for Karim - becomes symbolic of self
confrontation rather than evasion because it entails “disturbance” and “possession” that is not a
part of sex (188). It also becomes a means of interrupting deadening repetition. The claim that
Kureishi himself makes for what creativity enables – “a kind of skepticism which attacks that
which is petrified,” based on how it functions as a “disturbance” for him – is here made by Karim
(“Some Time” 144).

Childs’s argument that both Charlie and Eleanor “represent a kind of ideal for Karim as
both are quintessentially English in a way that Karim finds attractive and impressive” configures
Karim’s relationship to the nation in terms of a love relationship (155); it is significant, however,
that Karim himself cultivates this representational association. In a voice redolent of Haroon and
Gene he observes, “we pursued English roses as we pursued England; by possessing these prizes,
this kindness and beauty, we stared defiantly into the eye of the Empire and all its self-regard . . .
. We became part of England and yet proudly stood outside it” (Kureishi, Buddha 227). For
Morrison, this stance functions as “a revenge and a defence against the racism and imperialism of
England” (187); he observes, however, that it also “does little to deconstruct the assumptions of
imperialist and racist discourse” (187). As a repetition, however – an iteration of Haroon’s and Gene’s narratives – it speaks to the surprising compatibility of suburban space with sexuality. This holds true for Barnes’s treatment of suburbia in *Metroland* and *England, England*.

Christopher in Julian Barnes’s *Metroland* recalls “Toni’s Theory of Suburban Sex” which holds that London is the “centre of power and industry and money and culture and everything valuable, important and good” and “therefore, *ex hypothesi*” is the “centre of sex” (156). As Karim would confirm, this view is in part based on the proximity that the suburbs engender. Though “sexual energy” dissipates the further you get from the center, “in the suburbs” according to Toni, “you are in a strange intermediate area of sexual twilight” (156): it is in the suburbs “that the really interesting bits of sex took place” (157). *England, England* continues this coupling of extreme sexuality and suburbia in Pitman’s predilections for gaining sexual gratification while pretending to be an infant (156-8). Barnes’s novel intimates the hidden sexual life of the suburbs is symptomatic of the dissembling that configures inhabitation of this space. In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Karim’s sexual acts are surface encounters that are continuous with the ethos of suburbia and as such unsurprisingly represent a mode of engaging with the world that assuages rather than remedies the persistent symptoms of a stagnant culture.

Karim’s discomfort with how Eleanor represents love, in contrast to suburban sex, is traceable to his understanding that love requires him to enter into a relationship with another that is intrinsic rather than extrinsic. In part, this is because of how love seems to require an overt subscription to suburban and consequently Thatcherite values. Karim muses, “love was too powerful for me. Love swam right into the body, into the valves, muscles and bloodstream, while sex, the prick, was always outside. I did want then, in a part of myself, to dirty the love I felt, or, somehow, to extract it from the body” (188). Nonetheless, for him, it is also that which promises
the possibility of drawing together the different parts of himself, a promise that he similarly finds in creation which, he explains, is “an accretive process” that involves “patience and, primarily, love” (217). Kureishi’s tacit recognition that Thatcher’s creation of symbolic blocs involves a similar process leads him to conclude in “The Body” especially that Thatcher has succeeded in her goal of changing the British people. This casts a pall over Karim’s moment of epiphany.

The political ambiguities of the function of art are shown when he sets out to recreate Jamila’s husband Changez in the guise of Tariq in Pyke’s play, but the character he chooses to represent is interpreted by the subject of his imitation, Changez, to be “‘fundamentally autobiographical’” (Kureishi, Buddha 231). Like the continual processes of geographical relocation that offer Karim the possibility of “add[ing] up the elements of [his] life” (217), his participation in the construction of a subjectivity compatible with liberal approaches to the imperial venture ultimately remains unrooted. Perhaps for this reason, when he positions himself at the end of the narrative “in the centre of this old city that I loved” which “sat at the bottom of a tiny island” he privileges metropolitan space over national space at the same time that he recognizes his affinity for a parochial version of Englishness (284). In this way he anticipates how Adam, the protagonist of Kureishi’s “The Body” articulates an affiliation for a past form of identity that enfolds within it the expansiveness of metropolitan London and the parochialism of English pubs. Though his emphasis on the small scale of the nation indulges in a qualification of Englishness – a rejection of its colonial centrality – his expression of love for “old” London indicates that he has come to perceive himself as existing within a self-fashioned version of historical Englishness.

Though the novel ends with ambivalence – he feels “happy and miserable at the same time” – his hopeful introduction of the possibility that “it wouldn’t always be that way” is
attributable in part to his anticipation that in the future he will have the ability to remap the “mess everything had been” (Kureishi, *Buddha* 284). The conclusion of the novel remains inscrutable because Thatcher’s symbolic constructions to some extent perform the same work as creation, which Kureishi himself has argued is “‘counter-consumerist’ in itself” (“Dreaming and Scheming” 256). As Karim’s careful self-positionings of himself at the outset of the novel show, Thatcherism shapes even the counter narratives that offer an alternative conception of political and cultural nationhood. Even as Karim betrays his self-positioning within Thatcherism, his narrative nonetheless implies that in the present-time of writing he has not succumbed to the “Thatcherism of the soul that imagines people are not dependent on one another” (*Intimacy* 58). Instead, he insists that he has allowed himself to enter into relationships with others that meet the criteria of “possession” that he associates with love. Karim is careful to insist that he treats Haroon’s dilemma sympathetically: “There are certain looks on certain faces I don’t want to see again, and this was one of them” (66). He tempers his depiction of the aftermath of Anwar forcing Jamila to agree to an arranged marriage: “I’m convinced he drew me aside . . . because he was ashamed, or at least bashful, about his unsweet victory” (79). When he describes his first visit to his mother following his parents’ separation he also slips into the present tense and directly acknowledges, “I’m probably not compassionate or anything, I bet I’m a real bastard inside and don’t care for anyone” before describing his dislike of “treading up those stairs to Mum” (104). That Karim calls into question the genuineness of his emotion in his response to his mother both suggests that he acts out of duty – as an object of rather than subject of love – in other words, in a role that is compatible with Thatcher’s emphasis on how communities are forged through family. It also undercuts the possibility for creation or love – both of which are interimplicated in *The Buddha of Suburbia* – to oppose the political.
In Kureishi’s “The Body,” the protagonist Adam, a writer in his mid-sixties, is grappling with the fact that his body makes it impossible for him to ignore that he is of an aged and aging generation. When an unexpected offer takes hold of his imagination he agrees to a Faustian deal: if he temporarily surrenders his old body he can acquire a new one and with it a new cultural and political outlook and new possibilities. After becoming Leo Raphael Adams, he leaves London to embrace the hedonistic possibilities that youth appears to offer and eventually takes up residence in a self-help centre in Greece that is populated predominantly by middle-aged, English women. His experiment is interrupted, however, when his encounter with a fellow Newbody, Matte, who is intent on obtaining a body for his own aging brother, forces Leo to seek refuge in London and familiarity. When he attempts to reverse the procedure he comes to find that his Oldbody no longer exists and that the return he envisaged is no longer possible.

In reflecting on his adolescence, Adam describes himself as being a member of the post-war generation who “grew up after the major European wars” (Kureishi, “The Body” 37). A closer contemporary to Barnes’s Christopher in *Metroland* than to Karim in *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Adam’s political and cultural memory is forged by the “late 1950s and early 1960s” which he explains “were supposed to be my heyday” (“The Body” 1). For Adam, Newbody technology offers to “cure[]” him of “indifference, slight depression or weariness; of the feeling that [his] interest in things – culture, politics, other people, [him]self – was running down” (34). His ennui parallels the state of a contemporary nation that has itself been pathologized. Evocative of the political and social currency of the ‘New’ that was expressed through Tony Blair’s simultaneous rebranding of Labour and Britain, protagonist Adam’s transformation into a ‘Newbody’ then appears to function as a straightforward allegory of national renewal because it repeats the “final passing away of old irrelevant structures, relationships and ideologies” that New
Labour’s electoral victory in 1997 appeared to indicate (Alibhai-Brown 35). In other words, Adam’s turn to the body as remedy for his increasing apathy is an alternative that exposes a wider political and cultural shift. Kureishi explains, “If our age seems ‘unideological’ compared to the period between the mid-1960s and mid-1980s; if Britain seems pleasantly hedonistic and politically torpid, it might be because politics has moved inside, into the body. The politics of personal relationships, of private need, of gender, marriage, sexuality, the place of children, have replaced that of society which seems uncontrollable” (“Filming Intimacy” 228).

The London Adam inhabits as an old body is predicated on the dissolution of community. Its “dusty and deserted streets” as well as his sense that London has come to be peopled by “cameras and security people” culminates in the emblematic replacement of “boozers” by “bars” (Kureishi, “The Body” 5). “There was no possibility of engaging in those awful pub conversations with wretched strangers which connected you to the impressive singularity of other people’s lives” (5), he explains. Adam’s own sense of growing apathy is resonant with the “evaporation of the remarkable enthusiasm that had greeted New Labour” (Nairn, Pariah 2) following Blair’s first term in office; it is also a function of Adam’s political as well as cultural dispossession – which is, at least in part, an effect of generational difference. He is “no longer familiar with the pop stars, actors, or serials on TV” and also finds it difficult to “make out which side” the politicians “are on” (4). The lack of social cohesion emerges alongside the dissolution of a coherent political counter narrative. His use of the present tense to describe how “[t]he elderly seem to have been swept from the streets” and “the young appear to have wires coming out of their heads, supplying either music, voices on the phone, or the electricity that makes them move” (5, my italics) is predicated on an altered perspective that emerges through his experience
as a Newbody but is also a logical continuation of the onset of the postmodern society of the spectacle that Guy Debord identified as early as 1967.

What is at stake in his transformation is in part the rupture of generational transference central to the vision of the nation and which the Conservatives altered during their time in power in the 1980s. Adam’s doctor anticipates that the technology will provoke arguments comparable to those that have taken place “‘over abortion, genetic engineering, cloning, organ transplants, or any other medical advances’” (Kureishi, “The Body” 24). For the doctor the new technology evokes the paradigm of an older debate. In contrast, what is at stake in this transformation for Adam is the relation between generations. He replies, “‘[s]urely this is of a different order . . . Parents the same age as their children, or even younger, for instance. What will that mean?’” (24).

Nonetheless, it is Leo/Adam’s acquisition of the Newbody that remakes London into a space of political and cultural possibility. “When I open my door today” he confesses, “I am still excited by the thought of what I might see or hear, and by who I might run into and be made to think about” (Kureishi, “The Body” 4). For Leo/Adam (rather than Adam), as for Karim in Kureishi’s first novel, London represents an alternative to the failing nation. He explains, “London seems no longer part of Britain – in my view, a dreary, narrow place full of fields, boarded-up shops, and cities trying to imitate London – but has developed into a semi-independent city state . . . and has begun to come to terms with the importance of gratification” (4). Adam’s turn to the body as that which offers the possibility of cultural and political (and not incidentally personal) renewal is predicated on the return to promiscuous proximity that refashions the space of London. It returns to being a space which enables bodily interactions. “In
the countryside,” he says, “there are fewer bodies and more distance between them. I came to the city because the bodies are closer; there is heat and magnetism” (37).

There is obvious continuity between the respective protagonists’ reading of London as a space that offers sexual and cultural possibility in *The Buddha of Suburbia* and “The Body.” Karim’s hedonism has been interpreted by most critics to be a straightforward riposte to “Thatcher’s trope against feeling,” what Kureishi has argued was a “resurrection of control, a repudiation of the sensual, of self-indulgence in any form” that to some extent comes at the cost of collective political engagement (“Eight Arms to Hold You” 117). Pleasure, in Kureishi’s first novel, nonetheless offers to assuage rather than alter. Though “The Body” “offers Kureishi’s most telling analysis of the economic and power based dynamics of desire since *The Buddha*” (Buchanan 101), it is obvious that the relations among culture, politics and the body have to account for the parodic nature of revolutions that focus on the individual. Adam’s turn to the body is an overt substitution. The as-yet-unnamed voice that opens the novel proffers the Faustian exchange with all the aplomb of a used car salesman: “‘How about trading it in and getting something new?’” (Kureishi, “The Body” 1). In part, it is the prospect of renewal that captures Adam’s imagination. The acquisition of a Newbody promises reinvigorated engagement with the political and the cultural by offering an alternative to the “purifications and substitutions of culture” (67). With age, Adam explains, “I tried to dissociate myself from my body . . . . My pride, my sense of myself, my identity, if you will, didn’t disappear; rather, it emigrated” (33). He explains, “I believed I was returning to something neglected: fundamental physical pleasure, the ecstasy of the body, of my skin, of movement, and of accelerated, spontaneous affection for others in the same state” (67). His bodily experience is filtered by his use of stimulants; although taking E leads him “into [his] own body and out into others’” his inability to tell if “there was
anyone real there at all‖ (67) intimates the extent to which this turn to the body is a litany of displacement and substitution. Though the body represents a predictable counter to culture (in the conventional nature/culture divide), it becomes clear that through his successive sexual encounters he in fact participates in his own objectification and fetishization.

In his first sexual encounter as a “Newbody,” Adam experiences a “perfect paradigm of impersonal love, both generous and selfish” (55). He explains, “[w]e could imagine around each other, playing with our bodies, living in our minds” (55). It is an interaction based on fantasy and detachment to the extent that he recognizes they “became machines for making pornography of ourselves” (55). His growing desire for the “pornographic circus of rough sex; the stuff that resembled some of the modern dance [he] had seen, animalistic, without talk” is an evasion that has ethical implications (67). His (re)turn to the primacy of bodily sensation is predicated both on his own objectification and on his “use” of others. His desire to flee when the “other, or ‘bit of other’ . . . would turn human” (68), causing “the bubble of fantasy” to “prick” (68) and offer “an opportunity for another kind of entry – into the real” (69), is predicated on his reluctance to “take” him “too far into another person” (69); this mode of sexual pleasure is a significant departure from his youthful pursuit of pleasure when he “wanted to get inside bodies, not just with a portion of [his] frame, but to burrow inside them, to live in there” (38).

That his excitement is generated by how the offer forces him to confront an “idea that was – and had been for a while . . . inevitable” (1) foreshadows his eventual recognition of “how desperate the pleasures were” (68) and how “ridiculously romantic their sense of shared tragedy and doom was” (68); although it is a logical extension of the desires of his past it is also a repetition of that which his own generation had “been through” with “James Dean, Brian Jones, Jim Morrison” (68), a phrase that borrows from Karim’s earlier assessment of what he had “been
through” in *The Buddha of Suburbia*. This leads him to conclude that “it is our pleasures, rather than our addictions and vices, that are our greatest problems” (69). He explains, “[p]leasure can change you in an instant; it can take you anywhere” (69).

Adam’s disillusionment locates him within a wider trend of the British novel’s portrayal of “the retreat of intelligent, dissenting protagonists into hedonistic despair” which subsequently becomes “the subject of tortuous debate in which themes of complicity, loss, regret and guilt are explicitly related to social and political concerns” (Hutchinson 41). In Kureishi’s novel, Adam’s turn to the Newbody technology explores how the body has come to be the basis of a substitutive and constitutive discourse and in doing so registers the cultural effects of remaking the political life of the nation in the image of the middle class: namely the arrival of the nation at the apparent “threshold of a mythical ‘classless’ society” through Major and Blair (Driscoll 9). Kureishi, then, exposes the naturalization of this narrative in order to examine the new social relations for which Thatcher and Thatcherism paved the way. Thatcher’s construction of a symbolic middle-class majority that has persisted beyond her time in office is in part predicated on Thatcher’s appeal to, in David Cannadine’s words, a “dichotomous adversarial picture” of a society founded on “us and them” (21). What made Thatcher’s appeal to this model of social description plausible, according to Cannadine, is “discontent, which means that the version of society as it is becomes less appealing than a vision of society as it might be” (21). In other words, this is a social model whereby fantasy becomes constitutive of cultural life. In the case of Thatcherism, it is a model that arises out of the political cultivation of an existing narrative of post-war decline.

The turn to a kind of speculative social realism in Kureishi’s “The Body” and Barnes’s *England, England* intervenes in the fantasy of collective individualism that Thatcher appeared to offer her electorare and which subsequent governments have continued to cultivate. Although a
break from Kureishi’s fictional oeuvre (with the arguable exception of some of his short stories and to some extent Gabriel’s Gift, though this novel’s magic realist elements are tempered by the novel’s narrative point of view – it is told from a young adolescent’s perspective), the speculative turn that “The Body” appeared to represent in Kureishi’s fiction is in fact consistent with the brand of social realism of his films which anticipated the publication of The Buddha of Suburbia. Films like Kureishi’s in 1980s Britain were embracing the conventions of social realism only to depart from them, in order to “give expression to those ‘realities’ which a realism ‘of the surface’ might not otherwise be equipped to provide” (Hill qtd. in Kirk 365). With his second film, Sammy and Rosie Get Laid, Kureishi sought to continue the “mix of realism and surrealism” (“Some Time” 64) that he had begun to explore in My Beautiful Laundrette as a means of responding to the “fall-out of Thatcherism” (Kirk 365). Though The Buddha of Suburbia departs from the “conventional social realist text” to a lesser extent than his “‘state of the nation’ films” (Kirk 365), Kureishi’s “The Body” and even Barnes’s England, England overtly marry speculative fiction with social realism and, in doing so, begin to construct a counter narrative to the prevailing middle-class fantasy which has come to structure Britain’s political and cultural life. Indeed, Luckhurst, as I have indicated, has persuasively argued that the proliferation of science fiction in the 1990s speaks to its capacity for political and social resistance: “if we read these low genres contextually, then relative to the co-optation, complicity or evasion manifested in other cultural forms, these genres become available as potential sites of critique within a particular historical conjuncture” (83). What Kureishi and Barnes intimate through their turn to this genre, is that the genre bears possibility because it, like social realism which ostensibly proclaims its allegiance to the middle class, is an extension of the fantasies of the middle class. Karim makes this explicit in Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia when he refers to how “the
science-fiction fantasies of Oxford-educated boys” are “loved” by the “middle class” (207). These writers, then, set out to intervene in the national narrative they seek to proscribe if not counteract from within.

At stake in this endeavour, then, is the question of whether or not it is possible to reconcile collective and individual political aims. In a literary context, the task of “renegotiating a collective history along politically and culturally subversive lines” which British novelists have faced according to Hutchinson “remains a task that is attempted but rarely achieved” largely because even “experiments with form seem to have been absorbed into the popular literary novel in ways that set off few cultural or political ripples” (35). The resulting ambivalence which has come to demarcate the social novel of the “contemporary white male left-liberal” in particular, according to Hutchinson, has meant that, politically, the “individualistic-libertarian sensibilities that dominated the post-war decades” have been reconsidered resulting in a “consequent revival of collectivist discourses” (3). “This in turn is countered by a persistent individualism that insists upon independence from what is fearfully perceived as the unbending dogma of collectivist programs” (3), he warns. The left, “obliged by the social, economic and political legacy of the Reagan-Thatcher years to acknowledge the dangers of untrammelled individualism,” have turned to “tropes lately associated with conservatism – community, tradition, history, the family – while the right has loosened its association with those tropes in the interests of the advantages to be gleaned from embracing the libertarian ethos” (11). For him, then, it makes sense that “in effect, social novelists appear to be following a Blairite trajectory in the sense that their attempts to reconcile their conflicting impulses propel them in the direction of a conservatism that neutralizes the sting of their engagement” (35). Despite this appearance, Kureishi’s interrogation of these themes entails a more sophisticated diagnosis of the maneuvers that have led to the political and
cultural context Hutchinson describes; indeed, Hutchinson’s argument in part rests on his understanding of the social novel as the domain of white, left, male writers – Barnes included – for which he is unapologetic.

The fantasies of transformation that the Newbody represents in fact reinscribe social difference and are deeply implicated in the capitalist narrative central to advanced class democracies that they appear to evade. Adam’s recognition that his Newbody is in “‘demand’” (Kureishi, “The Body” 116) paves the way for Kureishi’s pointed consideration of how the aesthetics of the New are made possible by the modes of production that ensure the supply will be adequate to meet desire. He has in effect, become complicit in his own objectification and placement within an industry of the New as Matte, a businessman and Newbody, makes clear when he describes how “[t]he bodies of young women, on which there has always been a premium, are in big demand in the United States” and articulates his own desire to be “‘involved in the manufacture’” of the machines that “‘painless’” murder these women who disappear from the streets (117).

Kureishi’s “lack of apparent interest in the real social impact of the technology” he describes in “The Body” has been taken to indicate that he “does not feel the same urgency about contemporaneity as he once did” (Buchanan 93); however, Kureishi’s engagement with the social implications of the aesthetic body shows that this is too easy a conclusion to draw. Instead of confronting “the medical or mechanical aspects of brains being implanted into recently deceased bodies” (Thomas 154), Kureishi confronts the cultural implications of this technology through the lens of representation and in doing so is able to extend the ground of the issues that the topic of biotechnologies raises. “The Body” is in fact consistent with his previous works in which, from Gabriel’s Gift on, the “newly dominant theme” according to one critic is “artistic creativity, the
same one that plays a secondary role” in Kureishi’s earlier fictions (Buchanan 106). Adam’s use of a simile to describe the sensation of gazing at the “stationary army of the dead” from which he is to choose his new identity foreshadows the ‘mediation’ that his turn to the ‘biological’ in fact represents. He looks at a body “as one might look too long at a painting until its value – the value of life – seemed to evaporate, existing only as a moment of embodied frustration between two eternities” (Kureishi, “The Body” 27). The body that he chooses conforms to stock notions of beauty: it is as “[s]tocky and as classically handsome as any sculpture in the British museum” (27). In writing with an awareness of “the history of how the body has been regarded” and “what bodies do and what they tell us” (“Filming Intimacy” 229), Kureishi’s turn to the aesthetic body is compatible with Terry Eagleton’s argument regarding the mediatory function of the aesthetic which was “born as a discourse of the body” in the eighteenth century (7); that is, the aesthetic for Kureishi has the capacity to “reunite the idea of the body with more traditional political topics of the state, class conflict, and modes of production” (Eagleton 7). The fantasies of transformation and of the middle class that the Newbody reinscribes are deeply implicated in the capitalist narrative central to advanced class democracies that it appears to evade.

Eagleton’s argument that the aesthetic offers the middle class “a superbly versatile model of their political aspirations, exemplifying new forms of autonomy and self-determination, transforming the relations between law and desire, morality and knowledge, recasting the links between individual and totality, and revising social relations on the basis of custom, affection, and sympathy” is in a sense what Kureishi takes up in “The Body” as a means of reflecting on how the aesthetic of the New works itself out and is worked out in the electorate (28). The Newbody is an obvious representation of a brand of the New that has the qualities of cultural biology that I have already noted Gilroy finds assuages the melancholic nation. What Kureishi
shows, however, is that the relation between law and desire is recast through this rhetoric: most obviously, based on how Adam’s Newbody subjectivity in fact makes him legally a Nobody; the construction of him as a legal entity, accomplished by “‘illegal’” means also emerges at the personal level because his decision to adopt this identity severs personal ties (Kureishi, “The Body” 44). Instead, it forges new connections between those who have achieved membership in the Newbody society.

Adam’s desire for the pursuit of hedonistic pleasure is an obvious extension of what, according to critics, Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* pointedly seems to offer as a panacea for the state of the nation. The Newbody seems to carry with it the possibility of returning Adam to an age – both his own biological age and, implicitly, a historical age – before appetite and desire were restricted. The connection between social propriety and the proscription of desire seems trenchant: “[a]s you get older, you are instructed that you can’t touch just anyone, nor can they touch you” (Kureishi, “The Body” 36). Although he seeks escape from his marriage – a unit that is locatable within the wider social bloc of the middle class – Kureishi frustrates reading his movement toward the possibilities the Newbody represents as a straightforward turn toward but also disavowal of individualism. The very reason he is able to conduct his experiment is because of the agreement he has with his wife not to “turn” their “marriage into more of an enclosure than necessary” (20). Rather than the cultural becoming a means of revising the civic, the aesthetic from Eagleton’s point of view is based on the balance it achieves between communality and singularity, a balance that is shown to be at work in the status quo from which Adam seeks to escape.

In Kureishi’s novel, the Newbody is symbolic of the aesthetic political and cultural body. As an organic model of the New Britain it carries with it the promise of being “a genuinely
emancipatory force,” of creating a “community of subjects now linked by sensuous impulse and fellow-feeling rather than by heteronomous law, each safeguarded in its unique particularity while bound at the same time into social harmony” (Eagleton 28). This paradox that the aesthetic en folds within itself negotiates the fraught discourse of individualism that is challenged both for how it has come to be a marker solely of right-wing politics and for how it has come to be associated with identity politics. In “The Body,” this paradox which is depicted by Adam as lost – along with the pubs in which such connections were possible – becomes possible only in the realm of the aesthetic.

Thomas’s argument that the paucity of academic attention given to Gabriel’s Gift and “The Body” is attributable to the fact that “they cannot be viewed through the lens of postcolonial theory” (161) overlooks not only Kureishi’s interrogation of hybridity but also the extent to which the aesthetic is bound up with race, a point that Gilroy forcefully argued in The Black Atlantic. Her point that the novel “may well attract the kind of philosophical discussion about identity and authenticity that seems increasingly necessary in a postmodern culture of simulation where the fake is invariably indistinguishable from the natural” (161), however, is indicative of how the terms of this intimate relation between the aesthetic and race have been (implicitly) recast – which is largely the subject of Kureishi’s novel. In fact, Kureishi’s turn to the body can be read as a response to how interpretations of Karim’s hybridity depoliticize his position by making him exemplary of a productive difference that is largely an effect of fluid identity politics. Though Kureishi’s project in destabilizing fixed identities is directed to the tyranny that is at stake in the desire for coherence, critics have tended to argue that “the self for Karim is fluid, an image to be altered at whim” and read his narrative as a utopian movement from “social fixity to limitless self
exploration” even as they acknowledge that the novel moves toward the repressive regimes of Thatcherism (Finney 126).

With his choice of a body that is “neither white nor dark but lightly toasted” Adam claims a hybrid identity that is fashionable (Kureishi, “The Body” 27). He quips, “[a]nyway hybrids were hip” (44). His transformation then is overtly framed in terms of the turn toward cultural biology that Gilroy argued accompanies a “morbid fixation with the fluctuating substance of national culture and identity” (Postcolonial 12) and with the yoking together of past and future that has become central to the visions of nationhood offered by successive British governments. The very success of Zadie Smith’s White Teeth (2000), which preceded publication of Kureishi’s novella by two years, registers, according to Dawson, “the enduring fascination with racial mixing and hybridity that characterizes our supposedly ‘postracial’ epoch” (152). At the same time, White Teeth is a critique of the “contemporary discourses of biological determinism” that “are gaining purchase in societies already saturated by forms of biopower” (152). Although it “garnered much critical acclaim for its lively embodiment of a supposedly ‘postracial’ London” upon publication, critics have subsequently argued that the novel offers a more pointed examination of how “one’s cultural and biological pedigree affect identity and belonging in contemporary Britain” (Dawson 152). Such readings which seek to rescue Smith’s iconic novel from charges that it offers merely a playful and utopian model of hybridity speak to an ambivalence at the centre of the critical gaze that itself registers the slippage between hybridity and deterministic modes of ethnicity in the political and cultural imaginary.

While Smith’s White Teeth to some extent feeds into the biological narrative of renewal, Kureishi in “The Body” appears to answer Gilroy’s “plea” that “further enquiries should be made into precisely how discussions of ‘race,’ beauty, ethnicity, and culture have contributed to the
critical thinking that eventually gave rise to cultural studies” based on his presiding sense that “questions of ‘race’ and representation have been so regularly banished from orthodox histories of western aesthetic judgement, taste, and cultural value” (*Black Atlantic* 9). Kureishi’s novella instead sets out to reveal and intervene in the reactive prioritization of the cultural in which, to some extent, Smith participates.

Adam’s evocation of the mediatory category of the body is resonant with Eagleton’s argument that the aesthetic also “signifies what Max Horkheimer has called a kind of ‘internalized repression’” that has the capacity to “insert[] social power more deeply into the very bodies of those it subjugates” and in doing so to function “as a supremely effective mode of political hegemony” (28). In part, Thatcher’s successes were based on just this understanding of representation. Matte’s proclamation that “[t]here’ll be a new class, an elite, a superclass of superbodies. Then there’ll be shops where you go to buy the body you want” (Kureishi, “The Body” 114) not only confronts the compatibility of the new technology with consumer culture but also the formulation of a superclass that is predicated on the role the body plays in the fantasy of the middle class which cuts across social blocs. Andrew Adonis and Stephen Pollard agree with Cannadine that “middle class, middle England, middle of the road” have come to be “the three vital qualifications for success in national politics” and have in fact given rise to a “House of Commons more uniform in appearance – socially and ideologically – than any since the Great Reform Act of 1832 forced the aristocracy to share power with the Victorian middle class” (Adonis and Pollard 103). While this implies that “politicians may almost all look alike in social terms,” they argue that “this uniformity is essentially superficial” (106). Instead, “the public-private divide has become the essential differentiator between the two main political parties” (106). While “a public sector elite” is aligned with the Left, a “private sector elite – the Super
Class” is affiliated with the Right (x-xi). This divide that Adonis and Pollard describe, which is structured around a seemingly homogenous national political vision, appears in Kureishi’s novel in his return to the debate of public versus private – the collective versus the individual. The Super Class that Adonis and Pollard describe, and which obviously has its roots in Thatcherism, has Nietzschean overtones that Kureishi himself argued were at the heart of her politics in his assessment of Thatcher in 1988. Observing “her unexhausted and unenglish sense of mission” Kureishi muses, “I began to think of something which couldn’t possibly be said of any other successful British politician. It was that in some aspects of herself Thatcher embodied some of Nietzsche’s ideas” (“Finishing the Job” 90), specifically “scorn for weakness, the basic belief in inequality and the passion for overcoming” (90); he adds, “Nietzsche who hated free thinkers, humanitarianism and socialism . . . also dismissed compassion” (90). From this perspective, “The Body” registers the logical extension of the successes of Thatcher’s reformulation of Englishness through a Nietzschean lens. In other words, the Newbody technology is the inevitable culmination of a political and cultural shift whereby, as Leo/Adam points out in response to Matt: “‘We seem to have replaced ethics with aesthetics’” (Kureishi, “The Body” 114). Revising Kureishi’s earlier attempt to decide “if the question about the relation between the real people, the real events and the portrayal is an aesthetic or moral one” (Kureishi, “Some Time” 171), Leo/Adam’s proclamation intimates that Kureishi has come to an alternative conclusion. Kureishi, like Gilroy, has come to perceive that representation is an ethical question. The transformation of Leo-Adam’s construction of the body as offering cultural and political renewal gives way to its entrenchment within a capitalist model of corrupt exchange. In this way, the body in Kureishi’s novella registers “a certain style of meditation on the body, on pleasures and surfaces, zones and techniques” that Eagleton warned, writing in 1990, enabled the “convenient
displacement of a less immediately corporeal politics, and acted also as an ersatz kind of ethics” (7). Renewal as it emerges here is a form of disavowal in which Adam’s answer to the doctor’s exhortation for him to “‘think’” about what he’d “‘learn about society and . . . all that’” if he chose a “‘black body’” – “‘Yes’, but couldn’t I just read a novel about it?’” (Kureishi, “The Body” 26) – anticipates how aesthetic and corporeal experience become equivalent.

Rather than enacting the transition from Thatcher’s reactive politics to Blair’s overtly curative politics, Adam’s acquisition of the Newbody is an iteration of the politics of his youth. Instead of participating in communality, it is their shared “singularity” which marks him and Alicia, a woman he encounters at the center, as “insubordinate” and which causes him to reflect with “regret” on how he’d “been as a young man”: “rebellion as affectation” (Kureishi, “The Body” 100). His focus on the aesthetics of exceptionalism intimates that the emergence of Newbody technology is an extension if not exasperation of a pre-existent culture of singularity that the tentative and passing connections forged in the pub transcend. His turn to the Newbody is attractive in part because it offers him participation in collectivity that is predicated on the promise of “[m]ore love,” though he realizes that what he needs is “the ability to love more” (17).

When the centre’s members are invited to a lavish party, Adam finds himself on a boat that embodies the ethos of the 1960s. His declaration, “[t]his was what I, as a young man, would have wanted,” however, distances Adam from the experience and from what the boat offers: “Food, drink and sexual possibility” (Kureishi, “The Body” 102). Yet it is a significant experience in terms of how it forces him to confront his sense that the Newbody technology “worked better for people who didn’t have theories of authenticity or the ‘natural,’ people who didn’t worry about its meaning at the expense of its obvious pleasures” (59). The music which is playing upon his arrival to the boat, Von Karajan’s version of Strauss’s Also sprach Zarathustra,
is evocative of Nietzsche’s conception of eternal recurrence – and is in fact an ironic repetition of that concept. It also dramatizes the confrontation between nature and culture. The soundtrack here is also overtly evocative of the music that begins *2001: A Space Odyssey* and foreshadows the turn that the novel takes here as Leo/Adam is pursued and comes to realize his entrapment. Leo/Adam’s profession of his adoration of Strauss but also his readiness to “admit how much great music had been turned into kitsch” (102), in addition to his reservations regarding where one would “turn for something that sounds fresh today, except to the new or weird” (102), draws a parallel between Leo’s acquisition of his Newbody and Strauss’s music. His assertion that “[y]ou couldn’t turn Bartok’s quartets or Webern’s meditations into easy listening” aligns a cultural conservatism with preservation (102). It is the context in which the music is played that continues to have effect. He insists, “the Strauss didn’t seem only sententious,” but due to its unexpectedness – “[a]gainst the sea and sky, in this place, and taken by surprise” – “thrilled and uplifted [him] again” (102). Adam’s qualification of this effect, based on how he is “tricked into amazement” (102), however, suggests that the effect of this music, like his earlier passions experienced on first acquiring the Newbody, is a substitution that only momentarily interrupts a way of thinking about the cultural and the political that has become habitual – a deadening repetition.

By the end of the novel, Adam proffers sentiment as an alternative to a hedonism that has become habitual. “I’m a sentimentalist” he proclaims and adds, “and want always for there to be the quiet interminability of a London pub in the afternoon, rough men playing pool, others just sitting in near silence, smoking” (Kureishi, “The Body” 140-1). Adam’s Orwellian nostalgia for the pub indicates his participation in a pervasive and predominantly middle-class cultural relation to the past. In fact, it is very much the middle class fantasy to which Adam seems to turn,
according to Driscoll, that explains why “The Body” has tended to be “marginalized by the critical canon”: namely, because the novella is critical of “the supposed jouissance of the postmodern self” (131). For Driscoll, Adam’s transformation implies that he is “cut loose from history and his class-based identity” (131). Instead of “postmodern play and freedom for Leo/Adam” the protagonist’s transformation, he argues, provides him with “only horror” (131). Adam’s “final desire” which, Driscoll argues is “for the stability, comfort and safety of the grand narrative of his white middle class life and a desire to return to the lost Elysium of bourgeois culture and society” (131), proves “embarrassing to the parameters of postmodern liberal criticism that always desires to appear ‘classless’” (131), an aim which, Driscoll neglects to mention, as other critics have pointed out, liberal criticism shares with the governments of Thatcher and Blair. In the context of Adam’s reading of the political and cultural inevitability of his transformation it is paradoxically these bourgeois discourses to which he desires to return.

Critics’ castigation of this apparent turn in Kureishi’s novel echoes the criticism directed toward Barnes’s depiction of Martha’s return to Anglia at the conclusion of England, England. Like Martha’s return to Anglia, Adam’s return to London at the close of the novel is in some respects a return to a parochial space. He notes, “I felt safer, and more at ease in my mind, in a familiar place” (Kureishi, “The Body” 127); it is based in part on his possession of the city: “In your own city, you don’t have to think about where you are” (127). The version of London to which he returns, however, is distinct from the wider nation. His specification that it is a “London” pub which he desires to persist intimates an alteration in the imagined space of London from The Buddha of Suburbia to “The Body”; here Adam seeks to reconcile the nostalgic vision of communality that the pub represents with the individual gratification London offers. It is significant in this respect that the pub into which he ventures at the end of the novel houses the
theatre in which his body-mentor Ralph is performing: the value of the pub is illusive and reveals the collective identity he craves similarly to be performance. The productions that the theater is staging – The Glass Menagerie and Dorian Gray – importantly force self-confrontation.

In other words, this space is in part representative of his simultaneous participation in and refutation of the turn to “confession” that he identifies when speaking with Patricia, who is the head of the self-help centre where Leo gains employment. He observes, “[c]onfession, not irony, is the modern mode. A halting speech at Alcoholics Anonymous is the paradigm. But what concealments and deceptions are there in this exhibition of self pity?” (Kureishi, “The Body” 88). Kureishi reprises this argument in affirming that “writing is of benefit in the wider political sense” in contexts in which “there is a tendency for only the most acceptable or publicized voices to be attended to” (“Dreaming and Scheming” 255). He explains, “[c]onfession, rather than irony, has become the modern mode. If party politics is banal, formulaic and uninteresting, and most of the media the same, it will be to something as old-fashioned as writing that we turn to express and share our deepest concerns” (“Dreaming and Scheming” 255-6). The turn to confession is also indicative of a widespread political and cultural shift. In “Eight Arms to Hold You” (1991) Kureishi argued that “Thatcher’s attempt to convert Britain to an American style business based society” failed because it was “not something that could possibly have taken place in such a complacent and divided land, especially one lacking a self-help culture” (117). In this quotation, the implicit connection between complacency and the lack of a self-help culture appears to lend value to this self-conscious mode. In The Buddha of Suburbia, however, it is a more complex issue. For many critics, Eva is the voice of Thatcherism at the end of Kureishi’s novel. Indeed, her press statement – “‘We have to empower ourselves. Look at those people who live on sordid housing estates. They expect others – the Government – to do everything for them. 

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They are only half human, because only half active”’ sounds like a sound-bite from Thatcher, especially so given Eva’s argument that neither “‘socialism’” nor “‘conservatism’” caters to “‘individual human flourishing’” (Kureishi, Buddha 263). That Eva describes this mantra as “‘self-help’” intimates that for Kureishi, however, English complacency and the deep divisions that are based on a disavowal of sameness in fact act as a cultural check to that for which Thatcherism stands. The emergence of confession as the modern mode becomes a means to resist the fantasy of collectivity that paradoxically overwrites how Thatcherite individualism has remade society and also offers to remake an ironic mode that has in turn become habitual; it also speaks to an implicit winnowing rather than deepening of culture which latter Haroon intimates is desirable in The Buddha of Suburbia.

Patricia’s response to Adam reveals the danger to rest in how confession too threatens to become habitual: “‘There’s no rigor here anymore . . . . Or any progress. It’s become the same every day’” (Kureishi, “The Body” 88). The turn toward habit, within this context, is an effect of the incorporation of confession into consumer culture: “‘I wanted to run a center for self-exploration, only to discover I’d started a small business. You can’t explore anything if you don’t get the figures right – the eighties taught some women that, at least’” (88). Despite being a member of the old guard of politics – she is “‘an old style sixties feminist’” (76) – Patricia has also come to exemplify a consumerist version of collective politics. Upon meeting her, Adam observes, “I could recall her variety of feminism from the first time around: its mad ugliness, the forced ecstasy of sisterhood, the whole revolutionary Puritanism. I didn’t loathe it – it seemed to me to be a strain of eccentric English socialism, like Shavianism – as long as I didn’t have to live under or near it” (74). The formulation of a Newbody politics, given the Nietzschean subtext, functions like a “Shavian” politics, in the context of Shaw’s own interrogation of these concepts
in *Man and Superman*, for example. Though Patricia’s appeal at first rests in his sense that she is able to perceive him as he is – he explains, “[f]or the first time I felt that someone had seen me as an impostor, a fake, as not being what I seemed” (75) – this effect dissipates. Nonetheless, she continues to inhabit his mind “like a question”: “What do you really want?” (80).

Adam’s return to writing emerges in part as an effect of the unease that develops after he has slept with Patricia. “Without literature,” he says,

> I couldn’t think, and felt stifled by a swirl of thoughts which took me nowhere new. But writing and the intricacies of its solitude was a habit I needed to break in order to stray from myself. Some artists, in their later life, become so much themselves, they go their own way, that they are no longer open to influence, to being changed or even touched by anyone else, and their work takes on the nature of obsession. (Kureishi, “The Body” 99)

His attempt to “‘do something about an old man in a young man’s body’” (129) signals his desire to “think about properly – the implications of becoming a Newbody” (59) but also intimates a repositioning of the self in relation to the past and present. Alicia’s query about his writing, “[i]s it a film?” (129), evokes the distinction Ralph attributes to Adam: “[y]ou said that unlike films, plays don’t take place in the past” (14). Adam’s contemplation of the Newbody technology through this form is in one sense a straightforward rejection of nostalgia; at the same time, however, it also represents a disavowal rather than confrontation of a longer historical narrative. What Alicia’s interjection implies is that his narrative in fact broaches confession.

In fact, Adam’s break from “habit” (Kureishi, “The Body” 99) – repetition – through his acquisition of the Newbody is a process of renewal that echoes the disarticulations that comprise Anglia and the Island. Though he physically “stray[s]” from his former identity by acquiring a Newbody (99), he is nonetheless an iteration. His ‘hybridity’ takes the form of a haunting. Adam observes, “I stood back and stared at my signature, which resembled a bad forgery of my own
scrawl‖ (42) – and Mark, the rightful and original owner of the body he now inhabits. The Newbody carries with it a doubly inscribed relation to the past that he is encouraged by his mentor to forget much as Blair’s coined term ‘New Britain’ carries within it a reference to crisis – the need to formulate the ‘New’ – and the longer legacies of the continuous historical and markedly unified nation – ‘Britain.’ After his transformation he observes, “‘[i]t’s as if I have a ghost or shadow soul inside me. I can feel things, perhaps memories, of the man who was here first . . . . There’s a phrase of Freud’s that might apply here: the bodily ego, he calls it, I think’” (51). Adam’s recourse to the “‘bodily ego’” is evocative of Cheah’s conception of the haunted nation, which enfolds within itself the idea of freedom that the organic ideal of nationhood contains, if only as a kind of repetition. What is also significant, however, is the degree to which his acquisition of the “‘shadow soul’” (51) which he is encouraged to overlook evokes Haroon’s diagnosis of English culture in The Buddha of Suburbia. Haroon argues that a failure to attend to the “‘soul’” as well as the “‘body and mind’” has meant that “‘there has been no deepening in culture, no accumulation of wisdom, no increase in the way of the spirit’” (264); perhaps surprisingly, Haroon’s diagnosis speaks to a need for spiritual rather than political and cultural renewal. In the context of The Buddha of Suburbia it is the attention to the soul that serves as a productive counter to the self-help culture embodied by Eva and which emerges in “The Body” in the commercialization of Patricia’s self-help centre. The implicit potential in the New Body fails to come to fruition by the end of the narrative; it is a straightforward account of the failure of Blair’s Britain in this sense.

While, in Arthur & George, the return of the lost other through spiritism – a mode of haunting that reveals the discursive underpinnings of subjectivity – draws attention to the issue of George’s agency, in “The Body” it brings to the forefront the issue of the agency that Adam
wields in his Newbody form and which by extension is embedded in Blair’s conception of the New Britain. Though pessimistic in tone, Leo’s closing remark, “I was a stranger on the earth, a nobody with nothing, belonging nowhere, a body alone, condemned to begin again, in the nightmare of eternal life” (Kureishi, “The Body” 149), indicates a radical dispossession that nonetheless forms the precondition for renewal. The limited term of his acquired Newbody previously placed him in “limbo, a waiting room in which there was no reality but plenty of anxiety” (127). Because “I didn’t have time to begin a new life as a new person,” he explains, “expecting to go back, I missed my old life” (127). With his recognition that return has been foreclosed comes the possibility of formulating an alternative relation to his past that is amnesiac rather than nostalgic. The use of the present tense at the outset of what is ostensibly Adam’s confessional narrative leaves the issue of whether or not he will participate culturally and politically largely in question. He observes, “I imagine that to participate in the world with curiosity and pleasure, to see the point of what is going on, you have to be young and uninformed. Do I want to participate?” (4). Within this context, it seems likely that he will continue living out the evasion that the promise of renewal for which the Newbody appears to stand facilitates and to which Blair’s social vision condemns the nation.

Suburbia in Kureishi’s The Buddha of Suburbia is on the threshold of becoming Thatcherland. Barnes’s treatment of suburbia in Metroland lays bare its formulation and reveals the imperial texts that underlie the paradoxical expansion and contraction that are reconciled in the space of suburbia, both in terms of how the literal landscape gestures historically and symbolically beyond itself even as it is routed through and rooted in Englishness; suburbia in Kureishi’s novel is more obviously a post-war formulation.
Against *Metroland* the virulent strikes of the 1970s lurk in the background of Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* in the form of the chorus of assessments of the nation that proliferate toward the end of the novel – specifically in Terry’s assessment of left politics and in Charlie’s bleak assessments of England. Not surprisingly, given how the works are historically separated by publication date, Kureishi’s novel takes up the political subject of Thatcherism to a greater extent than Barnes’s – though, when read alongside *England, England* especially, *Metroland* aptly captures the mood that ensured Thatcher’s political and cultural successes. Beyond the predictable themes of individualism and entrepreneurialism that Thatcher’s economic reforms have closely yoked to cultural discussions of Thatcherism, Kureishi takes up the issue of how even the most liberal formulations of Englishness are proscribed.

The ironic mode of Kureishi’s novel is – as is Barnes’s *Metroland* – generated by the first-person narrator’s retrospective reading of his adolescence. Though Karim separates his suburban past from his present – grammatically and ostensibly through his own strategic self-positionings – the history of suburbia that the novel forges reveals Thatcherism and the discourses of nationhood it enfolds within itself to be continuous with the historical nation. The mechanisms by which the electorate is reformulated emerge through how Thatcher’s strategic formulations enact a kind of domestic mimicry; in this respect *The Buddha of Suburbia* anticipates Barnes’s *England, England*. What Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* indicates, however, is that the cultural mode of “knowing nostalgia” (Bentley 495) that to some extent is embodied by their protagonists’ self-conscious inhabitations of suburbia is defined by ambivalence. The “knowing nostalgia” (Bentley 495) that Karim’s narrative generates is also strategic; what his carefully crafted narrative shows is that this formulation becomes a repertoire of Englishness that is
consonant with Thatcher’s formulation of the ‘one nation.’ His subscription to what translates into a mode of inhabitation confirms his membership in the Thatcherite nation.

Kureishi’s “The Body,” like Barnes’s 1998 novel, then, reveals how this cultural mode of “knowing nostalgia” (495) is consonant rather than dissident with the obsession with the New that appeared to take hold of the imaginary and which Blair seemed to both register and actively propagate; in these later novels, crisis has given way to pathologization and the cityscape has been remade. *The Buddha of Suburbia* showed the cityscape to itself be a condensed version of suburbia in which the close proximity that it enforces counters the detached (literal and figurative) community of suburbia. Kureishi’s depiction of an older figure who chooses youth in order to become a participant in rather than witness to the social and political landscape simultaneously upholds the value Kureishi is taken to have found in youth culture and draws into question the possibility for youth culture to lead to viable social and political change. Like Christopher and Toni’s experience in *Metroland*, the youth movements that exist in suburbia are parodic but also aptly serve to capture the social and cultural mood of aimlessness.

What is compelling is how Kureishi’s treatment of hybridity in “The Body” is resonant with Barnes’s in *Arthur & George*. George, reminiscent of Karim, inscribes his claim to Englishness both politically and culturally, yet like Karim he has been interpreted by critics to be defined by how his hybridity seems to make him suited to model a ‘civic’-minded version of Englishness. Though Barnes’s treatment of Edalji is evocative of Bhabha’s theories of mimicry, he simultaneously rejects the neat formulations of hybridity that have come into political and cultural currency. In this respect, his work participates in Kureishi’s challenge to the cachet that hybridity seems to have acquired as it becomes enfolded into a problematic and homogenizing version of difference under Blair.

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For both Barnes and Kureishi the space of suburbia enacts the strategic displacement that occurs whereby Englishness and Thatcherism do not merely become synonymous but mutually constitutive. While it is tempting to read in the ambivalence of the landscapes of their fictions a modified articulation of hybridity, both writers sidestep this logical development in order to frustrate expectation. The cultural space of suburbia may enfold within it the demands for synchronism and diachronism at work in the fantastic time of the nation and accordingly satisfy the conditions that Bhabha argues enable political and cultural intervention, but it also satisfies the conditions which were necessary for the legislative and cultural nation to be remade in Thatcher’s image. For Kureishi, London which simultaneously condenses suburbia by forcing its inhabitants into close proximity becomes exemplary of a preferable articulation of the nation even while it too risks succumbing to a defensive parochialism.

What becomes noticeable when reading these works together is that Barnes addresses the national temptation to disavow race while Kureishi takes up the disavowal of class. Barnes insists that the role race plays in the legislative life of the nation must be recognized; Kureishi adds that this recognition does not go far enough. Instead, he argues that the role that class plays in the contemporary nation must just as urgently be decoded because the mythologies of race and class converge in the fantasy of Englishness.
Chapter 4

English Idioms: Pat Barker and the Politics of Cultural Reflection

Pat Barker’s early works overwhelmingly depict female, working-class communities in the years leading up to and following Thatcher’s election. Her first novel Union Street (1982) firmly established her reputation as a feminist and regionalist writer. Through seven vignettes, each of which tells a different woman’s story, Barker set forth an inter-generational, socio-historical narrative of a female, working-class community in Northern England in the late 1970s. Barker’s response to Thatcherism in these novels is consonant with that of Kureishi’s satirical butt, Pyke, in The Buddha of Suburbia. As the alternative theatre director pontificates rather memorably, the play in which he casts Karim “‘may revolve around the only subject there is in England’” – “‘Class’” (164).

Between the publication of Union Street and Regeneration Barker certainly broadens her discussion of female community to intervene in debates concerning the state of the nation, but the masculine emphasis of Regeneration marked a noticeable shift in her oeuvre. Critics, however, were quick to emphasize the novel’s continuity with the wider project of her fictions, namely, the recovery of the “repressed other(s)” of “English collective memory” (Bernard 174). Set during the Great War, predominantly in Craiglockhart, a psychological military hospital which houses anthropologist and psychologist W.H. Rivers as well as poets Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen – historical figures that appear alongside fictional characters in Barker’s novel – Regeneration acts in one sense as a predictable counter-narrative to the hegemonic account of World War One. In her subsequent novels, The Eye in the Door (1993) and The Ghost Road (1995), which together with Regeneration form the Regeneration trilogy, Barker continues her
interrogation of political and cultural Englishness. Indeed, Childs has argued that in these novels, Barker “gradually expands from a small community, the patients and staff at the Craiglockhart hospital near Edinburgh to the domestic front in London in the second volume and finally the war in France itself in The Ghost Road” (73).

Regeneration (1990), however, “was originally” intended to be “one” novel; Barker explains, “I wrote and rewrote the final chapter of Regeneration trying to give the sense of completion, and in fact I couldn’t make it complete because the story ends with the end of the war” (Interview 175). By taking as her point of departure Sassoon’s protest against the war, Barker’s Regeneration significantly announces itself not only as a work that meditates on the place of the Great War in the national imaginary but as a more pointed narrative that locates Thatcher’s recursive rewiring of the political and cultural within a wider historical context. Regeneration tacitly acknowledges that Thatcherism is exemplary of a suspect relation between the political and the cultural, whereby culture becomes constitutive of the public life of the nation but its pre-eminence is facilitated by the political. Critics have tended to regard Regeneration (1990) as an alternative to the hegemonic Heritage narratives of the 1980s even while “the impact of the trilogy” is “positioned by the heritage industry” (Hitchcock par. 5). Indeed, as Peter Hitchcock observes, this industry “has found in World War One a way to rearticulate heroic Englishness in the face of a much diminished and otherwise troublesome image of England as a nation state. This nostalgic mode is not just raging against the dying of England's light (or might), but it is part of a complex array of cultural discourses that are rearticulating what it means to be English into the new millennium” (par.5). For Hitchcock, Barker’s Regeneration trilogy resists “the regenerative claims of cultural nostalgia” central to heritage discourse and “displaces the
scene of Englishness not by attacking what is remembered but by exploring the process of memory itself” (par. 6).

Hitchcock’s reading of *Regeneration* is consonant with Catherine Bernard’s more recent claim that “showing the process of meaning making at work” is a central aim of Barker’s fictions (175). The challenges her works pose to the prevailing cultural and political narratives of the contemporary British landscape are subtle as well as obvious. In fact the argument that has become a critical commonplace – that Barker tests the limits of realism by pushing “the formulas of representation to a breaking point” in order to “open[] the way for a renewed form of discursive agency” and to “understand the mechanisms of ideological fashioning and the specific ways private psyche resists them” (Bernard 173) – can be deployed to discern, in her writings, the function and significance of the symbolic identifications Thatcherism forged.

While Kureishi’s and Barnes’s earlier novels make suburbia the grounds for their interrogation of Englishness as it has been consolidated by the cultural and political narratives of the late twentieth century, Barker’s *Regeneration* treats the nation under siege as a hyperbolic synecdoche for the resolutely middle-class nation. Her aim is to expose the opposition between primitive and civilized that underwrites the cultural and political national imaginary. This imaginary then reveals itself in the “discourse of modern English cultural uniqueness” (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 9) that it is the task of her oeuvre to examine and disarticulate.

Though told from the third person, omniscient point of view, *Regeneration* is predominantly focalized by its anchoring character, Dr. William Rivers. Rivers’s interactions with his patients, who in addition to historical figure Sassoon include fictional characters David Burns and Billy Prior, force him to define his political role in the Great War and to confront the cultural implications of the therapy he offers. He realizes that English cultural and social mores
rest on a greater civic ideal of enlightened Englishness which his patients shatter just as the Great War has devastated their psyches and their faith. By the end of the novel, Rivers has left Craiglockhart in order to take up a position in London; though he questions his role in perpetuating the war, he, like Sassoon who returns to the frontlines in France, remains implicated in the political and cultural paradigm that the War comes to represent: namely, a model in which the legislative body incites and then absorbs the allegiance of its electorate. Barker seeks to alter this novel’s ambivalent conclusion in her subsequent works in the trilogy, *The Eye in the Door* (1993) and *The Ghost Road* (1995).

Barker’s *Regeneration* opens with “Finished with the War: A Soldier’s Declaration,” a historical treatise by poet Siegfried Sassoon that establishes a precedent for Barker’s own counter-narrative. Sassoon’s treatise elaborates how legislators and those on the home front conspire to ensure the persistence of the war. He takes care to explain, however, that his protest is conducted on political rather than cultural grounds. “I am not protesting against the conduct of the war,” he declares, “but against the political errors and insincerities for which the fighting men are being sacrificed” (Barker, *Regeneration* 3). His approval of the “conduct” of war simultaneously enables him to differentiate between the actors of war – the soldiers – and its legislators and to inscribe his own highly recognized actions within a cultural code that is predicated on honour (3). Sassoon’s argument that a “war of defence and liberation, has now become a war of aggression and conquest” (3) reveals that cultural Englishness – the ideal that he insists on preserving – has ironically become a repository of cultural anxieties that have to do with the integrity of a doubly embattled nation. In Sassoon’s declaration the cultural comes into conflict with the political regarding the grounds on which civic Englishness – an ideal claimed by both – will be defined, extended or ignored. Implicit within Sassoon’s declaration is a claim that
by returning to a cultural ideal, forged by the translation of post-Enlightenment civic ideals like “the rule of law, parliamentary sovereignty, individual freedom and certain common assumptions about individual freedom and group tolerance in a wider social collectivity” into a national (and not incidentally “Whiggish”) ideal (Goulbourne qtd. in Aughey 117), the government will be able to reinstate the ethical and political limits that previously defined cultural Englishness. It is tempting to read *Regeneration* as Barker’s endorsement of this remedy to a nation that cultural critics and novelists of the 1990s believed had been irremediably altered by Thatcherism. Given that cultural theorists and novelists like Barnes and Kureishi from 1990 on were coming to realize that Thatcherism and historical Englishness worked using the same mechanisms, Barker shows instead that the symbolic identifications central to the construction of the communal identity Sassoon celebrates are at work in the interests of the political nation.

Rivers’s suggestion that the writing of the Declaration may have been “therapeutic” (26) paves the way for reading Sassoon’s precise delineation of cause and effect as being locatable within a continuum of such responses that are traceable to “social values and culture that pre-exist yet are foregrounded by this extreme situation” (Hitchcock par. 6). Though the symptoms Rivers’s own patients manifest are predicated upon a refusal to remember and to discern the implications of their conditions, Sassoon’s therapeutic diagnosis anticipates (cultural) recovery and reclamation even as it enacts it by insisting on the contextual relationship between the former nation and the nation of the present, his former self and his present self. Barker herself has notably resisted the category of “historical novel” to describe her trilogy precisely because the description implies that the work has “no connection to the present” (Westman 163). As Barker’s early works make clear this is at least in part due to her awareness of how the “defensive operation” (Hall, “Emergence” 21) Thatcherism enacts is successful because it defines
Englishness through a similar temporal negotiation, through a process that resists resolving the issue of cultural stability even as it promises to do so. Indeed, the resolution of the cultural crisis of Englishness was precisely what Thatcher could not afford. Thatcher’s systematic construction of an exclusionary national community meant that anxieties provoked by the “enormous struggle to define what Britain can mean in the twentieth century if it is not to be the center of a huge commercial, economic, and imperialist empire” remained beyond her time in office (21).

Barker’s use of Sassoon’s declaration, however, also registers the emergence of a growing sense among cultural theorists/the left that the nation was under threat from within by the hold that the effective wielding of the rhetoric of us and them in order to create new social blocs had exercised over the nation. During her time in office, Thatcher’s cultivation of the narrative of national crisis rested on the twin poles of external threat represented by the pressing Europe question and the internal threat represented by immigrants and miners. After three consecutive terms in office, it became clear that even her detractors had been unwittingly folded into Thatcher’s us, a realization that seemed to proscribe the possibilities of Englishness and to suggest a kind of latent inevitability to the events that had unfolded. The means by which Thatcher was able to achieve this end came about in large part because these categories repeat the cultural logic of difference that underwrote imperial Englishness.

The slippage from “liberation” to “conquest” that Sassoon observes not only challenges the grounds of the War (Barker, *Regeneration* 3), but in fact discloses the “‘inner compatibility of empire and nation’” (Anderson qtd. in Bhabha, “Of mimicry” 87). Rivers’s sense of being changed by the war is itself a repetition of an earlier encounter that brings these twin narratives together. During his anthropological expedition to Melanesia, the islanders “‘turn the tables on’” Rivers by asking him “‘the same questions’” he asks them (241). With his realization that any of
his responses would have been greeted with laughter because it was “‘too bizarre’” (242), he concludes, “‘I suddenly saw that their reactions to my society were neither more nor less valid than mine to theirs’” (242); this meant, “‘not only that we weren’t the measure of all things, but that there was no measure’” (242). The monumental conclusion that derives from an event “‘so trivial you almost can’t see why it had the effect it had’” (241) fits the ironic pattern that Paul Fussell has argued distinguishes memory of the Great War. Fussell explains, “by applying to the past a paradigm of ironic action, a rememberer is enabled to locate, draw forth and finally shape into significance an event or a moment which otherwise would merge without meaning into the general undifferentiated stream” (30). From this perspective, Rivers’s reflection on his experiences in Melanesia emerges as a consequence of the ironic inversion whereby the Melanesians — constructed as the primitive other — assume his role, displacing his authority as the rational observer.

His encounter, like the War, challenges the “Meliorist myth which had dominated the public consciousness for a century” or, in other words, the very “idea of Progress” itself (Fussell 8). The importance that this event assumes is unsurprising because Rivers himself is in many respects an “ideal figure to embody a transition from Victorian self confidence to modernist doubt (he died the same year The Waste Land was published) and from the totalizing grand narratives of modernity to the ‘petits récits’ of postmodernism” (Brown 188). It is tempting to read Rivers as yoking together a nostalgic vision of lost cultural and political certainty with the onset of an age of “posthistoricity,” to use John Brannigan’s terms. This move is not incompatible with conservative visions of the English nation which appear to hold the promise of breaking with these predictable inevitabilities only to reinforce them. The absence of measure which Rivers believes he fails to assimilate into his everyday life when he returns to England is in fact
ironically consistent with how (imperial) Englishness, when confronted with the implications of
the differences it authors, ameliorates inequality by rejecting difference in its totality. It is an
early formulation of the disavowal at work in Thatcher’s one nation rhetoric – which offers the
promise of the one class nation – and also Blair’s multiculturalism, Barker suggests. It is also
overwhelmingly compatible with Rivers’s conception of “protopathic sensibility” which has “an
‘all or nothing’ quality” and which, in effect, signifies as a “primitive” sensibility in contrast to
the “epicritic” (Barker Regeneration 46). What this parallel draws into question is whether the
ironic inversions that Rivers’s experience in Melanesia and his officers’ experiences with war
produce have the potential to become counter narratives. Instead, Barker shows that the
apparently desirable turn to the pre-modern is continuous with their identification with rather than
opposition to the ideal of Englishness.

I want to interpret the pattern into which Rivers’s narrative of his Melanesian experience
falls – and the narrative trajectory of the change that he insists his interactions with his patients
bring about – in terms of his subscription to the “distinctive English idioms of cultural reflection”
I broached earlier (Gilroy, Black Atlantic 9). While it has become commonplace to trace the
modernist subtexts of Barker’s fictions, her intertextual references to works by T.S. Eliot,
Virginia Woolf and Joseph Conrad among others, the central role that the primitive plays
throughout Barker’s works has garnered less attentive consideration on the part of critics. It is this
significant strain in her writing that I want to pursue to demonstrate what Gilroy refers to as the
primacy of culture in the political life of the nation and to elucidate the bases of Sassoon’s appeal
to a post-Enlightenment brand of Englishness.

Gilroy’s explication of “distinctive English idioms of cultural reflection” emerges in the
context of his wider argument that “the contemporary black English . . . perhaps, like all blacks in
the West, stand between (at least) two great cultural assemblages, both of which have mutated through the course of the modern world that formed them and assumed new configurations” (

*Black Atlantic* 1); he explains, “at present, they remain locked symbiotically in an antagonistic relationship marked out by the symbolism of colours which adds to the conspicuous cultural power of their central Manichean dynamic – black and white” (1-2). “These colours” have come to “support a special rhetoric that has grown to be associated with a language of nationality and national belonging as well as the language of race and ethnic identity” (2). While these “ideas about nationality, ethnicity, authenticity and cultural integrity are characteristically modern phenomena” which were cemented “at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries” (2), Gilroy stresses the importance of attending to how the “conspicuous power of these modern subjectivities” persists in a postmodern context (2); Barker, perhaps surprisingly, shares this take on modern subject formation as well as on the peculiar rhetoric in which it finds expression. It is precisely her attentive consideration to this rhetoric of representations that makes her project of working through the repertoires of Englishness possible.

In *Regeneration*, Rivers’s ironic reflections convey how “notions of the primitive and of the civilised which had been integral to pre-modern understanding of ‘ethnic’ differences became fundamental cognitive and aesthetic markers in the processes which generated a constellation of subject positions in which Englishness, Christianity and other ethnic and racialised attributes would finally give way to the dazzling dislocation of ‘whiteness’” (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 9). Rivers describes his transformation in the phrase – the “*Great White God de-throned*” (Barker, *Regeneration* 242) – clearly evoking the paradigm that Gilroy describes. He carefully crafts his experience of alterity, however. The primitives that challenge his assumptions are “‘recent converts’” and consequently subjects who are comfortably locatable within a narrative of Empire
(241). His careful negotiation of the primitive/civilized divide here explains his inability to
cchange, a fixity he ascribes to his cultural Englishness: “He’d gone on being reticent, introverted,
reclusive” perhaps because his attempt to change had itself “… been a very introverted, self-
conscious attempt” (249).

Rivers’s suspicion that his patients have been responsible for inducing a “far deeper
change . . . than merely coming to believe that a negotiated peace might be possible, and
desirable” (Barker, Regeneration 249) suggests that his exposure to his patients’ symptoms which
remake the wider socio-cultural and political narrative out of which they emerge as revenants has
a far-reaching communal as well as individual effect. When Rivers states, “‘[y]ou’ll just have to
trust us,’” Sassoon replies, “‘[u]s? You’re sure you don’t mean “them”?’” (203). Here, Sassoon
draws attention to how the separation between “us” and “them” that is internal to the nation is
upheld at the level of culture and in the service of politics. In suggesting that Rivers’s
identification is negotiable, Sassoon recognizes that Rivers’s allegiance is determined by the role
he plays in the political nation, but he has the ability to exercise cultural agency and to be ‘of’ the
people. His complicity in the authorizing political narrative of nation comes to the fore in his
response to Sassoon’s provocative “Declaration.” Brock, a treating psychologist and Rivers’s
colleague, adopts the terminology of Rivers’s pre-war experiments when he observes that
Sassoon is a “‘remarkably protopathic young man’” based on his “‘all or nothing’” political and
cultural stance (74). In response to Rivers’s stricture that emotions “‘mustn’t be allowed to
dominate’” (73), Brock queries, “‘[t]he protopathic must know its place?’” (74). Rivers’s visible
shock at Brock’s application of terminology borrowed from experiments on the biological
recovery of nervous sensation that he once performed confirms his reluctance to confront the
“widely diffused” sensations that emerge when the “threshold” of protopathic sensibility is
crossed and that threaten the clear boundaries that he believes enclose the epicritic (46). Brock’s reading of his relation with Sassoon thus implicates Rivers in the very process of repression that he ostensibly seeks to reverse. According to Bernard, the aim of the talking cure, of which Rivers is a proponent, is to “reinscribe the symptom, in all its unmitigated immediacy into a discursive economy and to reappropriate it narratively” (181). Brock insinuates that this process of reinscription and narrativization entails a political repression that takes place in the name of culture. While the fact that he does not disagree with Brock’s classification of Sassoon as protopathic is telling, Rivers rejects his own terminology. Rather than “[e]picritically” (Barker, *Regeneration* 74), Rivers clarifies, he asks Sassoon to defend his position “[r]ationally” (74). Rivers’s liberatory attempts to counter the “repression of emotion and desire” by “advising his young patients to . . . let themselves feel the pity and terror their war experience inevitably evoked” put him in danger of “excavating the ground he stood on” (48) but nevertheless implicate him in a politically motivated repression.

The pull that Rivers experiences, Barker intimates, is one explanation for the stutter that he shares with his patients. As I observed in my introduction, Mukherjee has provocatively argued that the “epistemology” of stutters in Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy can be “conceptualized in the context of ‘DissemiNation’ where Bhabha explicates the ‘nation’s interrupted address’” (59). The stutters of the patients who inhabit Barker’s novel and which derive from an internal conflict speak to their inability to reconcile the demands of the pedagogical nation with the performative nation. Their speech impediments consequently become localized, if extreme, incidences of the difficulties of achieving full articulation for Mukherjee: these patients participate in the process of “performative hysterization – or dissemi-

nation” that Bhabha describes (Mukherjee 59). The retrieval that this process implies frames the
populist revival of the nation in terms of its feminization; the feminine signifies akin to the
primitive, the latent return of which promises to revive the nation. The coupling of feminist
discourses with a populist narrative simultaneously makes the counter narrative of Englishness
that it represents suspect at the same time that it comforts.

Rivers, according to Mukherjee, experiences a similar conflict in the pull that he feels
between duty and fraternal obligation: “Rivers is the most notably chiasmatic figure in the novel,
doubly inscribed as a pedagogical object and a performative subject” (Mukherjee 59). For
Mukherjee, Rivers “negotiates” the inevitabilities of “incommensurable identities and
identifications” (60): while his rank, coupled with his masculinity, are compatible with his
identification as English, his class and position outside of the English establishments of Oxford or
Cambridge suggest that he does not quite fit. His “‗critical mourning‘” comes about when he
laments the loss of a straightforward sense of unconflicted identity: an apriori Englishness
(Mukherjee 60). Rather than succumbing to the appeal of this narrative, Rivers’s negotiation of
nostalgia perhaps surprisingly becomes the means by which he is able to achieve the process of
opposing “‗the close teleology of identity and authenticity‘” [Chambers 11])” (Chambers qtd. in
Mukherjee 61) that more usually accompanies mourning; his rejection of authenticity – a
cohesive narrative – which is signalled by his sense that everyday Englishness conceals the fact
there is “‗no measure‘” (Barker, Regeneration 242) is at odds with the therapeutic answer at
which Sassoon arrives and which begins Barker’s novel. In his protest he refuses to lament the
loss of the cultural nation and instead insists on the imminence of its resurrection as a means of
altering the political nation.

Rivers’s careful interpretation of the effect his patients have on him and his desire to map
the structure of his Melanesian experience onto the structure of their narratives suggest that the
disruption that he represents to the prevailing social order is not straightforward. Ross
Chambers’s conception of critical mourning, which Mukherjee applies to Barker’s *Regeneration*,
is in fact akin to Bentley’s conception of “knowing nostalgia” (495); as does Barnes, Barker
entertains the possibility that this mode of consciousness might intervene in contemporary
formulations of Englishness. The precariousness of the social reformulation that Rivers
envisages, in which alternative cultural codes of behaviour will rewrite the significance of class
divisions, is due to his attempt to reconcile his intuition that the War is an extension of the
historical nation with its discontinuity with a civic version of Englishness. Barker thus draws the
political and cultural motives that make this solution the logical next step in reformulating
Englishness into question.

In his discussion with Sassoon about tolerance, Rivers describes how a society moving
toward tolerance has regressed. “I thought things were getting better” (Barker, *Regeneration*
204), Sassoon says to Rivers regarding the social treatment of male-male desire to which Rivers
replies, “I think they were. Before the war. *Slightly*” (204). Rivers attributes the fact that the
“movement towards greater tolerance” ceases during “wartime” (204) to the anxieties that
accompany patriotism. He explains, “in war, you’ve got this *enormous* emphasis on love
between men – comradeship – and everybody approves. But at the same time there’s always this
little niggle of anxiety. Is it the right *kind* of love?” (204). To Rivers, increased patriotism then
becomes perceived as the answer to homophobic anxiety. Rivers’s diagnosis is akin to Hall’s
analysis of the “defensive exclusivism” that emerges when “a nation state is bowing off the stage
of history” (“The Local and the Global” 25). In this instance, a paradox emerges wherein
patriotic fervour generates anxieties which violate the civic ideals that are the very source of that
patriotism.
The linguistic slippage in Rivers’s speculation, “‘perhaps the patients’ve . . . have done for me what I couldn’t do for myself’” (Barker, *Regeneration* 242), embeds a class marker into his speech that is akin to the “tell-tale ‘our’” that enters Prior’s mother’s speech when she meets with Rivers (58). Like Karim, whose heteroglossic diction enables him to “liberate himself from an oppressive past, a difficult present and an outdated form of discourse” (125 Carey qtd. in Holmes 649), Rivers’s language here is of a piece with his movement toward a space between classes and ideologies. The fact that he identifies his patients as the cause of this slippage reinforces his habitation of this in-between space; it entails recognition of the erosion of the distinction between us and them that Barker has argued is necessary for “clinical detachment” (Interview 181). His correction of his speech, however, calls into question the extent to which he is outside of the ‘one nation rhetoric’ that he ostensibly rejects. Just as Thatcherism’s formulation of the “one nation rhetoric” enfolds within itself class difference, Rivers’s work supports the vision of a collective nation that is predicated on difference. While Rivers agrees with Head’s wife that “‘the crust of everything is starting to crack’” (Barker, *Regeneration* 164), his warning – “‘I’m just not sure we’re going to like what’s under the crust’” (164) – reveals this alteration to be both precarious and threatening.

On one level, Barker’s novel is a straightforward corrective to the myth of the classless society that the war yields. Ronald Paul, for example, has pointed out that “the image of Britain socially and economically divided along class lines is in complete contrast to the patriotic conception of a nation at one with itself” (149). When Prior states “[t]he only thing that really makes me angry is when people at home say there are no class distinctions at the front. Balls” (Barker, *Regeneration* 67), he not only exposes the gap between the lines and the
homefront but also challenges the role the War has come to play in the political and cultural imaginary.

Barker’s interrogation of the myth of the classless society also has bearing on the time of the novel’s publication given Thatcher and Thatcherism’s reprisal of the same myth in order to unify a besieged nation. Rivers considers himself proof that one can get on without an Oxford or Cambridge degree (Barker, *Regeneration* 135), thus projecting a vision of the continuous historical nation. His prediction that “‘things'll be freer after the war. If only because hundreds of thousands of young men have been thrown into contact with the working classes in a way they’ve never been before’” projects a utopian and collective political and cultural vision that has its roots in pre-war Englishness (135). Against this naive optimism Prior warns, “‘[c]areful, Rivers. You’re beginning to sound like a Bolshevik’” (135). This tongue-in-cheek warning reveals that Rivers’s ideal of national unity is predicated upon the isomorphic relationship between cultural membership and economic standing.

According to Gilroy, “the emphatically national character ascribed to the concept of modes of production (cultural and otherwise)” is a “fundamental question which demonstrates the ethnohistorical specificity of dominant approaches to cultural politics, social movements, and oppositional consciousnesses” (*Black Atlantic* 9). Although the working classes represent the potential transcendence of a class-bound society, as the instruments of the modes of production they implicitly underwrite the ethnohistorical narrative that Gilroy describes in *The Black Atlantic*. Unlike Rivers’s blind presence within this interdictory space, which upholds the ethnohistorical distinction between classes, Prior’s recognition of the space he occupies between classes leads to a more strategic self-positioning: arguably his individualist politics are based on his strategic subscription to collective units. Prior’s mimicry of a “public school accent” as he
repeats “‘[t]he pride of the British Army requires that absolute dominance must be maintained in No Man’s Land at all times’” ironically shows how the war both exposes and draws into question a prevailing cultural idiom (Barker, Regeneration 52). The articulation of the language of Englishness finds its home and its reinforcement in the system of schooling that encourages and enforces domestic mimicry. His imitation of a “strangled version” of the accent (52) – an adjective evocative of the speech of the patients of Craiglockhart – intimates that this cultural production of authority is itself symptomatic even as it identifies this authority as a locus of desire. When Prior again slips into his “mock public school voice” (131), as he explains the etiquette of censoring his men’s letters for a different audience, his repetition is interpreted by his prospective girlfriend and munitions worker Sarah to be the real thing. He explains to her, “‘[t]hey rely on our sense of honour’” and adds, “‘we’re supposed to leave them [the letters] open so the CO can read them if wants to [sic], but it would be thought frightfully bad form if he did’” (131). Here Prior seeks to reinsert difference between himself and Sarah – a task which he successfully accomplishes. Taking Prior’s public school accent “at face value” (131), Sarah functions as a working class voice of dissent that is predicated on the same distinction between us and them that comes to the fore in Barker’s depiction of Rivers. She says, “‘[y]ou lot make me sick . . . I suppose nobody else’s got a sense of honour?’” (131). Sarah’s focus on “‘honour’” here (131), which closely echoes Sassoon’s cultural appeal to “conduct” (3), points to how civic Englishness – a version of Englishness notable for its exemplification of liberal values – assumes a particularly middle-class inflection. Prior finds her appealing because she comes to stand for the working class from which he originates – he focuses particularly on her “precise delineation of the cost of everything which” he interprets to be “not materialistic or grasping, but simply a
recognition of the boundaries and limitations of life” (127) – but it is also what makes him middle class in her eyes.

In Barker’s *Regeneration* as in Kureishi’s “The Body,” the bastion of political promise – working class communality – is tempered by its reification. In *Regeneration* the working classes take on the attributes of the primitive when filtered through Rivers’s gaze. Rivers’s analysis of his patients maps his experience in Melanesia onto them. He likens Willard, a patient suffering from an imagined spinal injury, to a “bull seal dragging itself across rocks” when he describes the “mixture of immobility and power” that he represents (Barker, *Regeneration* 112); through the use of another simile he also likens the “sheen on his hair and skin” to “the gloss on the coat of an animal” (112). Rivers’s apprehension of Prior betrays a similar field of vision. It is specifically Prior’s “Northern accent” that alters Rivers’s perception of him (49). “Hearing Prior’s voice . . . had the curious effect of making him look different” he says, like “a little, spitting, sharp-boned alley cat” (49). For Prior too, though Sarah functions as a figure aligned with boundaries – not insignificant in the context of Sassoon’s interpretation of how the government of war fails to inscribe limits on the action in part because of the sway the argument of cultural legitimacy holds over them – she also represents the primitive: “At this distance her eyes merged into a single eye, fringed by lashes like prehistoric vegetation, a mysterious, scarcely human pool” (215). Prior’s reading of Sarah, which mimics Rivers’s reading of him, can be traced to the paradox that he finds in the need she fulfills for him. The narrator observes, “[h]e needed her ignorance to hide in. Yet, at the same time, he wanted to know and be known as deeply as possible. And the two desires were irreconcilable” (216). Rivers’s response to his patients oscillates between needing them to serve as catalysts for his own self-realization and maintaining distinctions between us and them by fetishizing their (class) difference.
Though Prior dismisses the myth of the erasure of class distinctions, presumably because his own subjectivity is predicated on difference, he anticipates the emergence of another form of difference – another category of us and them – within his own generation which will take on the same attributes of class. “‘When all this is over’” (Barker, Regeneration 135), Prior says “‘people who didn’t go to France, or didn’t do well in France – people of my generation, I mean – aren’t going to count for anything. This is the Club to end all Clubs’” (135). Prior’s anticipation of how the war will exacerbate divisions or inaugurate new forms of social classification counters Kaley Joyes’s argument that Barker rewrites Owen’s poems in order to broaden their generational perspective. In “Regenerating Wilfred Owen: Pat Barker’s Revisions” Joyes insightfully points out that “[w]hile Barker clearly reworks Owen’s ‘The Dead-Beat’ and ‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’” she also refers to ‘The Parable of the Old Man and the Young’ . . . without drawing attention to her intertextual actions” (170). For Joyes, “like Owen,” in “The Parable of the Old Man and the Young” Rivers in Barker’s Regeneration maps “the social bargain between generations” onto the parable of Isaac and Abraham and arrives at the conclusion “that the First World War is a betrayal” (175). Barker’s depiction of Rivers’s awareness of his generation’s “actions and their consequences,” according to Joyes, “diminishes the gap between generations by constructing them as similarly critical of Britain’s willingness to sacrifice its young men” (176) but, moreover, offers the possibility for this gap to be healed through “contrition” (175). The disjunction between generations easily stands in for the rupture of the unified nation.

While tempting to read Regeneration as a reconciliatory narrative, it is significant that Rivers’s initial suspicion that he has been made different occurs during the discussions of kinship – of generational inheritance – which also comes to the fore in his reconsideration of his role in the War. Barker in fact shows generational inheritance to be the guarantor of sacrifice, of the
individual’s willingness to submit to the prevailing narratives that an overwhelmingly Christological narrative solidifies between us and them; the opposition between primitive and civilized, Barker intimates, persists in part because it is bound up with a desirable model of organic nationhood.

In this sense, her interrogation of the First World War resonates with the focus of her early novels. For Nick Hubble, Barker’s *Union Street* and *Blow Your House Down* “were not written to expose social problems and encourage reforms, but to critically examine gender roles and relations in the working class by focusing on the effect of historical strains on the generational cycles which reproduce and intensify patterns of behaviour” (156). Hubble’s argument regarding Barker’s early novels comes to bear on his interpretation of the role Prior plays in *Regeneration*. He explains, “[l]ike other Barker characters, Prior’s function at one level is to relive certain archetypal working-class experiences” (159); Barker ruptures this cycle according to Hubble because Prior “is free from the contextual boundaries of the period where he has been located and is . . . ‘neither fish nor fowl’ [*Regeneration* 57]in terms of class, sexuality and gender” (159-60). Consequently, “he is able to represent not so much working class consciousness as the working-class unconscious” (160). In other words, for Hubble, Prior serves as a productive anachronism in Barker’s novel. The connection Barker draws between “the working-class unconscious” (Hubble 160) and the primitive symbolically transforms Prior into an exemplar of a nation whose debt to “English idioms of cultural reflection” manifests in a purposeful evasion (Gilroy, *Black Atlantic* 9): rather than confront class difference, it subjects itself to repeated hauntings by ethnic others who do not fall neatly into the proscribed scheme of sanctionable Englishness which demands that rank be recognized and then disavowed.
England, England might be said to be Barnes’s intercession in cultural repetition that conceals its political origins. This effort finds its elegant counterpart in Barker’s interruption of the discourse of inevitability that the very notion of the continuous historical nation requires. First, Barker succumbs to the twin pressures that mimicry enfolds within itself – synchrony and diachrony. Rather than structuring the everyday time of the nation by expressing a preference either for a prescriptive, static formulation of the nation or for its dynamic counterpart, mimicry reconstitutes historicity by expressing a preference for both; the convergence of these narratives in the public space of the nation proscribes political and cultural possibility, according to Barker. The role of the opposition between the protopathic and epicritic in the nation ensures that the productive ambivalence both generate will give way to an “‘all or nothing’” (Regeneration 46) sensibility that overrides the possibility of political or cultural alternatives. In Barnes, these pressures combine to create a presiding discourse of renewal; in Barker, their convergence produces a narrative that justifies cultural and political inevitabilities. Despite Rivers’s protests to the contrary, class will continue to define the nation and the narrative of English exceptionalism that provides an explanatory framework for the War will persist.

As Eluned Summers-Bremner points out, this narrative is embedded in the ‘everyday’ life of the nation as an ersatz form of “trauma management” (276). While Summers-Bremner makes this claim in her interpretation of Barker’s later novels such as Border Crossing and Another World, it can be made equally plausibly in the context of Regeneration. According to Summers-Bremner, not only “History” but small c conservatism in “English post-Enlightenment tradition, absorbs revolutionary fervour by first using it to create and then forgetting that it has created, a parallel story of the past, named English history or heritage” (273); this has the effect of providing “nostalgia” with a “fallback linear framework” (274).
Although Prior is scornful of the firmly held belief that “the whole thing’s going to end in one big glorious *cavalry charge*” (Barker, *Regeneration* 66), Rivers notices the alteration in Prior when he quotes from Alfred Lord Tennyson’s “Charge of the Light Brigade.” Prior’s use of the past tense when he admits “‘I was in love with it once,’” is belied by his physical response – Rivers notes how his “face lit up as he quoted the poem” (66) – which clearly expresses his affective response to its celebration of doomed heroism. Prior’s reaction to Tennyson’s poem reproduces the paradox that Barker finds in Owen and Sassoon but which she argues is also symptomatic of the wider nation: “‘the whole British psyche is suffering from the contradiction you see in Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, where the war is both terrible and never to be repeated and at the same time experiences derived from it are given enormous value’” (Barker, qtd. in Ezard).

The ethical response to the conduct and ideology of war is at odds with the symbolic inscription of these experiences in the national imaginary, a predicament that is analogous to the hold the imperial narrative of empire continues to have on the contemporary imaginary. Rather than redirecting “the focus of our understanding” of World War One “from pity at passive suffering to wonder at this courage that goes beyond meaning” (Hubble 156), Barker boldly insists that even this repressed other of the imaginative apprehension of war legitimates both the contingency and the necessity of war, rendering its recurrence inevitable.

Barker thus divulges that the war’s mythic status stems from a symptomatic response to trauma; figurative language here becomes the means to codify experience that exceeds the frame of cultural expectation. While Owens’s perception of the War emerges through his use of a simile – “‘It’s as if all other wars had somehow . . . distilled themselves into this war, and that makes it something you . . . almost can’t challenge’” (Barker, *Regeneration* 83, ellipses in orig.), Sassoon’s near parallel experience is conveyed using the language of semblance. He observes,
“I seemed to be seeing it from the future . . . I seemed to be in that time and looking back. I think I saw our ghosts’” (84, my ellipses). Brannigan argues that Owen and Sassoon’s re-membering signifies not only that “the time of the war is never self-present, but must always be filtered through its mythic resonances or its future significance” (118), but that their obscure knowing is an effect of living in “an age which defines itself as post-historical” and in which “the very possibility of scientific or historical knowledge is thrown into crisis” (118). This crisis of knowledge, that is also a crisis of history, forces them to inhabit a temporal disjunction in which the present severs the relation between past and future. Haunting, which in Regeneration is emblematic of the post-historical for Brannigan, is also emblematic of the beleaguered nation.

The project that Brannigan locates in Barker’s trilogy is to show that “[h]istory, after the Great War” is in fact “continually haunted by the memory of loss, and is constantly striving and failing to regenerate the past” (116). Conscious of the danger that the narrative Barker helps shape might be used to justify the nostalgic nation, Brannigan points to Michel de Certeau’s conception of haunting as being a more accurate reflection of the form haunting takes in Barker’s fiction than Freud’s. De Certeau “counters Freud’s notion that the modern rational mind can ‘rid himself’ of primitive beliefs in the ghostly and the uncanny and argues that the present is perpetually haunted by the dead” (111). What Barker’s novel intimates is that Thatcher’s ameliorative promises are suspect. In other words, the perpetual haunting of the nation ensures that its postimperial legacies remain relevant to the contemporary nation in a way that cannot be conjured up at will.

In Regeneration, Burns, a young officer whose “suffering was without purpose or dignity” acts as a limit case for Rivers (Barker 19): “[w]hat had happened to him was so vile, so disgusting, that Rivers could find no redeeming feature” (19). Rivers describes him as one “in
whom a prematurely aged man and a fossilized schoolboy seemed to exist side by side,” an effect which gives “him a curiously ageless quality” (169). In reflecting that “[i]t was different in kind from other such experiences . . . if only because of the complete disintegration of personality it had produced” and because “he could discern in him no trace of the qualities he must have possessed in order to be given that exceptionally early command” (184), Rivers casts Burns as simultaneously haunted and haunting. As a ghost of his former self, he also raises the spectre of loss, of the fragility and imminent disappearance of the patriotic and masculine English self, the exemplary war hero. It is, notably, Rivers’s own sense of the “horror of the event” that leads to Burns’s breakdown (184), a horror that increases as Burns himself becomes able to create a framework to deal with his gruesome experience. In part, this is because his interpretation of Burns has hitherto been mediated by myth. Rivers observes, “I’ve let him . . . – no, that was unfair, that was completely unfair – I’ve let myself turn it into . . . some kind of myth. And that was unforgivable” (173, first ellipses mine). Rivers’s consideration of the possibility that “[t]he condensation and displacement” he “encountered in the dreams of patients” might be the very “mechanisms . . . at work in the myth and ritual of primitive people” (186), construes the widespread social and cultural change enforced by World War One as the return of the repressed. What Rivers is forced to realize is that the myth that palliates his interpretation of Burns’s experience is part of a wider narrative that rationalizes the war.

It is Rivers’s interpretation of Burns that forces him to acknowledge the protopathic – all or nothing – reality of political and cultural change. The narrator observes that “Rivers knew only too well how often the early stages of change or cure may mimic deterioration. Cut a chrysalis open, and you will find a rotting caterpillar. What you will never find is that mythical creature, half caterpillar, half butterfly” (Barker, *Regeneration* 184). The relationship between
decay and renewal that Barker confronts here speaks to how a politically-inflected cultural vision, such as that offered by Thatcherism, comes itself to form the precondition for cultural renewal. Indeed, Brannigan points out that in the companion novels to *Regeneration* “Rivers discovers that war, however morally decrepit, appears to have a regenerative function, and this serves to question whether the same ghastly idea might be true of the Great War (114). Barker contends that the political nation, which forges but in turn comes to be forged by the desires of the populace, is the architect of a cultural and political melancholia. The persistence of this melancholia is assured by how it absorbs rather than confronts the cultural and political revenants that belie the narrative of the everyday nation that it offers. As an embodiment of the political nation, it is unsurprising that Rivers himself takes on pathological characteristics.

Barker’s depiction of Tom Seymour, a child psychologist, in *Border Crossing* almost a decade later insists that the disavowal that she finds in the Thatcherite nation continues to work itself out through the inhabitants as well as the geographical and physical terrain of the nation. The novel opens as Seymour contemplates the breakdown of his marriage. His thoughts are interrupted when a young man’s suicide attempt breaks his reverie and causes him to dive into the river in pursuit of him. Only later does he discover that the man that he has saved, Ian Wilkinson, is in fact Danny Miller. Seymour recalls that he served as expert witness at Miller’s trial twelve years earlier after assessing his moral responsibility for his alleged crime. After being convicted of the murder of elderly neighbor Lizzie Parks at the age of ten, Danny spends his adolescence in a series of institutions and, on being released, desires to reclaim his past. For him, embarking on sessions with Dr. Seymour is a means of confronting a past that his newly formulated identity conceals. Their exchanges equally force Tom not only to confront the accuracy of his assessment of Danny but also to interrogate the extent to which change and redemption are possible. Though
primarily focused on reconstructing Danny’s childhood, Tom also visits those who encountered Danny following his conviction. Just as they are about to broach the ‘horror’ to which their sessions have been moving toward – the day of Lizzie’s murder – two boys are arrested for killing an elderly woman. They embark on a final session in which the two seek to get at the truth of Danny’s experience so that it will not be tainted by media coverage of the more recent case. When Tom becomes complicit with Danny, failing to report his “lapse into a borderline psychotic state” on their final night together (Barker, Border Crossing 210), Danny/Ian is again reintegrated into society in order to avoid the media. Although the regeneration of the area around which Tom lives suggests recovery, Barker refuses so easy a solution. The novel closes after Tom unexpectedly reencounters Danny in his new guise when a university invites him to speak on troubled youths.

Barker once again focuses on a protagonist whose authorized and acknowledged expertise makes him an establishment figure who enters into psychological sessions with Danny Miller in order to reassert the prevailing social order. Danny’s sessions with Tom are ostensibly predicated on constructing an alternative to the narrative Danny himself has constructed and to the formulaic narrative at the basis of Tom’s diagnosis. Danny says, “‘I wasn’t there because I’d done anything wrong. I believed my own story’” (Barker, Border Crossing 137). Danny’s representative value as a child who comes from the moral heartland of the nation – and who thus embodies an ideal at the heart of Englishness – renders the retrieval of his narrative a miniature version of the forging of narrations of nation. Summers-Bremner argues that the aim of Barker’s fictions is to “open received accounts of history up to the space of the intimate workings of their terms” (273). In Regeneration, Barker does so by revealing the political and cultural investment in history to be assured by how the twin terms of the primitive and civilized are mobilized in
relation to fantasies of civic Englishness; *Border Crossing* extends this conception of history. In *Border Crossing*, Barker extends her consideration of how the retrieval of history – rather than history itself – functions as an object of fantasy and desire. In the context of critics such as John Kirk who associate Thatcher and Thatcherism with a linear narrative, Barker’s *Border Crossing* is also interpretable as a work that uncovers how Thatcherism itself retrospectively appears to fulfill the same psychological need as the historical narrative of the modern English nation by offering itself as a “revolutionary mode of trauma management” that creates crisis in order to absorb and redirect the anxieties of the electorate (Summers-Bremner 276).

The preoccupation with new identities that is central to Kureishi’s “The Body” reappears in *Border Crossing* because Danny’s reintroduction to society as Ian Wilkinson is what drives this interrogation of the past. At the level of plot, retracing Danny’s childhood up until the murder offers Tom an opportunity to fill in the “huge gaps in . . . information” that forced him to construct a limited yet conclusive pronouncement on Danny’s “mental and moral maturity” (Barker, *Border Crossing* 36). In constructing this coherent narrative, Tom seeks to establish an understanding based on the social environments in which he grew up and the historical moment of his youth. It is significant in this respect that Danny’s childhood memories reveal him to be a child of the Thatcher-era. In part, then, Tom’s assessment of Danny confronts the fallout of Thatcher’s turn away from the welfarist conception of the child as a “focus for the combined effects of the community” toward an alternative conception of the child as “a focus for the limited and private competitive unit” (Nunn 108). Danny’s father’s participation in the Falkland conflict and in Northern Ireland in Barker’s novel in fact confronts the justificatory narrative of Thatcher’s imperialist ventures. Danny muses, “I think he came back from the Falklands in a far worse state than he let on . . . . Or perhaps I’m just making excuses and he was a violent
bastard’” (Barker, *Border Crossing* 92). If, in Thatcher’s rhetoric, the “secure family home” came to represent “the ‘ground’ won through the Government’s ‘many battles’ from the Falklands to the Miner’s Strike [Thatcher, 1986, 220]” (Nunn 109), then the disintegration of Danny’s home with his father’s return disrupts this triumphant Thatcherite social vision.

The connections between public and private violence that Barker interrogates here brings patriotic and state of the nation discourses into conversation in what has become a familiar theme throughout her fictions. The “moral circles” that Tom perceives being defined through Danny’s account of his childhood offer to act as a justificatory framework for Danny’s crime (Barker, *Border Crossing* 97). Barker has noted her interest in “the network that grows up between” three types of violence: “legitimate public violence, domestic violence, and . . . criminal violence outside the home” (Interview 180). Violence has come to be inscribed in the contemporary nation because of the persistence of the narratives she interrogated in *Regeneration* in its political and cultural imaginary. Gilroy has persuasively argued for the existence of a connection between the role the Wars play in the cultural imaginary and “the bewildering effects of England’s postcolonial melancholia” (*Postcolonial* 107). In describing the patriotic violence that has come to be associated with its sporting events and chants, Gilroy concludes that “[a]ll the latent violence, all the embittered machismo, all the introjected class warfare articulated by defeated victors (mostly men and boys who were baffled and bewildered by a new postwar world that refused to recognize their historic manly qualities) is coded here in a dynamic and still explosive form” (*Postcolonial* 107). In Danny’s narrative, publicly sanctioned violence which takes place outside of English space during his father’s deployment to the Falklands and to Northern Ireland, translates into domestic and criminal violence at home. In other words, the political narrative that sanctioned the Falklands by appealing to a cultural narrative of Englishness intersects here with a
political narrative that seeks to protect cultural Englishness against the violence that it has itself perpetuated.

The role children came to perform in the “late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries” as the locus of a “range of political discourses and actions that sometimes challenged, sometimes justified the developments and social conditions of a modern industrialist capitalist nation” is central to Barker’s representation of the plight of Danny Miller (Nunn 98). As does Prior in Barker’s *Regeneration*, Danny challenges a divide between us and them that is predicated on the difference between those who inhabit the “sink housing estates” and “urban ghettos” and “mainstream society” (Barker, *Border Crossing* 25). In *Border Crossing*, the estate obviously functions as a version of the primitive. “Their was a warrior morality, primitive and exacting” (25), Tom notes, when describing the children and adolescents who are subjects in his book.

“Many of the children, and most of the adolescents he talked to, were preoccupied – no, obsessed – with issues of loyalty, betrayal, justice, rights (theirs), courage, cowardice, reputation, shame. Theirs was a warrior morality, primitive and exacting. Nothing much in common with the values of mainstream society, but then they came from places that had been pushed to the edge,” he explains (24-5). The absence of the values that Tom describes in mainstream society intimates that the wider public space of the nation is itself degraded; their values are the characteristics of Englishness although they themselves are the sanctionable others that inhabit the nation. In response to Tom’s hushed confession that “‘[i]f Ian had done what he did there’” – on the estate – “‘there wouldn’t have been nearly the same uproar’” Martha (116), Danny’s parole officer, replies “‘[n]o . . . . Because that’s them’” (116). In contrast, Danny’s place at the heart of the space of imagined Englishness confronts the myth of cultural Englishness that supports the political vision of renewal.
From the outset of the novel, Danny appears to represent the primitive for Tom. On rescuing him from the river, Tom regards the as-yet-unknown boy to be “a creature formed, apparently, of mud” (Barker, *Border Crossing* 5). The transference of the trope of mud that the narrator focalizing through Tom describes during the rescue as “[t]hick, black, oily, stinking mud, not the inert stuff you encounter in country lanes and scrape off your boots at the end of the day, but a sucking quagmire” signposts how he will function as the inscrutable and archaic horror that Tom attempts to understand but by which he will also be overtaken (4). The resonance of the opening of *Border Crossing* with Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* becomes clear through Tom’s later contemplation of the applicability of the term “‘horror’” to describe Danny, an overt reference to Kurtz’s final words (36). Danny’s appearance simultaneously constructs him as a figure of the antipastoral based on Tom’s careful distinction between “country” mud and other mud (4).

It is Danny himself who paves the way for the parallels between himself and Kurtz through his own allusions to *Apocalypse Now*, the contemporary filmic remake of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. He refers to it as the film he “‘saw . . . three or four times’” with his father and also describes “‘the poster of *Apocalypse Now*’” that he had at Long Garth (Barker, *Border Crossing* 95). In describing the morning of Lizzie’s murder, which had been immediately preceded by his violent reaction to his mother’s attempt to discipline him, he also observes, “‘I knew everything had changed. I’d kicked away the ground under my feet’” (179). Although Tom recognizes that Danny’s narrative is a carefully crafted refutation of his testimony, his own encounters with Danny are mediated and also tellingly inflected by the same narrative. The third person narrator’s observation at the outset of the novel, “at this moment, seeing in memory what in life he did not see, Tom freezes the frame” (2), implies retrospection at work despite the fact that the narrative is
set forth using the present tense, third person point of view and also significantly foreshadows the failures of narrative reconstruction.

Tom’s observation that “[t]he mud on the boy’s face had begun to dry and crack, like a ritual mask or the worst case of psoriasis you could imagine” intervenes in the trope that he has established as a marker of the primitive (Barker, *Border Crossing* 8). The similes Barker employs introduce the possibility that he in fact exemplifies dual aspects of the social – either its production of a ritually inscribed subject or its production of a subject who stands for the psoriatic nation. The doubling that occurs between Tom and Danny especially draws the state of the nation that their interactions register into question. In fact, Barker’s explanation that “‘Rivers actually manages to maintain his balance, whereas Tom Seymour . . . tilts into complicity with Danny’” intimates an alteration in her trajectory that has to do with how a narrative of national decay has come (Interview 181), paradoxically, to signify a cultural ideal. At the close of the novel, Tom perceives himself to have taken on Danny’s attributes. After talking to the media about the parallel case that threatens to expose Danny, Tom observes that his face, which is “greasy with make-up and sweat,” makes him look “as if he were wearing a rapidly disintegrating mask” (Barker, *Border Crossing* 192).

Tom’s positioning of himself in relation to Danny is in part due to the precarious role he plays in the transactions between us and them. Though he clearly differentiates himself from the children of the estates – the “‘them’” to which Martha alludes (Barker, *Border Crossing* 116) – his successive rhetorical questions, which establish Danny as an overtly state-crafted subject, simultaneously locate himself against the “they” of the institutions which have housed Danny. He queries, “[w]hat had they made of him? What had they done with him?” (18). In this moment, he implicitly identifies with Danny. Indeed, Barker foreshadows this parallel in the
opening pages when the narrator describes how Tom’s “breath snagged in the boy’s throat” (6). This image suggests that the therapeutic procedure involves Danny constructing a response to Tom’s testimony, a development that Tom himself comes to acknowledge. It is also evocative of how Danny’s narrative fills a need for Tom; his interpretation of Danny’s narrative is filtered through his desire for redemption, both his and Danny’s – if only in order to prop up his earlier diagnosis. Summers-Bremner has persuasively argued that it is possible to read “the project” of *Border Crossing* “as a demonstration of the dream work that childhood so often performs for adulthood or fantasies of English history for the English nation: a looking back that is a means of managing anxiety about the future in the present but one that, if unchecked, can threaten to overturn or annihilate all meanings” (275). This certainly seems to be the case for Tom. He identifies the specific gap between childhood and adulthood which seems to represent an irresolvable rupture (and results in a break with linear continuity) in his own childhood experiences. On revisiting a place in which he, like Danny, could have become responsible for another’s death, Tom recalls that “[i]n spite of the connecting thread of memory, the person who’d done that was not sufficiently like his present self for him to feel guilt” (Barker, *Border Crossing* 48). That Danny offers to bridge these narratives – offering a non-linear notion of temporality that is akin to the temporality of haunting in *Regeneration* – is signalled by Tom’s perception of him after he comes to realize that Ian Wilkinson is in fact Danny: “Now, second by second, under the sharp bones and planes of the adult face, a child’s rounded, pre-pubescent features rose to the surface, and broke through, like a long-submerged body” (16). Reminiscent of the opening of *Border Crossing*, when Tom literally pulls Danny out of the water following Danny’s failed suicide attempt, this paradigm is also a repetition of how, in *Regeneration*, Rivers’s perception of Prior alters when he speaks, which suggests thatDanny is for Tom, as
Prior was for Rivers, an emblem of the collective unconscious of the wider social and political context.

*Border Crossing*, like Barnes’s *England, England* and Kureishi’s “The Body,” proffers the natural as a predictable source of cultural renewal in the wake of social crisis. The area next to which Tom lives is transformed by the end of the novel. That he lives “on the edge of what had once been a thriving area of docks, quays and warehouses, now derelict and awaiting demolition” (Barker, *Border Crossing* 1) stands as an obvious symbol of decline that is countered by the development of “shops, restaurants and hotels” at the end of the novel (212). Though primarily predicated on socio-economic changes, the alteration of the river is symbolic. Focalizing through Tom, the narrator observes “[e]ven the river changed. The crumbling jetties and quays were demolished, paths laid, trees planted” (212). While the appearance of “[o]tters on the Tyne” seems to underscore renewal (212), the likening of Danny to an otter earlier in the novel disrupts straightforward interpretation. The headmaster’s wife at Long Garth, the facility where Danny was imprisoned, tells Tom that he worked the system “‘[l]ike otters swim’” (129).

Tom’s establishment of a “new pattern” (Barker, *Border Crossing* 212) following Danny’s departure recalls his earlier recognition “that when confronted by a number of disturbing events, the human mind insists on finding a pattern” (20). The pattern that emerges at the end of the novel, however, is not straightforward given the river’s earlier symbolic function for Tom. Early in the novel, the narrator, focalizing through Tom, describes how “[t]he Quayside never failed to lift [his] spirits” (81): “You could smell the sea on windy days like this, imagine cliffs crumbling, the coast nibbled away, big concrete tank traps, eroded by spring and neap tides, blown as specks of grit in the eye” (82). The process of erosion that Tom associates with the Quay at once leads to the literal contraction of the nation in a process that repeats the contraction
of suburbia in Barnes’s *Metroland* and the contraction and intensification of suburbia that Kureishi values in *The Buddha of Suburbia* especially; this vulnerable vision of the nation seems preferable to the extension of the fraught renewal of the landscape in which Tom lives.

On reencountering Danny/Ian at the end of the novel, Tom describes his reintegration as a “success” albeit in a qualified fashion (Barker, *Border Crossing* 216). It is “[p]recarious, shadowed, ambiguous, but worth having nevertheless” (216). While it is tempting to read this conclusion as an optimistic assessment that finds value in proscription, Sharon Monteith and Nahem Yousaf have convincingly argued that the scent of lilacs in this closing scene “purposefully recalls T.S. Eliot’s classic opening image to *The Waste Land* where in the spring lilacs emerge, ‘breeding . . . out of the dead land, mixing memory and desire,’ portending an anti-pastoral unease in which images of regeneration . . . are overwhelmed with ambivalence” (295). Monteith and Yousaf importantly emphasize how Barker undermines Tom’s reading of Danny’s reincorporation as fantasy; their intertextual reading also intimates how his desire of partial renewal is itself a function of fraught desire.

Tom becomes a repository of Lizzie’s memory, and, in doing so, himself becomes a repetition of Danny, reversing the imitative relationship that configures the encounters between the two men through much of the novel. Here, by taking on Danny’s sight – Danny acknowledges that in his new post-Ian incarnation he “‘doesn’t fight her now’” – he is able to construct a coherent narrative that redresses a broken line of inheritance (Barker, *Border Crossing* 215). In the wake of his inability to procreate with his wife Lauren, Tom compares himself unfavourably to his friend Roddy who “looked much older than his forty years” but “at least . . . knew where he was in the generations” (26). The role that Danny promises to fill as surrogate son offers Tom the possibility of definitively placing himself by becoming an iteration of him.
While tempting to read as a moment of spectral return that enables renewal, Barker troubles this easy interpretation by suggesting the “selfishness” of Tom’s actions (26), in a repetition of the qualities he assigns the “childless” (26). The resolution that he achieves is largely made possible only by his own strategic concealment of the symptoms of psychosis he observes prior to Danny/Ian’s relocation.

Barker’s bleak assessment of the possibility of renewal expresses disillusionment with Blair’s social vision. Tom’s reading of the newly introduced Danny is resonant with Blair’s Third Way response to crime, which was described tongue-in-cheek by the Economist at the beginning of Blair’s time in office as a stance that “combine[s] the left’s acknowledgement that crime has social roots, with the right’s unwillingness to make excuses for criminals” (“Getting tough”). The redemptive version of nationhood offered by Blair, in which his stance on crime leads to the construction of “‘one nation, one community’” (Blair qtd. in “Getting tough”) Barker’s novel ultimately suggests, feeds into a culture of melancholia in which renewal is both evasive and habitual. In her subsequent novel, Double Vision, then, Barker assesses how the morbidity that accompanies imperial versions of Englishness has been reformulated in the domestic cultural landscape; in part, she hints, this process has been enabled by a historical and political conjuncture in which the events of 9/11 have come to cement the trajectory of a habitual renewal that had already come to be closely associated with Englishness.

Set in between the days immediately following Christmas and the beginning of the Easter period, Barker’s Double Vision focuses on protagonists Kate Frobisher, a sculptor working on a statue of Christ after having recently lost her husband, and Stephen Sharkey, a war correspondent who has retreated to the country in order to write and to find respite from the memories of war which pursue him. The connecting thread between these central characters is their shared
relationship with and memories of Ben Frobisher, Kate’s husband and Stephen’s colleague, who was killed while on assignment as a war photographer. Their mutual interrogation of how representation acts as a kind of “trauma management” serves as the engine that drives the novel (Summers-Bremner 276).

Kate and Stephen are also tellingly joined by their experiences with Peter Wingrave, a character whose references to his “‘Yorkshire’” upbringing (20), when coupled with the fact he “‘read English’” and (21), more tellingly, the particulars of his crime – that he “‘was in a house stealing money’” when “‘the old lady whose house it was came back unexpectedly’” (233) – signals that he is in fact the latest iteration of Danny Miller whose past is known by the vicar intent on enabling his reintegration into society. Forced to take on Peter as an assistant when a car accident at the outset of the novel limits her mobility, the novel charts Kate’s increasing mistrust of him as she copes with her grief for her husband. Stephen is similarly yoked to Peter when, during his retreat to his brother’s house in the country, he becomes romantically involved with Justine who is the vicar’s daughter and also Peter’s former girlfriend. As the novel progresses, Peter’s past comes to be known to both Kate and Stephen; Double Vision in this respect predictably extends the interrogation of redemption and renewal begun in Border Crossing. The eruption of violence in the moral heartland of England at the close of the novel, when Justine is attacked by burglars whom she surprises while house-sitting for Stephen’s brother, forces her father to confront his spiritual belief in redemption and forces Stephen to confront the revenants of violence that he has experienced abroad and which continue to haunt him. Like Border Crossing, Double Vision concludes ambivalently, gesturing toward the possibility of provisional renewal as Kate completes her statue and Stephen and Justine journey to Lindisfarne at the onset of Easter.

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Stephen and Kate are themselves metonymic because contiguous with rather than standing in a part/whole relation to the landscape that falls prey to Barker’s penchant for the pathetic fallacy. After her accident at the outset of the novel, Kate likens her body to a “barren plain,” a “fenland under its covering of snow” (*Double Vision* 6) and, in doing so, takes on the attributes of the border landscapes which her husband photographed on his retreats: “Fenland, waterland, brown tarns in gorse-covered hills, snow light, water light – all with the same brooding darkness in them” (55); though ostensibly “a break from the subjects he spent most of his life pursuing” the landscapes imply violence (55). Stephen similarly conceives of his own vulnerability; the terms “[i]nvalid, or invalid” apply equally to him (31), he muses toward the beginning of the novel. Rendered aware of boundaries and of that which lurks beyond and threatens to disrupt them, Kate and Stephen become the figures through which Barker reveals middle class fantasy itself to have overwhelmed the cultural and political life of the nation. This transformation occurs through a strategic concealment of revenants that make the nation – and consequently the subjects and communities of the nation – vulnerable. Rather than offering vulnerability as a remedy – as that which enables an experience with alterity that destabilizes middle class fantasy – Barker articulates her awareness that the flip side of the narrative of vulnerability or instability is that of safe return or stability.

Barker signals how the pastoral setting of *Double Vision*, which is noticeably that of the England that Prior indicates is possessed by his “brother officers” in *The Eye in the Door* – “a pastoral place” composed of “fields, streams, wooded valleys, medieval churches, surrounded by ancient elms” (*Eye* 115) – is bound up with this notion of return. Through the contrast she establishes between the “symbolic weight” of “the landscape” and the “mental geography that overlays the rural” which “seems to contradict the pastoral” (Monteith 293) she troubles this
myth, however. Stephen confronts the central place the “image of the soldier returning” has in English mythology (Barker, *Double Vision* 168), the continuing appeal of which according to Monteith and Yousaf comes to the forefront in how “Barker fuses Stephen” (292) with this role. He muses, “[i]t’s part of English mythology, that image of the soldier returning, but it depends for its power on the existence of an unchanging countryside. Perhaps it had never been true, had only ever been a sentimental urban fantasy, or perhaps something deeper – some memory of the great forest” (Barker, *Double Vision* 168). Monteith and Yousaf’s argument that the “image of the soldier returning” is a “cultural discontinuity” (292) makes an explicit claim for the work that this mythology accomplishes in re-establishing continuity. Stephen’s description of this myth in terms of “fantasy” or “memory” implies the role of the pastoral in the mode of trauma management that Summers-Bremner describes (Barker, *Double Vision* 168).

The narrator, focalizing through Stephen, conveys his recognition that the weeks in which he “lived in the hollow of a green wave, knowing it couldn’t last, that it must end soon” (Barker, *Double Vision* 168-9) have “the shaped quality of the past” (169) and, in doing so, aligns Stephen’s relation to the past with the cultural mode of “knowing nostalgia” (495) that Bentley finds in Barnes’s *England, England*. The pastoral to which Barker ostensibly turns in *Double Vision* is not a straightforward version of the anti-pastoral. The natural is constructed: “Forestry Commission land” exists alongside “deciduous forest” (4). Stephen’s description of how the signs of crisis come to be incorporated into the landscape strikingly colludes in the construction of an alternate “unchanging countryside” that is predicated on trauma (168). His catalogue of the countryside in which he observes “[b]oardered-up shops and cafés, empty fields, strips of yellow tape that nobody had bothered to remove even after the paths reopened, just as nobody had bothered to remove the disinfectant mats that now lay at the entrance to every tourist attraction,
bleached and baking in the sun” contains the traces of the recent foot-and-mouth crisis that make the landscape forlorn but also wryly insinuates that this narrative of trauma is now a banal convention rather than a tell-tale document of crisis (168).

Barker focuses on the parish community as a microcosm of the nation. Angela, Kate’s friend and a minor character in the novel, is a symbolic inhabitant and proponent of rural England. Her “English-rose face” readily makes her conventional (Barker, Double Vision 15). Her assessment of the “‘green Wellie Christians’” (25) is reported by Kate through a mediated narrative that reveals the role the Church of England plays in the national imaginary: “[w]eekenders who wouldn’t have dreamt of attending church in the city, but who in the country dropped in to morning service on their way to the Rose and Crown, as if – Angela again – God was thrown in as a job lot with Labradors and waxed jackets” (25). Angela’s interpretation of the “‘green Wellie Christians’” (25) also implies how the city as bastion of ‘semblance’ has come in a reversal to fulfill a central role in the rural idyll at the heart of Englishness. In part, this emerges through the vision of secular renewal around which both city and country converge. The fashionable acquisition of religion that Angela describes finds its parallel in Kate’s observation that “the locals . . . turned up only two or three times a year” (25); that this speaks to a secularization of faith is intimated by Alec’s own “cheerful[]” admission that they attend only on “dates at or near the main pagan festivals” (25).

The need that the church appears to fill becomes most clear in Barker’s novel when Kate comments that the Green Men have come to serve as symbols of renewal in a contemporary context as a result of “[a] secular world sifting through pagan images, like a rag-and-bone man grubbing about for something – anything – of value” (Double Vision 26-7). Kate attributes this reading of the Green Men to the failure of people “look” at them (27). Her own discovery of the
figures “at Ben’s funeral” as well as her “regular visits” to view them suggest that they fill a need that is traceable to the paradox they enfold within themselves as representative of abject destruction and suffering but also hope and renewal (26). If Barker’s own fictions act as a “renewed and critical aesthetic practice, showing representation at war with itself, just as society is shown to be at war with its own past” (Bernard 175), *Double Vision* discloses that the interpretation of representation is at war with representation as well. This struggle over meaning is attributable to the fact that the agents of interpretation are themselves not immune to cultural desires of renewal despite how they position themselves as interpreters rather than participants in the production of culture.

Like Kureishi, “Barker has begun to deploy artists and art more widely in her fiction” (Nahem and Yousaf 288). Traces of Barker’s focus on representation are evident in her earlier fictions. For example, her own sense that “[w]hat’s interesting about Rivers . . . is that instead of being wholeheartedly an advocate of the epicritic and the hierarchical structure of his society, he came more and more to value the protopathic as the parts of the personality that were chiefly involved in creativity, and he included in that scientific creativity” (Interview 184) maps aesthetic representation onto the biological but also speaks to the capacity for representation to act as a register of the social and the bodily/nervous that it expresses but also creates. As is also clear in “The Body,” *Double Vision* conveys that aesthetic representation carries with it a therapeutic value that is not without risk.

Kate’s own secular aesthetic interpretation of the sculpture that dominates the novel acts as a motif of renewal that parallels the function of the Green Men. Barker directly confronts this when Alec contemplates Kate’s “lack of belief” and “wonder[s] what she’d be able to make of this commission” (Barker, *Double Vision* 9). Kate’s construction of the Christ is significantly
interrupted by Peter’s presence. She observes, “[n]ormally she had the conception clear in her head from the beginning, so that the process of carving seemed almost like the uncovering of a figure already there, waiting to be released. Peter had destroyed that” (90). In attributing Peter’s presence in *Double Vision* to “[t]he cull” early in the novel (19), Kate foreshadows the threat to the rural idyll he ostensibly represents but also draws a connection between the social and aesthetic disruption he causes. Peter’s performative mimicry – he adopts her clothes and mimes her movements – alters her conception of the statue. The threat that he poses by “stealing her power in an almost ritualistic way” is a result of how he forces her to confront herself (149): “She felt a spasm of revulsion, not from him but from herself, as if he had indeed succeeded in stealing her identity. It was easy to believe that what she’d seen in the studio, through the crack in the door, was a deranged double, a creature that in its instability and incompetence revealed the truth about her” (150). Kate’s unease is traceable in part to how he appears to embody the secular gaze through which she views the Christ. Throughout the novel, from Kate’s point of view, he appears to exemplify the failure to look that she attributes to those who read the Green Men redemptively. When she meets him the first time he appears for a moment to be “blind” (18). When she later uses him as a ‘stand-in’ to get a sense of the scale of the Christ she also observes that although he possesses eyes that “were larger than most” they are “difficult to see” and also “ma[k]e no impact” (59). When he leaves his glasses behind in the studio, Kate comes to realize that they are in fact “clear glass” (60). Like Kate, he succumbs to the allure of misinterpretation from which she had believed herself exempt.

When Stephen reads one of Peter’s stories, “Inside the Wire,” which relates how fictional character Andrea White’s affection for one of the prisoners who is incarcerated where she teaches art leads to her death, he concludes that “Andrea died a terrible death because she projected her
own values on to an image created by somebody else for his own purposes” (Barker, *Double Vision* 137). In his story, Peter attributes Andrea’s misinterpretation of the artwork produced by the prisoner – she mistakes an image of torture for the Amnesty International candle – to the fact that she is “starved of meaning” (135); Andrea, then, functions in Peter’s narrative as an extreme example of the dangers of misinterpretation that a culture desperate for renewal provokes.

Stephen, however, recognizes that he is also subject to the same danger in mapping his own interpretations onto Peter’s story. Just as Peter’s story causes Stephen to contemplate the problems of interpretation, Peter’s presence doesn’t alter the statue itself but his presence restructures Kate’s field of vision.

Though the figure seemed “different” she recognizes that it was in fact “her way of seeing it” that “had changed” (Barker, *Double Vision* 151). In some respects, this is consistent with Childs’s argument that Barker’s aim in her fiction is “to defamiliarize the images of pain and violence that people see all around them everyday” which is part of “the abiding conviction of Barker’s work: the need to reverse the desensitizing effects of over-familiarity on our responses to violence and its effects” (69). Observing that the statue looks as though “[s]omebody with a talent for such things had given him a right going over” (Barker, *Double Vision* 151), she describes her statue as a secular image, the “Jesus of history” (152). The violence that her statue depicts is evocative of the vision of Christ that enables Burns in *Regeneration* to put his experience into context and of how Barker also “gives a religious perspective to the sufferings of the war in the trilogy by linking the perennial fear of gas attacks to the repeated asthmatic problems of the characters, all of them likened to Christ and the circumstances of his death” (Childs 67). In *Regeneration* it is evocative of the problem of “imagination” that the manner of Christ’s death poses for Burns (Barker, *Regeneration* 183). To Rivers he says, “[s]omebody had
to imagine that death . . . . You know that thing in the Bible? “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth”? I used to wonder why pick on that? Why his imagination? But it’s absolutely right” (183). Rivers’s emphasis on how this revelation enables Burns to construct a coherent narrative reveals an important connection between violence and creativity. In Double Vision, Kate’s recognition that “everything she found most disturbing in this figure corresponded with his mimed movements” similarly shows that the altered point of view that Peter elicits is based on how the event and its representation partake of the same violence (152).

The final shape of the sculpture, which she likens to “a pupa starting to hatch, grave cloths peeling away to reveal new skin” is reminiscent of the marriage of decay and renewal that closes Regeneration (Barker, Double Vision 242). In her reading of the statue, Kate views Peter to be emblematic of the “darkness” within her statue in a process of displacement that enables her to transfer the dark implications of her aesthetic creativity. She senses him “in the darkness between the white figures” (244) who signify the perpetrators of 9/11 and describes him as “the dark one, the shadow on the X-ray, who could never be counted” (244-5). Like Danny in Border Crossing, Peter takes on the attributes of the repressed that threatens to return. Kate observes, “[i]nside there, buried as deep as bones in flesh, was the armature that he’d made. The carving was hers, but the shape was his” (245). While designated as an ‘other’ whom Kate earlier realizes threatens to reveal more about the self than might be expected, Peter is not exempt from projecting his own desires onto his interpretation of the aesthetic object. In the context of how Border Crossing focuses on his desire to reclaim his past, it is significant that Kate asserts, “[h]e hasn’t forgotten anything, has he? Betrayal, torture . . . . And none of it matters”’ (245). Her resistance to his interpretation – “she didn’t want to talk about it. She didn’t even want to look at the figure with him standing there, in case his response contaminated hers” (245) – however
suggests that collective interpretation of the aesthetic object serves a mediatory function. When she views the final sculpture, she recognizes that her “way of seeing it” has “changed” again (251): “Partly because of Peter. Because somebody else had seen it” (251). Her recovery of the ‘fresh vision’ that is a prerequisite for creativity, then, is based on how the aesthetic carries with it an implied reciprocity – a communal vision that is nonetheless mindful of individual interiority. With this transformation, she recognizes that “[t]he resemblance to a fish, or a pupa starting to hatch, was still there, but no longer dominated. He was a man now” (251). The transformation that she observes is also due to the statue’s exposure to the natural. She muses, “[a]ll this time he’d been alone with the clouds and the moonlight and the shadows forming and dissolving on the floor, and in that time he’d become a thing apart. There was a life here now that no longer depended on her” (251). The convergence of the aesthetic and the corporeal here is analogous to Kureishi’s “The Body.” The aesthetic entails a separation that reveals the biological body to be a predictable social and cultural construction: both works chart the coming into being of the aesthetic body, though this takes place on different terms. In Barker’s novel the aesthetic body takes on an organic life and, in doing so, supplants mythology with history. In Kureishi’s novel an opposite process takes place whereby an insistence on the aesthetic body – the body of fantasy – enacts an evasion that is equally as dangerous as the turn toward cultural biology that Gilroy has described. While both writers offer aesthetic creativity and bodily interaction as equivalent modes of therapy, they warn of the possibilities for both to facilitate the continuation of a cultural and political pathology.

On viewing an exhibition of Goya with Stephen, Kate interprets Goya’s coping mechanisms through the lens of T.S. Eliot’s The Waste Land. After voicing her opinion to Stephen that “[t]herapists are quite scathing about “taking your mind off it”, but there’s no doubt
it works. At least for some people. It worked for him’” Kate ruminates, “[c]ircuses, freaks, markets, fiestas. An odd collection of fragments to shore against his ruin” (129). Stephen’s suggestion that Goya’s wife, Leocadia, was also one such remedy completes “a train of thought she hadn’t shared” and establishes a communal moment which speaks to the capacity for the aesthetic object to create a community of sympathetic viewers (129). His solution, in contrast to Kate’s which centers on the aesthetic, is predicated on how the body appears to offer an important alternative to a language of pathology.

The role Eliot’s The Waste Land plays as a subtext in her Regeneration Trilogy and in her subsequent works Border Crossing and Double Vision indicates that Barker’s works share its intuition that the desire for spiritual renewal lies at the heart of the cultural and political and literary imaginary. In Barker’s novels the spiritual life of the nation and memory – or the relation between past and present – are inter-implicated. Rivers’s insight that “the congregation, having renounced reason, looked rather the happier for it” recognizes that political and religious narratives accomplish the same cultural work (Barker, Regeneration 150). Rivers’s repeated references to the “flag-draped altar” (150) in the church reveal a literal conjunction between the political and spiritual nation. That the “flag-draped altar” (150) comes to be emblematic of the irretrievability of the past for Rivers simultaneously reveals this alteration to lead to the construction of a nation predicated on nostalgia. The third person narrator focalizing through Rivers observes, “he remembered the smell of the hassocks and fastened his eyes on the flag-draped altar. They would never come back, those times” (150). Catherine Lanone has argued that Barker’s trilogy “draws much of its strength from the rewriting of Christian motifs to suggest the horrible mystery of a world full of abandoned meanings” (267). Rather than coming to such a benign conclusion, Barker urges that how these Christological narratives are reworked still has a
role in determining the contemporary nation and in ensuring the continuation of its melancholic
caracter. That Barnes and Kureishi perhaps surprisingly share these concerns speaks to the
political and cultural urgency of unpacking how these narratives persist in the public life of the
nation, albeit in tacit form.

Barnes’s *England, England* and *Arthur & George* directly take up the role these
narratives play in political and cultural fantasies of Englishness. Martha’s secularized re-working
of the Lord’s prayer as a child attests to the fact that she is “not a believer” (Barnes, *England,
England* 12). At school, she is made to “lead the school in prayer” and “counterfeit an ardent
faith” (13) in an act likened to that of a “born-again convict assuring the parole board that he was
now washed free of his sins” (13). Against this tongue-in-cheek formulation of religion, her turn
to the “church of St Aldwyn” which is located in a portion of the “Island still unclaimed by the
Project” appears to counter the simulacra of *England, England* (218). It is not “a snug sanctuary,”
but rather a “continuation, even a concentration of the dank chill outside” (218). The austerity of
the building “left her alone with what the building stood for” (218); it is a representation of a lost
inheritance that is resonant with Barker’s and Kureishi’s confrontation of the ‘generational’
implications of the narrative of decay that has taken hold of the contemporary national imaginary.
Martha’s description that “the hymns and the villagers had vanished, as surely as if Stalin’s men
had passed this way” reveals the political to be at the root of this cultural interruption; it is the
“disused church” (220) where she seeks salvation which takes the form of a “seriousness” and
reveres the “remnants of a greater discarded system of salvation” (236). Martha queries, “an
individual’s loss of faith and a nation’s loss of faith, aren’t they much the same? Look what
. But it lost seriousness” (237); while Martha eschews sentimentality, her sense that she “can’t
explain without mocking [her]self” defines the limits of liberal skepticism and of faith (237). The alternative that Martha proffers rests instead in images: the ability to “celebrate the image and the moment even if it had never happened” (238).

In *Border Crossing* Tom’s notion of qualified redemption props up the existing pattern of socio-economic renewal that is predicated in part on the perpetuation of a problematic cultural idiom. When speaking with Danny, Tom admits that he doesn’t know what other route besides confession there could be to redemption. In contrast, Stephen offers the body as a means of achieving redemption. Against Stephen’s accusation that Alec, as a pastor, is “‘committed to the idea that people can change’” Alec clarifies, “‘[c]an be changed. As an act of individual will, no, I’m not sure I do believe it. I think that’s actually quite a secular belief. Therapy. Self-help books . . . It’s an industry, isn’t it?’” (Barker, *Double Vision* 179, ellipses in orig.). While Alec’s belief in this formulation is later challenged when he is forced to confront the violence that is enacted against his daughter Justine, his position here is an important foil for Stephen’s. Stephen rejects the possibility of “‘change’” and instead asserts his belief that people “‘can learn to manage themselves better’” (179). He proffers the possibility of “‘[g]et[ting] . . . bod[ies] moving. Hav[ing] sex’” as a means of self-management (179); in this respect, Stephen is commensurate to some extent with Karim in Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Adam in “The Body.” Stephen’s turn to sex is palliative rather than curative. This panacea counters the recent turn to pathologization that Stephen, like Adam in Kureishi’s novella, associates with the notion of therapy: “the man had understood the symptoms perfectly well” but Stephen feels as though his therapist “had underestimated [his] powers of recovery” (52).

Stephen’s faith in the prospect of bodies coming together, especially when read against Kureishi’s depictions of sexuality, offers just as fraught a conception of renewal as the aesthetic
to which Kate turns. When they stop to investigate whether or not their car hits a fox, Stephen and Justine submit to their mutual desires for each other. Here, as in her *Regeneration* trilogy, Barker shows lust and violence to be intertwined. Through his gaze, Stephen maps “the darkness of nights in Africa” onto English space (Barker, *Double Vision* 75). The wound that Justine acquires as she climbs through the barbed wire is significantly the catalyst for his altered perception, however: “He could only stare and stare at the red tear in the white skin . . . . It was as if his mind had been torn, a rent made in the fabric of his daily self and through this rent, slowly, all previous inhibitions and restraint dissolved into the night air” (76). The body here acts as that which enables the return of the repressed. It is unsurprising, then, that the contact of their physical bodies appears to offer the possibility of enacting a haunting that is akin to that which is central in *Regeneration*. The elision of past and future as they come together — “[t]here was no past, no future, only their two bodies pressing against each other in the darkness at the edge of the wood” (Barker, *Double Vision* 77) — rather than the return of distinct temporalities, prioritizes the present. Physical proximity breaks down boundaries and, in doing so, challenges everyday time and the everyday self. This signifies “the human possibilities” that Hubble argues the supernatural has come to represent in Barker’s fictions (from initially representing “the imminent onset of unavoidable fate” [153]). If interpreted in this way it is a fleeting possibility that speaks to the inevitability of return, however.

Barker’s implication that physical proximity enables diachronous time to infiltrate everyday time is akin to the temporality that Barnes’s depiction of spiritism appears to privilege in *Arthur & George*; the corporeal language that Barker uses to describe the rupturing of the everyday time of the nation recalls the organic and corporeal metaphors she uses to describe the physical nation itself. Early in the novel, Kate’s “lighted car travelled along the road between the
thickly crowding trees like a blood corpuscle passing along a vein” (Barker, *Double Vision* 4). What Barker’s depiction of the organic nation shows is that although both times are at work in the nation, the legislative nation ensures that synchronous time is privileged. Diachronous time is concealed but has the ability to interrupt the everyday time of the nation by itself returning as a revenant.

In both *Border Crossing* and *Double Vision*, a journey to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, the ‘cradle of Christianity’ and the site of Lindisfarne Priory, a centre of early Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England, precedes the novels’ conclusions. Though neither work ends with the spiritual reclamation that both pilgrimages suggest is desired, they nonetheless carry with them overtones of renewal. In *Double Vision*, Stephen and Justine’s journey is made after she has been attacked by burglars in an incident that yokes together the pairs’ separate experiences of violence. The regenerative overtones of this journey are redoubled by the fact that their visit to the Farnes takes place at Easter. Even this quest for renewal is a repetition, however. Kate reflects, “[s]o many times she and Ben had set out to go to the Farnes and nearly always at this time of year. Her heart felt full. A distinct, entirely physical sensation” (238). Her punctuation of her thoughts with a line from one of Housman’s “Last Poems,” entitled “tell me not here, it needs not saying” (xl, 1922) – “Possess, as I possessed a season, the countries I resign” (238, italics in orig.) – positions Stephen and Justine as the logical inheritors of Kate and Ben. For Monteith and Yousaf who persuasively argue that the close of *Double Vision* is an intertextual homage to Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*, Kate “recaptures his lyric to a lost pastoral . . . in the very moment she creates a bridge between her experience and theirs” (Monteith and Yousaf 295). Taken in context, however, these lines from Housman’s poem confront Nature’s betrayal. Nature is a
“faithless mistress” (Efrati 136) that “is presented as accepting the persona’s homage but not responding in kind to his devotion” (Efrati 138).

*Double Vision* instead closes as Justine and Stephen walk “half in the water, half on land, while behind them the sun rose above the dunes, casting fine blue shadows of marram grass onto the white sand” (258); this image is a domesticated version of the one Ben captured before his death in which, “from the viewer’s angle,” a “mass of military debris . . . seemed to be a huge wave about to break” (103) in front of “a small white sun, no bigger than a golf ball, veiled in mist” (103-4). The composition of this photograph, the narrator focalizing through Stephen explains, “was so powerful it transcended the limits of a particular time and place, and became a *Dies Irae*. A vision of the world as it would be after the last human being had left, forgetting to turn out the light” (104). This image is an iteration of the Green Men that occurs earlier in the novel: it stands for the extremity of renewal through absolute destruction. Its manifestation here conjures the connotations of its aural counterpart – the Latin hymn central to the requiem mass. Rather than intimating closure, the appearance of the *Dies Irae* on the natural landscape here evokes its earlier aesthetic iteration. It also reappears across Barker’s works. A version of this emblem emerges in *Regeneration* as the narrator, focalizing through Sassoon, recalls the transition as he travelled to Arras: “No more walls. Ruined buildings. Shelled roads. ‘From sunlight to sunless land.’ And for a second he was back there, Armageddon, Golgotha, there were no words, a place of desolation so complete no imagination could have invented it” (44). *Border Crossing* also contains within it a similar symbol in the form of the painting that Tom’s wife leaves him after they separate. He observes, “[t]he sun hung over the water, a dull red without rays and without heat, as it might look in the last days of the planet. Beneath was an almost abstract swirl of greys and browns, and in the bottom right-hand corner, barely in the
picture, a dark figure, himself, looking out over the water” (169). Not coincidentally, these images of absolute desolation and renewal are fitting manifestations of the void Raphael Ingelbein identifies at the heart of Englishness which tends to be read “either as the absence left by a defunct British Imperialism or as an emptiness that must urgently be filled with new national myths” (qtd. in Aughey 79). The Dies Irae in Barker’s novels ostensibly proffer themselves as images that confirm a transcendent narrative of nationhood; these images are extensions of the Christological narrative that underlies colonial understandings of Englishness. Their appearance in Barker’s novel insists on the absolute destruction of the nation in order for its redemption to occur. Barker insists, however, on portraying this image as a structuring aesthetic vision for her middle-class characters especially. In doing so, she intimates that their visions of the decaying nation are self-justifying. They defer confronting the implications of how these narratives structure the nation by insisting that the nation is already spectral and also by finding consolation in the possibility that the nation’s soul can find even temporary repose through how they arrive at a qualified mode of inhabiting the nation that suggests at least qualified renewal comes through its demise.

Barker’s consideration of pastoral space throughout her work – rather than suburban space – hints at a desire to unravel the symbolic formulations of Englishness, though her sustained awareness of how these fantasies are linked to the middle class means that her treatment of these spaces is directed toward registering the effects of Thatcherism as much as Barnes’s and Kureishi’s focus on suburbia becomes a fitting metaphor for the post-war, post-imperial nation. In Border Crossing suburbia is notable in its absence. Instead, Barker sets in sharp relief the sink estates and what Monteith and Yousaf have described as a version of the traumatized pastoral.
Barker circles the moral heartland that motivates and legitimates political action in *Regeneration*. In *Border Crossing* she directly confronts it in terms that are very similar to Barnes’s confrontation of pastoral space in *Arthur & George*. Though the landscapes that she represents in *Border Crossing* largely exclude suburbia, the fantasies that underlie suburbia overwrite the landscape. In some respects, the ambivalence of the regeneration of the landscape that occurs at the close of *Border Crossing* returns to the renewal that takes place at the end of Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and overtly rehearses the wider narrative of renewal that gives rise to Anglia in Barnes’s *England, England*.

Barker’s *Double Vision* importantly anticipates how the traumatized landscape becomes a fantasy that reaffirms a pervasive and pathological desire for cultural renewal. This desire is fulfilled through the reclamation of the past that poses as the political future. In this respect, like Barnes’s and Kureishi’s novels, *Double Vision* is forward-looking. Barnes’s depiction of the pastoral in *Arthur & George* in the setting of George’s section of the novel – Great Wyrley – shows the pastoral to have always been a place of trauma and conflict, a point that Barker makes through her depiction of the pastoral landscape in *Double Vision* and which Kureishi repeats through his representation of the London-pastoral Adam inhabits in “The Body.”

In Kureishi’s novella, the vision of the London pub as the model for a parochial and deeply rooted sense of community is based on how proximity forces difference to be acknowledged. Adam’s nostalgia is fragmented because this version of community existed before Adam’s overt disconnection of himself from his old life and is thus old rather than new. The ostensibly dystopic landscape that dominates the end of the novella enacts the reversion of the transformation with which Barker’s *Border Crossing* ends. For Tom, the reconstruction of the wasteland intimates possibility – though a fraught version of renewal; for Adam, in Kureishi’s
“The Body” the interior of the warehouse in which the Newbodies were located now matches its derelict exterior. What becomes clear in Barker’s *Double Vision* is that the traumatized landscape itself stands for the impossibility of renewal through reconstruction; instead, it gestures toward how these formulations of the past become a political and cultural inevitability. In one sense it is the coincidence between the need for renewal and the impossibility of its accomplishment that sustains an imperially-inflected mode of national consciousness which these writers speak to – a conclusion that suggests the particular suitabilities of ‘fiction’ to provide a truer narrative of culture; what Barker shows is that even these portraits are deeply indebted to the “cognitive and aesthetic markers” that map Englishness in relation to otherness (9).

The inhabitants of the Englands of these writers’ novels in some respect read the landscape as a primary signifier. That the country landscape of *Double Vision* has been remade – as an extension of the larger cities as the home of “‘green-wellie Christians’” rather than locals (Barker 25) – means that it has taken on the attributes of suburbia as a literal extension of the city; within this formulation, parochialism is circumscribed and the narrative of communality exists only as a revenant that derives meaning from the incursions of the outside other which threaten the space. That the inhabitants of the village share these tendencies intimates that what is at stake in contemporary formulations of Englishness is a fundamental detachment between political centers of Englishness and regional Englishness. The latter has itself become a cultural signifier of return, although a notably temporary one in the case of the “‘green-wellie Christians’” (25).

Barker’s portrayal of the possibilities physical proximity – sex – and aesthetic representation hold echoes the choices that seem to be on offer in Kureishi’s “The Body.” *The Buddha of Suburbia* believes accretion – represented by love but also by creation – counters a repetition compulsion that enables the protagonists’ restlessness to be temporarily assuaged.
What “The Body” makes clear is that the therapeutic pleasures sex affords in fact reproduce a basic disconnection that is physically mapped onto the landscape of suburbia. In *Double Vision*, Barker proffers sex as that which enacts a return to the primitive which overturns social constraint, but it is similarly palliative – as Stephen’s evasions when speaking with Alec make clear.

What Barker focuses on instead is how aesthetic representations in *Double Vision* serve as vortexes in which the desires of the observer are fulfilled if not affirmed. In a specifically English context this carries with it the possibility for the aesthetic to function as a potent signifier of cultural renewal. Barker, however, warns that the aesthetic is always already inscribed within the wider pathology that Gilroy has described based upon how its formulations reproduce middle-class fantasies. The aesthetic itself becomes a signifier for the desires that have remade the English subject and which, as Barnes and Kureishi have argued in their essayistic assessments of the late twentieth century landscape, are traceable to Thatcherism. Although both *Border Crossing* and *Double Vision* acknowledge the desirability of spiritual renewal – which might be conceived of as the reformulation of the English cultural soul – Barker rejects self-conscious cultural modes such as “knowing nostalgia” (495), because they reproduce the Thatcherite version of Englishness. As Summers-Bremner suggests, “If conservatism can be a revolutionary mode of trauma management” – an idea “we have more willingly come to accept of psychoanalysis than English history, then postrealist novels such as Barker’s *Another World* and *Border Crossing* can be read as endeavours to discover how history works when its reliable revolutions no longer comfort” (276). What Barker and Kureishi show is that by seeking to straddle a middle ground between diachrony and synchrony, proponents of cultural self-consciousness end up producing one such comforting narrative that evades rather than recognizes
the prior claims that the legislative nation makes on cultural Englishness: their view is
simultaneously forward looking and backward looking but occludes the present. Kureishi and
Barker suggest instead that the solution Barnes proffers does not go far enough.

The relative ease with which reviewers and critics have read Barnes as a novelist who
offers a corrective to rather than a complication of Englishness speaks to how Kureishi and
Barker are right to be concerned with this critical mode. While he does not fall into the trap of
proffering cultural otherness in the guise of hybridity as a means of remodeling Englishness, his
productive complication of Englishness too easily lends itself to the navel-gazing that has ensured
the continuation of melancholia by encouraging that contemporary Englishness examine itself for
traces of a lost and resolutely civic identity. This may not be Barnes’s fault per se, but Barker
and Kureishi are able to avoid this trap in part because both take care not only to undercut their
own interrogation of Englishness as Barnes does but to offer a more assertive assessment of their
own complicities.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

Julian Barnes, Hanif Kureishi and Pat Barker are logical choices for literary critics who seek to make sense of the contemporary British cultural and political landscape; their works offer timely responses to and function as artefacts of the ‘reign’ of Thatcher and the culture of Thatcherism. Moreover, their writings have served as exemplary reflections on the vexed question of Englishness that has dominated public consciousness, media, and academic discourse on ‘the hard road to renewal.’ These authors, critical orthodoxy suggests, counter an overbearing narration of nation that seeks to legislate the cultural present by courting symbolic majorities rather than democratic consensus. Kureishi’s and Barnes’s political writings certainly bear this interpretation out because they delineate the radical alteration of the political and cultural landscape as well as of the electorate that Thatcherism, against all odds, achieved. What is less often noticed, however, is that their fictions locate this narrative of alteration within not only a post-war narrative of crisis but also within a longer historical narrative of the making of Englishness. The cultural and political successes of Thatcherism are straightforwardly attributable to Thatcher’s mobilization of a desirable mode of post-imperial identity; what these authors simultaneously trace, however, is a process of slippage whereby Thatcherism itself operates as a stand in for Englishness, its proxy, its alibi, and its incarnation. On the one hand this slippage is a consequence of how Thatcherism comes close to enacting the processes that historically affirm cultural Englishness; on the other, the slippage marks Thatcherism as a version of nationhood that is simultaneously performative and pedagogical in Bhabha’s terms. The authoritative or pedagogical version of Englishness that Thatcher models bears features of the
performative version of nationhood that Bhabha associates with the people. That is, Thatcherism achieves its hegemony by taking the place of the people and, in doing so, disabling the simple recourse to culture or politics that might provide a means of reformulating Englishness. Even more disturbingly, Thatcherism returns as a revenant that continues to haunt the political scene well beyond Thatcher's time in office.

In *The Buddha of Suburbia*, Kureishi powerfully describes the nation after a decade of Thatcherism through the portrayal of a protagonist who ostensibly aspires to but cannot conform to Englishness. Far from being a poster child for the politics of hybridity and cosmopolitanism, Karim stands on the threshold of a more sobering fate—his world is about to become Thatcherland. The mode of being, or version of national character, that Karim has been taken to exemplify—a remaking of Englishness that asserts the viability of ‘almost’ identities—actually derives from a narrative that precedes Thatcherism, emerging out of the social-realist parochialisms of the 1970s. In one sense, Kureishi rewrites the dominant social realist concerns of the 1970s; in another, he traces the socio-political conditions and cultural anxieties that legitimate Thatcher and Thatcherism as a viable political and cultural choice in the General Election of 1979. This doubled approach enables him to point to the limitations of his own approach by sending up his own vested interests in reflecting on but also intervening in a socio-historical and political narrative of which he was—and still is—a part. Although colonial scripts underwrite Thatcherism’s strategic remaking of the nation under the rubric of ‘one nation,’ Kureishi tacitly suggests that Thatcherism takes on the appearance of hybridity itself through the organic model of nationhood her alignment with renewal promised. Her ability to redraw the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’—a task crucial to remaking England in the image of the ‘one nation’ central to her rhetoric—in fact comes about through her simultaneous avowal and

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disavowal of the claims imperial structures of feeling have on the contemporary nation. Karim’s own rejection of a perverted hybridity comes about because Thatcherism paradoxically declares more honestly what is at stake in its political project than the hybridity that the liberal left claims. In Kureishi’s novel, Karim’s description of himself as an “Englishman” in the opening pages demonstrates the difficulty of differentiating between the logic whereby conservative and liberal narratives seek to place him within Englishness (Buddha of Suburbia 3); instead, he tacitly endorses Thatcherism when he carefully scripts his claim to Englishness using the predictable formulations provided by Thatcher’s rhetoric.

It is important then that Thatcherite politics does not simply serve as a historical and political backdrop in the fictions of Barnes, Barker and Kureishi. Instead, their works pick up on the representational archive that informs the legislative present. Their fictions show that the alteration that has taken place in the English subject is not as radical as it may first appear; instead, the fraught version of Englishness that Thatcherism represents is an iteration – if not near faithful representation – of a version of national identity that is itself opposed to surety despite the role the ideal of the stable, imperial nation continues to play in the contemporary imaginary. This opposition to surety occurs when the prevailing qualities of historical Englishness are taken either to be its prevaricating cultural character or its anticipation of revolution; in both scenarios, how the nation calls itself into question is in fact expressive of a desire to assert authority. Humility in Arthur & George, and Barnes’s interrogation of the role national character plays in the public life of the nation, are bound up with the nation’s imperial roles. In Kureishi this paradox emerges when the suburban obsessions of Do It Yourself betray how the nation space lends itself to constant remaking but also, and more forcefully, in how he, like Barnes in Metroland reveals the absorptive qualities of the English patria (represented by suburbia) to be preemptive, to direct
itself toward anticipating and quelling revolution. In fact, the belatedness of social change in the suburbs speaks to the successes of suburbia in predicting and cushioning against alteration. Barker perhaps most forcefully asserts that historical Englishness is in effect imperial Englishness when she shows how the surety of the nation is drawn into question by the suppressed primitive’s threatening and continual return in new guises.

What distinguishes these writers from others who disclose the imperial desire at the heart of the nation is that they make it coincide (and collide) with the appeal of the middle-class fantasies that structure Thatcherism—the balance the latter struck between the careful preservation of the individual and the stability of community. If this proclivity in their works has frustrated easy political critique this is because it reproduces the “[a]mbivalence” that Hutchinson has argued “is the distinguishing feature of the contemporary white male left-liberal” which “manifests itself in a reassessment of the individualistic-libertarian sensibilities that dominated the post-war decades, and in a consequent revival of interest in collectivist discourses” (3). Barnes’s political profile and the often ambivalent politics of his postmodernist fictions obviously asserts his membership in this coterie, a fact that Hutchinson’s discussion of him confirms. Although Barker’s and Kureishi’s susceptibilities to collective political formations – feminism and postcolonialism, respectively – should mean that their fictions follow a different trajectory from Barnes’s, what their fictions reveal is that both at least to some extent claim symbolic membership in the political group Hutchinson describes. The terrain of Kureishi’s suburban fictions counts in his favour; while Barker’s overtly feminist fictions are harder to reconcile with the concerns that Hutchinson marks out, her obsessive return to the possibilities of therapeutically reincorporating individuals into society suggest that she in fact takes up the issue of what politics in a contemporary context might constitute – and how it might be enacted through fiction – in
terms very similar to Barnes and Kureishi. The preoccupation with masculinity which becomes a manifest text in Barker’s *Regeneration* trilogy similarly signals that Barker’s framing of her interrogation of the possibility for community – both in its wider imagined and national sense but also in a parochial sense – in terms of camaraderie enters the territory Hutchinson claims for white, male liberals.

In fact, Barker’s and Kureishi’s later works especially have been charged with offering alternative forms of political investment that sit more uncomfortably with liberal expectations; this critical trend speaks to how the representation of the middle class has come to signify as a discernible political and cultural issue. In this regard, these writers’ probing return to the protocols of social realism marks their unsettling confrontation of the intersections between the fantasies of the middle class and the cultural and aesthetic markers of (imperial) difference that continue to inform contemporary repertoires of Englishness. Although Kureishi’s and perhaps Barnes’s experiments in social realism are parodic reiterations of works that themselves parody the prevailing social landscape, their works simultaneously express a nostalgia for the politics of parochialism evident in these fictions. The community that emerges in their works is both self-conscious and ironic, even ambivalent in its response to Englishness, but paradoxically requires the legislative aspects of Englishness against which it struggles and in whose name it celebrates both alterity and identity. Curiously, this ambivalence is not confined to the *white* left-leaning liberal, suggesting that class, education, and milieu may have more to do with remaking Englishness than race, at least where these authors are concerned.

Barnes’s early fictions pose a challenge to dominant narratives because of the very postmodernist attributes that draw the social realist politics of his fictions into question. It is significant, then, that he proclaims himself to be an inheritor of the Anger generation in
*Metroland.* The relation between politics and aesthetics is covert, but central to the maneuverings of the legislative nation: suburbia itself bears this out. The past is aesthetically mapped onto the space of suburbia in *Metroland* anticipating the process by which suburbia is symbolically remade to become Thatcherland in Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia.* In both scenarios, suburbia is shown to be compatible with Englishness because it is purposefully constructed in its image. What “The Body” warns is that this ideal is bidding fair to overtake not only the pastoral vision of the nation as suburbia encroaches on the pastoral, but also to overtake the cosmopolitan centre as well. Barker’s *Double Vision* demonstrates the likelihood of the first of these warnings when the decision of the “weekenders” from the city to attend Church while in the country is interpreted by Angela as being an extension of the semblance that characterizes the suburbs for Barnes and Kureishi (25); it seems as though “God was thrown in as a job lot with Labradors and waxed jackets” (25).

For Kureishi, the totality of transformation that has taken place is traceable almost wholly to Thatcherism which, he recognizes, emerges out of the post-war climate. Thatcherism speaks to a threatening and doctrinal vision of the political and cultural nation but it simultaneously exposes an innate Englishness against which it is juxtaposed. While in other advanced class democracies Thatcherism’s individualism would be appealing, it is Englishness itself that, for Kureishi, provides a check to Thatcherism. What his later critical writings show, however, is that Thatcherism has altered Englishness. Its successes are locatable in the emergence of a self-help culture and the widespread tendency to embrace pathological diagnosis that Kureishi earlier thought impossible. Kureishi’s pronouncement that confession has become the modern mode from this perspective suggests that what it means to be English – that is, the very mode by which Englishness has been enacted – has changed. It is unsurprising, then, that a nostalgia for a lost
Englishness emerges in his fictions as a positive force despite his recognition that this remaking of Englishness has been accomplished through the strategic mobilization of imperial modes of identity. The shift that he charts speaks to how Englishness has lost its distinct character and instead has become overwhelmingly compatible with the formulations of citizenship prevalent in other advanced class democracies. At the same time, this recognition reaffirms the hold a parallel narrative of Englishness has taken in the form of a populist nostalgia; this populist version of Englishness which sees the governing political body as threatening the integrity of the national character by remaking it, in fact only appears to resist Thatcherism and Blairism despite being pitted against them. Rather than entertaining an ironic relation to the official narratives on offer, this populist version of national identity takes the form of confession; it recognizes and resists the one nation formulations Thatcher and Blair offer because it reads domination in them. At the same time, however, what Kureishi shows is that this articulation of national identity becomes a narrative that is self-excoriating and which feeds into melancholia afflicting the contemporary nation. More dangerously, the mode of articulation makes it tacitly compatible with the discourse of renewal that Thatcher and Blair author and authorize.

While recognizing its appeal, these writers are deeply suspicious of the adequacy of recourse to the cultural. How Englishness is put together is a constant theme in their works. Their interest in it is provoked by a desire to understand the legislative nation as a narrative that shapes its electorate but that also comes to be inscribed as a cultural progenitor by the same body which has willed it into being. This is an understanding of itself that Thatcherism sets out to foster.

This tautology can also be understood as the prospect of return which is a common feature that cuts across Barnes’s *Arthur & George*, Kureishi’s *The Body* and Barker’s *Border*
Crossing and Double Vision. Their gaze is simultaneously directed toward a post-war, pre-Thatcher narrative and a Thatcherite version of national consciousness that has come to signify as Englishness. Thatcherism revives the symbolic usefulness of the categories of ‘us’ and ‘them’ that underwrite the primitive-civilized opposition in the imperial scheme with a narrative of enlightened Englishness that rejects the usefulness of those terms even as it deliberately conjures them. This cultivation of a perverse nostalgia that raises the possibility for a forbidden stability to be resurrected is not unique to Thatcherism. For Aughey, the issue of return or recovery is a common characteristic of Englishness that explicitly derives from the fraught relationship the British have entertained with Empire – though he notably does not connect this trend with the politics of Thatcherism. The “most commonly understood meaning” of “[r]eturn or recovery,” Aughey explains, “has involved a contraction of power now that Britain/England, whose influence was spread across the globe, had returned to the condition of a medium-sized European power. Not only had political power contracted and been returned to more limited ambitions but also the power of English cultural attraction had weakened, returning it to the parochial when formerly it was international” (88). There is also another meaning at work in this “unrelieved tale of political retreat” which he argues is “a tale of rediscovery, one in which the incredible vagueness of being English – a vagueness that is not authentic but a product of its imperial accretion of Britishness – is dispelled in the achievement of self-recognition” (Aughey 88). The politics of Englishness these authors disclose is that the “rediscovery” (88) Aughey describes is predicated on a process of self-recognition whereby Thatcher constructs an image of historical nationhood in which her electorate recognizes itself.

As Aughey acknowledges, it is difficult to discern the effects of the end of Empire on the political and cultural life of contemporary Britain; what is clear, however, is that within this
context literature does not simply mediate between the civic and the populist lives of the nation but rather lays bare the mechanisms that determine both. In one sense, the preoccupation with the return or recovery of Englishness that emerges in these writers’ fictions is locatable within a larger historical pattern and contemporary cultural trend that are informed by the “character of the United Kingdom polity” (89). While Aughey points to imperial historians to argue that the extent to which the end of empire can be said to emerge as “public trauma” is vexed if not indeterminate (89), Barnes, Kureishi and Barker collectively indicate that this question – even if the answer is ambiguous – is itself a product of a pervasive post-war narrative of crisis. It is significant then that the imperial historians who challenge the idea of “public trauma” do so on the basis of a separation between Empire and the everyday legislative life of the nation (89). Notable among these, according to Aughey, are historians P.J. Marshall and J.G. Darwin who offer complementary perspectives on the legacy of empire: “whatever ‘one’s view may be about the institutions of the present British state, it is unlikely that empire has had much to do with shaping them’” (Marshall, qtd. in Aughey 89), and “[i]n other European countries, the retreat from empire had contributed to serious political upheaval and social convulsion” but “[i]n Britain it had left few visible traces and had never threatened the viability of British institutions” (Aughey 89). Although he emphasizes the existence of a viewpoint counter to these interpretations, Aughey contends, “[b]ecause of the reluctance to mobilise opinion on imperial issues it has become difficult to gauge the force of popular sentiment but public opinion appeared to receive the death of empire with equanimity and the reason for this may have been the priority given by political parties to domestic strategies” (89). For Aughey, Linda Colley offers the most plausible explanation of the effects of the end of empire when she argues that “[t]reating empire and the nation as separate entities” for Britons is “a way of investing in empire ‘to a conspicuous degree
while simultaneously drawing a mental line between it and themselves” (89). Gilroy’s description of Englishness in terms of its historical morbidities comes close to this understanding of Englishness. What Gilroy’s interpretation of the contemporary landscape adds, however, is an awareness of the importance of attending to the invisible traces that empire has left on British politics – in other words attending to how “domestic strategies” rewrite an imperial script (89).

As Gilroy’s *Postcolonial Melancholia* amply demonstrates, the widespread pathology that he identifies is inscribed within and perpetuated by the legislative nation. For Gilroy, it is no longer adequate to announce a “commitment to undo institutional racism in which the production of inequalities does not depend upon any prior attachment of individual actors to racist ideology or belief” because it would draw us “beyond that necessary but insufficient stance into a view of racial discourse as endowed with its own political life and institutional tempo” (*Postcolonial* 12). In a specifically British context, he explains, “a refusal to think about racism as something that structures the life of the postimperial polity is associated with what has become a morbid fixation with the fluctuating substance of national culture and identity” (12). This predicament is a consequence of how “Winston Churchill’s influential triangulation of the post-1945 world” in which “the core of British particularity is deemed to be under disastrous attack from three different directions: Americanization, Europeanization, and a nonspecific subsumption by immigrants, settlers, and invaders of both colonial and postcolonial varieties” continues to inform the present (12). What the authors under scrutiny here also show is that this defensiveness is mirrored in a refusal to think about class. While Thatcherism could be deemed a political repetition or at least parallel formulation of the modes of government observable across advanced class democracies at the end of the twentieth century, it gains a specifically English inflection as a political and cultural doctrine because it works by obfuscating class and does so in order to
reassure the electorate of their ability to be included in the middle-class of Thatcher’s fantasies if they are able to match their performance of Englishness with Thatcher’s pedagogical scripts.

Hall’s assessment of the Thatcher era, which anticipates Gilroy’s assessment of the late twentieth-century landscape, shows that Thatcher and Thatcherism are both subject and author of the pathology that Gilroy describes. Writing in 1990, Hall persuasively situated Thatcherism within a longer narrative of crisis and argued that its distinguishing feature was, in fact, its “attempt … to discover who can really still be English” (“Emergence” 21). He observes, Thatcherites “are engaged . . . in an enormous struggle to define what Britain can mean in the twentieth century if it is not to be the center of a huge commercial, economic, and imperialist empire” (“Emergence” 21). Hall’s identification of Thatcher’s “reworking[s]” of “repertoires of Englishness” (“Introduction” 2) only two years earlier recognizes that although Thatcherism enfolds within itself what Gilroy strategically calls the “distinctive English idioms of cultural reflection” it is not reliant on these “premodern understanding[s] of ‘ethnic’ differences” to make its case (Black Atlantic 9). Barker’s obsessive return to the primitive in her fictions, however, suggests how the shifting narratives of Thatcherism simultaneously reveal the return of the primitive in its many manifestations – as spectre, as the unconscious, as the protopathic – to hold the promise of return to an ersatz and pre-modern Englishness at the same time that it seems to be an extension of the exclusive model of nationhood Thatcher endorsed. In her fictions, then, Barker’s own treatment of the primitive offers a predictable counter to the “discourse of modern English cultural uniqueness” that is central in the remade landscape and a more fraught assessment of the rearticulation of these paired “cognitive and aesthetic markers” in and through discourses of renewal that seek to recover both opposed terms (Gilroy, Black Atlantic 9). In
doing so, she entertains the possibility of her own complicity in this search for renewal only to complicate the narrative of return that both political and cultural revival seem to demand.

The fictions of these writers show that literature, as Gilroy argues, is one space which registers the effects of the end of empire on the public. As I have mentioned in my introduction, Gilroy explains that it is necessary to attend to “how the literary and cultural as well as governmental dynamics of the country have responded to” the transformation “that reduced the world’s preeminent power to a political and economic operation of more modest dimensions” in order to find out “what it can tell us about the place of racism in contemporary political culture” (*Postcolonial* 12). In this formulation, literature lays bare the relationship between the cultural and the political but is also necessarily complicit with the pathology Gilroy diagnoses. Clive Bloom’s argument, that “[t]he last thirty years of the twentieth century have . . . witnessed unprecedented levels of debate over the nature of cultural change” and that “[c]entral to much of this debate has been the role and significance of literature” (24), supports the idea that fictional works function not only as a register of the populist imaginary but also as active architects of the legislative and populist conceptions of the nation.

Gasiorek’s sense that “[w]hat it means to be an ‘experimental’ or ‘realist’ writer is very much up for grabs in the post-war context, partly because of the historical avant-garde’s failure to carry through on the political side of its aesthetic revolt, and partly because postmodernism has virtually turned the modernist impulse to ‘make it new’ into a contemporary orthodoxy” speaks to an erosion in classification that broadens parochial definitions of the social novel (181). His argument also presciently speaks, however, to how the “impulse ‘to make it new’” becomes a political as well as cultural orthodoxy under Blair (181). Gasiorek explains, “[t]he proliferation of ever more flamboyant texts, actively promoted by the ‘culture industry’ and consumed by an
eager public, suggests that ‘experimental’ works have lost any capacity to shock and that it may be ‘realist’ works which now pack the more powerful punch” (181); the writers in this study, far from losing their “capacity to shock” (181), exploit the resources of realism against the flamboyant rhetoric of the New that marked both the culture of Thatcherism and of its epigones. What is surprising is how the coherent and hegemonic narratives of Thatcherism become objects of nostalgia when set against Blair’s investment in the New.

Gasiorek’s evocation of Ricoeur importantly moves toward addressing the real political implications of genre. He explains, that for him, “Ricoeur’s account of mimesis provides a useful way of thinking about contemporary realisms. Realist fiction . . . does not ‘correspond’ to reality, does not portray pre-existent events, but offers representations that are plausible by virtue of their rootedness in social reality” (183). Barnes’s England, England neatly fits this categorization – as does Kureishi’s “The Body” – as speculative works that interrogate what the after-effects of this conception of the New Britain will be. The formulation Blair offers may be found to be lacking on its own terms; however, it persists in terms of how it both aids the perpetuation of Thatcherism and cultivates a nostalgia for the political possibilities that seem to have been closed off, especially to the left.

Pointing to “writers such as Carter, Swift, Barnes and Rushdie,” Gasiorek argues that “[t]heir departure from realism results on the one hand in complex examinations of its aporias and limitations, but leads on the other hand to searching analyses of the political consequences of this departure” (192). As Kureishi’s speculative fictions and the postmodernist qualities of Barker’s works attest, searching departures from realism come to bear on the speculative departures that political parties make use of in forming symbolic voting blocs. This is a point Hall makes when he observes,
If nobody was prospering under Thatcherism, ideology alone could not parachute such an ‘illusion’ into the heads of the majority. However, if some people are doing well – as they are, especially, in personal terms, in the ‘South’ – and the ideological climate is right, and the alternative ways of measuring how ‘well’ you are doing are effectively silenced or stigmatised, then the small number who define themselves as ‘doing well’ will be swelled by a much larger number who identify with this way of ‘getting on.’ (“Blue Election” 33)

While here Hall reveals Thatcherism to be speculative in economic terms, what becomes clear is that Thatcher’s speculative departures extend to how she was also able to construct a fantasy out of what had occurred during the Falklands in order to reverse the electorate’s perception of her and win the 1983 election.

The speculative – and spectral – nature of Barnes’s and Kureishi’s later works are implicated in a vision of the nation that combines the forces of synchrony and diachrony. Like the legislative vision of nationhood offered by political parties their writing offers a vision of the nation as it is and will be and also as it has been. Childs’s reading of *England, England* as “a fantasy, but one that has many recent echoes and real-life parallels” misses the mark in this respect (84). What the convergence of these narratives in *England, England* and *Arthur & George* and Kureishi’s “The Body” shows, however, is that these fantasies are not separate from the real life of the nation but have come to be central in their manifestations as legislative realities or at least as organizing principles.

The politics of works like Barker’s *Regeneration* and Barnes’s *Arthur & George* have been taken to reside in their status as historiographic metafictions; in this view, their fictions offer a counter narrative of nationhood to the coherent narratives that Kirk finds in Thatcherism. This reading, however, overlooks the extent to which the political and cultural narratives of Thatcherism come close to the performative mode of nationhood that Bhabha describes, a point made by Hall when he argues for Thatcherism’s transformation of repertoires, performative and
plural, of Englishness. What their works call into question, then, is the argument that Gilroy has made for the existence of a “demotic multiculturalism that is not the outcome of governmental drift and institutional indifference but of concrete oppositional work: political, aesthetic, cultural, scholarly” – what he describes as a “pressure from below” (99). The writers in this study are less sanguine than Gilroy appears to be about making oppositional work the province of the people. Barnes, for instance, shifts the focus to the bureaucratic nation as the agent that produces the illusion of “homogeneous, consensual community” (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 146), an emphasis that Kureishi acknowledges but also expands to include the perception that notions of community mask “contentious, unequal interests and identities within the population” (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 146). Finally, Barker explores how these “unequal interests and identities” threaten to disrupt and dissolve vaunted community (Bhabha, “DissemiNation” 146). These writers are all too aware that the erosion of fine distinctions between the people and the state results in Thatcherism itself coming to haunt the political present as a signifier of the people’s Englishness. This means that Thatcherism usurps the place of the people in Gilroy’s discourse. If “[n]ationalism has almost become the exemplary figure for death” (Cheah 1), then in a specifically English context, Thatcherism has become a powerful signifier for life after death based not only on how her policies and cultural politics have been taken to remake the political right and left but also on how she comes to function as a nostalgic figure of return.

As the construction of Anglia in the aftermath of the government of renewal in England, England shows, even these organizing principles are invested in state-supported conceptions of Englishness; like Adam who is left to deal with the unforeseen and visceral haunting that acclimation to his New body entails – which is significantly a haunting not of his own past self but of the unknown former and disjoined inhabitant of what has been remade as new through a
process akin to aesthetic renewal – the inhabitants of Anglia continue to orient themselves in relation to a prior citizenship that anticipates the formulation of Old England – the moniker of the post England, England nation – that is similarly scripted as return.

If, for Barker, the issue of return is bound up with a primitive confrontation it is scripted in terms of a modernist fascination. That is, it manifests itself as a counter to the modern scripts to which Thatcherism responds but also to a canonical and sanctified vision of frozen renewal – not incidentally the central motif with which Eliot’s *The Waste Land* begins – that has similarly come to be an enduring representational trope to which Barker returns throughout her fictions. The primitive reveals that which is hidden from view by initiating a process of reordering that unlocks this stasis. It reconceives and reorders that which is other by insisting that past scripts appear through present corporealities. Although Barker appears to conclude like Cheah that the organic nation has become the haunted nation, she takes care to intimate that the organic nation was and is always and already haunted. Further, this model of the nation is not the only possibility for Barker but is perhaps the most preferable when considered next to the formulations offered by Thatcher and Blair.

Gilroy’s argument that “the political conflicts which characterize multicultural societies can take on a very different aspect if they are understood to exist firmly in a context supplied by imperial and colonial history” is particularly significant to the fictions of Barnes, Barker and Kureishi, all of which trace the persistence of the past in the inhabitation of the present and the imagination of the future (*Postcolonial 2*). The othering of the legislative body in formulations of us and them which, as *Metroland* shows, is a feature of the post-war landscape, are obviously evocative of the paradox of sameness and difference that is a central feature of Thatcher and Thatcherism from her early years in office and which, for both Gilroy and Bhabha, is a hallmark
of colonial formulations of Englishness. According to Gilroy, “[t]hough that history remains marginal and largely unacknowledged, surfacing only in the service of nostalgia and melancholia, it represents a store of unlikely connections and complex interpretive resources” (Postcolonial 2). This is clearly the history that inspires the writers in this study. In their recent works especially these writers equally resist the ‘New,’ however—whether of the nation as in England, England, the body in “The Body” or the figure of the other marked by violence in Barker’s Border Crossing and Double Vision. That works in their oeuvre have not escaped being read as “revisionist accounts of imperial and colonial life” that “feed[] the illusion that Britain has been or can be disconnected from its imperial past” (Gilroy, Postcolonial 2), paradoxically speaks to their successes in mirroring how political and cultural disconnection is central to the historic as well as the contemporary legislative nation.

Kureishi’s sense that “seeking to fix one’s sense of identity in any one position, whether that is national, ethnic, religious or political is self-defeating” (Finney 126), which he articulates through Karim, easily lends itself to championing historiographic multiplicity; in his novels, he warns against the possibility of reformulating national identity along these lines by expressing his awareness that Thatcherite Englishness itself acknowledges the existence of “repertoires” of Englishness, to use Hall’s term (“Introduction” 2). His later works in particular explore the propensity for disconnection to characterize Englishness. For Kureishi, the separation between past and present that the formulation of the New entails is far more threatening to community than Thatcherism. Kureishi’s “The Body,” for example, contradicts Gilroy’s contention that the disconnect he describes would be most evident in the heritage narratives of Thatcherism.

These writers’ revisionist accounts of imperial and colonial life crucially engage “… the processes that produce and regulate individual subjects, conditioning the intimate consciousness
through which they come to know and understand and indeed constitute themselves as racial beings” (Gilroy, *Postcolonial* 12). They also share Hall’s awareness of how Thatcherism reworks “different repertoires of Englishness” “against the background of a crisis of national identity and culture precipitated by the unresolved psychic trauma of the ‘end of empire’” (“Introduction” 2). They demonstrate how these narratives of the end of empire solidify the morbidities Gilroy describes and discern that Blair’s resolution of crisis through rhetorical separation is a disavowal of the regulation of ethnic Englishness that Thatcherism proclaims.

The writers of Kureishi’s generation are implicated in the pathology that Gilroy describes. Their obsessive returns to the question of Englishness in their subsequent works which have the effect of broadening the continually shifting terrain of the repertoires they trace, insists that articulating and rearticulating the relationship between the cultural and the political is an urgent but also complex task; the ambiguities they cede to in their fictions are revealing about the fraught relationship between the political and cultural landscape but also indicate that this relation is derivative. Colonialism is an obvious thematic concern that comes to the fore in Barker’s *Regeneration*, Kureishi’s *The Buddha of Suburbia* and Barnes’s *Arthur & George*. Colonial formulations of Englishness also emerge in their fictions covertly. Their works, in effect, confront “the multilayered trauma” of the “loss of the empire” by attending to the “country’s complex investments in the ethnic absolutism that has sustained it” and the effects of colonial rule on “their political culture at home and abroad” (Gilroy, *Postcolonial* 99). That the aesthetic is the domain of politics as well as culture not only comes to the fore in how literary works make public concerns disturbingly intimate, but in how the historicization of the fashioning of Englishness divulges the contemporary legislative nation’s investment in constructing itself as a simultaneously populist and civic formulation. Thatcherism has remade England and Englishness
in part by becoming a spectre of Englishness – both a vision of the historical nation and its manifestation.


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