# Englishness Revisited

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Edited by

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# INTRODUCTION:
# THE DILEMMA OF ENGLISHNESS

FLORIANE REVIRON-PIÉGAY

What is Englishness? Is it an instinctive or a constructed concept? And if it is a construct, is it an imaginary or a cultural or an ideological one? Or is it a state of mind? Is there such a thing as a national temperament, a character or an identity which can be claimed to be specifically English? The question has already been explored in the past by a wealth of studies but it continues to fascinate and to provoke thought.[1] It is now acknowledged that the definition anyone gives of Englishness depends on his or her own nationality: whether it is endogenous or exogenous, the definition will necessarily be very different. The fact is that the English have always been reluctant to provide their own definition of Englishness. For a long time, the question was hardly of any relevance at all: there was no difference between Britishness and Englishness. As Krishan Kumar shows, the imperial reach of the English both at home and abroad and the fact that they have been the largest and most powerful state in the British Isles for over a thousand years both account for the synecdochical use of "England" as encompassing "not just the island of Britain but the whole archipelago."[2] When the notion of Britishness was forged in the eighteenth century, with Protestantism linking the peoples of England, Scotland and Wales as Linda Colley has convincingly argued, it did not compete with

[1] A comprehensive—but not exhaustive—list of such works includes J. V. Morton, *In Search of England* (London: Methuen & co, 1927); J. B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: Penguin 1984 [1934]); Anthony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1998); Jeremy Paxman, *The English: A Portrait of a People* (London: Penguin, 1999); Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), Paul Langford, *Englishness Identified: Manners and Character 1650-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (The University of Chicago Press: Reaktion, 2001).

[2] Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English Nationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 [2003]), 1-17.

Englishness but rather the two continued to exist together, sometimes overlapping.[3]

The collection of articles in this volume all, with one exception (Larkin), discuss Englishness since the eighteenth century. The main bulk of the articles situate Englishness in the nineteenth, twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Although it is in fact very difficult to place the advent of Englishness as a feeling of nationalistic belonging,[4] one may argue with Kumar that during the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the English did not feel the need to distinguish themselves from the more global appellation of "British." Britishness was indeed not just a cultural and a religious phenomenon but also a fact of social and economic culture. "The industrial revolution was a pan-Britannic achievement,"[5] so was the Empire and so were the two World Wars which shaped a British psyche. But while the Scots and the Welsh, because they were aware that Britain and the Empire were first and foremost English creations, clung to their particular ethnic identities (their Scottishness and their Welshness) as a sort of compensation for or counterweight against the predominant role of the English, the latter substituted pride in their Empire for the assertion of their own national identity. Because they were aware of their supremacy, they did not have to claim their specificity as a nation, a mark perhaps of a quality which is said to be typically English namely reticence or restraint.[6] Britishness therefore flourished alongside and perhaps to a

[3] "More than anything else it was this shared religious allegiance combined with recurrent wars that permitted a sense of British national identity to emerge alongside of, and not necessarily in competition with older, more organic attachments to England." Linda Colley, *Britons, Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico,1994 [1992]), 18.

[4] Liah Greenfeld places it during the sixteenth century. *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 42. Krishan Kumar places what he calls "a moment of Englishness" (distinct from English nationalism in a full-bodied and full-blooded form) at the end of the nineteenth century (*The Making of National Identity*, *op. cit.* 175). Our purpose in this collection of articles is not to define Englishness as being limited to English nationalism in its political acceptation. It is a concept which embraces nationalism but goes beyond simply the consciousness of the English people as a group with a distinct sense of its history, traditions and destiny.

[5] Krishan Kumar, *The Making of National Identity*, *ibid*., 169.

[6] Peter Ackroyd commenting on Chaucer's self-effacement says that it is "partly a matter of reticence" and reminds us that Pevsner noted the same quality in the work of Hogarth (both of them being considered as the embodiment of Englishness in the arts) *Albion: The Origins of the English Imagination* (London: Vintage, 2004 [2002]), 159. See also Pevsner who after Emerson says that the origins of

fair degree overlapped Englishness, which does not mean that Englishness did not exist as a cultural phenomenon but simply that it had no political existence and, to a large extent, still lacks political representation.[7] Over the course of the twentieth-century, however, Britishness has been dealt several weakening blows. The most violent was the end of the Empire, together with deindustrialization and now, devolution, the revival of nationalism in Scotland (and to a lesser extent in Wales), together with the European Union and immigration also threaten the integrity of the United Kingdom. It would therefore appear urgent to redefine Englishness and to find a moderate alternative to the aggressive nationalism represented by the British National Party.

There are indeed many ways of defining Englishness: the essentialists are in search of a common and stable identity. Kate Fox, a social anthropologist, acknowledges that her aim was to

> identify the *commonalities* in rules governing English behaviour—the unofficial codes of conduct that cut across class, age, sex, region, sub-cultures and other social boundaries. . . . [B]y looking beyond the "ethnographic dazzle" of superficial differences, I found that Women's Institute members and bikers, and other groups, all behave in accordance with the same unwritten rules—rules that identify our national identity and character. I would also maintain, with George Orwell, that this identity "is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists, as in a living creature." My aim, if you like, was to provide a grammar of English behaviour.[8]

The problem with Orwell's famous description of "old maids biking to Holy Communion through the mists of the autumn morning . . . solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar boxes"[9] is that it could have applied to any nation within the United Kingdom. It is indeed shared, in the sense that is has also become stereotypical. The same goes for John Betjeman's definition: "For me England stands for . . . oil-lit churches, Women's Institutes, modest village inns, arguments about cow-parsley on the altar, the noise of

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reticence go back "six or seven hundred years." *The Englishness of English Art* (London: Peregrine Books, 1956), 78.

[7] The Welsh have been granted their own National Assembly, the Scots their own Scottish Parliament. England still lacks its own Parliament.

[8] Kate Fox, *Watching the English: The Hidden Rules of English Behaviour* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2004), 2.

[9] George Orwell, "The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the English Genius," in *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. 3, ed. Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin books, 1970), 74-75.

mowing machines on Saturday afternoons, local newspapers, local auction . . . branch-line trains, light railways, leaning on gates and looking across fields."[10] Although some of these features are still valid as hallmarks of Englishness, they are mostly redolent of the kind of nostalgia expressed by Blake in "Jerusalem", nostalgia for an immutable pastoral England. Nostalgia may well be a permanent characteristic of the English people and indeed Ackroyd sees it as a "national mood" pervading the music of Vaughan Williams and Elgar with the Victorian Age in particular "a period of unremitting nostalgia."[11] Kumar contends that "all that the English can really call upon is the highly selective, partly nostalgic and backward looking version of 'cultural Englishness' elaborated in the late nineteenth century and continued into the next."[12] And Paxman defines the English as a people "marching backwards into the future." It ensues from this that the English look for permanence through change and this is perhaps one of the main paradoxes of Englishness: it is both permanent and ever-changing, continuous and transient, fixed and flexible. As paradoxical as it may appear, the fact is that traditions look both backwards and forwards. Q. D. Leavis's assumption that "a live tradition must obviously contain both continuity and innovation"[13] has been taken up again more recently by Eric Hobsbawm who refers to traditions that were invented specifically— in fact for political reasons—to fit modern times, "exercises in social engineering", as he calls them, explaining that they are "highly relevant to that comparatively recent historical innovation, the "nation", with its associated phenomena: nationalism, the nation-state, national symbols, histories and the rest."[14] And as the English have no traditional way of defining themselves, they have to invent the traditions to do so (the display of the English flag representing the St George cross during sporting events may be seen precisely as belonging to this new tradition). Yet this emphasis on the artificiality of Englishness as a deliberate construct is in contrast with the equally valid assertion that national identity is less a matter of reason than of emotion, that it is

[10] Quoted by Jeremy Paxman, *The English: A Portrait of a People*, *op. cit*., 151.
[11] *Albion*, *op. cit*., 442, 251.
[12] *The Making of English National Identity*, *op. cit*., 269.
[13] Q. D. Leavis, "The Englishness of the English Novel," in *Collected Essays, The Englishness of the English Novel*, ed. G. Singh (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 303.
[14] "Inventing Traditions," in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1983]), 13.

instinctive rather than calculated.[15] Is nationality ingrained, instinctive and emotional or can it be constructed and taught? The answer is probably that it is both and shows that essentialist definitions of Englishness are bound to fail: Englishness is not fixed and singular, it is protean and multiple. One could even argue that it is oxymoronic. Nikolaus Pevsner shows that English art is characterized by an alternation of opposite tendencies. He reminds us that perhaps one of the best ways to approach national character is through polarities.[16] Englishness should therefore be seen as a tension between sets of antithetical notions, which is also the point made by Ackroyd:

> The English penchant for the dream and the vision may in turn be part of a general escape from the conventions and practicality and commonsense which make up so much of the native psyche. The tradition of empiricism or pragmatism is not in contradiction to the equally large inheritance of ghosts, dreams and visions; they are opposite sides of the same coin of the realm.[17]

A contrasted and relative definition of Englishness is necessarily more satisfying than an essentialist one: the perception that ethnic or national identity is more a matter of exclusion and opposition than some more or less unchanging cultural "essence" has become widely accepted in recent years.[18] The content of ethnic or national identity can change from time to time depending on who is regarded as the other in contrast with whom one defines oneself. In other words, there is no "Englishness" in isolation. To understand English identity at any one time, we need to consider the context in which it is defined, that is the context in which, among other things, the English encounter people. Depending on the Other which it faces and challenges, Englishness itself takes on different garbs. Its rivalry with the continent has adopted many forms, aesthetic, intellectual,

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[15] "A sense of collective identity rarely if ever proceeds from stipulation, it is instead an affectionate condition." See Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Identity*, *op. cit*., 12. See also Benedict Anderson who argues that nationalism today commands "profound emotional legitimacy" *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 4.

[16] "The history of styles . . . can only be successful—that is approach truth— if it is conducted in terms of polarities, that is in pairs of apparently contradictory qualities. English art is Constable and Turner, it is the formal house and the informal, picturesque garden surrounding it." *The Englishness of English Art*, *op. cit*., 24.

[17] *Albion*, *op. cit*., 270.

[18] See Krishan Kumar, *op. cit*., 60.

ideological, religious and political: the Continent is the main entity against which Englishness developed and still does, with the European Union seen as a threat to its sovereignty. But the Continental influence has not been entirely negative:

> Only half the story of the English Imagination resides in England itself, the rest derives from Continental source. . . . There has never been a time, in fact when European scholarship and cultivation did not materially affect the fabric of English life.[19]

Again one is led to acknowledge the polarity of each definition: the mainly repulsive othering process does not preclude attraction at other periods of time. During the Empire, England's reaction to the world at large was one of openness[20] and expansionism whereas now it appears to turn in on itself in the face of immigration from the former colonies. We cannot speak of an English identity "outside the history of Empire and the culture of colonialism"[21] because Empire continues to play a key part in British consciousness.[22] Imperial otherness is still in the process of being accommodated, assimilated and integrated.

If it is possible to reach some agreement about the identity of the different others who have shaped Englishness (basically the Continent, Catholicism, the Celtic fringe, Empire, the colonies), it must be borne in mind nevertheless that "national identification and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods."[23] Wendy Webster shows that during the transition from imperial power to post-imperial nation (roughly between 1939 and 1965), no less than three radically different modes of thought shaped the English psyche. Up to the Second World War, an image of Empire as "the people's empire" was generally propounded, with the emphasis placed on ideas of welfare, development and egalitarianism, a narrative which, according to Webster, faded rapidly after the mid-1950s. Its apex was Coronation Year and it was associated with youth, modernity and optimism as well as moral seriousness. It emphasized the ideal of a multiracial community of equal

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[19] *Albion*, *op. cit*., 197.

[20] So much so that Peter Ackroyd has said: "Englishness is the principle of appropriation. It relies upon constant immigration, of people, of ideas or styles." *Albion*, *op. cit*., 237.

[21] Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 213.

[22] See also Krishan Kumar, 235.

[23] Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 11.

nations that would maintain Britishness as a global entity through the transformation and modernization of its imperial dimension. During this period, the terms "English" and "British" were often deployed interchangeably. Then the people's war took over, together with ideas of national identity, emphasizing the common people and unity cutting across differences of class and gender: the Empire was a threat to Englishness in its ethnic dimension, England was seen as a domestic sanctuary threatened by violation, in the Empire and at home. The old idea of "Little England" was reworked and Englishness was constructed in opposition to Empire and particularly immigrants.

> Englishness was increasingly invoked as an intimate, private, exclusive identity that was white. In much of this imagery it is hard to imagine that Britain had ever occupied a position as colonial power or continued to embrace a global identity through the transition from Empire to Commonwealth.[24]

The third popular narrative focused on the Second World War with its celebration of national greatness and bearing strong traces of imperial identity. The climax here was Churchill's funeral with its heroic and masculine vision of national destiny and conveying stories of valour and victory. Strangely enough, it also invoked England's Imperial past which, unyoked from the Commonwealth, was increasingly remasculinized. [25] All this tends to confirm Nikolaus Pevsner's conviction that there "does not exist anything like a national character consistent over centuries"[26] nor even over decades.

To attempt to understand this extremely protean concept, the best means is perhaps to explore the contradictions and tensions inherent in its development.

The intention of this book is to transcend fields of study and to subsume the different approaches to be found in diverse analytical forms: the cross fertilization between historiography, political, social, cultural and literary studies allows for the emergence of a composite image of Englishness

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[24] Wendy Webster, *Englishness and Empire, 1939-1965* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.
[25] *Ibid*., 6-13.
[26] *The Englishness of English Art*, *op. cit*. 16.

as both a reality and an imagined representation.[27] Echoes and correspondences between the different articles show not only that "the art of any country is an exact exponent of its ethical life"[28] but also that landscape and literature have much to say to each other or politics to music and *vice versa*. The mixed and mongrel mode which Ackroyd sees as best defining Shakespeare's art, mingling "high and low, king and fool, prince and gravedigger, commander and soldier,"[29] is perhaps the best one to attempt to grasp Englishness in all its variety and fluidity.

Part one therefore concentrates on the socio-cultural aspects of Englishness. The narratives of the early modern writers (Larkin) are to be found side by side with a philosophical enquiry into Empiricism (Semblat) and a study of the line in English art (Aymes), English opera (Heberle) is treated alongside pop music (Costambeys-Kempczynski) and camp aesthetics (Ganteau), while rural studies remind us of the necessary conflation of national identity and territoriality (Mischi). Krishan Kumar has argued that Englishness is a cultural rather than a political construct, and that even what he calls the "moment of Englishness"[30] towards the end of the nineteenth century, that is to say the first fluttering of English nationalism, took on a cultural and not a political form. Things are, however, changing rapidly and politics should be considered as central to the next step towards a global definition of Englishness.

Part two, despite its concern with the political sphere as suggested in its title, addresses more generally the way England and Englishness emerged from the Empire and the way historiography accounts for it (Mioche). It then broaches the subject of ethnic nationalism with Englishness seen by the émigrés from Nazi Europe in the mid-twentieth century (Deakin), or with Scottish nationalist thinking in the inter-war period (Dixon). Englishness is by no means to be considered an abstract concept, being fully embodied in people. This explains the focus on politicians like Edward Heath, with his (failed) attempt at Europeanizing Englishness (Langlois) or on Billy Bragg's "progressive patriotism" (Tranmer), both articles defining civic nationalism. Finally, the need for a

[27] As Robert Burden argues "to separate history or social reality and representation is no longer possible. . . . Clearly, Human Geography, Cultural and Literary studies and the new Cultural History have gone interdisciplinary. If geography now looks at literature, spatial practices are part of cultural studies." "Englishness and spatial practices," in *Landscape and Englishness*, ed., Robert Burden and Stephan Kohl (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2006), 18, 25.
[28] John Ruskin, *Lectures on Art* vol. 20 (London: Library Edition, 1870), 39.
[29] *Albion*, *op. cit*., 226
[30] Krishan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity*, *op. cit*., 175-225.

political definition of Englishness is reasserted by Schnapper who delineates the history of the relationship between Englishness and Britishness.

Parts Three and Four of the volume seek to trace the evolution of the literary representation of Englishness from the Victorian age to the early twenty-first century. The third part in particular focuses on Victorian literature as a vehicle of the idea of nationality. "Ideas of English character and identity have been, and are still being formed by English novels" says Patrick Parrinder[31] and Krishan Kumar shows that at the end of the nineteenth century "literature—not Parliament or the monarchy—was England, the noblest and most heartfelt expression of the English people."[32] Intellectual and artistic exchanges with the Continent were the means to define oneself in opposition to the Catholic other, France essentially, but also Italy and Spain (Camus and Kennedy) although dissident voices could be heard from within (Masural-Murray, Ramos Gay). The Empire, the industrial revolution and the First World War shaped an ideal of Englishness as a lost pastoral locus, mythologized and sought for (McDonough and Kovačević).

Part Four shows that the bourgeois novel proved inadequate to convey the multifariouness of Englishness. Generic experimentations betraying a fundamental disease with an increasingly problematic nationality (Lochot) led to an upsurge of narratives exploring Englishness from the fringes (stylistically, socially, ethnically or geographically speaking). The Second World War, the loss of the Empire and a pervading sense of fragmentation led the English novel to evolve from a faithful rendition of peaceful middle-class regionalism, exalting Englishness, into a hybrid genre denouncing it as an illusion or a myth (Bradford). The traditional models of Englishness, amongst which was the perennial figure of the gentleman (Cavalié) together with the ideal of a refined, standard English language (James), were considered as the remnants of an outdated nationalism. The growing hybridization of the novel—a mixture of auto/biography, travelogues and fiction—is perhaps the best indicator of the hybridization of Englishness as a result of the waves of immigration from the former colonies. Post-colonial and postmodern readings deconstruct the ideal of Englishness as a fixed national identity, denouncing it as a cultural construct (Lanone) and focusing instead on ethnicity and multiculturalism

[31] Patrick Parrinder, "Character, Identity and Nationality in the English Novel," in *Landscape and Englishness*, *op. cit*., 89-100.

[32] "The 'nationalizing' of their literature was one way in which the English somewhat belatedly caught up with the nationalism of other European cultures." Krishan Kumar, *op. cit*., 221.

(Tomczak). Finally, Berberich shows that Baudrillard's definition of a hyperreal applies to Englishness in the post-modernist novel. Englishness "is no longer itself but a gigantic simulacrum—not unreal, but a simulacrum, that is to say never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference."[33]

The reader is therefore invited to follow a twisting itinerary, akin perhaps to the long serpentine line which Hogarth called "variety" and which has so often been used to express the English style in the Arts. In order to grasp the complexity of Englishness, it is necessary to allow for perpetual oscillation in the mind between centre and periphery or margin, transience and timelessness, rurality and urbanity, practicality, commonsense and dream or vision, the gentleman and the common man, reticence and loutishness, commitment and isolation. The aim of this volume is to offer a kaleidoscopic vision of Englishness, one that acknowledges stereotypes while at the same time challenging them.

## Part I: Socio-Cultural Aspects of Englishness

Hilary Larkin reminds us that the traditional approach to Englishness focuses on the question of its origins and denounces the inadequacy of this method. Instead, she proposes to turn to early-modern writers to discover what they had to say about being English, focusing on the ideal of plainness conveyed by the Protestant Reformation and on both its theological and practical repercussions. She sees them as defining the national ethos of England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a country wary of foreign influences, particularly those of France, Italy and Spain. Larkin shows that national identity at the time was very much a personal matter, hence the development of a kind of literature which aimed at warning the traveller against potential contamination by a culture of ornamentation and artificiality—bordering on the effeminate—or at helping him get rid of these foreign influences upon his return. The returning traveller was seen as a borderline figure deemed to have forsaken his identity by taking on foreign forms of speech and behaviour. Larkin analyses the way accents, lisping or any other foreign inflection affecting the English pronunciation, were seen as diminishing national authenticity.

Martine Semblat pursues this discussion of the value of words and the English language by studying the way in which the basic tenets of English-

[33] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans., Sheila Glaser (Ann harbour: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), 6.

language philosophy inform and sustain the concept of Englishness. The outstanding feature of this tradition is empiricism which, with Locke, Berkeley and Hume defines a particular relationship to reality and facts, somewhat different from continental approaches in terms of method rather than ideology. In this regard it is symptomatic that English-language philosophers should never have given rise to any complete philosophical systems. This approach also entails the constant rejection of metaphysical abstractions and theoretical speculations while everywhere common sense is upheld as the only valid measure. In this context of enlightened scepticism, the value of words becomes a major issue. These characteristics all merge to form the bases of a political philosophy often described as inclining towards tolerance and pragmatism. Semblat opposes the English utilitarian tradition which bases its moral and philosophical system on happiness for the greatest number and the European tradition which places freedom at the heart of its systems. She concludes that philosophy, more than any questionable attachment to a nation or a land, provides an illuminating insight into a whole set of cultural and political attitudes, which, however unconscious they may be, are recurrent traits of Englishness.

The same opposition between insular and continental thought or between empiricism and abstraction can be found in the arts, notably during and after the Second World War. This is what Sophie Aymes demonstrates in her examination of texts by Michael Ayrton, Robin Ironside, John Piper and Nikolaus Pevsner. Robin Ironside and Michael Ayrton were spokesmen for a generation of artists whose desire was to return to the sources of English art. They praised individual experience and emotions as opposed to the theory and formalism to be found in Roger Fry, and they sought a way of reconciling some artists'modernist and abstract tendencies with a genuine expression of Englishness. These men defined the sinuous graphic line as a characteristic feature of English art: used in engraving it was the epitome of Romantic art as an art of particulars, hence their shared admiration for wood engraving and engraved book illustrations. Nikolaus Pevsner joined them in their use of the sinuous line not only as a formal device that structured their narratives but also as a metaphor for artistic survival and political freedom. Aymes shows how some of these inheritors of the "native tradition" believed that Neo-Romanticism would eventually overcome abstract and formal art—a reading of art history that was to be belied in the 1950s.

The revival of native English art was by no means restricted to the visual arts and it is a particularly conspicuous aspect of the search for Englishness. Jean-Philippe Heberlé analyses Ralph Vaughan Williams's

first opera, *Hugh the Drover*, composed between 1910 and 1914, and shows that Vaughan Williams—who remains one of the masters of the "English Musical Renaissance" in the first half of the twentieth century—tried to revive English opera through the use of real or invented folk songs. Indeed, the use of folk songs in *Hugh the Drover* brings it close to the ballad opera, a typical English form that appeared in the eighteenth century to compete with Italian opera and mock some of its aspects. The setting of *Hugh the Drover*—a Cotswold village—as well as the time when the action takes place—on the eve of Napoleon's attempted invasion of England—both contribute to emphasizing the Englishness of the work. Vaughan Williams and his librettist, Harold Childe thus extolled the charms of the English countryside and national feelings. Heberlé shows that the score is full of typical English musical idiosyncrasies but is not devoid of extra-national influences. It is in the love duets that the influence of the Italian operatic composer Puccini appears clearly and quite convincingly. The combination of vernacular and foreign elements leads Heberlé to ponder over the forms and limits of Englishness as propounded by Vaughan Williams .

Raphaël Costambeys-Kempczynski's article shows that pop music is also concerned with the definition of Englishness, loss and nostalgia. Mike Skinner, the central figure of the UK Garage group The Streets, has found himself compared to distinctly English poets such as William Blake and Philip Larkin, and also to decidedly English song-writers such as Ian Dury and Paul Weller, while his voice—both as a writer and rapper—also sounds unmistakably English. But Costambey-Kempczynski shows that loss and nostalgia, though present, are treated in a fundamentally different way from what is found in the English song-writing tradition mapped out by pop-music groups such as The Kinks and Blur. The new sense of English loss is not associated with the past but is a loss of the immediate and experienced present. Costambey-Kempczynski's analysis of *A Grand Don't Come for Free*, Mike Skinner's 2004 concept album, explores the Englishness of the story's twenty-year-old Everyman protagonist through the notions of loss, crisis, gender, class and belonging and stresses the notion of spatial rivalry. Through a detailed analysis of the rhythm, melodic line and lyrics together with references to Jürgen Habermas's work on crisis tendencies, Costambey-Kempczynski provides a very clear vision of the urbanity of the English underdog. The persona of Skinner in the album—interestingly called Mike—redefines masculinity and the figure of the geezer in a post-modern reading of identity. Behind the mask of the geezer, Skinner is able to perform Englishness rather than define it.

To a certain extent, Jean-Michel Ganteau carries on with Costambey-Kempczynski's definition of Englishness as a fuzzy, unstable and ostentatious identity. He identifies a diffuse definition of the camp sensibility at work in the whole of Peter Ackroyd's *oeuvre*, both in his fictional production (from *The Last Testament of Oscar Wilde* to *Chatterton*, *Hawksmoor* and *English Music*), or in volumes like *Albion* and the earlier *Dressing up. Transvestism and Drag: The History of an Obsession*. Ganteau reveals the poetics, pragmatics and ethics of camp as cultural constructs. He evokes Ackroyd's taste for excess, ostentation and performance, the hallmarks of camp, but insists that this should not be seen as being limited to the construction of character but rather as infusing the whole of the Ackroydian *oeuvre*. Aesthetically, the hedonism inherent in camp means that it prefers the marginal and the subversive and expresses itself best in opposition to a norm or to a dominating culture. Camp thus becomes the emblem of the vestigial Roman Catholic culture that Ackroyd analyses as the matrix of Englishness, envisaging camp sensibility as fundamentally ethical. Ganteau sees Ackroyd's definition of the "English imagination" as pertaining to camp ethics and aesthetics, his main argument being that Ackroyd uses the transformative power of camp to prise open and question a consensual vision of Englishness

That Ackroyd should have entitled the conclusion to his extensive study of the English imagination "the territorial imperative" is an apt reminder that one cannot ignore a country's physical reality. The fact that Englishness is often seen as a cultural and imaginary construct cannot ignore the prevalence of the "sense of space" in its definition.[34] Julian Mischi is indeed interested in showing how British rural studies address the issue of national identity: taking as his starting point the observation that the English countryside has often been seen as the locus of Englishness itself, he shows how social sciences have been engaged in deconstructing this fallacious perception since the 1990s. The change has been brought about by a growing refusal to sever the link between rural and urban studies. The association between Englishness and the countryside is first and foremost a historical and social construct: industrialisation and the social breakup of communities that accompanied it are responsible for the vision of the English countryside as an idyllic place, free from conflicting relations of class, race and gender. It is also a geographical construct, the South of England being considered as a metonym for the whole of England. Mischi shows very well how rural studies have attacked these myths by applying the most recent developments in British social studies. The countryside is not exempt from

[34] Peter Ackroyd, *Albion*, *op. cit*., 448-49.

a phenomenon of marginalization in terms of gender, race, lifestyle, health and sexuality, hence a focus on ethnic and social minorities. Rural studies have had to acknowledge the existence of rural racism and of visible and less visible minorities who are seen as challenging the dominant definition of rurality. Mischi finally contrasts British and French rural studies, considering what he sees as the advantages and drawbacks of each method and acknowledging the true Englishness of the method used in British studies.

## Part II: The Political Sphere

Antoine Mioche proposes an illuminating synthesis of the principal historiographical avenues opened up by the end of the Empire during the last thirty years or so in the United Kingdom. He contrasts the new "British History" put forward by John Pocock with respectively "Four Nations History", "Revolutionary Historiography" and finally "Post-colonial Historiography." He analyses the new British History as an archipelagic form, proposing the interaction between a centre and its peripheries, including Wales, Scotland, Ireland, the Empire and the Commonwealth. "Four Nations History" sees the shrinking of the Empire to metropolitan dimensions as accounting for the decline of the United Kingdom both on the domestic and on the international scene. On this last point Mioche shows that Revolutionary Historiography differs greatly from Four Nations History, the loss of the Empire being considered by revolutionary historians as an eye-opener and a catalyst in the process of recovering national identity. Finally post-colonial historiography is presented as combating the idea that England possesses an unbroken history of cultural hegemony and territorial integrity as well as deconstructing both the nation and society in favour of a multicultural definition. Mioche's aim is not to argue for or against the centrality of Empire to the constitution of English or British identity, but rather to highlight the nature and the degree of relevance of the now defunct British Empire to each of these historiographies, to question the purpose or purposes to which they put the Empire, and to consider how much light they thus throw on it and on the metropolis. All of these historiographies, it is argued, approach the Empire with a view to dealing with a nation, but only one—multi-contextual history—seeks to view the Empire and the nation as being engaged in a dynamic relationship, while the others—seeking variously to retrieve the United Kingdom's peripheral nations from historiographical neglect, to invest the masses with the mission of embodying the British nation, or to denounce the artificiality and

oppressiveness of state, nation and society—instrumentalise and marginalise the Empire to their own interconnected but separate ends. This, Mioche concludes, is sad and regrettable, both from the point of view of imperial studies, as well as of metropolitan history.

Nicholas Deakin explores the experience of emigrés from Nazi Europe and their attempts to accommodate themselves to the culture and values of mid-twentieth century England. The analysis of this wave of mainly Jewish immigrants allows him to comment on England as it was seen by the potential immigrants before they arrived, at the outbreak of the Second World War, during their stay *i.e.* the war years, and after the war, for those who stayed. Englishness is therefore considered both from the outside and from the inside. He lays particular emphasis on the people who were interned as enemy aliens after 1940, either in the Isle of Man, Australia or Canada and the impact that this experience had on their own sense of identity and the prospect of adapting to life in the society in which they had taken refuge. Responses to these experiences ranged from outright rejection of Englishness—either by moving on as soon as possible to the US or other parts of the UK—or through various forms of accommodation to enthusiastic adoption of the (presumed) values of the English as a prelude to assimilation. The part played by the English themselves in these processes (including evidence of anti-Semitism) is also reviewed. For the émigrés who stayed, the language barrier was no small obstacle to their assimilation, given the link between accents and social class. Deakin also looks briefly at the subsequent impact on the English cultural scene of those refugees who opted for full engagement. He argues that full acceptance remained a dream for the first generation émigrés but that they made sure that their children went through the process of full Anglicization. The experience of the second generation is therefore outlined, marked as it was by tensions between their desire on the one hand, to be fully accepted as English and, on the other hand, for a legitimately distinctive identity which would connect them with their parents' culture and experiences.

Keith Dixon broaches the subject of Englishness from without through a discussion of the modes of representation of the English and Englishness in nationalist discourse in Scotland. He distinguishes two phases in nationalist agitation: the twenties and thirties saw the emergence of a nationalist party (the NPS in 1928 and the SNP in 1934) on the margins of Scottish political life, whereas the period since the seventies has been marked by the key role played by political nationalism. Dixon goes back to the origins of the nationalist movement during the inter-war period, a movement characterized by several forms of xenophobic discourse,

including anti-Englishness, perhaps more so than at the present phase of Scottish Nationalism. To make his point, he introduces two contrasting figures of the nascent nationalist movement: Andrew Dewar Gibb, Regius Professor of Law at Glasgow University and a representative of the conservative tendency within the nationalist movement of the time, and Christopher Murray Grieve ("Hugh MacDiarmid") the poet and polemicist, representing the radical republican nationalist tradition. Both of these thinkers posit the English and Scottish races as being fundamentally different: they represent the "nationalism of the dominated" which is directed against the English. But Dewar Gibb and Hugh MacDiarmid differ radically in their attitudes to their Irish neighbours and to the Empire in general. While Gibb is vigorously opposed to the Irish presence in Scotland and claims a new and egalitarian co-management of the Imperial endeavour, representing thus the "nationalism of the dominant" and violently caricaturing and stigmatizing the Irish, MacDiarmid aligns himself with the Irish separatist tradition in its rejection of the Empire.

Laetitia Langlois analyzes the resistance to Edward Heath's attempts to Europeanize Englishness. Her portrait of Edward Heath allows her to delineate the evolution of England's position regarding Europe since the 1950s. A typical Englishman and a staunch European, Heath is the embodiment of a paradox, harmoniously reconciling, as he does, the two antithetical concepts of Englishness and Europeanness. Langlois reminds us that England has a tradition of openness to the world (in particular to the United States and to the countries of the Commonwealth) but has always made an exception of Europe, considering it as a threat to the country's sovereignty. She adroitly links England's identity crisis in the wake of the Second World War and the loss of the Empire with the simultaneous weakening of the special relationship with the US and explains that this context was conducive to the emergence of both the nationalist and the European discourses. The wave of nationalism in the 1960s and Enoch Powell's racist rhetorics thrived on the mistrust inspired by the European institutions. Even though the United Kingdom reluctantly and pragmatically joined the European Community in 1973, Langlois shows that the country remains impervious to Edward Heath's enthusiastic vision of a European form of Englishness.

Jeremy Tranmer displaces the concept of Englishness far from any commitment to Europe with the contrapuntal portrait of Billy Bragg, the left-wing singer-songwriter, who has become one of the main advocates of what he terms "progressive patriotism" in England. Tranmer evokes the political and musical scene of the mid-1990s and notably the revisionist

atmosphere in the Left to explain Bragg's convictions. He skilfully demonstrates how the growing sense of Englishness, the crisis of the monarchy, post-war immigration, Britpop and the Euro 96 football tournament all helped to shape his civic nationalism. Tranmer argues that, although there are similarities between Bragg's thinking and that of George Orwell, his support for devolution for England marks him out from the English left. Indeed, Bragg's choice of "Jerusalem" as the National Anthem, his radical positioning of Marxist inspiration and his unwitting embrace of a fairly traditional form of patriotism reveal a rather inconsistent ideology that is likely to remain a marginal phenomenon.

Pauline Schnapper's survey of the relationship between Englishness and Britishness over the past decade, brings us back to the complexity of the definition of the concept. She reminds us that while the debate on what is supposed to be a crisis of British national identity has been growing in academic as well media and political circles in the last few years, the whole issue of Englishness or English identity has been much more subdued. She shows that alternatively, from the left and from the right, attempts have been made to find a moderate definition of Englishness and of imposing it on the political scene. But as if fearing the emergence of an ugly type of chauvinism and/or of undermining the unity of the kingdom, politicians have preferred to avoid the subject altogether and to stress the need to strengthen Britishness. Gordon Brown was one of the most vocal advocates of Britishness in 1997 and Schnapper convincingly lays out the personal and political reasons which led him to defend a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-national vision of Great-Britain. Since then, a small number of intellectuals and politicians, such as David Blunkett, have tried to put forward a positive vision of Englishness both distinct from Scottishness and Welshness and yet compatible with Britishness. The issue still needs to be addressed, if only to allow a benign and open definition of Englishness to emerge.

## Part III: Englishness Versus Otherness

Marie-Claire Méry proposes to look at the influence of English aestheticism on Viennese artists and critics in the 1900s. She shows that Englishness was then very much admired, and focuses on two prominent figures of the Viennese intelligentsia at the time: Hugo von Hofmannstal, a young poet and talented essay-writer whose admiration for Swinburne and Pater in particular brought him to write five essays on English art and English culture in the 1890s, and Rudolf Kassner, an art critic and cultural philosopher, who was very much influenced by Hofmannstal. Méry

describes the elective affinity between Hofmannstal and his English contemporaries who shaped his vision of criticism as a form of creation and led him to conceive art as an extension of life. She then assesses the influence of Hofmannstal on Rudolf Kassner who was equally attracted to Englishness and whose monumental masterwork on English art and literature was published in 1901. The book ends with a 30- page imaginary dialogue between two young students at Oxford, Walter (Kassner's persona) and Ralph, a conversation which is indeed a pretext to discuss art and culture. The definition of style which emerges from it stresses the nationalistic differences between the two art forms. The paper can be read as an essay on the cross-fertilisation between England, Austria and to a lesser extent France at that time, a theme developed in the course of this second part.

Masurel-Murray's article proposes quite a different vision of Englishness, not as a model to be admired but on the contrary as the embodiment of Protestant austerity. Such was at least the vision of the Decadent authors at the end of the nineteenth century, when the Catholic faith had become an object of fascination upon which they drew for images and myths. Masurel-Murray shows how the Catholic imagination of the Decadents was constructed in opposition not just to the Protestant discourse but also more widely to Englishness, Catholicism being considered as incompatible on several grounds with the English ethos. For writers such as Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson and Oscar Wilde, turning to Catholicism was a way of rejecting the values of Victorian England and the English Establishment Masurel-Murray shows that they reacted to the anti-Catholic up-surge by emphasizing the most un-English elements of Catholicism. Her reading of Oscar Wilde's texts in particular gives an illuminating vision of these writers' attraction to the most flamboyant and theatrical elements of Catholicism. The Church of the Irish and of continental Europeans, precisely because it was foreign, alienated and marginalized represented a utopian alternative to Industrial England. Rome in particular was seen as an alternative to the secularized Protestantism of the Anglican Church and to modernity and progress. More than a set of beliefs and dogmas, it represented an aesthetic dream, a continental Arcadia recreated through the poetic imagination, an idealised land far removed from industrial England.

Ignacio Ramos-Gay focuses on Wilde's problematic identity by looking in detail at his attachment to France. He argues that Wilde's natural tendency to reinvent himself at crucial periods of his life, stems from his Irish origins. He analyzes Wilde's Irishness in the light of post-colonial theory and argues that it is precisely because Irishness was

considered as non-existent that Wilde felt free to reinvent his nationality and psyche. Ramos-Gay contends that nationality is the result of a cultural negotiation based on personal affections and desires and he reads Wilde's choice to impersonate an ultra English Englishman and then a French man of letters as an apt illustration of this theory. True to his own aphorisms that "life imitates art" or that "literature always anticipates life", Wilde went very far in this self-invention, modelling himself on the literary heroes of the writers he admired, such as Balzac and Baudelaire. France indeed represented a literary myth that Wilde tried to emulate in his works and also in his life. Ramos-Gay analyzes Wilde's francophilia as an expression of both an aesthetic and a political concern, a means for him to play France against England. His resorting to French to write his play *Salomé* suggests the author's political struggle to undermine the rulers' imposition of English as a vehicle for culture. Identity was thus, according to Wilde, the result of a flexible cultural negotiation relating to art rather than to geography. His francophilia was both a way to highlight his cultural identity as well as a means to contrast it with Englishness.

Dickens's Englishness is also a matter of dispute although of course it has nothing to do with nationality. Valery Kennedy points out his fundamentally ambivalent attitude to the idea that English culture is superior to that of other nations. While his work frequently mocks characters, such as Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend,* who are convinced of the superiority of the English language, nation, and culture, at the same time his fiction, and even more so, his journalism, reveal that he himself often sees England as superior indeed to various other countries and cultures. The essay focuses on *Little Dorrit* and the articles, "Travelling Abroad", "A Monument of French Folly", and "Medicine Men of Civilisation", as examples of Dickens's critique of the myth of English superiority, before turning to *A Child's History of England*, *Pictures from Italy*, and *American Notes* for evidence that in comparison to the past of England or Italy or to the present of the United States in 1842, England emerges as superior in a number of ways. The essay concludes that while Dickens saw his own age as a great one, despite its faults, he was frequently much more concerned with the faults than with the age's greatness.

Marianne Camus is also interested in the manifestations of Englishness in comparison with other national identities on the Continent: she shows how the mid-Victorian novels by Dickens, Gaskell and Thackeray construct and define Englishness in relation to France in particular, but also to Germany and Italy. These two countries are both used, in different ways, to bring out an English feeling of superiority. Their people are

considered as childlike and the Englishman abroad must treat them with leniency. But this feeling, based on the pride of being the first industrial nation in the world, is tinged with envy and nostalgia when it comes to the art of living. The Italians and Germans have been able to preserve their rural world and their traditions. When it comes to France, the only European nation to be seen as a political rival at the time, the discourse is even more ambiguous. As regards virtue (whether public or private), elegance and proper social behaviour, Englishness tends to appear as most assertive when it is least sure of itself. Camus contends that the highly contradictory image of Englishness which emerges from these mid-Victorian novels is perhaps the origin of the malaise English people still feel when asked to define the term. She suggests that the national character being in constant flow, it is perhaps this very adaptability which is the hallmark of Englishness.

Ford Madox Ford's *It Was the Nightingale* is indeed hinged around this idea of the elasticity of the concept of identity. Robert McDonough analyzes the way Ford Madox Ford deals with his own contradictions in this autobiographical novel and explains the reasons why he left England after the First World War, showing that paradoxically his Englishness was perhaps reinforced by his departure. The hybrid genre of this work, written and published in 1933 at a time when Ford had for many years been alternating between America and France, together with his usual narrative devices (the unreliable narrator, the *progression d'effet* and three layers of narrative time) display Ford's skill in forging a new identity for himself. Ford Madox Ford feels nostalgia for pre-war England and yet knows that he cannot stay any longer in a country which increasingly restricts individual freedom, hampers the arts and has no respect for the soldiers who won the war. Ford claims never to have been English in peacetime (a Londoner, certainly, and proud of it, but not English), nor a gentleman (being a gentleman and an artist seem to be mutually exclusive); however, a careful reading reveals that throughout the book Ford displays the kind of knowledge to be expected of an English Gentleman, and boasts of the education of a gentleman. *It Was the Nightingale*, then, does not suggest that the "English gentleman" was a false ideal but rather that post-war England was no longer true to this ideal.

Milena Kovačević also discusses the effects of the Great War on a true-born English gentleman. She provides a reading of D. H. Lawrence's short story *England, My England* which can be viewed as a rueful, half-despairing cry for England and Englishness, congruent with Lawrence's state of mind at the time. Significantly, the story depicts the slow degeneration of Egbert, the male protagonist. Estranged from his family,