

“WHERE DO YOU *REALLY* COME FROM?” UNOFFICIAL ENGLISHNESS IN JULIAN BARNES’ *ARTHUR & GEORGE*

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Imagining the nation and commenting on the state of nationhood in different periods of history are among the functions of historiographic metafictional novels. They reach back into particular moments in the history of a nation in order to connect shared memories to collective cultural identities. Julian Barnes’ *Arthur & George* (2005) reflects a growing concern with the politics of belonging at the very beginning of the third millennium when concepts such as migration, diaspora, hybrid identity, and belonging in general come to the fore in social and cultural studies. From the very beginning of the novel the readers are exposed to two different versions of the past, not a single definite one. We are also shown different versions of Englishness (the Scot-Irish Arthur’s, the Anglo-Indian George’s, and the English Captain Anson’s). Both Arthur and George abide by an English ‘gentleman’s code of proper behavior’, yet there are times when they both feel they are ‘unofficial Englishmen’. The gap between these differing definitions of Englishness allows the author to examine the issue of racial prejudice in the heyday of British imperialism. Drawing, mainly, on the ideas of Homi Bhabha and Eric Hobsbawm, this paper examines the interrelationship of history and nationhood in Barnes’ *Arthur & George*.

Keywords: Englishness, National Identity, History, Invented Tradition, Barnes, *Arthur & George*

1. Introduction

In the decades following the Second World War, English literature witnessed a resurgence of the historical novel. The postmodern paradigm shift revitalized the genre and gave it new bearings. This paradigm shift had liberating implications for historiography: it repudiated essentialism and objectivism in favour of narrative constructivism, and gave voice to alternative versions of history, to unrealized possibilities. An outcome of this paradigm shift was the emergence of what Linda Hutcheon (1947–) called “historiographic metafiction”:

what would characterize postmodernism in fiction would be what I here call ‘historiographic metafiction’ [...] which is both intensively self-reflexive and parodic, yet it also attempts to root itself in that which both reflexivity and parody appear to short-circuit: the historical world. (Hutcheon 2004 [1998], ix–x)

This seemingly unresolved paradox is, for Hutcheon, a characteristic of the postmodern that “worked to challenge our entire concept of both historical and literary knowledge, as well as our awareness of our ideological implication in our dominant culture” (Hutcheon 2004 [1998], x). Historiographic metafictional novels entail a critical return to history – critical in the sense that they question the essence of historical knowledge and revisit the past in order to comment on the contemporary politics of national identity. They present an insider’s view of a nation. Julian Barnes’ *Arthur & George* (2005) is one such novel: published at the time of Tony Blair’s envisioning of a multicultural nation, it examines the conflicts of Englishness as an identifier. Cheng Hao Yang noted how, “read in a way that is relevant to the post-September 11 context, Julian Barnes’ *Arthur & George* (2005), with its setting in the Edwardian period, critiques the nationalistic particularism of English identity and offers the possibility of reconfiguring Englishness. An institutionalized reading of the novel would draw the reader’s attention to the issue of racism” (Yang 2013, 162). The present paper thus aims at examining the relationship between history and national identity in Barnes’ *Arthur & George*.

Barnes started his novel-writing career with *Metroland* (1980), which won him the Somerset Maugham Award for a first novel. After *Metroland* came *Before She Met Me* (1982) – a novel about sexual jealousy, rendered with dark humour – which, similar to almost all his later work, “settles on a combination of social satire, Swiftian irony, and experimentation” (Childs 2011, 5). Barnes, however, found his voice in his 1984 *Flaubert’s Parrot*¹, a parodic formal experimentation with biography and novel writing. With this novel he starts questioning the nature of fact and fiction, history and story. He also challenges generic conventions, mixing differing genres and styles, expanding the novel’s boundaries. Geoffrey Braithwaite’s chase for the titular bird is not so much a quest but a parody of it: a wild goose chase after the Truth. By the end of the novel, Geoffrey is faced with dozens of parrots, each possibly being (or not being) the ‘real’ one.

The remarkable success of *Flaubert’s Parrot* encouraged Barnes to abandon writing conventional novels like *Metroland* or the so-called ‘Duffy’ crime novels (under the pseudonym of Dan Kavanagh), and focus instead on experimenting with form and style. He is now “one of the foremost contemporary British writers to explore the variety of forms of writing that the novel encompasses” (Childs 2011, 7). Barnes later wrote *Staring at the Sun* (1986), a rumination on death and mortality, and the famous *A History of the World in 10½ Chapters* (1989), an experimental novel about love and history. The novel purports to argue in favour of our natural need for narrative, storytelling, and mythmaking. So, the history of the world becomes in fact a series of stories: “The history of the world? Just voices echoing in the dark; images that burn for a few centuries and then fade: stories, old stories that sometimes seem to overlap; strange links, impertinent conclusions” (Barnes 1989, 242). Although the novel gives voice to people on the margins of history, it reveals the author’s general approach to

¹ “After two comparatively conventional novels anatomising modern love, Barnes’s next book contains by contrast an unusual range of narrative types, including apocrypha, autobiography, bestiary, biography, chronology, criticism, dialogue, dictionary, essay, exam, guide, and manifesto” (Childs 2011, 46).

history: self-reflexive scepticism towards History as a grand narrative². He maintains and further develops such a postmodern take on history in his later novels such as *England, England* (1998) and *Arthur & George* (2005), his ‘memory’ novels³.

Barnes’ *England, England* – “launched against the waning importance of the UK in a neoliberal era” – is a “postmodern play with place, identity, and memory” (Nitsch 2015, 47). The novel is also a satire of postimperial capitalist free-marketism. Like almost all the mature novels of Barnes, *England, England* challenges historical authenticity, and is critical of ill-considered nostalgia for erstwhile imperial glory and a lost utopian, georgic past. Sir Jack Pitman’s manipulation of history and commodification of Englishness is in fact an attack on Thatcherite capitalist policies. Pitman’s plan to build a *theme park* of Englishness on the Isle of Wight and to make a profitable industry out of English heritage is a caustic picture of post-imperial Britain in the 1980s.

Arthur & George is another top-shelf novel by Julian Barnes. It comprises four chapters, and its narration oscillates between past and present tenses. There are several historical references to issues, establishments or events which were important during the Victorian era and in the early twentieth century, such as the Indian Mutiny, the British railways, English public schools and the Tolley, the Chartist upheavals, the Victoria Law Courts, the Court of Appeal, the Scramble for Africa, the London Olympics, the Battle of the Somme, and so on. There are also several metafictional statements in reference to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s composition of the Sherlock Holmes story: how he chose the name of his renowned detective, and how he developed the general structure of his stories, “beginning with an ending”⁴.

The author has reached back into dusty archives of history and has taken a subject that would have appeared to almost anyone else as just a historical footnote, because it was a local event, without national significance (“The Great Wyrley Outrages”⁵). Yet, Barnes

² “Barnes’ novel was published in 1989. That was indeed a year in which history was thought to come to an end according to one hypothesis. At least until the events of September 2001 in New York, for some writers in the West an apparent ‘End of History’ occurred with the closing stages of the Cold War, the Tiananmen Square protests and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, followed by the growth of globalization, proclaimed by the neoconservative Francis Fukuyama as the triumph of economic liberalism” (Childs 2011, 82).

³ Barnes was intrigued by memory, which is fuelled by imagination and yet linked to our sense of identity. Does it make our identities, in a sense, ‘imagined’? According to Peter Childs: “Barnes’ understanding of memory connects clearly with his most characteristic approach to fiction and its relation to alternative modes of writing: generic fabulation. With regard to *England, England*, Barnes describes fabulation this way: ‘convincing ourselves of a coherence between things that are largely true and things that are wholly imagined’” (Childs 2011, 6).

⁴ Like his created detective Sherlock, Arthur starts analyzing the Edalji case with the help of his secretary, Investigator Wood, filling the role of Dr. Watson. (Notice how real life can imitate fiction!) Therefore, “the frontier between Sir Arthur as investigator and defender of an innocent victim, and Conan Doyle as writer, becomes blurred, and a series of metafictional remarks are inserted, comparing Arthur’s investigation of a real case to the composition of a novel: ‘It was like starting a book’” (Guignery 2006, 130).

⁵ A series of slashings of livestock, wrongly attributed to the marginalized George Edalji of Parsee descent, who was put on trial and sentenced to seven years of imprisonment with hard labor in 1903. Arthur Conan Doyle, then a very famous figure and the author of the successful Sherlock Holmes series, took the case to prove

has used this minor footnote as the source for his compelling historical novel. He weaves a riveting story round a minor ‘real’ historical event, showing how the separate lives of the famous creator of Sherlock Holmes and an almost unknown solicitor George Edalji – subject to a racially-prejudiced miscarriage of justice – tie together. Since it is quite likely that “[w]hat happened to the truth is not recorded” (Barnes 1985, 65), and since “the human mind can’t exist without the illusion of a full story [...] it coherently links the real and the totally imagined in a plausible narrative” (Barnes, quoted in Childs 2011, 7). Not only does the novel mix imagination and reality, it also mixes genres (detective fiction, history, biography). It, above all, “explores the borderlines of nationality and ethnicity, evidence and imagination, doubt and faith, fact and fiction, endings and beginnings” (Childs 2011, 139). While Childs only focuses his attention on the metafictionality of Barnes’ novels and the way their author employs postmodern techniques such as parody, pastiche, intertextuality, this paper is going to examine the convergence of history and the nation, a subject that presses for more scholarly attention.

There are a number of studies on *Arthur & George* highlighting race cosmopolitanism (Yang 2013), race (Fluet 1998; Cavalie 2009), and “partial postcoloniality” (Dodson 2018). Dodson in particular argues that the novel “explores the racial politics of Edwardian England” (Dodson 2018, 112) and he manages to explain Barnes’ partial postcolonial critique of Englishness caught “between the death of an imperial past and the seeds of a postcolonial future” (Dodson 2018, 115). Dodson also raises our attention to a tension between different conflicting definitions of Englishness which can be explained with particular attention to the socio-political discourse of the time in which it was written. In the face of multiculturalism and the discourse of social inclusion, the conventional understanding of identity and nationality is transformed. Increased migration sparked debates over multiculturalism and made it possible to have a paradigm shift in public discourse from the so-called heritage culture and ‘white nationalism’ of the 1980s to a discourse of cultural diversity, social inclusion, and racial hybridity: “[f]inally, in the last decade [of the twentieth century] or so, as the direct impact of Thatcherism ebbed, [...] national character triggered multi-cultural re-evaluations” (Mandler 2006, 188). The former government’s discourse of nostalgia and the ‘enemies within’ were rejected and, instead, the idea of England as “the world’s crossroads” and “the nation of diversity” was introduced (Mandler 2006, 235).

Arthur & George thus employs the familiar frame of a detective story where the narrator or the protagonist play the role of an explorer of history and, in its own unique ways, the novel thematizes distinctive features of English life and culture.

George’s innocence. However, “newly discovered documents show that the Staffordshire police fabricated evidence to try to discredit Arthur Conan Doyle’s investigation into the curious case of George Edalji”. The novelist believed Edalji, and was convinced that “colour was involved [in his conviction],” said Barnes, adding that “we would now use ‘institutional racism’ as the way to describe the Staffordshire police constabulary” (Flood 2015).

2. *The Imagined Space of Englishness*

The theme of duality is established and developed from the very first pages of the novel. The author emphasizes the main characters’ difference from one another, their different upbringing and their differing mindsets shape their views of Englishness. Arthur values chivalry, gentlemanliness, noble descent, and sportsmanship (to name a few), while for George the core of Englishness is the Church of England and nothing else. The whole novel is focused, I argue, on how the nation is conceived as an ‘imagined community’. In *Imagined Communities* (1983) Benedict Anderson argues that nationality and nationalism are modern cultural constructs; he defines the nation as “an imagined community” – imagined because each community imagines itself differently from others by reason of their different cultural roots and traditions (Anderson 1991 [1983], 6). The nation as an imaginative construct both produces and is produced and shaped by dominant ideological discourses. Englishness – as ‘imagined’ by the majority of Englishmen during the late Victorian and Edwardian period – was not receptive of ‘others’.

According to Slavoj Žižek in *Looking Awry* (1991): “the subject attempts to fill out its constitutive lack by means of identification, by identifying itself with some master-signifier guaranteeing its place in the symbolic network” (Žižek 1991, 163). In *Arthur & George*, the nation serves the function of master-signifier, and George has an Anglo-Indian desire to identify with the master-signifier of Englishness. In the geographical space of England, George is not a stranger, but in the ‘imagined’ space of Englishness he is a ‘domestic other’. Nonetheless, he is needed as an ‘other’, he is needed to maintain the position of the ‘other’ in order for the ‘self’ to retain its own sovereignty. If George is “overwhelmed to such a degree by the wish to be” considered a total Englishman, “it is because he lives in a society that makes his inferiority possible [...] in a society that proclaims the superiority of [only] one race” (Fanon 2008 [1952], 100). George craves to win admittance into the world of English gentlemen by setting his mind to becoming a solicitor. He has denied his cultural origins and he insists on not being associated with his different lineage. George repeats, time and again, that he is an Englishperson, but he is never recognized as such. Although born and bred in England, he is teased about his origins:

George, where do you come from?

– Great Wyrley.

No, where do you *really* come from?

Have you got a girl, George?

.....

Is she a darkie?

– She’s English, just like me.

Just like you, George? *Just like you?*

When can we meet her?

I bet she’s a Bechuana girl.

Shall we send a private detective to investigate? (Barnes 2007 [2005], 70–71)

Yet George never refers to or accepts his origins. Is he one of those ‘reformed’ imperial subjects whom Macaulay has called “a mimic man raised through our English School?” (cited in Bhabha 2004 [1994], 125). If so, he is unaware that “to be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English” (Bhabha 2004 [1994], 125). As Lisa J. Fluet comments: “[i]n the cultural imaginary of 1890s British residents,” Anglo-Indians were regarded as “non-quite-English,” as “domestic others,” and “significantly represented as ‘strange’” (Fluet 1998, 134).

3. *Stereotype and Imperialism*

A key characteristic of any discriminatory ‘us’ versus ‘them’ discourse is

its dependence on the concept of ‘fixity’ in the ideological construction of otherness. Fixity [is] the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism. [...] Likewise the stereotype [...], its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that [...] must be anxiously repeated. (Bhabha 2004 [1994], 94–95)

In a society that holds a ‘fixed essence’ for national identity, George is and will always be a “recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha 2004 [1994], 122). If he is clever, he is “[d]evilish clever”; if he is a gentleman, he is an “Oriental gentleman” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 73). He is “odd-looking” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 101) and “[h]is appearance is *essentially* Oriental” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 140) – I added the emphasis to show how appearance could calcify into an essence, and function “as a signifier of discrimination” in a society that is obsessed with race and family descent (Bhabha 2004 [1994], 113).

The difference between Arthur and George in terms of roots and genealogy is highlighted throughout the novel. George’s father was born in “distant Bombay, at the far end of the bubbling bloodlines of Empire” and there he “was converted to Christianity” and found his way to England (Barnes 2007 [2005], 72). Arthur is also half Irish, half Scottish: “This damn temper is not getting any better. He puts it down to being half Irish. The Scottish half of him has the devil of a job keeping the upper hand” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 238). Arthur, however, claims that his ancestry goes back to “the Plantagenets” (229), we are also told that he is a very imaginative child:

Here were different kinds of stories, which more resembled school homework, about the ducal house of Brittany, and the Irish branch of the Percys of Northumberland, and someone who had led Pack’s Brigade at Waterloo, and was the uncle of the white, waxen thing he never forgot. And connected to all this were the private lessons in heraldry his mother gave him. (Barnes 2007 [2005], 6)

The above quote reveals both the discursive nature of history – that the historical records are not absolute truths – and the constructed nature of national/racial identity. Otherness is therefore nothing but “an articulation of difference contained within the *fantasy* of ori-

gin and identity" (Bhabha 2004 [1994], 96, emphasis added). These fantasies are so firmly established and frequently repeated that even children use them automatically. Seven-year-old classmates of George do not fail to remind him that he is "not a right sort" (Barnes 2007 [2005], 11, 14). George is called "half-caste," "the only brown face," "little mongrel," "pagan," "odd-looking," and many other things. His father is called "Pharisee," "false prophet," and finally "damned." They even say his brain is "formed differently from that of ordinary men and women" (Barnes 2007 [2005], 176). This is how racial stereotypes work: by fixating the subject in an inferior position, through use of false representation, as the following examples taken from the novel show:

I do not doubt that it is the mixing of the blood that partly is the cause of all this. (338)

When the blood is mixed, that is where the trouble starts. [...] Why does human society everywhere abhor the half-caste? Because his soul is torn between the impulse to civilization and the pull of barbarism. (339)

[A] mixing of the blood produces a tendency, a susceptibility under certain extreme circumstances to revert to barbarism. [...] As the full moon may trigger lunacy in some gypsies and Irish. (340)

Racism – the belief in the innate supremacy of a particular group of people in opposition to "some tendency to evil in the blood" of some other groups (338) – was to a large extent powered in Victorian times by the pseudo-scientific discourse of racial privilege, prevalent in the nineteenth century. According to Sean Purchase:

Victorian anxieties about race, however, a product of centuries of British involvement in slavery and imperialism, were largely of their own conception. This conception was, in turn, both partly constructed and reaffirmed by the rise of the biological sciences, by discourses of anthropology and Orientalism, and especially by the sinister theories which grew out of 'scientific racism.' By the end of the century, most Victorians assumed that the Anglo-Saxon race was the biologically 'natural' superior to other races. (Purchase 2006, 112)

Two notorious examples of such 'sinister theories' of 'scientific racism,' dominant at that time, were Phrenology and Eugenics. Victorians were obsessed with the matter of racial purity and "the threat of cross-racial contamination" (Purchase 2006, 112). They were anxious and afraid indeed of the "danger posed by hybrid and hence 'inferior' races" (Purchase 2006, 113). Such a race-conscious society will not only be unsympathetic to an Anglo-Indian like George, it will also extend racist assumptions and employ xenophobic rhetoric about almost every other race, including the Irish, whom Charles Kingsley (1819–1875) – a famed historian, novelist, and a priest of the Church of England – described as "white chimpanzees" (Purchase 2006, 114). Consider the following examples, where hateful Captain Anson, chief police constable, addresses Arthur:

“But a murderous spree like this [...] it seems so *foreign*. In Ireland, *of course*, the midnight houghing of the landlord’s cattle is practically part of the social calendar. But then, little would ever surprise me of a Fenian.” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 97, emphasis added)

“What is he, this Hornung? Half Mongol, half Slav, by the sound of him. Could you not find someone wholly British? [...] There is something odd about him. I can sniff it.” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 74–75)

These stereotypical images are made and maintained by the Empire and imperialist discourse. According to Kenneth Wilson, “Imperialism had a great emotional appeal to a large [...] section of British society: an appeal that was by and large produced by its various cultural expressions [...] and it saturated British popular culture during the late Victorian and Edwardian period” (1993, 23). A telling example is where George’s father catechizes him:

George, where do you live?
 – The Vicarage, Great Wyrley.
 And where is that?
 – Staffordshire, Father.
 And where is that?
 – The centre of England.
 And what is England, George?
 – England is the beating heart of the Empire, Father. (Barnes 2007 [2005], 20–21)

This is Arthur’s family’s take on Englishness; the Parsee Edaljis saw it differently:

“George, this is true enough. You are an Englishman. But others may not always entirely agree. And where we are living –”
 “The centre of England,” George responds, as if in bedroom catechism.
 “The centre of England, yes, where we find ourselves, and where I have ministered for nearly twenty years, the centre of England – despite all God’s creatures being equally blessed – is still a little primitive, George. And you will furthermore find primitive people where you least expect them. They exist in ranks of society where better might be anticipated.” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 50)

Both families live in England, yet the experience is not quite the same. As a typical Briton, inspired by “English history,” proud of “English Freedoms,” Arthur is brought up by his mother’s stories of knights and heroes: “For Arthur the root of Englishness lay in the long-gone, long-remembered, long-invented world of chivalry” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 28). His favourite author was Captain Mayne Reid (1818–1883), a famous writer of adventure stories full of stereotypical exotic and orientalist images. One is immediately reminded of Edward Said’s thesis in *Culture and Imperialism* that the Europeans’ knowledge of the East is mostly textual, based on exotic tales and pro-imperialist adventure stories they have read or were taught when they were younger. And what was the result? “[T]hey were not like

'us', and for that reason deserved to be ruled" (Said 1994 [1993], xii). Doyle himself "described his exploits in Africa and the Arctic" later in his writing (Barnes 2007 [2005], 35): "He set his adventures in distant lands, where buried treasure could often be found, and the local population was high on black-hearted villains and rescuable maidens. [...] These descriptions would bring him money, and money would do the rest" (Barnes 2007 [2005], 29–30). Kenneth Wilson goes as far as claiming that Conan Doyle was an "ardent imperialist" (Wilson 1993, 24), since "[t]he majority of [his] prodigious and popular literary output was written between 1883 and the First World War, the period that historian Eric Hobsbawm calls 'the era of a new type of empire, the colonial'" (Wilson 1993, 22) and his stories "reproduced the ideology of popular imperialism" (Wilson 1993, 25).

Imperial expansion in action is represented in Barnes' novel by the notorious 'scrambles' for Africa and the Orient: "Why is everyone going to South Africa all of a sudden?", Arthur asks Mr. Greatorrex, looking puzzled by the flow of people from the metropolis to the outposts of the Empire (Barnes 2007 [2005], 355). Yet, when the South African War wages, he immediately volunteers and joins the 'scramblers.' Although "the war [is] nothing but a dishonourable scramble for gold," he believes "this war is worth a white lie or two" (Barnes 2007 [2005], 227). This is the view of an educated man, a man "second only to Kipling in his influence on the healthy, sporting young men of the country" (Barnes 2007 [2005], 236). And why does he volunteer to go to such a 'dishonourable' war?

[He] has lost muscle, and requires danger. He has been among women too long, and too confusingly, and yearns for the world of men. [...] On his return, his patriotic accounts of the war bring approval from the highest ranks of society. It is the interregnum between the old Queen's death and the new King's coronation. He is invited to dine with the future Edward VII and seated beside him. It is made clear that a knighthood is on offer in the Coronation Honors List if Dr. Conan Doyle would care to accept it. (Barnes 2007 [2005], 228–29)

Both Arthur and George (and George's family) are loyal to the Empire, yet Arthur becomes "a knight of the realm" and dines with the King (Barnes 2007 [2005], 236) while George and his family receive threatening letters in unformed hand and are subjected to a series of hateful hoaxes.

4. *Cricket as/and 'Invented Tradition'*

Imagining the nation and commenting on the state of nationhood in different periods of history are among the functions of historiographic metafictional novels, because of the fact that they reach back into particular moments in the history of a nation in order to connect shared memories to collective cultural identities. This paper has so far shown different versions of Englishness, and as also shown that both Arthur and George abide by an English 'gentleman's code of proper behavior', but is this 'code' a sign or an icon of national identity?

Nationalism forms a feeling of solidarity through 'invented traditions.' For Hobsbawm, the nation and its icons, symbols, and rituals are all invented traditions which, notwith-

standing their novelty, are linked to the past and “use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion” (Hobsbawm, Ranger 2013 [1983], 12). Such historical continuity is an ideological construct. The invention of traditions has usually followed an ideological plan not only to control the mass of the people but to invite them into liking and following that plan as well. Much of what we might assume to be tradition of an ancient past could simply be a recent invention. This is the main lesson of *The Invention of Tradition*, an instructive collection of articles edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Thus defines Hobsbawm an ‘invented tradition’:

[A] set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past. A striking example is the deliberate choice of a Gothic style for the nineteenth-century rebuilding of the British parliament, and the equally deliberate decision after World War II to rebuild the parliamentary chamber on exactly the same basic plan as before. The historic past into which the new tradition is inserted need not be lengthy, stretching back into the assumed mists of time. [...] [I]nsofar as there is such reference to a historic past, the peculiarity of ‘invented’ traditions is that the continuity with it is largely factitious. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant, that makes the ‘invention of tradition’ so interesting for historians of the past two centuries. (Hobsbawm, Ranger 2013 [1983], 1–2)

Therefore, for example, the Scottish tartan kilt⁶, or even “the practices associated with the Cup Final in British Association Football” are invented traditions (Hobsbawm, Ranger 2013 [1983], 1). The function of invented tradition is then to create some sense of national identity and belonging. It is in this context that a turn to cricket and a discussion on the role and value of sportsmanship as an element of national identity is in order.

For English people, cricket has been more than just a game; it has been a sign of Englishness; Arthur said: “English cricket made him patriotic” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 28). It was thus sent to the outposts of the Empire as a national-cultural icon. Terence Ranger refers to Lord Bryce’s visit to “the ‘tropical wilderness’ of Rhodesia in the mid-1890s” and how he was “much struck by white southern African enthusiasm for cricket, ‘the national game’” (Barnes 2007 [2005], 217), so ‘struck’ indeed that he said: “They are as much Englishmen in Africa as in England” (Hobsbawm, Ranger 2013 [1983], 218). As the narrator

⁶ Hugh Trevor-Roper writes: “the kilt is a purely modern costume, first designed, and first worn, by an English Quaker industrialist, and that it was bestowed by him on the Highlanders in order not to preserve their traditional way of life but to ease its transformation: to bring them out of the heather and into the factory” (Hobsbawm, Ranger 2013 [1983], 22). So, the invention of tradition may sometimes follow exploitive or hegemonic goals.

of Barnes' novel says, the English "invented cricket in order to give themselves a sense of eternity" (Barnes 2007 [2005], 303).

From the very first pages of the novel a visible distinction is established between Arthur and George. While George leads a secluded life within the Vicarage walls, Arthur finds "happiness on the cricket field" (Barnes 2007 [2005], 13). While George lacks the skill for games: "he has never even jumped a hopscotch grid, while a thrown ball makes him flinch" (15); Arthur is "marked down as a future Captain of Cricket" (17), because he is fond of "tricycling or playing tennis" (68), "[a]nd like any healthy Briton, he enjoyed a good hunt" (32); "George [however] has no taste for such adventures" (31). For the Victorians, mastery in sports, especially in cricket, was an important dimension of the gentleman's code of proper behaviour, a sign of English character⁷. They were firm in their belief that sports could provide a moral outlet for the youth's energy. Sportsmanship was part of the English ethos. Thus, a person like George who has no outdoor activity is bound to be considered morally weak (if not perverted). When Anson, the chief police constable, accuses George of committing the 'Great Wyrley Outrages,' his explanation is: "He [George] does not engage in sporting activities either. Had you [Arthur] noticed that? The great manly English games – cricket, football, golf, tennis, boxing – are all quite foreign to him" (Barnes 2007 [2005], 341).

Hobsbawm refers to three major innovations with regard to the invention of tradition – of which the first and foremost is "the development of a secular equivalent of the church" (Hobsbawm, Ranger 2013 [1983], 271). Barnes cleverly alludes to the conflict of religion and science in the late nineteenth century throughout the novel: "But what is the Church threatened by? [...] By Science. [...] By the prospect of the twentieth century" (18). Arthur "joined the Rationalist Association" (89) because "science [was] leading the way" (245). "The Mam brought Arthur up a Catholic, but both have since deserted the faith: [...] Arthur [has deserted it] for Sunday golf" (317). The second and third innovations are "the invention of public ceremonies" (vicarage rituals, spiritual seances, etc.) and "the mass production of public monuments (as in *England, England* and Sir Jack Pitman's capitalist plan of creating a theme-park of England as a lucrative nostalgia shop)", examples of both are to be found in Barnes' novels.

5. Concluding Remarks

Historiographic metafictional novels present an inside view of a culture, society or nation; in choosing to rewrite a historical event or a historical period, these novels not only shed light on the past but they use the past to analyse the present situation. As a conduit for national imagination, a historiographic metafictional novel connects the past to the present

⁷ According to Hobsbawm, "[t]he rise of sport provided new expressions of nationalism through the choice or invention of nationally specific sports" (Hobsbawm, Ranger 2013 [1983], 300). It provided "a medium for national self-identification and factitious community" (300). Among sports, cricket had a distinct place: "Cricket both embodied and disseminated the imperial idea"; it "embodied so many of the values and ideals which [...] they [the imperial subjects] aspired to" (238–239). See also Holt 1996, 48–70.

forms of belonging. In *Arthur & George*, Barnes masterfully walks on the borderline of history and fiction as well. The conscious merging of fact and fiction is visible when the author refers to reports and cuttings from newspapers (such as *The Times* or *Daily Telegraph*) in order to give facticity to his fictional descriptions, thus underscoring the constructed nature of (historical or fictional) narratives. From the very beginning we are exposed to two versions of the past, not a single definite one. We are also shown different versions of Englishness: Arthur's Scot-Irish one, George's Anglo-Indian one, and the English one of Captain Anson. Anson, Staffordshire chief constable, looks down on the former two. He even has what he calls "a theory":

"Again, you are being facetious. Horace Edalji lives in Manchester, for a start. Besides, I am merely proposing that a *mixing of the blood* produces a tendency, a susceptibility under certain extreme circumstances to revert to *barbarism*. To be sure, many half-castes live perfectly respectable lives."

"Unless something triggers them..."

"As the full moon may trigger lunacy in some gypsies and *Irish*."

"It has never had that effect on me."

"Low-born Irish, my dear Doyle. Nothing personal intended."

"So what is the difference between George and Horace? Why, in your belief, has one resorted to barbarism and the other not – or not as yet?" (Barnes 2007 [2005], 370, emphasis added)

That is perhaps the reason why Arthur turns to George and says: "You and I, George, you and I, we are... unofficial Englishmen [...] George is taken aback by this remark [...] If so, he has no other land. He cannot go back two generations" (291). The gap, the fissure between these differing definitions of Englishness allows the author to highlight the matter of racial prejudice and othering, rampant directly in the heyday of British imperialism and indirectly after the September 11 attacks, and in the worsened situation of migrants.

Perhaps the reason why Arthur describes himself and George as 'unofficial Englishmen' is the instability or the ambivalence of what being English means. It is therefore quite fitting that the novel ends in ambiguity:

He gazes through his succession of lenses, out into the air and beyond.

What does he see?

What did he see?

What will he see? (Barnes 2007 [2005], 441)

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