

Challenging Englishness:  
Rebranding and Rewriting National Identity  
in Contemporary English Fiction

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# 1 From Warm Beer to Chicken Tikka Masala: Rebranding and Rewriting Englishness

In 2005, the British Government under Tony Blair initiated an online project to nominate and vote for a hundred 'Icons of England'.<sup>1</sup> Ironically, it had been seven years earlier that Julian Barnes' satirical novel *England, England* was published, which included a fictional list of 'Fifty Quintessences of Englishness' that bear some remarkable similarities to the icons enumerated in the governmental survey. The Icons project is arguably one of the most explicit manifestations of the recent public political opinion on matters of English national identity. At the same time, however, its initiation seemed to conjure up the end of an era that had celebrated a vision of a newly defined, 'rebranded' Englishness in the preceding years. The project can be seen as one of the last attempts of the Blair government to come to terms with the aftermath of political devolution in Britain, the so-called 'English Question', and the crisis that is constantly diagnosed in English national identity.

A search for the unique and quintessential characteristics of England and the English is a popular contemporary political, cultural and literary discourse. The online Icons project is a remarkable example of this discourse, and serves as a fitting point of departure for an introduction to Englishness since it raises several essential questions: to what extent can the project be seen as a case in point for Englishness as it was redefined at the time of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and what elements and actors were involved in the processes? What does it mean to say that Englishness was 'rebranded' or 'rewritten' at that time and how did narratives contribute to the changing perceptions of national identity?

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<sup>1</sup>The website invites users to explore icons that are held to be particularly English. Cf. "Icons. A Portrait of England". (2005). *Culture Online*. <http://www.icons.org.uk>. Since the project finished in 2011, the original website is not available anymore but most of the content can still be accessed at <http://web.archive.org/web/20100125093050/http://www.icons.org.uk/> (07/02/2012).

The Icons project exemplifies how Englishness is represented and constructed on various levels that involve political decisions, medial representations and narrative strategies for the dissemination of a positive image. Firstly, against the backdrop of the devolution, it is interesting that the New Labour government had paid an initial sum of £1 million to focus specifically on English identity, and not on the Scottish, Welsh or Northern Irish. Secondly, the survey clearly represents a modern, rebranded version of Englishness, since it combines traditional icons such as the pub, the oak tree or cricket with more recent manifestations of national identity such as Brick Lane or the popular dish Chicken Tikka Masala. The dish was invented by Bangladeshi chefs in London as a hybrid Indian meal (cf. Marr 2000: 6) and – unlike almost all other icons – is often taken as a culinary example of representing Britain’s ethnically diverse society. Through the range of icons it gathers together, the list underscores the mingling of traditional, easily recognisable aspects with innovative and modern facets of Englishness. Thirdly, the way in which the hundred most popular icons are represented – namely as a list – appears to be quintessentially English. This configuration is, as I will show in detail in the course of this study, a fashionable and recurrent feature in narratives dealing with Englishness. Lastly, although the search for icons pretends to be a democratic poll, several icons were uncovered not to be elected but rather selected for political and ideological ends (cf. Henderson 2010). The Icons project showcases the way in which representations of national identity depend upon the cultural context. It is a conspicuous example of the manifold factors and agents that were at work in the processes involved in constructing and promoting a positive image of Englishness at the time of the turn of the millennium, especially between 1997 and 2007 as cornerstones of a political era.

In hindsight, one might have the impression that the New Labour Party and Tony Blair endeavoured to give Britain a new, positive ‘branding’.<sup>2</sup> However, national identity was not merely rebranded in the political and cultural sense. Narratives in different media supported the establishment, rethinking and critical engagement with self-images, thus rewriting national identity according to new trends and realities. This applies to narratives presented and negotiated in the media and in news coverage, in political speeches, in non-fiction and fiction as well as in academic research. This study specifically focuses on literary, fictional texts that do not simply reflect but rather critically engage with concepts of Englishness and the rebranding process, and thereby rewrite prevalent

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<sup>2</sup>Rebrandings as such were not, in fact, a singular phenomenon in Britain but developed as a general trend in the 1990s not exclusively in the business sector. Image marketing campaigns with the aim of establishing corporate identities boomed in different public or institutional sectors and also in other countries.



identity concepts in different ways.<sup>3</sup> I aim to develop an analytical approach to read contemporary fiction as it represents cultural-historical dimensions in order to explore what role literature plays in cultural processes.

Fiction and its relations to cultural developments provides a revealing and an exciting subject since literature examines the values and norms of society, and is characterised by a self-reflexive and aesthetical dimension. As Patrick Parrinder states, novels have a “subversive tendency” (Parrinder 2006a: 93) to write against political developments. In identity politics, literature can be considered to have another subtle but highly important function, as Raphael Ingelbien suspects: “[...] it may be that literature helps fellow citizens imagine the nation most efficiently when it tacitly posits the existence of a national community, instead of trying to define that community in an explicit way” (Ingelbien 2004: 162). In addition, concepts of national identity are not only represented in literature, but also anticipated and formed by it (cf. Parrinder 2006a: 91). In other words, literary texts are never isolated from the cultural context and from previous narratives but refer to certain plots, images and concepts. In doing so, they repeat these aspects and can eventually contribute to a continuation of these ideas. It is the main aim of this study to find out how literature at the time around the millennium negotiated, constructed or deconstructed – but in all cases challenged – concepts of Englishness.

Three selected novels allow us to get new insights into the diverse ways of how a rebranded version of Englishness has been challenged. Nick Hornby’s *How to be Good* (2001), Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) and Julian Barnes’ *England, England* (1998) will be in the focus of this study. Although selecting novels for a closer analysis always seems arbitrary, there are three main reasons that justify this selection. First, the selected books were published at the time around the turn of the millennium and will be analysed in a synchronic approach. Second, all three novels were not only popular, widely read and discussed at the time of publication but also at least long-listed for one or several renowned British book prizes, which can be seen as a possibility to acknowledge their literary quality.<sup>4</sup> Third, the novels cover a range of genres and present a variety of categories and concepts associated with Englishness. They thus allow us to get insights into the diverse strategies that narratives can employ when dealing with questions of national identity. In order to back up the findings and to demonstrate that the three novels are also part of literary tendencies on a larger scale, I will consider and analyse

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<sup>3</sup>The original idea for this study and some of the assumptions made here and in the following go back to my master thesis (Justus Liebig University Giessen, 2008, unpublished).

<sup>4</sup>*How to be Good* was long-listed and *England, England* short-listed for the coveted Man Booker Prize (cf. “Timeline of the Man Booker Prizes” n.d.). *White Teeth* won the Whitbread First Novel Award and the Commonwealth Writers Best First Book Prize (cf. Squires 2002: 15).

sixteen additional novels that can be read in relation or in comparison to the three main narratives.

However, several aspects need to be introduced before analysing the novels. The first chapter will consider the following questions: in what context could Englishness become a phenomenon that recently came to occupy so much space in public discussions? What changes occurred in Britain in the late 1990s that made English self-images undergo such fundamental redefinitions? How are the differences between Englishness and the related concept of Britishness evaluated in research? How has English literature represented national identity, and what role do such canonised literary works play for contemporary novels? Since Englishness is a cultural construction, an interdisciplinary literary analysis of this phenomenon first calls for an exploration of the political and cultural context in which the narratives are situated.

## 1.1 The Time of ‘Cool Britannia’: Political and Cultural Contextualisations

On the eve of St George’s Day in 1993, Prime Minister John Major made a speech that is still famous for its lines: “Fifty years from now, Britain will still be the country of long shadows on county grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and – as George Orwell said – ‘old maids cycling to Holy Communion through the morning mist’”<sup>5</sup> The speech has in hindsight been evaluated as a conservative and traditional statement about British identity, in which Major struggled to promote a common feeling for British national identity in the light of the ‘threat’ posed by the unifying movements of the EU. However, he mentioned notions of Englishness that are closely associated with a specific English tradition, e. g. by referring to statements by Stanley Baldwin and, more obviously, to George Orwell’s famous essay “England Your England” (1941). Krishan Kumar critically states that Major’s declaration did not only exclude citizens outside the English middle class but also neglected metropolitan and multiethnic communities (cf. Kumar 2003: 227). In the years to come, ideologies of the like were increasingly to be questioned, marking a trend which coincided with the emergence of a new *zeitgeist* and a redefinition of national identities in Britain.

The new spirit that dominated Britain was branded by the slogan ‘Cool Britannia’, which in fact originated from an ice-cream advertisement (cf. Leonard n.d.). The word play, referring to the eighteenth-century poem and song “Rule Britannia”, seemed to mark the beginning of a new era. With the influence of young politicians like Tony Blair,

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<sup>5</sup> *The Guardian*, 23 April 1993, quoted in Kumar (2003: 227).

who is a key figure in the identity politics at that time, the Labour Party had rebranded itself as ‘New Labour’, indicating its reformed political course. New Labour’s election campaign for the 1997 general election was supported by spin doctors from the media, aiming to promote the vision of a ‘New Britain’.<sup>6</sup>

Although Blair, who is Scottish by birth, did not openly promote Englishness but – in a politically correct way – spoke up for a stronger British community and unity, the politics of his period in office have come to be associated with a new dawn in English identity in a number of ways. This is fundamentally linked to one of the election pledges that were put into action after New Labour’s landslide victory in the general election of 1997: referendums were held in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with the result that these British countries established their own national parliaments or assemblies. The devolution of political power can be seen as a development that also encouraged people to rethink their national identities. Especially the English, who constitute the majority of the British population and have dominated identity politics in Britain, were now regarded as having regained a national self-confidence that would not succumb to nationalist movements such as the one supported by the British National Party (BNP). The vast field of still ongoing discussions as to whether England, like the other British countries, should also have its own parliament or assembly, is often referred to in debates as the ‘English Question’.<sup>7</sup> These issues and their relations to national identity have been directly addressed in several political speeches by New Labour politicians, which has also led to a general rethinking of English and British national identities.

However, the impression that New Labour actively participated in rebranding processes is not without cause. National institutions such as the British Council, the British Tourist Authority and think tanks were involved in the rebranding endeavours (cf. Kumar 2003: 254), including public figures from the fields of politics, the media and academia. An interesting manifestation is a pamphlet, pointedly entitled *Britain<sup>TM</sup>: Renewing our*

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. Blair’s rhetoric in his speech “The Third Way” (2001 [1998]). As it is pointed out in the TV documentary “Andrew Marr’s History of Modern Britain” (2007), New Labour used television as a tool to get control through the media. Blair was supported by Alistair Campbell, a journalist, and by Peter Mandelson, who came from a TV background and was seen as the master of image and spin (cf. Marr 2007). According to Marr, an aid of Mandelson once told an undercover journalist that a circle of only about 17 people were running Britain at that time. In the newly formed government, Mandelson later became what is known as the ‘Dome minister’ to observe the set-up of the pricey Millennium Dome, which had been planned as a great national event under the former Conservative government (cf. McGuigan 2004: 39). In this context, Andrew Marr himself is a figure who is actively involved in the discussions about national identity. The Scottish-born journalist living in West London is the former editor of *The Independent* and of the political section of BBC News (cf. Marr 2000). He has published books like *The Day Britain Died* (2000) and made documentaries about the history and state of the nation (cf. *ibid.*).

<sup>7</sup>In this context, see e. g. Kenny & Lodge (2009 & 2010)

*Identity* (1997). It was published by the *The Foreign Policy Centre*, an “independent think tank” (Leonard 1997: ii) aiming to revitalise debates on global issues. Yet, the fact that the institute was launched by Tony Blair and Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and directed by Mark Leonard (cf. Griffith & Leonard 2002) demonstrates the influential role of some figures in the process of branding a ‘new Britain’. Discussions of the ‘Cool Britannia’ *zeitgeist* were fuelled after an event that related politics to popular culture: Tony Blair had invited celebrities of sport, music and culture into 10 Downing Street. A photograph showing the Prime Minister with Oasis songwriter Noel Gallagher at the party is still one of the most frequently used images that came to symbolise the new spirit of the age. British pop bands like Blur and Oasis were enjoying world-wide popularity again in a manner recalling the ‘British Invasion’ and ‘Swinging London’ of the 1960s. Such developments in popular culture supported the positively redefined picture of the country, which was pinpointed by the new culture secretary, Chris Smith, when he declared that “Cool Britannia is here to stay” (quoted in Leonard n.d.: n. pag.).

The changing mood was palpable not only in politics but also in popular culture. Journalists and, in retrospect, academics, often point out that an emerging English self-awareness clearly surfaced during the 1996 European Football Championship.<sup>8</sup> What surprised many commentators was that flying the English national flag, the St George’s cross, became a popular and wide-spread phenomenon, as it had hitherto been rather a symbol of hooliganism or nationalist political movements (cf. Aughey 2007: 5). The fact that flying the St George’s cross had become attractive for many people also became an indicator for the re-emerging awareness of an English national identity.<sup>9</sup>

The positive *zeitgeist* was further supported and disseminated by newspapers and the media, e. g. in surveys or compilations about what it means to be English. An insert in *The Sun* on the occasion of St George’s Day in 1999 that presented “100 Reasons Why It’s Great to be English” (cf. Paxman 1999: 21) is just one typical example of how the media dealt with the issue and promoted new perceptions of Englishness. Discussions about Englishness as they were led in an interzone of political developments, a rather fuzzily emerging *zeitgeist* and medial narrative representations had, after all, a great impact on society. This also manifests itself in a survey, in which British subjects were asked how they felt best described, with the options to choose between being British,

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. e. g. Easthope (1999: 31 f.), the introductory chapters in Arthur Aughey’s *The Politics of Englishness* (2007) and Simon Featherstone’s *Englishness: Twentieth Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (2009), as well as the chapter “Two World Wars and One World Cup” in Paul Gilroy’s *After Empire* (2004: 116 f.).

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Finney (2006: 107), Aughey (2007: 5), and Susanne Reichl’s article about the semiotics of flying the flag (2004).

English, European, Irish, Northern Irish, Scottish, Ulster, Welsh or other (cf. Curtice 2010: 4, Uberoi & McLean 2009: 48). When only one choice was to be made, the votes of those who identified themselves as English rather than British increased from 33 % in 1996 up to 44 % in 1999. In a recent survey from 2011, when subjects were asked to choose what they mainly identified themselves as, as many as 63 % said they were English, in contrast to only 19 % who opted for British (cf. “YouGov Survey Results” 2011: 1). Although quantitative analyses will not be the focus of my study, the survey results indicate that identifying oneself as English rather than British has become increasingly attractive for people during the last two decades.

If there was something like a ‘moment’ in which Englishness was rebranded, it can be made out most remarkably at the turn of the millennium, which has frequently been considered the heyday of Englishness. Discussions about national identity at that time often revolved around the role of multiculturalism, and the year 2000 saw the publication of a number of studies and pamphlets, like the so-called *Parekh Report* (2002 [2000]) or journalist Yasmin Alibhai-Brown’s *After Multiculturalism* (2000).<sup>10</sup> These representations explicitly promoted the vision of “rethinking the national story and national identity” (Parekh 2002 [2000]: xiii) on different levels, and they are evaluated as important postcolonial contributions to the exploration of the complexity and fuzziness of concepts like ethnicity, minority, majority and ‘race’. Incidentally, a publication like the *Parekh Report* is another case in point when regarding the agents that were involved in the processes of rebranding Englishness and in constructing national identity: the report was accomplished by a think tank of intellectuals and scholars, commissioned by the government. Apart from politics, the media and – as will be shown – literature, academic research itself has thus also played a fundamental role in the rebranding process. That academics had an influence surfaces in the boom of publications and conferences about the issue across various disciplines.<sup>11</sup> Against this backdrop, it does not seem arbitrary that national identity has been widely discussed in all these different spheres

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<sup>10</sup>As for the moment of Englishness, Bhikhu Parekh states that “Britain is at a turning point, a crossroads [...]. It is a coincidence but symbolically apt that the current confluence occurs simultaneously with the start of a new millennium” (Parekh 2002 [2000]: 2). Yasmin Alibhai-Brown writes in her provokingly entitled book *Who Do We Think We Are?* that “2000 will go down in British history as the year when nationhood became the most emotionally charged, hotly debated topic in this country” (Alibhai-Brown 2001 [2000]: xiii). In his study *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis*, John McLeod points out that London occupies a special role in the rebranding process, and he observes that a positive awareness of multiple cultures awoke at that time, which he terms “millennial optimism” (cf. McLeod 2004b: 160).

<sup>11</sup>Conference about the topic included, amongst others: the conference “Reinventing Britain” that took place in March 1997 in London, with an opening by Stuart Hall and a manifesto by Homi Bhabha (cf. Bhabha 1999: 38 f.), and a conference on “Relocating Britishness” in 2000 (cf. Caunce et al. 2004). Studies dealing with Englishness will be introduced in detail in chapter 1.3.

since the mid-1990s. Yet, at least two concepts tend to be distinguished in discourses about national identity in Britain, most clearly in research. How the conceptions of Englishness and Britishness have developed, how they are evaluated by academics today, and how they are understood in my study shall be discussed in the next chapter.

## 1.2 Debating Conceptions of Britishness and Englishness

When dealing with national identity in Britain, it is – literally speaking – impossible not to set sail into the choppy waters of the blurred boundaries between Englishness and Britishness. It is for the constructed nature of the concepts that they defy any clear-cut definitions. A popular strategy that writers of various genres have used to evade the problem is to simply list those particularities that they take to be characteristic of England.<sup>12</sup> Englishness is thus rather ‘defined’ and constructed through the ideas associated with it at certain times in history, as Paul Langford (2000) argues. The idea that Englishness is a construct is also supported by Silvia Mergenthal who explains that “‘Englishness’ does not reflect a pre-established ‘reality’ – what ‘the English’ are *really* like – but describes a discursive field, in which various groups of individuals are identified as ‘English’ on the basis of (historically variable) attributions” (Mergenthal 2003: 24). Defining Englishness remains a difficult endeavour, which will not be the aim of my study. However, to make clear how I use the terms Englishness and Britishness, I will first focus on some corner stones throughout history that have led to the current understanding of Englishness from a diachronic perspective. Thereafter, I will outline how Englishness and Britishness tend to be distinguished nowadays in a synchronic approach, and thereby clarify how both concepts will be used in my study.

When taking a look at the historical progress of how national identity was understood, it is remarkable that the term ‘Englishness’ itself was apparently first introduced as late as 1805 (cf. Langford 2000: 1), and the first book with a title containing the term was published only in 1956 (cf. Vaughan 2002). As Paul Langford remarks, the ‘invention’ of the term is thus of relatively recent origin, which does not mean, however, that an idea of national identification had not existed earlier (cf. Langford 2000: 1 f.). Antony Easthope

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. the above mentioned incidents: John Major’s speech with its reference to George Orwell’s list, the insert by *The Sun* and, most obviously, the Icons project. Moreover, several authors have also fallen prey to listing particular characteristics of England and the English instead of describing or defining Englishness: in journalism there is, e. g., an “unofficial guide to being English” in an article by John Walsh for *The Independent* (2002); in popular non-fiction, e. g., Jeremy Paxman’s *The English. A Portrait of a People* (1999), Kate Fox’s *Watching the English* (2005) or Nicholas Hobbes’s *England: 1000 Things You Need to Know* (2008). Kate Fox even sets out to define Englishness in the last chapter of her book, which is entitled “Defining Englishness” – an ambitious aim that she does not put into practice.

argues that “the great foundational moment for Englishness” (Easthope 1999: 28) was the period between 1650 and 1700, i. e. before the Acts of Union and the ‘forging’ of a common British identity that Linda Colley traced in her seminal publication *Britons: Forging a Nation* (1992). However, before ‘discovering’ a distinct national awareness that opposed an overall British identity at the beginning of the twentieth century (cf. Kumar 2003: 202 ff.), the English rather identified themselves in terms of regional identities and “thought of themselves as either locals or cosmopolitans” (ibid.: 120). According to Linda Colley, the conception of Britishness was fundamentally forged in the course of the Acts of Union in 1707.<sup>13</sup> For decades then, the English as the majority of the British were not clearly identified, as Christopher Bryant points out: “For the English, Britishness came to subsume Englishness, so that the two were often indistinguishable; for the Scots, the Welsh and later the Irish, Britishness was more of an overlay” (Bryant 2003: 394). As Krishan Kumar remarks, English national identity was not a clear-cut concept but rather was connected to the project of imperialism, since the English would take pride in their role as empire-builders (cf. Kumar 2003: x).

A significant ‘moment of Englishness’ can be identified at the end of the nineteenth century (cf. ibid.: 176 ff.). In his study *Englishness: Twentieth Century Popular Culture and the Forming of English Identity* (2009), Simon Featherstone aptly shows that a number of literary accounts and performances in popular culture of the early twentieth century illustrate a rediscovery if not a revival of English traditions. Englishness became associated with images of what we now mainly think of as a traditional, rural, idyllic England closely connected to the landscape as a counterpoint to the industrialised cities and areas. Literature helped to create and disseminate images connected to this ‘original’ perception of national identity, which represents a reference point for the construction of a ‘rebranded’ Englishness of the late 1990s.<sup>14</sup>

With the end of the Second World War and the break-up of the British empire, society became fundamentally restructured on various levels: the rigid class system became increasingly permeable, which meant that traditional perceptions of Englishness connected to the middle class needed to be reconsidered. Moreover, immigration from the former colonies provoked the redefinition of a concept of Englishness dominated by images of

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<sup>13</sup>Linda Colley herself is an important figure in the academic and political discourse on Englishness. In addition to occupying herself with constructions of British national identity in her role as a researcher, she was an advisor to Tony Blair during his governmental period. Her husband is the historian David Cannadine, who has among other things written a contribution to Eric Hobsbawm’s and Terence Ranger’s book *The Invention of Tradition* (1994 [1983]), which will also be of importance in the course of this study.

<sup>14</sup>Aspects concerning literary representations of Englishness will be introduced in greater detail in the next chapter, 1.3.

‘white Englishmen’. Notions that were traditionally considered as typical of the English were challenged, resulting in an often felt loss of national identification, which gave way to the assumption that Englishness was in a crisis. The topos of the crisis has been repeated in debates about national identity and continues unabated today, especially in political and social discourses (cf. e.g. Gikandi 1996: xvi). Paul Gilroy describes the mood as a “postimperial melancholia” (Gilroy 2004: 98), and Krishan Kumar mockingly observes:

Gone are the cosy assumptions of ‘Englishness’, with its sleepy villages and ancestral piles. They have gone because the empire has gone, and so has British economic power. They have gone because the English are not even safe in their homelands, challenged as they are by the rise of Celtic nationalism and by the claims of ‘multiculturalism’ within English society. (Kumar 2003: 16)

Consequently, the conception of English national identity needed to be reconsidered in post-war times. In his widely discussed book *After Britain* (2000), Tom Nairn points out that England first needed to regain its own voice after the British-imperial class had spoken for the nation for too long (cf. Nairn 2000: 85). However, Arthur Aughey (2007, 2010) shows that regaining a national self-awareness did not appear as an easy task: he analyses the different English ‘anxieties’ and alludes to the imagined crisis of Englishness with H. V. Morton’s metaphor of the ‘vague mental toothache’ that the English were suffering from – “a disquiet often based on the feeling that they should feel anxious rather than actually being anxious” (Aughey 2010: n. pag.).<sup>15</sup> With these changes in politics and society, the English apparently needed to re-invent themselves as a nation and rethink their understanding of Englishness.

In accordance with the sketched developments, three main constructions or versions of national identity that play a role in this study can be differentiated: first, what is understood as ‘traditional’ perceptions of Englishness as they evolved in the early twentieth century; second, a ‘rebranded’ version of Englishness that is based on, but largely redefines, images connected to the traditional version; and third, conceptions of Britishness that are nowadays usually understood as a complement of notions of Englishness but – again – with blurring boundaries.

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<sup>15</sup>Apart from these observations the field of political studies, there are also ideologically permeated conservative voices which openly lament the ‘loss’ of the bygone days. These most prominently surface in publications like Clive Aslet’s *Anyone for England? A Search for British Identity* (1997), Roger Scruton’s *England: An Elegy* (2000) or Simon Heffer’s *Nor shall my sword: The reinvention of England* (2000 [1999]). Simon Featherstone evaluates the approaches by Scruton and Heffer as elegy or even “racialised pastoralism” (Featherstone 2009: 27).



In order to explore and highlight the differences between Englishness and Britishness as they have been understood in the last two decades, I propose to examine them on two levels from a synchronic perspective: firstly, in terms of the *context* in which they are referred to, and secondly, with regard to the *attributes* they tend to be associated with. On the first level, concerning the *context* in which the concepts are used, it is apparent that Britishness is more often a reference in political and legal discourses requiring political correctness, while the term Englishness is predominantly used in the cultural sphere.<sup>16</sup> Bearing this in mind helps to explain why narratives originating from a national political and medial context (e.g. the BBC) generally refer to Britain and Britishness. This also holds true for the aforementioned commissioned pamphlets and reports about multiculturalism, which eventually turned out to be essential for the redefinition of the positive understanding of Englishness.<sup>17</sup>

Several studies point out that at the time around the millennium, many people felt that the notion ‘British’ did not present a satisfying identity marker any longer, especially for those with an immigrant background, and that it became fashionable to identify through multiple, hyphenated identities such as ‘British-born African-Caribbean’, sometimes even by adding British regions, like ‘Scottish Pakistani’ or even ‘Black English’.<sup>18</sup> Since Britishness became a topic of discussion in politics, many academic studies in the political sciences, and especially a number of them written by British scholars, engage with this issue.<sup>19</sup> The fact that some of these publications were commissioned by official institutions highlights the rather constructed quality that clings to Britishness, as Bhikhu Parekh

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Gikandi (1996: xii), Mergenthal (2003: 17), Kumar (2003: xii), V. Nünning (2004: 149), Habermann (2010: 7).

<sup>17</sup>Cf. the publications mentioned in chapter 1.1 by Leonard, Parekh and Alibhai-Brown. Additionally, New Labour politicians who allude to national identity in their speeches usually refer to Britishness, cf. e.g. Gordon Brown (1997, 2006), Tony Blair (2000), Robin Cook (2001) and Linda Colley in her ‘Millennium Lecture’ organised by Tony and Cherie Blair (1999). An exception to the rule is a speech delivered by MP David Blunkett (2005) in which he supports Englishness as an alternative or an addition to Britishness in the context of an identity pluralism. However, although New Labour strengthened the ideas of plural identities, politicians generally speak up for maintaining unity to avoid a break-up of Britain.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Kumar (2003: 261), Parekh (2002 [2000]: 10), Alibhai-Brown (2001 [2000]: vii ff.). Yet, examples of identifying through multiple identities include not only British immigrants: e.g. Andrew Marr also supports the idea when he claims to be a “Scottish Londoner” (Marr 2000: xiv), similarly to Gordon Brown (2009: 32).

<sup>19</sup>Several books on Britishness have been published in recent years, most of them collections: *Reclaiming Britishness* (2002) was published by the think tank Demos, edited by Phoebe Griffith and Mark Leonard; there is a volume of conference proceedings on *Relocating Britishness* (2004); Paul Ward’s *Britishness since 1870* (2006 [2004]) is an example of a monograph from a historical perspective on British national identity; *Britishness: Perspectives on the Britishness Question* (2009a) edited by Andrew Gamble and Tony Wright assembles contributions e.g. by Bhikhu Parekh and Linda Colley; and *Being British. The Search of the Values That Bind the Nation* (2009a) by Matthew d’Ancona, editor of the *Spectator*, commissioned and co-edited by Gordon Brown.

also points out: “Being British is a political project, not the actualisation of some primordial and unchanging essence” (Parekh 2009: 32).<sup>20</sup> Unlike Tony Blair, Gordon Brown struggled to actively promote a “Britishness 2.0” (d’Ancona 2009b: 21) in his time as Prime Minister from 2007 to 2010 with the help of journalists and researchers.<sup>21</sup>

In contrast to Britishness, Englishness is generally referred to in cultural discourses, including literary ones. In addition to novels,<sup>22</sup> this is also mirrored in the disciplines that are interested in Englishness; publications about literature, (popular) culture, music, art, media, tourism, architecture, humour and many more are almost exclusively concerned with Englishness and not with Britishness.<sup>23</sup> Although the narratives that will be analysed in this study at times also challenge ideologies linked to ideas of Britishness, my own study is primarily concerned with constructions Englishness. This also holds true for the second level that needs to be discussed when differentiating between Englishness and Britishness.

On the level of *attributes* that tend to be attached to each of the concepts, a main distinction between Englishness and Britishness may at first glance even seem surprising: the focus on a redefined perception of Englishness does not, as could be suspected, entail exclusive values connected to a white, male, middle-class identity in the way it was understood in the earlier twentieth century. Instead, both Arthur Aughey and Krishan Kumar observe that attributes have become attached to this new version of Englishness that involve inclusion, democracy and egalitarianism, multiculturalism and openness to other cultures, while Britishness tends to be associated with aspects such as backward-looking traditionalism, hierarchy, conservatism, imperialism and xenophobia (cf. Aughey 2007: 105, Kumar 2003: ix). Commentators who tend to refer to Britishness frequently

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<sup>20</sup>This is also reminiscent of a statement by Bernard Crick, who observed already in 1991: “‘British’ is a political and legal concept best applied to the institutions of the UK state, to common citizenship and common political arrangements. It is not a cultural term, nor does it correspond to any real sense of a nation” (Crick 1991: 97).

<sup>21</sup>Cf. also Simon Lee’s contribution on Brown’s “negation of England” and its consequences (2011).

<sup>22</sup>Contemporary novels that include references to ‘English’ or ‘England’ in their titles are e.g. Peter Ackroyd’s *English Music* (1992), Christopher Hope’s *Darkest England* (1996), Julian Barnes’ *England, England* (1998), James Hawes’s *Speak for England* (2005) and Natasha Solomons’ *Mr Rosenblum’s List Or Friendly Guidance for the Aspiring Englishman* (2010), to name but a few.

<sup>23</sup>Apart from the field of literature and culture, which will be focussed on later, just several examples shall be picked out to foreground how diverse the field of research on Englishness can be: it covers studies about Englishness in popular music, e.g. at the time of the 1990s (Cloonan 1997), in Ray Davies and the Kinks (Baxter-Moore 2006) or contemporary Mike Skinner and The Streets (Costambeys-Kempczynski 2009); Englishness in popular culture and TV, about the humour in *Fawlty Towers* (Lassen & Sellars 2009), or in the American vampire series *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer* (Pateman 2002); Englishness in tourism (Palmer 2005, Prieto Arranz 2006); and Englishness and landscape (Matless 1998, Corbett 2002, Burden & Kohl 2006). There is also a self-reflexive interest in how Englishness is expressed in scientific disciplines, such as in social theory (Kumar 2001), art history (Vaughan 2002) and literary history and historiography (Spiering 1999, A. Nünning 2001 & 2006, Scheunemann 2008).

stress the importance of common values or virtues, especially in political pamphlets or speeches.<sup>24</sup> This ideology is supported by Gordon Brown, as the publication assigned and co-edited by the former Prime Minister himself, entitled *Being British. The Search for the Values That Bind the Nation*, showcases (cf. d’Ancona 2009a, Brown 2009). Britishness might then be seen as “a set of institutions and bundle of interests” (Gamble & Wright 2009b: 7) attached to a multinational state rather than a common feeling for a shared national identity.

For the understanding of a redefined national identity at the end of the twentieth century, the newly awakening appreciation of multiculturalism<sup>25</sup> has been of paramount importance. Krishan Kumar sums up this new spirit when stating that most of the recent commentators on developments of national identity have been

pleased to see what they discern as the dissolution of the old, crusty, backward-looking British and English identities. They celebrate the new hybrid, multicultural Britain, humming with new kinds of food, music, clothes, literature, religions, marriage patterns, family styles and, potentially at least, new politics. (Kumar 2003: 242)

Multicultural identities as they evolved in Britain, then, have contributed to an increasing heterogeneity and hybridisation of national identities. The notions associated with the new spirit also paved the way for new, creative contributions in the field of literature that negotiate hybrid identity concepts. In fiction, so-called ‘Black British Literature’ and ‘British Asian Literature’ have become highly popular, which can be seen as characteristic of the time around the turn of the millennium. However, the popularity of multicultural literature dealing with questions of national identity is not simply a response to this new perspective on Englishness; rather, narratives dealing with national identity are full of

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<sup>24</sup>In his report, Bhikhu Parekh promotes Britain as a “community of communities” (Parekh 2002 [2000]: 3), that should be characterised by dynamic, cosmopolitan, generous, internationalist, democratic, outward-looking, inclusive and far-sighted Britain in contrast to a static, intolerant, fearful, insular, authoritarian, introspective, punitive and myopic state (cf. *ibid.*: 4). These positive attributes underline what is now perceived as those attached to the rebranded version of Englishness, while the latter ones are those associated with Britishness. Mark Leonard also talks about Britishness and highlights the importance of the Blairite era: “The embrace by the British people of a modern and inclusive identity is possibly one of the most significant (and under-acknowledged) achievements of the Blair Government in the first term” (Leonard 2002: xii).

<sup>25</sup>Salman Rushdie rightly pointed out the danger of over-using the word ‘multiculturalism’ as a mere token (cf. Rushdie 1991 [1982]: 137). Wolfgang Welsch also critically questions the term and aptly proposes using the concept of ‘transculturalism’ instead of ‘multiculturalism’ (cf. Welsch 1999), and Homi Bhabha has stressed the importance of overcoming binaries in favour of a ‘Third Space’ and cultural hybridity (cf. Bhabha 2004 [1994]). While I am aware of these difficult implications of the term, I refer to ‘multicultural’ or ‘multi-ethnic’ in this study because these terms are most frequently used in the discourses of Englishness and Britishness in British media and in research.

allusions to traditional perceptions of Englishness, and these references are not only used as intertextual means but also reconsidered and rewritten in innovative ways.

### 1.3 “This scepter’d isle”: Englishness and Literature

This royal throne of kings, this scepter’d isle,  
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,  
This other Eden, demi-paradise,  
This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea, [...]   
Against the envy of less happier lands;  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England.

(*King Richard II*: Act II, Scene 1)

Literature is, and always has been, a central medium for the negotiation of national identity, and English literature can look back on numerous narratives that deal with the state of the nation, national character and identities. These narratives are kept alive through constant repetition. For instance, Shakespeare’s descriptions of England as a “scepter’d isle” and “blessed plot” in *Richard II* have strongly influenced perceptions of the country. The poet and writer is widely regarded as one of the ‘greatest’ of all English poets (cf. e.g. Strong 2011: 60). In fact, the passage quoted above has become part of the repertoire of mini-narratives about England and is repeated in later discourses dealing with the concept of Englishness. Richard Hayton et al. argue that impressions of Englishness are based on a relatively limited number of canonised narratives such as the one above: “Despite the multiplicity of accounts of the English/British past that have been propounded from within the media and academy, English historical understanding remains tied to a remarkably selective set of (largely mythical) stories and icons” (Hayton et al. 2009: 128). These stories arguably form a repertoire of national narratives that is revised over and over again and requires a brief introduction. Taking a diachronic approach, I will refer to selected key narratives in English literature which reappear or have been creatively revised in contemporary novels. This introduction requires references to the discussion and classification of canonical texts by scholars who have considered the way in which Englishness is represented in literature, and will thus lead me to a research review in chapter 1.4.

The impression that the English literary canon is often reduced to a number of outstanding authors and their works has been highlighted in several studies concentrating

on the relation between literature and Englishness.<sup>26</sup> The English canon underwent a comprehensive process of ‘formation’ during the first half of the twentieth century, and has since exerted a tremendous influence on national culture and identity: “English culture, at its deepest level, is seen as created by a series of great ‘national’ poets, dramatists and novelists. Their writing embodies values, whole ways of life, which express the aspirations of the national culture at its best and most characteristic” (Kumar 2003: 219 f.). The English preference for structuring the national literary history and heritage according to outstanding writers and “a clear preference for particulars [...] and concrete ‘facts’” (A. Nünning 2006: 166) mirrors the way in which both Englishness and the English canon are organised in general; this is to say that instead of promulgating abstract definitions and trends, individual authors (in English literature) and icons (of Englishness) tend to be listed as *pars-pro-toto* elements as a means of facilitating an understanding of the overall notion of Englishness and its canon. As such, this approach itself exemplifies a “deep-rooted philosophic tradition” (Easthope 1999: v) of the English, namely empiricism.

Aside from Shakespeare’s contributions, early essential works in English literature include those by writers such as Chaucer and Milton. Antony Easthope evaluates the turn of the eighteenth century as “the great foundational moment for Englishness” (ibid.: 28). Daniel Defoe’s satire “The True-Born Englishman” (1701) is a notable example published at that time, and is frequently cited when the topic of Englishness is considered:

For Englishmen to boast of generation  
 Cancels their knowledge, and lampoons the nation,  
 A true-born Englishman’s a contradiction,  
 In speech an irony, in fact a fiction:  
 A banter made to be a test of fools,  
 Which those that use it justly ridicules;  
 A metaphor intended to express,  
 A man a-kin to all the universe.  
 (“The True-Born Englishman” 2009 [1701]: n. pag.)

Defoe’s satire sheds a critical light on English nationalism. It is an essential document in the discourse on Englishness, as it was one of the first narratives that radically challenged ideas of national supremacy based on ancestry. At a time when xenophobia was a widespread phenomenon within the English population, Defoe’s satirical text was one of the first to offer a rational counterpoint to those narratives which praised England as a nation superior to all others (cf. A. Nünning 2002: 73 f.). Defoe’s efforts to point out prevailing follies during this era remains a powerful critique, emphasising ideas which address English self-images and national identity.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. A. Nünning (2001 & 2006), Grabes & Sichert (2005) and Grabes (2010).

In contrast to Defoe's scathing satire, several literary creations cast a more positive light on England. One extraordinary example of a literary piece that continues to have a lasting influence on perceptions of Englishness is William Blake's "Milton a Poem" (1811), which starts with the famous lines:

And did those feet in ancient time,  
Walk upon England's mountains green:  
And was the holy Lamb of God,  
On England's pleasant pastures seen!  
("Milton a Poem" 1811: n. pag.)

Blake's poem contributed to 'branding' the image of England as the "green and pleasant land", a quote which has been cited frequently ever since.<sup>27</sup> The popularity of these lines and the portrayal of England propagated through them was further increased when they were adapted into lyrics for the hymn *Jerusalem* in 1916; often regarded as the unofficial English national anthem, it has itself become an icon of Englishness (cf. "Icons" 2005). *Jerusalem* may be considered an embodiment of how English national identity is imagined through the spatial relations of rural England, and functions as a paradigmatic mini-narrative for rewriting the concept of Englishness. Space is therefore a crucial aspect of images of England which are disseminated by literary texts.

The 'moment of Englishness' identified by Krishan Kumar at the beginning of the twentieth century also surfaces in the production of literary works by renowned authors such as Thomas Hardy, William Morris, E. M. Forster and D. H. Lawrence (cf. Kumar 2003: 210 ff.). A notably popular and widely adopted genre in the 1930s and 40s was travel literature; this genre focussed on the discovery (or indeed rediscovery) of rural – particularly southern – England and depicted the countryside as an idyllic counter-image to industrialised regions in the north. Examples of this genre include H. V. Morton's *In Search of England* (1927) and J. B. Priestley's *English Journey* (1934).<sup>28</sup> At the same time, however, "[t]hese English travel books articulated a kind of anti-theory of Englishness, celebrating the very evasiveness they were avowedly seeking to define" (Featherstone 2009: 67).

Aside from their interest in travel literature, Judy Giles and Tim Middleton have compiled a sourcebook containing contemporary texts not only by authors of fiction but

<sup>27</sup>In this context, cf. also Christine Berberich's discussion of the poem in relation to spatial constructions of Englishness (Berberich 2006: 207 f.).

<sup>28</sup>Cf. e. g. Kumar (2003: 9), Mergenthal (2003: 31), Featherstone (2009: 66 ff.), Habermann (2010: 61 ff.) and Strong (2011: 158). The persistent interest in such traditional accounts is reflected, for example, in the 2011 reprint of Victor Canning's *Everyman's England*, which had originally been commissioned as a "series of pen-portraits of England" (Canning 2011 [1936]: blurb) by the *Daily Mail* and was first published as a book in 1936.

also by politicians, journalists and social historians (cf. Giles & Middleton 1995: 1). This includes material described as “myths, memories and other representations [that] contributed to the construction and maintenance of accounts of what it might mean to be ‘English’” (ibid.). Similarly, Ina Habermann argues that many contemporary myths of national identity were created during the inter-war period (cf. Habermann 2010: 6). Focussing on symbolic forms of Englishness in ‘middlebrow’ literature by Priestley and du Maurier, Habermann turns our collective attention to a popular genre that has been neglected for a long time. Evidently, early twentieth-century literature and popular genres in particular have contributed immensely to those elements which are now widely associated with traditional images of Englishness.

At the same time, the early twentieth century also ushered in a period in which narratives started to rewrite and generally to interpret persistent images linked with Englishness. Judy Giles and Tim Middleton correctly observe that the ‘myths of wartime’ did not “emerge from a cultural vacuum” but rather “had their origins in earlier conceptualisations of Englishness” (Giles & Middleton 1995: 113). Literary texts that negotiate national identity do not represent Englishness in an impartial manner; instead, they continue to rewrite earlier national narratives. One of the most influential wartime narratives (which was mentioned earlier in the context of John Major’s speech), is George Orwell’s 1941 essay on English national identity, which presents a paradigm in the discourse on Englishness:

Yes, there *is* something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization. [...] It is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar-boxes. It has a flavour of its own. Moreover it is continuous, it stretches into the future and the past, there is something in it that persists, as in a living creature.<sup>29</sup>

Orwell hints at the particular habits, the unique weather conditions and the countryside as distinct features of Englishness. This is reminiscent of earlier narratives, such as a famous speech about England which was orated by Stanley Baldwin in 1924 (cf. Baldwin 1938 [1926]: 16). Simon Featherstone cleverly analyses Orwell’s influential text and demonstrates why it has served as such a useful resource for politicians of various parties throughout history: the text is easy to understand and quote, and it mixes populism, patriotism and radicalism into an easily digestible tonic which can be used to support different ideologies (cf. Featherstone 2009: 14 ff.). While Orwell’s essay has been repeatedly referred to in discourses about Englishness, the narrative also shows that traditional images had already been re-used and rewritten during the war-time period.

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<sup>29</sup>Orwell 1962 [1941]: 11. If not stated otherwise, italics correspond to the original throughout.

Generally speaking, the English novel as it existed between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century can be characterised by realism as a traditional mode of writing (cf. “Realism” 2012); this in turn has become associated with literary representations of a traditional concept of Englishness. While many post-war writers still primarily celebrated and rewrote traditional images of England, authors of the 1960s such as Doris Lessing and Janet Frame found ways to subversively challenge exclusive concepts of England and Englishness (cf. McLeod 2004b: 19 f.). As an innovative mode of writing, the role of postmodernism in twentieth-century English literature and in representations of Englishness is evaluated differently and is thus a crucial topic when considering questions regarding literary tradition and innovation. Similarly, comical understatement and irony have been evaluated as traditional English features (cf. Easthope 1999: 96 ff., 168 f.), but are also prevalent aspects of postmodern novels.<sup>30</sup>

The end of the twentieth century triggered a reconsideration of ethnic diversity in British society after years of immigration from the former colonies. In reference to the early 1990s, Patrick Parrinder observes: “In terms of public debate, the acceptance of multiculturalism soon became part of the liberal orthodoxy of British society, although the ‘mainstream’ English novel was slow to register much change” (Parrinder 2006b: 381 f.). Focussing on literary representations of London, John McLeod identifies several rather sceptical and troubled depictions of life in the capital city in 1990s novels by David Dabydeen, Fred D’Aguiar and Bernardine Evaristo, and it was only later that these portrayals of the metropolis were replaced by more optimistic configurations (cf. McLeod 2004b: 21). The late twentieth century eventually gave rise to novels that negotiate Englishness in relation to multiculturalism and that make use of different literary tendencies and modes.

Apparently, a number of essential and canonised works by celebrated authors who tackled questions of national character and identity have influenced the way in which the concept of Englishness has developed throughout history. Scholars have been able to identify ‘heydays’ in cultural and literary history that have formed and fostered traditional images of Englishness. The end of the twentieth century and the turn of the millennium seem to have marked another period of time which is characterised by a renewed interest in conceptions of Englishness. Contemporary authors have begun to rethink and rewrite traditional Englishness narratives through innovative means, either by repeating or by revising the images shaped throughout history. Consequently, the ways in which contemporary narratives manipulate and accommodate traditional and innovative

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<sup>30</sup>These issues of genre, mode and literary devices will further be addressed in chapter 2.3.1.



modes and genres while at the same time challenging traditional perceptions of English national identity must now be considered.

## 1.4 Challenging Englishness: Aims and Structure of this Study

The overall discourse of Englishness and its representations in literature is a huge, multifaceted field of study. A number of different contributions could be written about the topic, and the chosen focus may seem arbitrary on each occasion. The fact that contemporary fiction places significant focus on perceptions of Englishness demonstrates the need to engage with this issue in greater detail. Despite the plentitude of studies about Englishness which have been undertaken from different disciplinary perspectives, an analysis of novels published at the turn of the millennium according to an interdisciplinary approach and which takes literary and cultural concepts into account allows for new insights to be obtained.

The phenomenon of 'Englishness' has attracted the interests of scholars in various academic disciplines. A large proportion of the studies on Englishness originate from the field of political, social and historical studies. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, these analyses provide an excellent basis for outlining the basic principles of the phenomenon. When seeking an answer to the question regarding the way in which national identity is represented in literature, it is clear that the majority of academic studies on representations of Englishness published prior to the year 2000 consider twentieth century literature from a diachronic perspective. Such research presents a useful basis for further study, as it allows recent novels to be situated within a literary tradition and intertextual references to be uncovered. Earlier monographs on Englishness in literature include, for example, Menno Spiering's *Englishness: Foreigners and Images of National Identity in Postwar Literature* (1992) and David Gervais's *Literary Englands. Versions of 'Englishness' in Modern Writing* (1996 [1993]). Similar shorter contributions cover articles by Menno Spiering (1997) and Linden Peach (1998) as well as a collection of essays about cultural and literary topics of Englishness in a journal issue, edited by Hans-Jürgen Diller (1992). While these contributions constitute a valuable resource for addressing the way that Englishness is represented in earlier twentieth-century literature, my study presupposes a recent shift in the public understanding of Englishness which has affected the manner in which contemporary novels deal with the topic.

Available sourcebooks and anthologies provide both a source for primary texts and the relevant contextualisations and interpretations of the narrative pieces, such as the aforementioned sourcebook by Judy Giles and Tim Middleton (1995). Alessandra Marzola's

anthology *Englishness: Percorsi nella cultura britannica del Novecento* (2001 [1999]) takes a similar approach in this regard. This study provides examples of discourses on identity together with descriptive, analytical and interpretative sections which offer an analysis of these examples using the operative tools ‘culture’, ‘ideology’ and ‘discourse’ (cf. Marzola 2001 [1999]: 23). I will also approach the phenomenon of Englishness with the aid of the categories ‘culture’ and ‘discourse’; however, this will be carried out according to a different theoretical framework which will be introduced in chapter 2.

In addition, studies on the history of English literature offer worthwhile perspectives on popular and traditional genres and tendencies in which (national) narratives have been presented throughout the twentieth century. A selection of these studies include Ansgar Nünning’s *Der englische Roman des 20. Jahrhunderts* (1998), Nick Bentley’s collection *British Fiction of the 1990s* (2005), Patrick Parrinder’s overarching *Nation & Novel. The English Novel from its Origins to the Present Day* (2006b) and Vera Nünning’s collection *Der zeitgenössische englische Roman* (2007). These academic studies offer useful points of departure for a more specific focus on literature from the late 1990s to the early 2000s; in doing so, emphasis is placed on analysis from a diachronic perspective and on individual literary trends in which Englishness narratives appear and the tendencies that they exhibit. The studies mentioned allow for the individual novels to be embedded within their respective literary and cultural contexts and for them to be analysed according to a synchronic approach.

The vast majority of the studies focussing on late twentieth-century literature points out that important and popular configurations of Englishness at the turn of the millennium are represented in British Asian and Black British novels, which negotiate national identity from a postcolonial perspective. The significance of the novels subsumed under these categories is reflected in the relatively extensive field of studies focussing on the relation between Englishness and (post)colonialism in recent years. Notable examples published in the 1990s include Simon Gikandi’s *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (1996) which casts a critical eye over colonial times and texts, and Ian Baucom’s *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and Locations of Identities* (1999), in which the author concentrates on different sources such as literary texts by Ruskin, Kipling, Ford Maddox Ford, Forster, Rhys, C.L.R. James, Naipaul and Rushdie as well as situating his study in the context of popular culture and spatial aspects. Although the idea of considering popular culture and space in narratives dealing with Englishness is generally an accessible starting point, my focus will lie on different and more recent novels influenced by the changing *zeitgeist* of the late twentieth century.

Contributions focussing on immigrant and postcolonial literature in Britain shed a penetrative light on the various aspects embraced by these narratives. Roy Sommer's study, *Fictions of Migration* (2001), explores genre theory and typology of the intercultural novel, offering the means with which to understand the different genre tendencies in British immigrant literature. Tobias Wachinger's *Posing in-between: Postcolonial Englishness and the Commodification of Hybridity* (2003) concentrates on 1980s and 1990s postcolonial, multicultural literature and the manner in which it has been commodified as a mainstream genre. Wachinger evaluates literature addressing the concept of Englishness as a sign for imperial nostalgia, and traces the idea of 'reinventing' or 'reinscribing' Englishness in contemporary multicultural literature. Another helpful resource for the engagement with postcolonial writing in Britain is Mark Stein's monograph *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* (2004), which places specific focus on the *bildungsroman* genre. The aforementioned monograph by Patrick Parrinder also considers Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) to be an example of a postcolonial London novel which deals with Englishness (cf. Parrinder 2006b: 380 ff.), and cleverly relates immigrant fiction to traditional English novels. Based on a theoretical approach constructed from a line of reasoning pursued by Hanna Arendt, Graham MacPhee's and Prem Poddar's collection *Empire and after: Englishness in Postcolonial Perspective* (2007) compiles texts about the relations between Englishness, locations and postcolonial identities. Recent publications, such as a collection of conference proceedings on *Multi-Ethnic Britain 2000+* (2008b) and Jan Rupp's monograph on *Genre and Cultural Memory in Black British Literature* (2010), demonstrate the ongoing interest in these issues and highlight new perspectives for analysing the ways in which contemporary fiction tackles the issue of postcolonial identities. As an abundance of studies about postcolonialism in English novels shows, postcolonial literature has been productive in terms of the rethinking of identity concepts. These contributions constitute a necessary resource for understanding the ever-evolving concepts of English national identity. As my study does not exclusively focus on British Asian and Black British Literature, research about postcolonial literature will be considered in chapter 4, which takes Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* into consideration.

Aside from those studies that mainly deal with questions of genre and mode throughout English literary history, several other key concepts have not only become influential in academic studies in the late twentieth century, but have also surfaced in increasingly explicit ways in contemporary narratives. These concepts, namely memory and identity (the latter of which presents a case in point for addressing the issue of Englishness), take centre stage when it comes to contemporary fiction. Articles by Christoph Henke (2003), Vera Nünning (2003b), Raphael Ingelbien (2004) and Jürgen Schlaeger (2004)

provide valuable insights into how to perceive current approaches to memory and literary representations of Englishness; these observations will be discussed when introducing the theoretical framework in chapter 2.

In addition to memory and identity, space has established itself as a powerful key concept which is able to trigger certain images in literature, such as the distinct English landscape as a pastoral setting, or contrast between urban and metropolitan space. In the context of British Cultural Studies, Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) is a crucial document. Williams's book has arguably paved the way for recent monographs that negotiate space and national identity, such as David Matless's *Landscape and Englishness* (1998), the aforementioned publication by Ian Baucom (1999), the collection *Landscape and Englishness* (2006) edited by Robert Burden and Stephan Kohl, which concentrates more specifically on literature, culture and landscape, and Marie-Luise Egbert's German monograph *Garten und Englishness in der englischen Literatur* (2006), which considers the garden as a principal space of English images. Together with articles by Silvia Mergenthal (2006) and Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz (2009), discourse about space and Englishness is a highly productive field of research that shall be further explored as part of this study in chapter 2.3.3.

However, it is important to distinguish between narratives representing traditional images of Englishness and those negotiating contemporary, rebranded and rewritten versions of the concept. The majority of studies quoted so far concentrate on literary or cultural representations according to a traditional understanding of English national identity. Only a relatively small number of monographs has analysed contemporary novels representing the redefined spirit associated with Englishness at the turn of the millennium. Early glimpses into evolving ideas of a *rebranded* and *rewritten* Englishness in literature in general can be found in Barbara Korte's publication *Unity in Diversity Revisited? British Literature and Culture in the 1990s* (1998) and in the collection *Contemporary British Fiction* (2003) edited by Richard Lane et al.; however, these contributions frequently blur the boundaries between the concepts of Englishness and Britishness. Now approximately a decade later, an analysis of selected novels published around the year 2000 will be able to provide different insights into the matter.

Those studies taking recent developments into consideration are particularly relevant for my analysis. Texts acknowledging a redefinition of Englishness include a journal volume edited by Vera Nünning and Jürgen Schlaeger (2004), which provides a constructive overview of European perspectives on the conception of Englishness. Similarly, the collection *Englishness Revisited* (2009) edited by Floriane Reviron-Piégay assembles various European voices which discuss specific manifestations of contemporary Englishness in

literary and cultural discourses. In his monograph *English Fiction Since 1984: Narrating a Nation* (2006), Brian Finney considers the representation of London in multicultural literature according to a poststructuralist approach. Finney stresses the importance of historical memory in constructing identity (cf. Finney 2006: 7) while simultaneously focussing on a close reading of several selected novels. In one of the most recent treatises on Englishness, Arthur Aughey and Christine Berberich introduce interdisciplinary perspectives on the subject by researchers from the fields of politics, sociology and literary studies in their collection *These Englands. A Conversation on National Identity* (2011b). These contributions will prove particularly useful in supporting my analyses of the novels.

A highly beneficial source focussing on late twentieth-century literature and the rewriting of Englishness is Silvia Mergenthal's *A Fast-Forward Version of England. Constructions of Englishness in Contemporary Fiction* (2003). The monograph is certainly impressive in scope, with readings of no fewer than 28 novels from the late 1980s to the late 1990s. While the most recent novel Mergenthal analyses is *England, England* (1998), Julian Barnes' text is actually one of the earliest examples of the novels I will analyse. Mergenthal's monograph offers a solid basis to engage with Englishness narratives in general and to analyse Barnes' novel in particular; however, I will pursue further ideas in my reading of *England, England* that have not been taken into consideration by research before, and focus on more recent developments in Englishness narratives. Mergenthal also assumes that novelists writing at certain points in history are committed to 'the project' of constructing Englishness (cf. Mergenthal 2003: 25). She distinguishes between personal, temporal and spatial levels when pursuing strategies to construct Englishness; these levels are subsequently categorised as "Us and Them", "Now and Then" and "Here and There" (cf. Mergenthal 1998: 52 ff. & 2003: 25). In my theoretical framework, time and space are also essential categories. However, I will not consider the novels according to binary concepts as Mergenthal does, but describe the processes at work in the discourse of rebranding Englishness according to cyclical progress.

In addition to Mergenthal's monograph, various individual articles lay the foundations for my study, and specifically for the analyses of the novels. The articles by Vera Nünning (2001a) and Christine Berberich (2008 & 2009b) deserve special mention, as they provide astute observations regarding both the reading of Julian Barnes' novel *England, England* and theoretical approaches to Englishness narratives in general.<sup>31</sup> Most importantly, an article by Nick Bentley (2007) is invaluable in the sense that it not only acknowledges the ongoing redefinition of Englishness, but also provides an evaluation of the novels *White*

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<sup>31</sup>Literature reviews regarding studies on the three selected novels will be introduced in the individual analysis chapters.

*Teeth* and *England, England* while taking literary and cultural aspects into consideration. Bentley also uses Ricœur's approach as spelled out in *Time and Narrative* (1985 [1984]) as a point of departure, together with theories by Jacques Lacan. Although Bentley does indeed state that narrative techniques influence the ways in which narratives represent Englishness (cf. Bentley 2007: 488), my study aims to take these ideas further by expanding upon Ricœur's approach through additional concepts from media and cultural studies, and by elaborating on the individual narrative techniques and strategies that novels employ when dealing with Englishness. Bentley's article thus provides a suitable starting point and will also be of particular interest in the chapters analysing Barnes' and Smith's novels. However, the analytical model I aim to develop in chapter 2 differs from Bentley's approach in the sense that my approach also includes both the literary strategies and cultural concepts – such as memory, space and the media – and focuses on how (literary) rewritings challenge concepts of Englishness and what the consequences arising from this are.

Among the plethora of studies dealing with questions of Englishness, only a relatively small number of publications concentrate on contemporary narratives around the turn of the millennium whilst simultaneously presuming a shift in the self-images of the English population. It is this aspect that I aim to scrutinise in greater detail in three novels; I will also offer readings of sixteen additional contemporary texts, some of which have been barely discussed in academic studies or not considered at all. However, these novels are also intriguing examples which offer a means of tracing the ways in which fiction negotiates discourses on the concept of rebranded Englishness at the turn of the millennium. For the purpose of the analyses, I will first develop a theoretical approach which casts new light on contemporary English literature while at the same time being sufficiently unrestricted in scope to be used as a theoretical basis in the broader context of analysing identity discourses in literature. Since Englishness is primarily a cultural phenomenon, a literary analysis based entirely on a disciplinary approach would clearly not be effective or sensible. My aim is not to provide any clear-cut definitions of Englishness as such; instead, I intend to come to terms with the diverse narratives that do not simply represent, but rather *challenge*, the concept of Englishness.

The idea of 'challenging' concepts of national identity implies that the novels have an effect both on their readers and on the ongoing discussion about Englishness. The novels themselves thus become part of the overall discourse on the rebranding of Englishness. In this context, Gabriele Helms' monograph *Challenging Canada* (2003) can be considered a useful reference. I agree with Helms' choice of 'challenging' in the title instead of frequently used terms such as 'reimagining', 'renegotiating' or 'rethinking'. Indeed, Helms argues

that the Canadian novels she analyses “ask for, in fact they *demand*, responsive action” (Helms 2003: 152, my emphasis). This idea is also true for Englishness narratives which emerged at the turn of the millennium. An underlying assumption which needs to be kept in mind, then, is that literary texts do not simply reflect certain English self-images in a literary or aesthetic way; rather, they also have the potential to actively reconstruct, deconstruct and challenge these images. Literature thereby influences discourses that go beyond the scope of the fictional world constructed within the novel.

My approach is characterised by offering support to some existing readings of the novels whilst also providing references to other narratives, such as political speeches. The theoretical framework that I aim to develop is designed as an interdisciplinary approach based on literary studies which also draws on the theoretical findings of other disciplines and literary analysis as informed by the New Historicism. I consider novels to be narrative manifestations that are integrated into the cultural context from which they originate. Theories that I will weave into my approach include those from media studies, historical and cultural studies, memory studies, and social and political studies. Coming from a German academic background, my perspective has a decidedly comparative dimension to it, meaning that I will be able to comment on matters of Englishness from an ‘outsider’s’ viewpoint. Similarly, my theoretical approach is not exclusively based on Cultural Studies as it has developed in the field of British academia at such institutions as the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in Birmingham; rather, I also draw on several theories, methods and approaches according to a ‘study of culture’ or German *Kulturwissenschaften*. Although I will refer to theories and modes that have evolved under the roof of the CCCS, the majority of the theories is based on advancements in the field of ‘studies of culture’. The theoretical framework is laid out by discussions on national identity, memory theories, mediality and space. The methods I aim to employ are primarily rooted in narratology and allow for tackling the individual narratives. However, I will also utilise comparative approaches to different text types. This will thus form the basis for analysing the ways in which narratives challenge Englishness at the dawn of the new millennium and consequences that these representations may have.

The three novels I have selected for in-depth analysis were published between 1998 and 2001, and will be examined from a synchronic perspective. Nick Hornby’s *How to be Good* (2001), Zadie Smith’s *White Teeth* (2000) and Julian Barnes’ *England, England* (1998) are indispensable resources when conducting a discourse on Englishness due to the following reasons: all three novels have been publicly acknowledged, with each being longlisted (at the minimum) for a renowned British book prize. The novels are representative of a particular genre or literary field, and they differ in their approaches to national identity

and the themes negotiated in relation to Englishness. Although *How to be Good* is often labelled as ‘popular’ rather than ‘highbrow’ literature, the popular genre seems to be characteristic of depicting the particular *zeitgeist*. *White Teeth* addresses the issue of identity in multi-ethnic communities in London, and is a paradigm of those popular novels subsumed under the label ‘Black British Literature’. Finally, as an example of postmodern writing in the late 1990s *England, England* explicitly deals with rebranding efforts, the notions of tradition and heritage, and the development and implementation of identity politics. Of course, the three selected novels are not the only ones to have emerged in recent years that contain fictionalised discourses about Englishness. As I will show, a number of other novels take certain dimensions or features of national identity into consideration in similar ways, thereby allowing comparisons to be made and links to be drawn with the three main novels. At the end of each of the three extensive analyses, I will introduce and assess certain other novels that approach Englishness in a corresponding manner.

While the preceding chapters aim to introduce the cultural, political and literary context in which the novels are situated, the following chapters are organised as follows: the second chapter outlines a literary-cultural approach that serves as the theoretical basis for the analyses of the novels. This theoretical section first introduces the key concepts that generally help to grasp the abstract phenomenon of ‘Englishness’. Chapter 2.1 predominantly centres on concepts developed as part of memory studies, imagology and studies of culture relating to conceptions of national identity. However, these concepts move beyond mere coexistence and interact as a means of shaping identity. Consequently, chapter 2.2 addresses the processes at work in the ‘reconfigurations’ of Englishness according to a theoretical model originally introduced by French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. This cyclical model can be supported by narratological methods and makes it possible to come to terms with the narrative techniques and strategies employed by the novels in order to represent discourses on national identity. As chapter 2.3 demonstrates as a whole, such narrative strategies are linked to the cultural functions that narrative texts and specifically fiction may have. Three main areas prove to be especially useful for analysing Englishness narratives: to start with, section 2.3.1 addresses the potential of employing formal and generic features and different modes of emplotment to convey meaning and to strategically situate narratives in a culturally specific context. Section 2.3.2 explains how literary techniques of characterisation and perspectivation support the construction of individual and collective identities by employing different narrators and focalisers. Section 2.3.3 then explores the possibilities of literary representations of space and literary settings, since the way in which Englishness is constructed is deeply rooted in spatial



images. Finally, chapter 2.4 wraps up the theoretical section. At the same time, the necessary opposition between notions of what is ‘real’ and what is ‘imagined’ will be reconsidered in the summary of the theoretical framework.

The subsequent chapters 3 to 5 then analyse the individual novels – *How to be Good*, *White Teeth* and *England, England* – in accordance with this theoretical approach. The chapters follow a similar, but not exactly identical structure, depending on how prominently certain literary strategies or cultural concepts surface in each novel. In all three analysis-based chapters, the novels are first introduced on a general level in relation to the research question, their respective plots and general formal features. The analyses focus on narrative techniques and strategies in accordance with the aspects introduced in the theoretical chapter, and consequently highlight the additional cultural concepts that the novels refer to as a means of negotiating Englishness as a concept.

At the end of each of the three main chapters, an individual overview will be provided of novels that address Englishness in a similar manner to the novel under discussion. Similarities can exist both in the ways in which the narratives mediate Englishness and in the themes negotiated by the novels. The chapter which draws the analysis of *How to be Good* to a close considers novels that also negotiate Englishness in relation to class conceptions, predominantly in relation to the middle class. The final section in the chapter on *White Teeth* embeds Smith’s novel in the broader context of British Asian and Black British novels, and the analysis of *England, England* closes with comparisons to novels that likewise critically deal with the reconstruction and/or deconstruction of Englishness.

Chapter 6, the conclusion, sums up all of the findings, and places special focus on the role played by the novels in the process of remediating and disseminating certain concepts of national identity. It also provides an outlook on possible future research questions in this field. After all, academic and popular interest in Englishness is as pronounced as it ever was, and it will therefore be interesting to see how literature reacts to contemporary political and sociological changes in Britain.



## 2 Theoretical Framework: Constructing National Identity

As the introductory chapter aimed to show, cultural developments in England at the turn of the millennium seemed to be dependent on national stories and available cultural plots. The prefix ‘re’ in the terms ‘rebranding’ and ‘rewriting’ indicates that these cultural developments are not characterised by mere innovation. Instead, processes come into play *again*, thus alluding to a notion of repetition underlying these changes. Several categories and concepts constitute the foundation for analysing how representations of Englishness in literature developed around the millennium. Most of these abstract concepts are hard to define, and they are inextricably entwined with the processes at work: national identity, collective memory and narratives are key concepts whose interrelations need to be explored on a theoretical level first. The processes interrelating these concepts can be supported by narratological tools to develop an approach that enables an analysis of the strategies through which national narratives get rewritten and how they can contribute to a rebranding of national identity.

The three main concepts of identity, memory and narrative are tightly interlinked in the processes of redefining Englishness. Research has repeatedly indicated the relation between individual and collective memory, and also identity.<sup>1</sup> It has also been observed that both on an individual and on a collective level, identity strongly depends on narratives. Scholars – and not only scholars in the field of psychology – have stressed that narratives are crucial for individual ‘self-making’ and thus ‘identity-making’.<sup>2</sup> In addition, memory in its diverse forms strongly depends on narratives and narrativisation. Again, memory is not simply linked to an individual: while collective identity cannot exist without

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<sup>1</sup>The idea that memory and (individual) identity are interrelated dates back to philosophers like Plato, John Locke, David Hume and Friedrich Nietzsche (cf. Neumann 2005: 151, Erll 2010: 6). More recent scholars who have played a vital role in studying the workings of memory are Maurice Halbwachs, Aby Warburg and Jan and Aleida Assmann, whose approaches will be introduced in greater detail in chapter 2.1.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Leerssen (2007a: 337), Neumann (2008a: 183), and A. Nünning & Nünning (2010: 12f.), as well as J. Assmann (2005 [1992]), the collection on *Narrative and Identity* edited by Neumann et al. (2008), Bamberg (2009), and A. Assmann (2010).

individuals, personal memory is always shaped by collective remembering (cf. Erll 2010: 5).

Because of these cultural interrelations, it makes sense to understand the novels not simply as aesthetic, medial representations detached from their cultural contexts. Novels negotiating Englishness have been influenced by other medial discourses, and then, in turn, have themselves influenced these discourses. Consequently, in line with academic approaches after the ‘cultural turn’, practices introduced by scholars affiliated with the New Historicism present a fruitful framework for this study (cf. Greenblatt & Gallagher 2000). An advantage of the New Historicist approach is that it understands a literary narrative as a part and a product of its cultural context while still allowing for a close reading of the texts. Corresponding to the New Historicist approach, discourses are understood here in accordance with Michel Foucault’s conception, as introduced in his seminal work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002 [1969]). The assumption that discourses influence later discourses is also what basically happens in rebranding processes. This theoretical framework is influenced by French and US American thinkers, and many of the theories that play a role for the development of my approach succumb to the study of culture. However, I will also draw on several ideas connected to Cultural Studies as they have been articulated in a British academic context. This seems sensible given that scholars like Stuart Hall, Raymond Williams and Paul Gilroy have participated in discussions about English and British national identity. Cultural Studies has also greatly influenced how popular culture is perceived in academia and has fostered a critical engagement with the topic. It presents a helpful basis since it has brought the importance of cultural categories like gender, class and ‘race’ into focus.

To understand Englishness as a phenomenon that surfaces in different medial discourses also calls for further theories that are interested in the cultural functions of literature, particularly those on literature as cultural ecology. This approach acknowledges fiction as an aesthetic narrative form that does not merely represent or reflect cultural developments in a mimetic sense. Instead, literature is understood to have the potential to construct and disseminate images, values or identity concepts, thus influencing and creating reality.<sup>3</sup> The literary scholar Hubert Zapf remarks:

The function of literature as cultural ecology thus primarily consists not in the correct representation of some extra-literary reality or ecocentric ideology but in the fact that literature itself, precisely by its aestheticising transgression of immediate referentiality, becomes an ecological force-field within culture, a

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Fluck (1997: 21), Zapf (2001 & 2002), and in other fields of study e. g. Leerssen (2000: 268 f. and 2007b: 26).

subversive yet regenerative semiotic energy which, though emerging from and responding to a given sociohistorical situation, still gains relative independence as it unfolds the counter-discursive potential of the imagination in the symbolic act of reconnecting abstract cultural realities to concrete life processes. (Zapf 2001: 88)

The idea of literature as cultural ecology provides a productive point of departure to reflect on the interrelations between literature and culture. In line with this argument, novels at the time around the millennium appear to have the potential to rewrite processes of an identity transformation with the result that the novels disseminate imaginary versions of Englishness. The novels thus help to revise the contemporary understanding of national identity. In these processes, the narratives draw on several key concepts and categories which have attracted interest in various academic disciplines. In the following chapter, I will explicate these key terms, concepts and categories in relation to the rebranding of Englishness, since they are engraved in and sometimes even playfully fictionalised in the selected novels.

## 2.1 Approaching Collective Memory and National Identity

In order to grasp what national identity means, we need to engage with neighbouring concepts such as individual and collective identity, identification, self-images, nation and nationalism, as well as constitutive dimensions like collective memory, topoi or memory sites, invented traditions, national narratives and canonicity. A discussion persists as to what extent these concepts are imagined and constructed, drawing on Benedict Anderson's seminal definition of the nation as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1987 [1983]). Although it might seem a contradiction at first glance, approaches developed in the field of imagology – a research branch of comparative studies that engages with stereotypes and their dissemination in literature – can also support and expand theories that understand nations as constructs. It might seem a contradiction because Anderson understands the nation as an imagined construct while imagologists assume that images of the other and stereotypes exist. However, both lines of thought share some common ground, as can be traced in the definitions that come into play in each case when analysing quite a vague or contested phenomenon like Englishness.

Since Englishness is a phenomenon mainly rooted in cultural discourses, England – apart from being one of the countries forming the United Kingdom – can also be regarded as a culturally constructed nation. In his influential book *Imagined Communities* (1983), political scientist Benedict Anderson laid the foundations for research in social and

cultural studies to understand nations, nationality and nationalism as cultural artefacts (cf. Anderson 1987 [1983]: 13). Anderson's definition of the concept 'nation' has been repeatedly cited since its first publication and also provides a convenient point of departure for engaging with English national identity: "It [i. e. the nation] is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion [...]" (ibid.: 15f.). The idea that nations are not naturally given but artificial constructs still provides common ground for various studies. In line with this thought, Silvia Mergenthal remarks that "'Englishness' does not reflect a pre-established 'reality' – what 'the English' are *really* like – but describes a discursive field, in which various groups of individuals are identified as 'English' on the basis of (historically variable) attributions" (Mergenthal 2003: 24). Englishness obviously presents an imagined construct, although this approach has also been contested recently. After all, English national identity – linked to a shared national feeling or not – can have various material manifestations that can be articulated in narratives, visible in icons and present in memory sites, and are therefore not merely imagined constructions in the minds of group members.

While it remains a subordinate issue for my study, the intricate relation between national identity and nationalism is a field with which academics have been widely occupied in discussions about Englishness.<sup>4</sup> Against the backdrop of Anderson's observations, one can still question what else it takes for a nation to establish a common feeling as a community, even though of course not all individuals within a community can possibly know each other personally. One could argue that a nation generally needs to be based on certain shared values, images and memories to conceive itself as a nation. Linda Colley links Anderson's concept of the imagined community with the emergence of Britishness in her influential study *Britons: Forging a Nation* (1992). Colley states that Britain was forged

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<sup>4</sup>The relation of nationalism and Englishness has been dealt with in rather different ways in studies about English national identity. While e. g. Richard Hayton et al. (2009) mingle the concepts of national identity and nationalism, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (2000) clearly distinguishes between both. Krishan Kumar has engaged with the issue in detail, tracing the concept from as early as the ninth century through to contemporary developments in English nationalism and Englishness. He points out that English national identity in the past greatly depended on nationalism as it was connected to the, mainly English, project of imperialism (cf. Kumar 2003: x). Richard English in turn concludes that Englishness nowadays is rather to be seen as a "cultural sensibility, a feeling of distinct identity based on peculiarly English traditions, practices and attitudes – rather than English form [sic] of nationalism" (English 2011: 7). Simon Featherstone (2009) also differentiates between national identity and nationalism when he provides a sound overview of actors and media used by nationalists in the twentieth century. In line with these arguments, I will also regard national identity and nationalism as different concepts and understand Englishness as it has developed in recent years as not necessarily linked to nationalist ideologies but rather as a broader cultural phenomenon that has become an attractive means of identification for the majority of people.

as a nation in 1707 with the Acts of Union and that Britishness was invented if not even superimposed on the nation (cf. Colley 1992: 1, 6). In other words, referring to Benedict Anderson's study, Colley argues:

[...] if we accept Benedict Anderson's admittedly loose, but for that reason invaluable definition of a nation as 'an imagined political community', and if we accept also that, historically speaking, most nations have always been culturally and ethnically diverse, problematic, protean and artificial constructs that take shape very quickly and come apart just as fast, then we can plausibly regard Great Britain as an invented nation superimposed, if only for a while, onto much older alignments and loyalties. (ibid.: 5)

Colley's observation that nations in general – and Britain in particular – are not grown organically (cf. ibid.), is indeed true for the 'nation-making' of Britain. However, although her observations are valuable insights into the applicability of Anderson's theory to the British community, it cannot be as easily applied as such to England and English identity. In contrast to Britishness, Englishness around the millennium was not so much superimposed but developed. It was supported by the prevailing positive *zeitgeist* and constructed voluntarily by various actors. Although it was strategically promoted in politics and further disseminated by the media, in academia and in literature, it was not forged as a political entity in the way Britishness was forged three hundred years earlier.

Compared to the years after 1701, Britishness seemed to be rather artificially forged than the contemporary version of Englishness. While Britain was made as a political construct of four nations with different cultural identities, England can look back on its own national history including traditions, cultural plots and national narratives. However, for nation-building it matters only little if national stories are true or invented (cf. Neumann & Nünning 2008a: 185). In fact, many traditions, icons and mini-narratives that have fundamentally shaped contemporary Englishness are also, in part, relatively recent inventions, like the concept of 'Englishness' itself (cf. chapter 1.2). In *The Invention of Tradition* (1994 [1983]), Eric Hobsbawm states:

'Invented Tradition' is taken to mean 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 a continuity with a suitable historic past. (Hobsbawm 1994 [1983]: 1)

Similar to Anderson's assumptions, Hobsbawm points out that nations are constructions with an ideological framework that can be actively disseminated or even manipulated.

Both Anderson's and Hobsbawm's approaches thus stress that these constructions rely on the past and are continued with certain aims. Such processes are prevalent in the rebranding of Englishness in that traditional notions are repeated while innovative aspects become implemented at the same time. Around the millennium, political, cultural and demographic transformations took place, which according to Hobsbawm's assumptions also supported and triggered processes in which traditions could become invented (cf. Hobsbawm 1994 [1983]: 4f.). Krishan Kumar has also considered the consequences of inventing traditions for the making of English national identity nowadays and the manipulative dimensions this brings about:

National identity may be 'invented' – like everything else social – but if so it puts great power in the hands of those who do the inventing. If English identity is being vigorously debated today by intellectuals and politicians, this does not only tell us that, to an unprecedented degree, it has been put on the public agenda, but it is also likely to influence the outcome. English identity will to some extent be shaped by the variable success of different groups in the debate. (Kumar 2003: 253)

The power of those participating in the discussions is a crucial point here. Since literature is characterised by a high degree of inventive potential, it can actively contribute to and shape the discourse. Similar to the functions of memory, individual and collective identity are inextricably entwined since collective identity relies on the identification of individuals with an image constructed by a community (cf. J. Assmann 2005 [1992]: 132).

If Englishness is a construction with which individuals can identify, the relation between identity and identification needs to be discussed. In general, identification does not depend on a single option but can be understood as flexible, transformative and processable, related to tradition and invented traditions (cf. Hall 1996: 2ff.). This idea has been paraphrased by scholars in different fields of research. To begin with, Linda Colley observes: "Identities are not like hats. Human beings can and do put on several at a time" (Colley 1992: 6), and imagologist Joep Leerssen explicates: "At the individual level, one may at any moment feel [oneself] to be part of differently constituted groups ('Londoner', 'Englishman', 'Briton', 'European'; or, alternatively, 'male', 'working class', 'supporter of Tottenham Hotspurs')" (Leerssen 2007a: 338). Taking a similar perspective, egyptologist Jan Assmann, who has significantly contributed to the field of cultural memory studies, argues that individuals can incorporate various identities connected to different spiritual, ideological or political communities that have different collective memories (cf. J. Assmann 2010: 113). In contemporary Britain, this can also be seen in



the popularity of identifying through multiple, 'hyphenated' identities, as when individuals claim to be e. g. a 'Scottish-born Londoner' or a 'British-born African-Caribbean' (cf. chapter 1.1). In fact, individual identification is pivotal in forming a collective identity. Individuals identify with prevailing identity conceptions and form self-images that not only describe them as an individual but also connect them to the overarching national self-images, if not stereotypes.

Imagology is a field of study in comparative literary and cultural studies that is concerned with analysing images of 'the other'. Although my study is interested in self-images of the English, the theories by Joep Leerssen and Manfred Beller provide a useful point of departure. Manfred Beller defines 'image' "[...] as the mental silhouette of the other, who appears to be determined by the characteristics of family, group, tribe, people or race. Such an *image* rules our opinion of others and controls our behaviour towards them" (Beller 2007: 4). Beller also refers to Anderson's ideas and explains that the images of the other are always a fiction or fictionality, a product of one's imagination (cf. *ibid.*: 5). The main focus of imagology lies in images and stereotypes of the other, which are called 'hetero-images' and 'hetero-stereotypes' (cf. Leerssen & Beller 2007: xiv). Accordingly, images about one's own nation are introduced as self- or auto-images, which are more important here. The difference between images and stereotypes mainly lies in their stability and persistence. While images are dynamic, not clearly defined and persistent, stereotypes are more stabilised, static perceptions with a longer persistence (cf. Neumann 2009: 56 ff.). Since imagology is mainly concerned with the creation of national images in literature, these categories provide fruitful insights into constructions of English self-images.

Linking up on the literary images about national identity, the relation between nation and narration is generally characterised by mutual construction. Postcolonial thinker Homi Bhabha's contention that narratives significantly contribute to constituting and shaping a nation is central for this understanding (cf. Bhabha 1990a). For Bhabha, people who bear a national identity are both the subject of the narratives and their audience or readers. In line with this argument, literature can be seen to function as a means of constructing and sustaining perceptions of Englishness. In the words of imagologists, this means that literature is a medium in which "national stereotypes are first and most effectively formulated, perpetuated and disseminated" (Leerssen 2007b: 26). Even more so, nations can be seen to be held together by narratives that contribute to the creation of collective memory and narrative communities (cf. Müller-Funk 2008: 99).

Apart from the fact that national images can be disseminated through literary accounts, cultural memory is also dependent on narratives. Since memory and identity are closely

interrelated in their workings and functional potential (cf. J. Assmann 2010: 113f.), recent approaches in cultural memory studies will help to back up the ideas introduced about national identity so far. Since contemporary constructions of Englishness depend on the development of national identity throughout history, cultural memory plays a fundamental role in the processes of rebranding and rewriting it. International researchers in the field of the study of culture have contributed to the understanding of memory, which has attracted a lot of scholarly attention during the last thirty years. Many of the theories are based on the pioneering works by the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs on the *mémoire collective* and by the art historian Aby Warburg, on Aleida and Jan Assmann's theories of the *kulturelles Gedächtnis* and Pierre Nora's *lieux de mémoire* (cf. Erll & Nünning 2006: 11). In recent years, Astrid Erll has played a great role in the field, not least by assembling different international and interdisciplinary approaches and concepts.<sup>5</sup>

In particular, Jan Assmann's approaches to cultural and collective memory (1988, 2005 [1992]) provide an invaluable basis for an interdisciplinary perspective on how Englishness was rebranded. Jan Assmann understands 'cultural memory' as an archive of important events for a community that is characterised by six features: first, a community such as a nation produces its cultural memory and thus creates its distinct identity; second, cultural memory is always *reconstructed* from the present with reference to an archive of narratives, images and schemata; third, cultural memory appears in certain material formations like narratives, rites, images or monuments; fourth, cultural memory is institutionalised through communication; fifth, it is binding in that it determines a hierarchy of values for a community; and sixth, cultural memory always reflects both the self-image of the group as well as itself and is thereby undergoing constant revision.<sup>6</sup> These characteristics are not only markers for a collective memory that is closely linked to a national identification. Assmann's observations also hint at the dynamics that exist in the making of cultural memory and identity that are constantly revised and rewritten.

Canonisation processes are essential in the constitution of national memory and identity. Aleida Assmann distinguishes between a nation's *canon* of "actively circulated memory" and an *archive* of "passively stored memory" (A. Assmann 2010: 98). Accordingly, both an archive and even more so a canon come into play in the rebranding and rewriting of Englishness since stored knowledge of both is used in new configurations. Although

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Erll (2003, 2005a & 2011), Erll & Nünning (2004, 2005 & 2010), Erll & Rigney (2009b).

<sup>6</sup>Cf. J. Assmann (1988: 13 ff.), Erll (2003: 172). These features also partly overlap with those introduced by Ann Rigney in her approach to the construction of cultural memory that include "the selectivity of recall, [...], the recursivity in remembrance, the recycling of models of remembrance and memory transfers." (Rigney 2005: 16)

I would argue that, according to Aleida Assmann, nations rely on a small selection of ‘sacred texts’ and key historic events (cf. *ibid.*: 101), this conception might not work so simply in fast-paced contemporary communities in a global age with accelerating information distribution. As with memory and identity concepts in general, cultural memory is not fixed but in a constant dynamic flow of reshuffling memories between canon and archive (cf. *ibid.*: 106). Aspects that play a crucial role for a collective memory include traditions, events and memory sites or, *lieux de mémoire*. Eric Hobsbawm’s observation also backs up this line of thought when he acknowledges that semi-ritual practices such as elections, ceremonies and special forms of music are significant factors (cf. Hobsbawm 1994 [1983]: 12), and that “the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs” (*ibid.*: 11) including e.g. flags are shaped by, and serve to shape, the imagined communities that we call ‘nations’.

As the aspect of memory sites implies, space is a significant dimension related to memory and identity constructions. What is more, the dimension of space can be seen as a theoretical hinge between cultural studies and literature. The relation between space and culture has seen an increasing interest in recent years, also influenced by the spatial turn in cultural studies. Several approaches are based on the influential ideas introduced in Yuri Lotman’s semiotic approach to the semiosphere, in which he points out that culture can be seen as a semiotised space (cf. Lotman 2005 [1984]). In a more recent approach, Hartmut Böhme suggests that literary studies require innovative approaches to space, topography and movements after the long reign of time as the only crucial dimension in literary analyses (cf. Böhme 2005: XII). Space presents a cultural signifier, and narrated space partakes in the semanticisation process that includes subjective perception, cultural context and spatial materiality (cf. Hallet & Neumann 2009: 11, 25).

Space is a crucial dimension for the creation of images associated with Englishness. The most obvious example is the status of the rural countryside as a national icon. Landscape is often introduced as a myth or as a mythical space (cf. e.g. Marzola 2001 [1999]: 13, 58), and studies about the dichotomy of rural and the urban space, especially Raymond Williams’s book *The Country and the City* (1973), have contributed to this image. In his book, Williams states that “the English experience is especially significant, in that one of the decisive transformations, in the relations between country and city, occurred there very early and with a thoroughness” (Williams 1973: 2). Moreover, it is the English experience that “remains exceptionally important: not only symptomatic but in some ways diagnostic; in its intensity still memorable, whatever may succeed” (*ibid.*). The associations connected to spaces of country and city differ tremendously, with “the city as a place of noise, worldliness and ambition; [...] the country as a place of backwardness,

ignorance, limitation” (ibid.: 1). Although Williams’s dichotomy has been questioned, it is still seminal for its recognition of “the interdependence of social, economic, and cultural forces” (Locatelli 2004: 5). These perceptions thus also again link back to discourses of memory and identity. In his study of the geography of Englishness, Ian Baucom equates English *lieux de mémoire* with locations of identity: “They are places where an identity-preserving, identity-enchanting, and identity-transforming aura lingers, or is made to appear” (Baucom 1999: 19). The intricate relations between memory, identity and space obviously figure prominently in constructions of Englishness.<sup>7</sup>

Memory theories also engage with the role of narratives for the construction of memories. Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney observe: “The rise, fall, and marginalization of stories as constitutive parts of the dynamics of remembering have thus emerged as key issues in memory studies” (Erll & Rigney 2009a: 2). Literature obviously plays a foundational role in the dynamics of collective memory and identity. The relation between literature and memory has been firm on the academic agenda during the last twenty to thirty years (cf. Erll & Nünning 2006: 13). According to Renate Lachmann, literature is the memory of a culture, and the value of literary memory is manifest in what we understand as intertextuality (cf. Lachmann 2010: 301), thus stabilising certain narratives in a nation’s memory through repetition. This aspect also surfaces in the rewriting processes of national narratives, which then help to perpetuate and disseminate concepts of national identity. Literature dealing with memory can be termed ‘fictions of memory’ (cf. A. Nünning 2003), which have opened a fruitful study interest of their own in recent years. Fictions of memory also frequently relate to identity politics (cf. V. Nünning 2003b: 43), which makes them invaluable objects for studying rewritings of Englishness. Still, memory is not only represented in literature, but narratives also produce and construct memory in the act of discourse (cf. Neumann 2010: 334). Additionally, literature can be regarded as a medium of cultural memory, and, as one might add, collective identity. The processes of stabilising what is remembered and what is regarded as a constitutive notion of national identity rely essentially on repetition, and are of special interest when considering the rebranding and rewriting of Englishness.

## 2.2 Reconfiguring and Remediating National Identity

The concepts introduced in the previous chapter are, however, not fixed phenomena but in processes of constant negotiation and revision to shape constructions of national

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<sup>7</sup>Since space and narrative strategies are related when creating a text-internal setting, the concept of space will be taken up again and dealt with in greater detail in chapter 2.3.3.

identity. Such processes can be framed by concepts that concentrate on the interrelations between the notions of self-images, identity, memory and narratives. Astrid Erll's and Ann Rigney's explanation of the functions of collective memory for a community serves as a transition from the previous chapter:

Indeed, the very concept of *cultural* memory is itself premised on the idea that memory can only become collective as part of a continuous process whereby memories are shared with the help of symbolic artefacts that mediate between individuals and, in the process, create communality across both space and time. (Erll & Rigney 2009a: 1)

Space and time are essential dimensions for the underlying processes of cultural memory. Scholars from different disciplines have observed that the nation is built on what is referred to as a 'mix of', a 'stock of' or – most popularly – a 'set of' images, narratives and topoi.<sup>8</sup> The idea of a 'reservoir' (Müller-Funk 2008: 14), archive or canon of available cultural plots is a notion that needs to be dealt with in greater detail. This 'set of' images is perpetuated through repetition to constantly shape and reshape national identity. The dynamics can be described through a theoretical approach about time and narrative introduced by Paul Ricœur. His theories present a convenient point of departure that can be expanded through notions of mediation. The roles of the media and media events are also essential for identity-making processes that include topoi, icons and national narratives. How these notions can be made fruitful for analyses of a literature about Englishness will be explained in the course of this section.

The rebranding processes significantly depend on temporality, with its inherent potential for change. Paul Ricœur developed an approach to mimesis describing the relation of temporal levels that are characteristic of narrations and language utterances in his work *Time and Narrative* (1985 [1984]). Ricœur distinguishes between three levels: 'mimesis<sup>1</sup>' is equated with prefiguration as preceding experience; 'mimesis<sup>2</sup>' as the actual configuration and fiction; and 'mimesis<sup>3</sup>' as the level of refiguration (cf. Ricœur 1985 [1984]: 62). In other words, the level of prefiguration always influences new representations and narrativisations, while refiguration comprises the influence of such representations at a later point. These can, with chronological progression, become new prefigurations for future configurations, which gives the model a cyclical structure. This theoretical basis can be applied to processes that include changing perceptions in favour of static concepts. As Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning have pointed out, Ricœur's cycle of mimesis can also

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Hobsbawm (1994 [1983]: 1), Hall (1992: 292 f.), Giles & Middleton (1995: 3 ff.), Easthope (1999: 4), Leonard (2002: x), Colley (2009: 21), Hayton et. al (2009: 128).

be a productive starting point to describe the dynamics at work in memory constructions (cf. Erll & Nünning 2006: 21).

The concepts of prefiguration and refiguration can be expanded through an approach developed in the context of media studies. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have introduced the concepts of premediation and remediation (Bolter & Grusin 2000, Grusin 2004). Unlike Ricœur, Bolter and Grusin are interested in the medial features and define remediation as “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” (Bolter & Grusin 2000: 273). The authors further describe remediation as “the mediation of mediation” (ibid.: 55, original in italics) and explain the functioning of remediation: “The goal of remediation is to refashion or rehabilitate other media. Furthermore, because all mediations are both real and mediations of the real, remediation can also be understood as a process of reforming reality as well” (ibid.: 56). However, the fact that every mediation is a remediation of past mediations becomes concealed, which Bolter and Grusin understand as the ‘paradox of remediation’ (cf. ibid.: 53 f.). In this context, the two researchers introduce the concepts of immediacy as an opposite to hypermediacy. Whereas some media create immediacy and transparency when transmitting a message, hypermediacy is understood as a medial representation that self-reflexively alludes to its own mediacy (cf. ibid.: 272 f.). These concepts are reminiscent of the narratological categories attached to realist, mimetic descriptions in contrast to innovative, meta-referential modes of emplotment. The categories present useful points of reference for a narrative analysis as they can be related to certain genre conventions and literary strategies.

While Bolter and Grusin are primarily interested in media and less in the contents of what is represented, Astrid Erll has further developed the concepts of pre- and remediation in her study of the Indian Mutiny (2007b). She understands the concepts as medial references to pre-existent schemata that are generated through various media and constantly revised in the representations of new events (cf. Erll 2007b: 31 f.). As these transformations are based on a cyclical structure, it is possible to describe cultural processes from a historical, diachronical perspective (cf. ibid.: 29), which also includes the constitution of memory cultures (cf. Erll 2011: 152 ff.). In this context, premediation is taken to mean that representations of new experiences and events follow schemata provided by preceding medial representations (cf. Erll 2009: 111). Thereby, representations of earlier events shape a community’s understanding and remembrance (cf. ibid.). ‘Remediation’, then, refers

to the fact that especially those events which are transformed into *lieux de mémoire* are usually represented again and again, over decades and centuries, in different media. What is known about an event which has turned into

a site of memory, therefore, seems to refer not so much to what we might cautiously call the ‘actual event’, but instead to a canon of existing medial constructions, to the narratives, images and myths circulating in a memory culture. (ibid.)

Since the constructions of collective memory and national identity function in similar ways (cf. chapter 2.1), this approach also helps us to grasp what factors and processes are at work in constituting Englishness.

However, what do these theoretical findings mean for the rebranding and rewriting of Englishness around the millennium? As I pointed out at the beginning of this chapter, it is striking that many scholars have observed that English culture is dependent on a ‘set of’ images, myths, narratives, etc. In fact, the description as a ‘set of’ – or, a repertoire – can be understood as the manifold premediations of Englishness, which constitute the first level of the cyclical model. In his reflections on cultural identity, Stuart Hall also remarks that there exists a

*narrative of the nation*, as it is told and retold in national histories, literatures, the media and popular culture. These provide a set of stories, images, landscapes, scenarios, historical events, national symbols and rituals which stand for, or *represent*, the shared experiences, sorrows, and triumphs and disasters which gave meaning to the nation. As members of such an ‘imagined community’, we see ourselves in our mind’s eye sharing in this narrative. (Hall 1992: 293)

Hall’s ideas, again with a reference to Anderson’s theory, paraphrase what role premediated cultural plots play for a nation. As for premediated narratives of the early twentieth century, Judy Giles and Tom Middleton clarify that they understand the signifiers ‘England’ and ‘English’ as they are “used by commentators to invoke a specific set of interrelated ideas, images and values” (Giles & Middleton 1995: 3) and as “a complex set of images, myths, collective memories and beliefs” (ibid.: 5). These ideas are also supported by Ina Habermann, who points out that various plots used as references nowadays originate from novels of the early twentieth century and have developed as national myths (cf. Habermann 2010).<sup>9</sup> Englishness thus depends on the huge field of discourses that are available to situate contemporary identity. Judy Giles and Tim Middleton created a metaphor for elements of premediation as a repertoire: “These images and ideas constitute what we might call a cultural storehouse from which writers draw material (not always consciously) in order to construct their version of what it

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<sup>9</sup>In my approach, I will mainly avoid the concept of myth since it opens a further huge field of research and would lead my argumentation astray. Instead, I will focus on premediations, which seems to be more helpful concept in the context of my study.

means to be English” (Giles & Middleton 1995: 21). In fact, this observation is also reminiscent of David Lodge’s observation that contemporary writers can choose modes of literary emplotment from an “aesthetic supermarket” (Lodge 1992), which paraphrases the variety of cultural and literary plots offered by history.

Yet, what elements and factors are part of this ‘cultural storehouse’? Several of the concepts and approaches introduced so far are crucial for premediation: the nation’s collective memory is a ‘container’ of those premediated plots, including events, myths and memory sites. As a possible means of identification, the repertoire includes self-images, values, rites, plots and icons that can be re-used. In this context, Joep Leerssen has pointed out that “[f]oundational episodes and crises in the nation’s past take on mythical meaning; in the permanence of their memory they establish a continuity between past and present which is properly identitarian” (Leerssen 2007a: 336). According to Aleida Assmann’s approach, such episodes or stories are stored in the national archive or canon. In her social-constructivist model of cultural memory, Ann Rigney describes the archive as a “virtual storehouse of information about the past” (Rigney 2005: 17), which corresponds to the metaphor introduced by Giles and Middleton. The canon of literature as it is commonly understood is thus an essential feature of premediated narratives, and has various functions for cultural memory and national identity (cf. Grabes 2010: 310). In the case of Englishness, the canon of English literature seems to be a particularly fixed and stable one tied to several ‘great national narratives’ and several outstanding authors like Milton, Shakespeare, Defoe or Dickens (cf. chapter 1.3).

The second level according to the cyclical model based on Ricœur’s approach, i. e. the level of configuration, describes the representation, mediation or narrativisation of a discourse which can refer to the available premediated plots of the cultural repertoire. Media and genres develop and privilege different, symbolically specific ways of representation and shape distinctive forms that are used for the construction of images (cf. Neumann 2009: 74). These ideas acknowledge the present perspective from which the topics are considered, which is linked to Jan Assmann’s observation that memory is always reconstructed from the present. Since journalism and news coverage can also be important means for memory-making (cf. Zelizer 2010), narratives seem to be privileged to negotiate and disseminate new perspectives on Englishness. As Stuart Hall puts it, identities are nothing naturally given, but constructs that “are formed and transformed within and in relation to *representation*. We only know what it is to be ‘English’ because of the way ‘Englishness’ has come to be presented, as a set of meanings, by English national culture” (Hall 1992: 292).



Studies dealing with events, media events and eventfulness also provide valuable insights into the modes of configurations that are involved in the ways in which Englishness is represented and rebranded in contemporary fiction. Although most of the processes at work for the rebranding and rewriting of Englishness are generally not characterised by a high degree of eventfulness, they still help to shed light on the strategies used in the narratives dealing with national identity.<sup>10</sup> According to Ansgar Nünning, events are the result of several criteria that contribute to processes like the rewriting of Englishness: configurations depend on the narrative ‘emplotment’ of events, i. e. they are organised to construct meaning by transforming incidents into a certain genre and narrative form (cf. A. Nünning 2009: 203 f.). Since these ideas can help to identify narrative strategies of how Englishness discourses are configured, they will be introduced in greater detail in the following chapters which focus on narrative strategies to negotiate national identity. However, although several events or special occasions contributed to the rebranding of Englishness, the overall process was characterised less by a high degree of eventfulness but more – for the sake of a parallel naming – by a ‘processuality’.

The third level according to the cyclical structure is remediation. Popular images, stories, events or plots with a great impact can become established as new cultural plots. These are achieved through different processes that Knut Hiekkethier (2003) termed ‘iconisation’ and ‘topicalisation’ in his analysis of the medialisation of ‘9/11’. “The term ‘iconisation’ draws attention to the central role which images and pictures play in the representation and production of media events. ‘Topicalisation’ refers to the close relationship between media events and certain places or sites” (A. Nünning 2009: 209). As a third dimension referring to narratives, canonisation would correspond to narratives and literature in particular. These three aspects can thus help us to describe how remediations of Englishness can revise and redefine national self-images and influence national identity.

Whether remediated plots become a part of the ‘cultural storehouse’ depends on one crucial aspect that corresponds to the cyclical structure of this model: repetition. Without being repeated, the cultural artefacts cannot become fixed schemata in the repertoire which forms the basis of national identification. The notion of repetition has been stressed in several of the theories introduced so far. In his approach to invented tradition, Eric Hobsbawm states: “Inventing traditions, it is assumed here, is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if

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<sup>10</sup>Wolf Schmid has introduced five categories for eventfulness in stories: 1. relevance (significance), 2. unpredictability (unexpectedness), 3. effect (consecutivity), 4. irreversibility (irrevocability), and 5. non-iterativity (non-repeatability). Cf. Schmid (2005: 22 ff.), and also Neumann & Nünning (2008a: 42), and Hühn (2009).

only by imposing repetition” (Hobsbawm 1994 [1983]: 4). Moreover, repetition is an essential underlying notion in the production of national self-images and stereotypes in the imagological approach. It is only through frequent use that images about the self or other can become more fixed and stable stereotypes (cf. Leerssen 2007b: 26, Neumann 2009: 56 ff.). Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney also acknowledge the need for the “inter-medial reiteration” (Erll & Rigney 2009a: 2) of stories if they are to become established in a community. What is essential, then, is the temporal and historical dimension which underlines the processuality in the construction of identity. In contrast to e.g. political actions conveyed in speeches, news coverage or the representations in other new media such as in the internet, one could argue that literature is able to react to changes in society with a slight delay but with a higher degree of reflection and consideration. It is the highly aestheticised form that makes fiction a special medial form that contributes to the formation and re-formation of national identity concepts.

### 2.3 Narrative Strategies and Cultural Functions of Negotiating Englishness

In recent years, an increasing interest in narratives for organisational or national identity has developed into a trend that can be seen as a continuation of the ‘branding’ boom of the 1990s. Since the development has also triggered a growing interest in analysing narratives, this has become a more and more transgeneric and transmedial endeavour.<sup>11</sup> Narratives present a fundamental means for constructing, revising and challenging Englishness. The intricate relation of narratives and national identity has probably been most notably stressed by Homi Bhabha in the introduction of his *Nation and Narration* (1990b), in which he makes clear that both phenomena are two sides of the same coin (cf. also chapter 2.1). Wolfgang Müller-Funk has also claimed that cultures should be regarded as narrative communities (‘*Erzählgemeinschaften*’) and that their stories draw on distinct ‘reservoirs of narratives’ (cf. Müller-Funk 2008: 14). Hence, Müller-Funk understands a culture “as a more or less structured, but not necessarily hierarchical system of narratives” (ibid.: 175, my translation). As the previous chapters aimed to show, narrativisation is not only essential for personal identity-making but also for ‘community-making’ (cf. A. Nünning & Nünning 2010: 13 f.). Narratives can be considered as an important means of identity construction (cf. Bamberg 2009: 132) while at the same time narrating presents a “privileged site for identity analysis” (ibid.: 133). Yet to what extent can fiction be described as an especially efficient narrative genre for dealing with national identity in

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. A. Nünning & Nünning (2002), Neumann & Nünning (2008a: 163).

the first place? And how can literary texts be analysed to gain new insights into the cultural interrelations at work in the rebranding processes of Englishness around the millennium? These questions need to be considered in order to find out more about the narrative techniques and strategies that fiction tends to make use of, and about the potential functions of literature, which have thus far only been implicit.

In comparison to narratives in a broader sense, literature is an aestheticising medium, characterised by semanticised narrative forms and modes. The aesthetic dimension thereby contributes to the very meaning of what is narrated. Consequently, it is not only the content that needs to be analysed but also the mediation strategies of literature. What are, then, the functions and potentials of literary texts for a culture and for creating national identity? To begin with, Wilfried Fluck's observation that literature is capable of creating reality through sheer possibility (cf. Fluck 1997: 21) supports the idea that Englishness is influenced by remediation. As Hubert Zapf has pointed out, literature can function as cultural ecology since analogies exist between ecological and aesthetic processes and forms.<sup>12</sup> In particular, literature is a medium that has the potential to disseminate values (cf. Baumbach et al. 2009: 8). According to Jan Assmann, values are a means of identification in nations (cf. chapter 2.1). Literature thus has a formative function for memory cultures (cf. Neumann 2005: 170) as well as, one could add, for narrative communities and national identity. Through the repetition of discourses and plots, literature can work on the level of configuration but it is also highly dependent on premediations and, in turn, it is capable of significantly contributing to remediations and the stabilisation of cultural plots and schemata. Against this backdrop, I will consider two narratological levels of analysis for studying rewritings of Englishness: the level of narrative mediation and the level of story or content.

The following subchapters focus on three different areas of narrative techniques and strategies which of course cannot be absolute or all-embracing but which seem especially important and productive for the analysis of fictions dealing with Englishness. It is basically the narrative techniques and literary strategies deployed on the level of configuration or, in other words, on the level of 'emplotment' – i. e. the forming and organising means that transforms the discourse into a certain genre (cf. A. Nünning 2009: 203 f.). This includes, firstly, the engagement with traditional and popular literary genres, modes of emplotment and forms that tend to be used when Englishness is represented. Secondly, tools provided by both story- and discourse-oriented narratology help to analyse

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<sup>12</sup>Cf. Zapf (2001, 2002 & 2008). According to Zapf's theory of cultural ecology, literature creates relationships to nature – and to culture and politics in a broader sense – by means of rhetorical and figurative devices (cf. Zapf 2001: 87). The potential functions will be addressed in the following subsection.

techniques of characterisation and perspectivation, which shed light on the construction of personal and collective identities.<sup>13</sup> Thirdly, the literary representation of space presents a highly significant dimension in the narrative construction of Englishness, which ties in with aspects like the narrative setting and represented storyworld. The occurrence of these techniques certainly vary in different novels but can be seen as a literary means to represent, contest or disseminate conceptions of national identity.

### 2.3.1 Configurations of Englishness: Literary Forms, Genres and Modes

For narratives that negotiate national identity, the recourse to traditional genres, forms, styles and modes of emplotment is an essential literary strategy to embed the narratives in their cultural context. However, novels not only recur to traditional forms but also explore and rebalance innovative narrative modes in order to make meaning. Traditional modes might be used only to be subversively undermined eventually. In fact, these recourses come to show that concepts of Englishness are not only dealt with on what narratology refers to as the level of story but also on the level of narrative transmission.

Genre conventions and literary modes present a first marker of associating narratives with identity conceptions. Throughout English literary history, the realist novel is probably the most established traditional genre, inscribed in collective memory and identity through canonisation. While ‘realism’ is certainly a debated notion in discourses in the humanities, it can be defined as “a system of conventions producing a lifelike illusion of some ‘real’ world outside the text, by processes of selection, exclusion, description, and manners of addressing the reader” (“Realism” 2008a: n. pag.). In the context of English literature, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* describes realism

as a dominant literary trend [...] associated chiefly with the 19th-century novel of middle- or lower-class life, in which the problems of ordinary people in unremarkable circumstances are rendered with close attention to the details of physical setting and to the complexities of social life. (ibid.)

Nick Bentley pointedly states that “if the realist novel represents the ideal literary expression of Englishness, then formal experimentation (for example, modernism or postmodernism) can be said to function ideologically as a disruption of that dominant narrative” (Bentley 2007: 488). In fact, postmodern writing tends to be mainly associated with American literature (cf. Lewis 2005 [1998]: 112) and rather as an innovative deviation from the norm in English novels. Postmodern writing has potentials, however, that

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<sup>13</sup>In what follows, I will use the term ‘discourse’ in relation to extra-literary discourses of Englishness in order to avoid confusion with narrative transmission or mediation.

play a role for a rewriting or remediation of national identity. First, Linda Hutcheon implies that postmodern literature is characterised by a great historical and political dimension, and secondly that “it is always a critical reworking, never a nostalgic ‘return’” (Hutcheon 1988: 4). According to the British literary scholar and writer David Lodge, postmodernism is a “rule-breaking kind of art” in contrast to modernist or anti-modernist writing (Lodge 2002 [1977]: 275). Literary modes and genres through which discourses of Englishness are mediated are consequently not a mere coincidental choice: while realism presents a premediated mode associated with Englishness, modernism and even more so postmodernism express meaningful departures from these premediations.

Stylistic devices and subgenres support these conventions and their effects. Like realist writing, the use of humour, irony and comedy is deemed typical of English writing.<sup>14</sup> In addition to these, satire presents an established genre inscribed in the English literary tradition. Satires generally aim to illustrate prevailing vices or deficits, often those connected to developments in society (cf. “Satire” 2007). This function related to developments in the extra-textual world makes satire an important generic feature to challenge discourses of Englishness in literature. Traditional genres, modes of emplotment and stylistic devices are thus a part of those premediations that contemporary rewritings of Englishness refer to, take up and rewrite in order to situate themselves in a specific cultural background.

Furthermore, events present a helpful narratological category that allows us to understand remediation processes in literature. Especially features of eventfulness, as introduced by Wolf Schmid (cf. 2005: 24 f.) on the level of mediation, and applied e. g. to analysing media events, provide a theoretical basis. Contemporary English novels frequently refer to extra-textual, real events to contextualise actions and thereby create an effect of reality for the story. In fact, the creation of narrative events is an act of constructivity that is culturally specific and historically variable (cf. A. Nünning 2009: 207). Narratives draw on criteria that are characteristic for making incidents become events, as Ansgar Nünning points out in his study of the making of events as a ‘way of worldmaking’: the first measures to create an event are the selection, abstraction and prioritisation of what really happened, which then needs to be shaped and arranged into a plot (cf. *ibid.*: 196, 201 f.). The configuration into a sequence and thus into a story presents the third feature in a typical narrative process, strongly depending on perspectivation (cf. *ibid.*: 203 ff.). Although the overall process of the rewriting of

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. e. g. Easthope (1999: 159-176). Nick Bentley also refers to Easthope’s observation when he argues: “Comedy and satire are [...] two of the modes that have often been identified as indicators of an English tradition in the novel” (Bentley 2007: 497).

Englishness is characterised, rather, by processuality, i. e. a low degree of eventfulness, narratives frequently make use of these techniques and refer to real events in order to contextualise a story. Furthermore, such narratives frequently employ strategies like selecting, abstracting and hierarchising, which results in the canonisation, iconisation or topicalisation linked to Englishness. Events thus come into play both on the level of mediation as well as on the level of content in narratives that deal with national identity.

A particular way to represent Englishness that links up on this matter is the narrative deployment of lists. Lists in general are, however, not a recent phenomenon but the tradition of using lists dates back to classical literature, as Umberto Eco demonstrates in his *Vertigine della lista (The Infinity of Lists, 2009)*.<sup>15</sup> However, list-making seems to be a particularly English way of dealing with national identity. Silvia Mergenthal has rightfully argued that “the list is a [sic] indispensable feature of well-nigh every definition of ‘Englishness’” (Mergenthal 2003: 111 f.), which does not seem to be a coincidence. In fact, many listings about what is held to be typically English can be found in English literary history, particularly throughout the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> Apart from George Orwell’s listing, this mode of representation can be found in writings by Stanley Baldwin, Vita Sackville-West, John Betjeman and T. S. Eliot.<sup>17</sup> Arthur Aughey has recently observed about this formal feature that is still highly popular today: “Listing is a case in point. It is a way of talking about England without having to analyze it, for enumeration intimates a personal command of relations” (Aughey 2010: n. pag.). The technique

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<sup>15</sup>In his book, Eco pays attention to listing as a literary means and a phenomenon that appears e. g. in fine art.

<sup>16</sup>In this context, cf. e. g. Merbitz (2005: 181 ff.), Berberich (2007: 24) and Aughey & Berberich (2011a).

<sup>17</sup>Lists by these authors read as follows:

The sounds of England, the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy, the corncrake on a dewy morning, the sound of the scythe against the whetstone, and the sight of a plough team coming over the brow of a hill, the sight that has been seen in England since England was a land ... the one eternal sight of England. (Baldwin 1926: 7)

England, Shakespeare, Elizabeth, London; Westminster, the docks, India, the Cutty Sark, England; England, Gloucestershire, John of Gaunt; Magna Carta, Cromwell, England. (Sackville-West 1966 [1930]: 341)

For me, England stands for the Church of England, eccentric incumbents, oil-lit churches, Women’s Institutes, modest village inns, arguments about cow-parsley on the altar, the noise of mowing machines on Saturday afternoons, local newspapers, local auctions, the poetry of Tennyson, Crabbe, Hardy and Matthew Arnold, local talent, local concerts, a visit to the cinema, branch-line trains, light railways, leaning on gates and looking across fields. (Betjeman 1943, quoted in Paxman 1999: 151)

Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, 19th century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar. (Eliot 1962 [1948]: 31)

of listing thus links back not only to national, but also, again, to personal identity constructions. On a broader scale, it also underlines the English empiricist tradition as listing requires processes of observation, selection and hierarchisation similar to the creation of events.<sup>18</sup> In contemporary fiction, listing is often associated with postmodern literature for its pastiche-like character but has e. g. also been recognised as a typical feature of popular literature.

Consequently, the list is a feature that affects the level of content as well as the narrative transmission. The narrative deployment of lists can have different distinct characteristics and bear various implications. Robert E. Belknap has observed that literary lists differ from what he calls the “pragmatic list”, both in their forms as well as in their functions (cf. Belknap 2004: 2 ff.). The literary list not only works as a reference but also has the potential to create meaning, rather than merely storing information (cf. *ibid.*: 3). As for the function for Englishness or England, listing can be used “to acknowledge diversity but also to imply its own unity” (Aughey 2010: n. pag.). Additionally, Arthur Aughey and Christine Berberich point out that lists of Englishness offer concrete, personal references that are implicitly linked and evoke a continuity (cf. Aughey & Berberich 2011a: 5 ff.). The list thus presents a characteristically English stylistic device, presenting familiar elements as *pars-pro-toto* metonymies for the overall idea of Englishness. Lists relate to premediated icons and plots that are easy to recognise, while at the same time lists further support and perpetuate iconisation. After all, the list is a paradigmatic technique for a self-reflexive emplotment of Englishness narratives: it is semanticised in its very formal representation as a reference to Englishness.

While these techniques mainly work on the level of textual emplotment, there are narrative strategies which link literature to cultural phenomena. John McLeod (2004) points out that ‘revision’ is a key strategy in the relation between literature and culture.<sup>19</sup>

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Some of the references mentioned above I owe to a speech by Arthur Aughey held at the “Literature of an Independent England Conference” at Warwick University on 6 November, 2010. In his speech, Aughey also considered lists as a typical form to deal with Englishness. In the introductory chapter to their recent collection *These Englands* (2011b), Arthur Aughey and Christine Berberich also pay special attention to listing as a typically English feature and introduce some more recent lists of Englishness. For even more lists as they have appeared in English and American literary history, e. g. in Dickens, Spenser, Wilde, Melville or Joyce, Robert E. Belknap has added “A List of Literary Lists” to his instructive study (cf. Belknap 2004: 207 ff.). Although Belknap primarily analyses American works by Emerson, Whitman, Melville and Thoreau, the lists in the appendix are mainly from English literature.

<sup>18</sup>For the topic of empiricism, cf. also Easthope (1999), A. Nünning (2000) and chapter 1.3. Christine Berberich has also pointed out that lists are highly selective and subjective (cf. Berberich 2009b: 392).

<sup>19</sup>One of McLeod’s observations needs to be quoted in lengths since it pointedly sums up several aspects that are essential for the rebranding and rewriting of English identity around the millennium:

In referring to particular scenes and received representations, conjuring again vistas located in another time, revisions provoke the familiarity of a tradition while inevitably

The workings of these ‘revisions’ can be read as a paraphrasing of the categories and functions of literature introduced in theories of cultural ecology, which can also be applied to narratives constructing national identity. Contemporary novels dealing with Englishness draw on cultural-narratological strategies corresponding to three discursive procedures introduced in cultural ecology, which, according to Hubert Zapf, only literature is capable of.<sup>20</sup> First, narratives can represent the system as a ‘cultural-critical meta-discourse’ by highlighting deficiencies in political or ideological systems, which are often depicted through self-alienation against a nightmare-like superiority in a distancing representation. This way of negotiating deficiencies in systems, I would argue, shares cultural and didactic functions with the genre of satire or – as the idea of ‘nightmare-like superiorities’ implies – of the functions of dystopian writing. As a second possibility, Zapf introduces the ‘imaginative counter-discourse’. It is taken to mean that the narrative confronts the political or ideological systems with the repressed, neglected or marginalised, thus aiming to bring the neglected to the surface of cultural consciousness. Aesthetics as an alienation of reality functions to react to the stabilisation of cultural self-images and world-views. These are achieved through a means of polyphony, pluralisation and the deconstruction of fixed self-images and world-views. Such counter-discourses evoke notions of postcolonial writing in the discourse of negotiating identities. The third function corresponding to Zapf’s theory is the ‘reintegrative inter-discourse’, which reintegrates the repressed into the system of cultural discourses. Through this means, literature serves the purpose to redefine and renew cultural creativity. This idea, however, is not to be mistaken as a superficial harmonisation but rather as a way of easing tensions by merging or consolidating cultural diversity.

These three possible functions of literature can help to understand the effects and the influence novels around the millennium had on rebranding processes of national identity. According to Zapf, the three effects can interact to confront culture with its inherent

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participating in it. They possess the potential to confront the pedagogical protocols of received wisdom with the performative interference of the present. Acts of revision may function to unsettle received representations and the values which have become attached to them. Revisions can chart and effect historical change; they take the measure of the present by confronting the extent to which it no longer conforms to familiar patterns. For some they open a strategy for dissent and subversion; for others (such as diasporic peoples or those descended from immigrants) they are a way of claiming critically as their legitimate property a tradition of national cultural authority. But if revisions can involve the questioning of received representations for the purposes of dissent and change, they do not constitute a demolition of tradition. Revision is not the same as ruin; it is not concerned with fully dismantling, dispatching or discarding Englishness by unravelling the political subtexts which underwrite its representations. (McLeod 2004a: 9)

<sup>20</sup>Cf. hereafter, throughout this paragraph Zapf (2001: 93, 2002: 63 ff. & 2008: 32 ff.).



paradoxes and dishonoured claims (cf. Zapf 2002: 67), which also presents a central means of literature partaking in rebranding processes. Although Zapf applies his theories to readings of American novels and ecology, his approaches can also be made fruitful for narratives dealing with Englishness since literature does not merely reflect identity concepts but actively challenges them. Additionally, literature functions as a symbolic medium to repeatedly inscribe the inexplicable into the cultural awareness and memory (cf. *ibid.*). In order to do this, literature must “continually renew not only the cultural categories that are its material, but also its own repertoire of symbolic forms and aesthetic procedures” (Zapf 2001: 94). This supports the cyclical structure underlying the dynamics of premediation, configuration and remediation that help form and reform national identity through repetition. Analysing the cultural-ecological discourses in contemporary English fiction can thus also shed light on the literary functions of representing, constructing or deconstructing conceptions of Englishness.

### **2.3.2 Constructing Identities: Characterisation and Perspectivation**

Since narratives and the construction of personal identity are closely interlinked, the ways in which literary characters are constructed and identity is mediated are essential aspects for analysing novels that negotiate Englishness. The following questions can help us to approach these aspects: first, how do individual characters express or symbolise identity constructions that represent collective identities? To what extent is characterisation a strategy to disseminate or contest certain national self-images? What role do aspects like the narrator, focalisation and perspectivation play in the construction of national identity? A stock of fictional characters that are regarded as typically English and can – in a more radical form – appear to be allegorical, contribute fundamentally to the cultural repertoire. As Patrick Parrinder points out, many of these characters are narrative inventions, such as John Bull or Robinson Crusoe (cf. Parrinder 2006a: 92). They can provide a foil for characters or types in novels while they can also be deployed in a subtle way. Depicting characters mimetically, in fact, contributes to achieving a strong effect of reality and is thereby likely to encourage identification for the reader. By presenting national self-images or stereotypes, versions of Englishness can thus be negotiated through the characterisation of fictional characters.

The narrative situation of a novel can be an indicator of the making of personal or collective identities. Birgit Neumann argues with reference to memory construction that personal memory is frequently presented by homodiegetic narrators while collective identity tends to be presented through multiple perspectives (cf. Neumann 2005: 165 f.). Accordingly, one could also assume that autodiegetic and homodiegetic narrators embody

certain values, character traits and images which are influenced by collectively shared norms and national identification. Regarding the transmission of individual memory through an autodiegetic narrator, one can distinguish between a ‘remembered I’ and a ‘remembering I’ (cf. *ibid.*) in line with the established distinction between the ‘experiencing I’ and the ‘narrating I’, which often coincides with a temporal difference of present and past (cf. Neumann & Nünning 2008b: 13). In these processes, retrospective meaning-making plays a significant role, i. e. the story becomes highly constructed through the temporal distance between the act of experiencing and narrating (cf. Neumann 2005: 166 f.). To give an example, the narrator in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* (1989) is a case in point. The novel can be seen as a paradigmatic example of fictional representations of Englishness, though it predates the rebranding of the late 1990s. The narrative situation in *The Remains of the Day* is characterised by an autodiegetic narrator – a butler – who recalls events of the past. This example of a fiction of memory undermines the temporal distance between the ‘remembering I’ as a contrast to the ‘narrating I’. What is more, the character is influenced by collectively shared values especially in regard to the way a butler should behave.

As for the negotiation of national identity, autodiegetic and homodiegetic narrators can function to stage fictional characters as lifelike individuals. These characters provide a sound basis for possible identification, which also includes identification on a national and collective level. Such individuals provide a foil against which available schemata may be tested for their current power and validity. Heterodiegetic narrators, in contrast, might rather serve to comment critically on processes of constructing national identities from a distanced point of view. Multiperspectivity opens the possibility of presenting a heterogeneity of voices that express different opinions and can be in conflict with each other. In other words, multiperspectival narration has the capacity to orchestrate a multitude of norms or discourses and to highlight prevailing values in a pluralistic society (cf. V. Nünning & Nünning 2000: 4, 29), thereby initiating dialogues in reality (cf. Fluck 1997: 258). An example of an earlier novel that deals with Englishness and represents events through different perspectives is Graham Swift’s *Last Orders* (1996). Each chapter of the novel is narrated by a different autodiegetic narrator and thus provides more than one perspective on the past and present incidents in the story as well as on the creation of individual identities.

The question of different perspectives can be addressed by analysing the underlying focalisation in literary texts. Genette’s concept of focalisation sheds light on who *perceives* in narratives (cf. Jahn 2008 [2005]: 173). Internal focalisers, and especially those limited to the perspective of only one character as in the case of fixed focalisation, rather serve

to stage individual perspectives. In contrast, heterodiegetic, overt narrators can function as commentators of global questions by openly discussing questions of identity. Variable and multiple focalisation,<sup>21</sup> in turn, can contribute to balancing different individual perspectives with the result that one-sided identity constructions can be contested and subverted through different points of view. These aspects can also be traced in analysing the perspective structure, i. e. the relation of individual perspectives, which can be competing and therein promote a negotiation of different prevailing identity concepts. What is more, the use of a heterodiegetic narrator together with multiple focalisation allows for the construction of moments of dramatic irony, which means that the reader knows more about the narrated circumstance than certain characters. Representing different perspectives can additionally have the function to evoke either sympathy or antipathy for certain characters (cf. V. Nünning 2002). If the characters that are represented either positively or negatively are associated with certain opinions about national identity, they can either provoke a feeling of identification with or a distancing from these conceptions in the reader. Consequently, novels dealing with Englishness do not simply fictitiously reflect concepts of identity constructions but rather bring them to life through mimetically represented characters that personify and consider these constructions as offers for identification. Thereby, literary texts are able to test the potential of existing versions of Englishness for their validity and power in reality, and influence the way characters as well as their opinions are perceived by the readers.

### 2.3.3 Mapping England: Narrative Constructions of Space

As the prominent example of Blake's "Jerusalem" demonstrated, literary-spatial representations have fundamentally contributed to the way in which Englishness has been imagined. Rural landscapes, rolling hills and green scenery are iconic images of what is held to be typically English and become repeated on the level of content to create meaning in literary and artistic works. Spatial images of Englishness have been remediated in different media, not exclusively in literature. Roy Strong has recently pointed out that apart from literature, art, music, cartography and gardening have taken a share in shaping the image of the English countryside as Arcadia (cf. Strong 2011). This assumption can be supported by an observation about the relation between space and identity by Robert Burden, who argues in his introduction to the collection *Landscape and Englishness*: "Symbolic landscapes and places have specific cultural meanings that construct, maintain

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<sup>21</sup>Multiple focalisation is a special form of variable focalisation. While variable focalisation means that the story is presented from different characters' points of view, multiple focalisation even presents the same incidents from different perspectives (cf. Neumann & Nünning 2008a: 96).

and circulate myths of a unified national identity, or whose visible ironies deconstruct those myths as we ‘think of England’” (Burden 2006: 14). Even more so, David Matless observes in his monograph with the same title as Burden’s collection that English space can be regarded “as a site of economic, social, political and aesthetic value” (Matless 1998: 12), also incorporating temporality through narratives of the past (cf. *ibid.*: 13) as a premediated space.<sup>22</sup> Although these ideas might in part originate in different art forms and other media, literature has still played a major role in perpetuating all these manifestations in an aesthetical, narrative form.

In fact, the image of rural England as ‘the green and pleasant land’ figured prominently in the literature of the last century and still persists today. This image of a typically English landscape, however, is frequently seen to be restricted to southern rural areas.<sup>23</sup> Apparently, the North has largely been written out of narratives that construct Englishness, especially in the first half of the twentieth century. What is more, narratives concentrated on the rural space of the southern countries, so that even London played a subordinate role (cf. Kumar 2003: 211). However, this arguably changed towards the end of the century, especially with postcolonial writings that started to semanticise urban space, and specifically London, as the metropolitan centre. After all, an understanding of the dichotomy of rural and urban areas, which can be seen as a legacy of Raymond Williams’ seminal study (1973), has persistently influenced literary constructions and ideas of English space until today.

In contemporary discourses on Englishness, London has apparently gained a special status in recent years. Iain Sinclair metaphorically compares London’s urban confines through the M25 to a “conceptual ha-ha” (Sinclair 2002: 3), and John McLeod notes in short: “City and nation are set at odds” (McLeod 2004b: 19). In his study about postcolonial London, McLeod pointedly elaborates on the developments for the discourse of space: “[...] London’s transcultural facticity has made possible new communities and forms of culture indebted to its history of ‘peopling’ which, in turn, come to pose a considerable challenge to the pastoral articulation of English national culture as representative” (*ibid.*: 18). McLeod further pays attention to the ways in which this challenge might work:

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<sup>22</sup>In comparison to Matless’ study *Landscape and Englishness* (1998) from the perspective of historical geography, Burden and Kohl’s collection with the same title assembles voices in the area of literary and cultural studies (cf. Burden 2006: 25). Robert Burden even goes so far to state: “Landscape [...] is synonymous with Englishness” (*ibid.*: 23).

<sup>23</sup>Several researchers have noted that the North is usually ignored in the images of the English countryside (cf. Marr 2000: 122) since it used to represent the industrialised space which is taken to be the counterpart to the endangered pastoral space. Simon Featherstone has pointed out that although ‘typical’ Englishness is represented by southern England, “Northerness is, of course, as much an imagined identity as an Englishness constructed from the metropolitan and rural resources of the South [...]” (Featherstone 2009: 84).

If a certain version of English national culture legislates against [...] a more pluralistic concept of national identity emerging, representations of postcolonial London perhaps offer the means of challenging its exclusive and undemocratic characteristics and opening up exclusionary national categories through an attention to the social and cultural possibilities of transcultural exchange. (ibid.)

McLeod pointedly describes the redefinition of space in the context of the rebranding of Englishness, although one might add that it is not so much about a 'pluralistic' concept but an increasingly hybrid one. Obviously, there has been a shift from the countryside representing traditional notions of Englishness to the city as the creative centre in recent literary works. Angela Locatelli shows how persistent ideals of the 'rural' were already challenged at the beginning of the twentieth century by Virginia Woolf (cf. Locatelli 2004). The rebranding and rewriting around the millennium also continues this line of thought. London is rather represented as a transnational, ethnically hybrid space that is rich in cultural potential and creative productivity. Although contemporary postcolonial novels still refer to topoi of the 'green and pleasant land' to situate the discourse as a national narrative, they live through the redefinition and renegotiation of national identity in London.

Several narratological approaches to narrative and space can also be made productive for analysing contemporary literary constructions of Englishness. To begin with, Marie-Laure Ryan notes: "An important aspect of the cognitive mapping of narrative texts is the attribution of symbolic meaning to the various regions and landmarks of the narrative world" (Ryan 2009: 428). English novels that describe regions and landmarks fictitiously thereby create a high degree of symbolic meaning. If authors situate their narratives in a certain setting – be it in the southern countries in Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* or in the former industrialised working-class district Bermondsey in South East London in Swift's *Last Orders* – it is apparent that space is semanticised and that the setting is not only referred to as a premediated topos but that the novels actively trigger certain associations with English national identity. Moreover, detailed descriptions of space are a functional feature of realist novels (cf. Buchholz & Jahn 2008 [2005]: 554) that help us to situate mimetically represented characters in a realistic surrounding. Yet, postmodern narratives also employ space self-consciously if not self-reflexively as a dimension to convey meaning.

In traditional images associated with Englishness, the countryside is often considered an idyll or a pastoral *locus amoenus*, which almost gives it the status of a utopian space. However, the perception of the 'green and pleasant land' is rather located at the margin of imagined or utopian, and real space, which raises the question to what extent typical

English spaces can be described as heterotopias in the Foucauldian sense according to the philosopher's definition:

There are also, probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places – places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society – which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. (Foucault 1986 [1984]: 24)

These ideas hold true for English space in so far as the rural landscape forms an imaginative counter-site to urban and industrialised areas, and thus displays the qualities of a utopian space while still being real. Against this backdrop, it can be argued that English topoi, such as the rural landscape as an abstract concept including e.g. the country house and the garden as significant icons, but also newly emerging topoi like Brick Lane, can be seen as sites that are characterised by having both real and imagined qualities. Although these places really do exist, they have a highly idealised, utopian dimension and are inscribed in the English collective memory as powerful cultural premediations. Foucault describes heterotopias as culturally specific (cf. Foucault 1986 [1984]: 24), and although many heterotopias like gardens, hospitals, ships or brothels can be found in most modern societies, spaces defined as quintessentially English are part of the way national imagination conceives of Englishness, also in contrast to Britain as a whole.

The question of real and imagined dimensions of space and literary-spatial representations seems crucial for the understanding of Englishness. In literature, the narrative world or story world presents the space as it unfolds in the reader's imagination, which can be both real and imagined (cf. Ryan 2009: 422). In his approach in the field of geography and urban planning, Edward Soja has described the differences between the real space as it can be geographically located, and the represented or imagined space as it is created e.g. in literature (cf. Soja 1996: 10, 64). Soja promotes his idea based on Homi Bhabha's 'Third Space' to merge these spaces into 'real-and-imagined' ones in the dimension which he calls 'Thirdspace' (cf. *ibid.*: 11). Soja defines the concept of innovative 'thirthing':

*Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history. (*ibid.*: 56 f.)

Topoi of Englishness, both in rural and in urban space, can consequently be perceived as real-and-imagined spaces since they exist but are to a high degree imagined and narratively constructed. However, since their iconisation and topicalisation has demonstrably been highly productive and influential, they have to a certain extent also become real themselves. As this ‘thirding’ can be used to describe the dynamics involved in constructing Englishness, it shall also be traced further in the following subchapter, which aims to sum up the theoretical framework that presents the basis for analysing the novels.

## **2.4 Real and Imagined: Analysing the Rebranding and Rewriting of National Identity**

The contrast between the real and the imagined is a topic that has been brought up in theories about space as well as other fields and provides an interesting point of departure for outlining my theoretical framework. Corresponding to this line of thought, Wolfgang Müller-Funk has observed with regard to narratives that ‘imagined’ phenomena appear especially real if they are contextualised in the dimensions of history, culture and nation (cf. Müller-Funk 2008: 14). Both individual and cultural or collective identity are constructed through images, and literature can create reality through imagined constructions. These images, in turn, become remediated and thus disseminated by narratives and influence the awareness of individuals in a nation. This can happen if novels are commodified, when they reach a broad spectrum of readers and are highly regarded. In contrast, when books create controversies or even scandals, it becomes especially clear that fiction can have an impact on reality and thus influence self-images and conceptions of national identity. Nevertheless, through what means and strategies can narratives take part in this process, and how can these strategies be analysed in novels?

As this chapter aimed to show, there are a number of key concepts and narrative strategies that support my approach to analysing how literature helps to configure and remediate versions of Englishness. On the level of the emplotment, the recourse to or negation of certain genres or genre conventions can help to challenge prevailing identity conceptions. Through these means, premediated modes of emplotment may be re-used in new configurations, thereby creating meaning through their aesthetic forms. To give an example of an earlier narrative that negotiates traditional images of Englishness, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* bears similarities to travel literature, which was highly popular in the mid-twentieth century, i. e. the time in which the novel is set. Although drawing on a traditional genre in which Englishness was often represented, the novel is characterised by features that subversively undermine traditional conventions:

for instance, the story is narrated by a butler, which is why it might be classified as an ‘imaginative counter-discourse’ in the sense of a ‘history from below’ (E. P. Thompson 1963). The reader learns how decisions about the Second World War are made by influential political representatives in a feudal country house through the butler’s rather naive perspective. In addition, his master allows the butler to take some days off to motor through the countryside by car, which used to be a privilege of the upper class, and the reader learns about these events through the butler’s eyes. The innovative formal representation of *The Remains of the Day* exemplifies how forms, genres, modes of emplotment, focalisation and perspectivation can be deployed strategically to convey meaning and to challenge fixed conventions.

On the level of content, the ‘cultural storehouse’ provides premediated schemata that create both meaning and recognition. Their power lies in their status as national narratives, which are deeply rooted in the nation’s collective memory and thus tied to national identity. This includes prevailing self-images, mini-narratives, icons and topoi that have accumulated as a repertoire of plots and schemata through constant repetition. To exemplify these assumptions with the help of *The Remains of the Day*, the novel refers not only to events connected to the Second World War as inscribed in cultural memory. It also creates a storyworld featuring the iconic country house, and plays with the iconic figure of the English gentleman.<sup>24</sup> In addition, it rewrites narratives of travelling through an unspoiled English countryside with small picturesque villages, which can be seen as both utopian and real topoi of Englishness. By drawing on these strong premediations of a traditional version of Englishness, the novel situates itself in the cultural context of this English tradition. What is more, it remediates these plots and itself becomes part of the ‘cultural storehouse’ as a narrative that plays with the real-and-imagined countryside tradition. Through this very repetition, the literary discourse on Englishness is contested, but at the same time stabilised.

Consequently, novels represent, orchestrate and disseminate real-and-imagined aspects of Englishness. They form part of the processes of discursive constructions of Englishness and contribute to the perception of what is represented and how it is represented. Since literature can be seen as a medium that reacts more slowly to changes in society compared to several other (new) media, it significantly contributes to the reflective and influential developments in line with the processuality – as opposed to eventfulness – inherent to the forming and reforming of national identity. Literature thus does not merely reflect or

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<sup>24</sup>Cf. Berberich (2007: 21, 135) and Elsa Cavalié’s article (2009). Christine Berberich’s monograph (2007) on the gentleman and nostalgic Englishness provides an excellent analysis of this icon.



revise reality, but it also fictitiously depicts what we can understand as real-and-imagined icons and topoi of Englishness.

Since the three selected novels that will be analysed in the following three chapters differ greatly in their form and content, the analytical categories introduced so far will not have the same relevance for each novel, which is why the analyses will differ in their foci and employment of the analytical categories. This also holds true for the saliency or density of negotiations of national identity. The differences in the ways in which the novels deal with concepts of Englishness thus also determine the different analytical tools used in each case.



### 3 The Middle Class and Their Englishness: Nick Hornby's *How to be Good*

Think of what our Nation stands for,  
Books from Boots' and country lanes,  
Free speech, free passes, class distinction,  
Democracy and proper drains.

(John Betjeman, 1940)

It is the middle class which stands for England [...].

(C. F. G. Masterman, 1909)

As the epigraphs exemplify, the class system has for a long time been regarded as a traditional and largely indispensable organising feature of British society.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, the idea apparently persisted that the middle class were the typical representatives of Englishness. As the first quote by John Betjeman demonstrates again, listing proves popular as the form to express what is taken to be quintessentially English. Although the class system, especially in regard to the middle class, became increasingly permeable and open towards the end of the last century, the image of the middle class personifying Englishness still seems to be valid. It is not surprising, then, that British novelists have taken up the issue of classes and class distinction, primarily as a means of characterising figures in their narratives. Contemporary novels tend to challenge the self-images of representative middle-class characters. The stereotypes frequently incorporate values of liberalism, which are closely related to the ideology pursued by New Labour politics and supported by newspapers such as *The Guardian*.<sup>2</sup> At first glance, New Labour's political programme did not seem to provide writers with such an obvious target for criticism when compared to the course pursued by the Tory government – and

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<sup>1</sup>From Betjeman's poem "In Westminster Abbey" first published in *Old Lights for New Chancels* (1940), quoted in Leger 2006: 15, and from Masterman's *The Condition of England* (1909), quoted in Marzola (2001 [1999]: 345 ff.).

<sup>2</sup>For an interesting overview of which British newspapers have supported which parties in UK general elections since 1945, cf. the graphics in Stoddard (2010).

specifically by Margaret Thatcher (cf. T. M. Stein 2003: 193). However, it turned out that authors still found ways to challenge New Labour's optimistic course in their fiction (cf. *ibid.*).

One literary example of a critical approach towards middle-class Englishness is Nick Hornby's novel *How to be Good* (2001), which puts the left, liberal values and the self-images of the characters to the test. As Thomas Michael Stein (2003) demonstrates, the novel can also be read as a deconstruction of some of the ideas introduced by Tony Blair in his vision of "The Third Way". Apart from Stein's analysis, the novel has hardly been considered by literary scholars. However, reading the fictitious account as a rewriting of Englishness at the turn of the millennium is in fact an endeavour that can shed new light on the matter. The aim of this chapter is consequently to find out in what ways, i. e. through which narrative strategies and references to extra-literary issues middle-class Englishness is challenged in *How to be Good*. After contextualising the novel and briefly summing up the plot, the focus will lie on how genre conventions of the popular novel help to create a strong link to an extra-literary, cultural background. Popular literature as opposed to 'highbrow literature' often tends to be ignored by literary studies but, as I aim to show in 3.1, can provide valuable insights when considering a cultural phenomenon like the rebranding and rewriting of Englishness.

The second subchapter 3.2 then aims to investigate how the self-images of the middle class are fictionalised in *How to be Good* from the protagonist's point of view, and how the narrative situation affects the representation of individual and collective self-images. This analysis will first concentrate on the characterisation of the protagonist and focaliser, and then on her antipode within the figural structure. 3.3 zooms in on the spatial representations in the novel. In that context, the setting of the novel in North London is not a coincidental choice but used to create meaning and to map collective identities. The aim of 3.4 is to point out how political notions and ideologies of the time around the millennium can be traced along the issues of justice, community and education. This also includes confrontations of the middle-class characters with representatives of the working class, while tackling the questions of gentrification and its consequences for feelings of community. Taking Thomas Michael Stein's study as a point of departure, 3.4 provides a reading of how New Labour's visions as presented in selected political speeches surface according to these topics and how the novel challenges these ideas.

Nick Hornby's fiction has been classified as a paradigm of popular literature, also beyond the borders of Britain. Among his novels, *High Fidelity* (1995) has so far been given most attention in literary research. According to Jens Gurr, it was this earlier book which decisively contributed to the incorporation of popular culture into literature

(cf. Gurr 2007: 185). In comparison to Hornby's previous writings, *How to be Good* has been acknowledged as his first more 'serious' novel, which is also highlighted by the fact that it was long-listed for the coveted Booker Prize (cf. V. Nünning 2003a: 32). Several studies on Hornby's writing engage with the issue of genre and question to what extent his novels can be classified as 'popular novels'.<sup>3</sup> A close relation between Hornby's narratives and popular culture certainly exists, since themes such as football, TV and pop music are frequently taken up. Such references mainly function as a means of organising and structuring the lives of the protagonists. However, they might also have further potential for a cultural reading of narratives that negotiate national identity. As the following chapters aim to show, popular novels can create an illuminating resource for an engagement with contemporary perceptions of Englishness, since the concept is closely related to the prevailing *zeitgeist* and popular culture at the time of the millennium. This argumentation goes in line with what John Fiske noted in his definition of popular culture: "Culture is ordinary, and the ordinary is highly significant" (Fiske 1995 [1990]: 335).

Apart from its close relation to contemporary popular culture, there are several recurrent features that are typical of several of Hornby's novels and which also surface in *How to be Good*. The depiction of middle-class representatives frequently appears in the author's writings, and this has also contributed to the image of Hornby as a middle-class writer.<sup>4</sup> Typical features also include the North London setting as well as the depiction of cynical males in their mid-thirties who have difficulties finding their place in private and social relationships.<sup>5</sup> Although several of these notions recur in *How to be Good*, the novel has been regarded as a first exception to the rule when compared to Hornby's previous writings, since the protagonist and focaliser is not a male character, but a woman in her mid-forties who is confronted with the miraculous transformation of her cynical husband.

As a brief summary, the story of *How to be Good* sets out with a suspenseful conflict: the protagonist and autodiegetic narrator Katie Carr explains how she has just proposed divorce to her husband David Grant on the mobile phone after having started an affair with a man called Stephen. Through Katie as the focaliser the reader learns more about her recent marital activities, which mainly consisted of ongoing verbal warfare. Whereas

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. articles such as those by Göran Nieragden (2000), Vera Nünning (2003a) and Jens Gurr (2007).

<sup>4</sup>In her biographical note on Hornby, Merritt Moseley e.g. points out that the writer comes from a middle-class background. His father is the businessman Sir Derek Hornby (cf. Moseley 1999: 145).

<sup>5</sup>The aspect of cynicism in characters could be evaluated as a tendency in contemporary British literature, as Göran Nieragden (2000) has pointed out analysing novels by Christopher Brookmyer, Irvine Welsh and Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*. This trend towards cynicism can also be traced in *How to be Good*, especially in the character of David before his miraculous change. In fact, cynicism is a motif and an important aspect for constructing characters throughout the novel.

David is a cynical newspaper columnist writing under the pseudonym of “The Angriest Man in Holloway” (*HTBG* 4), Katie is a doctor, working as “a GP in a small North London practice” (6) and considers herself to be a good person.<sup>6</sup> The couple is described as living in a house in the North London district of Holloway with their children Molly and Tom. Although the mentioned street names in the urban area are fictitious, there are references to the existing districts that permit the setting to be mapped.

In the course of the narration, there is a turning point in the story that influences the subsequent events: David consults a miracle healer called DJ GoodNews, who relieves him not only of his chronic back-ache, but also of his cynicism. As a consequence, David miraculously becomes a thoroughly good benefactor and plans charitable deeds together with GoodNews, who moves in with the family. A result of this miraculous conversion in his character is, for instance, that David gives his children’s computer and toys to a home, and together with GoodNews convinces his neighbours to take in homeless teenagers to their spare bedrooms. With his sudden and dramatic change, the interpersonal order between Katie and David is put off balance and the status of being ‘good’, which Katie had assigned to herself, is endangered by her husband’s new state of mind. However, even David and GoodNews eventually need to accept that these charitable, almost utopian values cannot be achieved. Their project to promote their ideology in a book, which is self-reflexively called *How to be Good*, fails – just like their endeavours to apologise to people they feel guilty about because they had been bad to them in the past. At the end of the narrative, David does not reconvert to cynicism but embraces normality whereas Katie decides not to get divorced but to live a family life, despite not being entirely convinced or happy about it.

### 3.1 Rewriting the *Zeitgeist*: Englishness in Popular Literature

Genre conventions and the narrative emplotment are aspects that need to be addressed when investigating the ways in which *How to be Good* negotiates Englishness. Literary studies dealing with Hornby’s novels have considered in particular the issue of their classification as popular literature. In an interview, the author explains why he situates his narratives and characters in the context of popular culture:

I use popular culture to place people. There’s an absence of all the old class nuances that we used to have when we looked at people; popular culture

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<sup>6</sup>Hereinafter in chapter 3, quotations with page numbers only refer to the novel *How to be Good*. If in doubt (e. g. after citations from other sources), the novel’s title will be abbreviated as *HTBG*.

is a better way of doing it now. You can work at where somebody is from, what they watch and read and listen to. (B. Lane 2001: n. pag.)

Although Hornby apparently distances himself from characterising people through class distinctions, it is still an obvious and important feature that can be traced in *How to be Good*. What is interesting here is that the author claims to use references to popular culture as a means of characterisation. The result of using such references is that the novels are classified as popular literature, while the characterisation, one could argue, opens possibilities of negotiating persistent versions of self-images, both on a personal and a collective level. It is for these reasons that engaging with *How to be Good* also provides enlightening results when read in the context of the rebranding and rewriting of Englishness around the millennium.

The formal features then are pivotal for the analysis of how the novel rewrites the special *zeitgeist* marked by a change in English national identity. As for the genre classification of popular literature, Hornby's earlier novel *High Fidelity* was classified by Moritz Baßler as a prototype, if not the "mother of the 1990s popular novel" (Baßler 2002: 50, my translation). According to Baßler, popular novels archive "contemporary culture in a straightforward positivistic manner" (ibid.: 184, my translation), e. g. by cataloguing and listing brand names or dealing with popular interests such as football, TV or pop-music (cf. ibid.: 186). These genetic feature can also be found in *How to be Good* which justifies its classification as a predominantly popular novel.

Only in recent years has the potential of popular literature found more appreciation among scholars of literary and cultural studies.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it has been pointed out that popular literature can transmit an understanding of national identity and shared values (cf. Erll & Nünning 2006: 24), which can also justify the engagement with popular writing in the discourse of rebranding Englishness. As is the case with 'highbrow literature', popular literature can also be seen as an important medium for constituting and fostering collective memory (cf. Erll 2005b: 249). Considering *How to be Good* as an example of popular writing to find out how Englishness has been challenged in contemporary narratives thus presents a worthwhile starting point.

However, in comparison to other novels by Hornby, *How to be Good* also differs in certain respects from the features that are characteristic of popular literature, so that simply subsuming it under the label of popular literature might be too general. Vera

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Neumann (2005: 170). As an example, Ina Habermann (2010) recently analysed 'middlebrow' literature in her study of Englishness in the mid-nineteenth century. Similar to popular writing, this 'middlebrow' literature has been regarded in contrast to 'highbrow' literature. Habermann also points out that middlebrow literature has the potential to remediate cultural plots, and that even current literary configurations rely on these earlier literary narratives that are not part of the literary canon.

Nünning suggests that Hornby's novels follow a specifically British literary tradition and that they are closer to English classics than to German popular literature as it was defined by Moritz Baßler (cf. V. Nünning 2003a: 33). For instance, Hornby largely abandons postmodern techniques such as the blending of different time strands or the deployment of meta-fiction or hybridity (cf. *ibid.*: 48). Furthermore, his novels are at times even reminiscent of modernist writing since the perspectives of the focalisers dominate the representation together with a mediation through free indirect speech (cf. *ibid.*). These observations are also true of *How to be Good*. In fact, it is remarkable that the narrative concentrates more on the development of the plot than on aestheticising the formal features. It even includes lengthy passages of direct speech, which is reminiscent of dramatic genres or film scripts. An example is the passage in which a telephone call between Katie and David is represented as a retrospective account from Katie's perspective:

Me: 'Hiya.'  
Him: 'Hello. How's it going?'  
Me: 'Yeah, fine. Kids all right?'  
Him: 'Yeah. Molly's here watching TV, Tom's round at Jamie's.'  
Me: 'I just phoned to say that you've got to write a note for Molly to take in to school tomorrow. About the dentist's.' (*HTBG 2*)

Although the dialogue is narrated from Katie's point of view, the narrating dimension retreats and the content is represented as if it were a drama or film script, using colloquial expressions and language. As this example demonstrates, *How to be Good* tends to concentrate on the plot and dialogues in favour of an elaborate emplotment and displays intermedial features reminiscent of a film script.

The high degree of immediacy also supports the assumption that *How to be Good* bears resemblance to realist fiction. Through the predominant deployment of free indirect speech and personal reflections of the focaliser, a high degree of transparency in the mediation process is achieved. The emplotment links the narrative to traditional realist fiction, which is "associated with middle- or lower-class life, in which the problems of ordinary people [...] are rendered with close attention to [...] the complexities of social life" ("Realism" 2008a: n. pag.). This emplotment thus also refers to a premediated scheme in a specifically English context (cf. chapter 2.3.1). However, the transparency at some points recedes in favour of self-reflexive observations that draw the reader's attention to the mediation of the narrative. This applies for instance to a scene that depicts the end of Katie's affair with Stephen:



And he does [go], and I never see him again. (Oh, but I think of him, of course I do. He's not really part of this story anymore [...]. So even though you will not hear much about him again, do not make the mistake of thinking that it is as if he never was.)" (92)

Reflections of the like are frequently represented in brackets to imply that they are retrospective or prospective observations and thereby self-reflexively hint at the very process of story-telling. As the quote also demonstrates, the autodiegetic narrator Katie at times directly addresses the reader, which creates a high degree of personal sympathy for the protagonist. This, in turn, supports the strategy of sympathising with the self-images and identificational foils represented by the protagonist.

In fact, the novel mixes different generic features and modes. *How to be Good* underscores Jens Gurr's observation that the distinction between the prevailing poles of light or popular fiction as opposed to highbrow literature have become increasingly blurred in contemporary fiction (cf. Gurr 2007: 181). *How to be Good* is characterised by elements of comedy or satire since it is rich in comical episodes and humorous descriptions. In an interview, Hornby has stated that "[c]omedy is [...] often seen as a barrier to novels being regarded as 'serious' and literary, yet the tradition of the realist novel allows for evoking laughter as well as profundity [...]" (Knowles 2002: 13).<sup>8</sup> Although the humour again creates a link to popular literature, the ironic tone and the implications of satire and cynicism are at the same time a characteristic tendency anchored in the English literary tradition. The generic features thus refer to premediated literary forms and situate the novel in narratives forming part of the discourse of Englishness.

Although Hornby himself regards his novels as examples of the genre of 'domestic fiction', which is traditionally labelled as 'women's writing' (cf. Knowles 2002: 14), the classification might apply to *How to be Good* only in so far as the novel has an inherent female perspective and has its dominant setting in the domestic environment of a family home. The development of and the relationship between the characters underlines the possibility of classifying the novel as a *bildungsroman* – a genre that is

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<sup>8</sup>The aspect of seriousness in *How to be Good* has mainly been emphasised due to the novel's bleak and unhappy ending. Hornby himself has accordingly critically stated in an interview: "To me, people have focussed more on the moral dilemmas than I'd intended; the book ends with a bleak image of family life, and yet the one or two reviews I have allowed myself to read acted as though the book ended when Katie rediscovered culture, as if the book had a comforting ending. It doesn't" (Martin 2002: n. pag.). Hornby himself assumes the negative, yet open ending to be one of the reasons why the book has been perceived by literary critics as being more serious than his other novels: "Hornby says that of all his books *How to be Good* was the most praised by critics. 'I had a lot of feedback from proper literary people that that was a proper literary book. Probably because it ended miserably'" (Hattenstone 2005: n. pag.). Hornby's statement is provocative since obviously a miserable or open ending does not necessarily make a novel serious.

traditionally presented in realist mode. As Alexander Weber has pointed out, Hornby's novels present features of this genre in that the continuation of the story frequently recedes in favour of character representations and humorous dialogues (cf. Weber 2002: 281). This said, another new tendency appears in Hornby's writing: even though the mode of traditional realism dominates, traces of magical or supernatural elements surface in *How to be Good*, which has been a continuing tendency in Hornby's recent prose writing.<sup>9</sup> Beginning with David's miraculous transformation caused by GoodNews's 'superpowers' that are supposed to have resulted from taking drugs (cf. *HTBG* 108), the aspect of the supernatural is introduced and influences the generic classification.

An interesting aspect that closely links the generic features of popular literature with typical representations of Englishness is the deployment of lists. Enumerations and listing, which often have an archiving function, can also be found repeatedly in *How to be Good*, which thereby relates the novel to the genre of popular literature as it has been defined by Moritz Baßler (cf. Baßler 2002: 186). Since listing presents a productive form for the representation of Englishness and also a characteristic feature of the popular novel, it is worth to look at this stylistic element in more detail.

Listing in *How to be Good* can have two major effects on the textual level: on the one hand, lists can function to take stock and to archive, and, on the other, they present a means of structuring for the lives of the characters and constructing their identities. As for the role that lists play for taking stock, the strategy comes into play when David and GoodNews have listed their neighbours to find out how many spare bedrooms are available in their street (*HTBG* 111 f.). Later, after the party at which David encouraged his neighbours to take in homeless teenagers, Katie, as the narrative reflector, takes stock: the neighbours who accept a teenager into their homes are listed as the "Famous Five" (148). This description can itself be seen as a reference to English cultural plots and as a humorous allusion to canonised intertexts such as the popular children's adventure book series *The Famous Five* by Enid Blyton. Moreover, the expression is reminiscent of pop music charts, a sports hall of fame and evokes plots like the 'Famous four', as The Beatles were known, which present specifically popular cultural premediations. What is

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<sup>9</sup>This trend can be observed since the publication of *How to be Good*: in the short story *Otherwise Pandemonium* (2005), an American teenager discovers that the video recorder he bought in a second hand shop is not only able to play and record videos, but it also allows him to forward the tape he has recorded into the future until he witnesses an apocalyptic scenario of the world's end. Regarding *Otherwise Pandemonium* retrospectively, the short story could be evaluated as an experimental basis and forerunner for Hornby's follow-up novel *Slam* (2007). *Slam* is also narrated from the point of view of a teenager called Sam Jones who experiences strange flash-forwards that allow him to see his own, somewhat disturbing, future as a teenage father. Both examples demonstrate how magical elements into the overall realistic writing become included into Hornby's narratives between 2001 and 2007.

more, the list is introduced to be “for the record” (149), which highlights the function of archiving. Consequently, lists have a twofold reference to the relatively new genre of popular literature, and the traditional emplotment strategy for Englishness. What is more, lists that represent current cultural phenomena and thus create references to popular culture, provide insights into prevailing cultural plots of Englishness that can become remediations of national identity. At the same time, the lists serve as ways to structure the world and the identity of the literary characters on the text-internal level. Accordingly, Anja Merbitz has observed in her reading of *High Fidelity* that lists provide constructive principles for the characters’ personalities and their environment.<sup>10</sup>

In summary, genre conventions and the literary mode of emplotment in *How to be Good* contribute to constructing or debating Englishness. The novel combines genre conventions of the relatively recent popular novel with traditional realist features. It is thus both characterised by a contemporary generic emplotment and influenced by traditional cultural plots inscribed in the premediated repertoire of Englishness. As a literary strategy connected to both these genre conventions, the formal feature of listing can be associated with characteristics of the popular novel as well as with typically English premediation. It thus has functions found in both genres that might also be employed at a later point as a remediation. However, popular novels have a reputation for being short-lived and less enduring, which would thus imply that they are less influential in regard to remediation. In line with this argument, it is likely that popular novels such as *How to be Good* work rather for the moment in which they are published, since they capture the spirit of the times very well. This is also attributable to the fact that popular literature takes up the immediate or present culture instead of the one inscribed in national or cultural memory, which is more persistent and fixed. Nonetheless, *How to be Good* refers to persisting cultural schemata such as middle-class stereotypes and tests them for their relevance and validity in the contemporary environment.

### **3.2 The “*Guardian*-reading Labour voter”: Character-based Configurations of Middle-Class Englishness**

The narrative situation of *How to be Good* allows us to closer investigate personal and collective self-images of middle-class representatives who, associated as they are with the conception of Englishness, can shed light on the perception of national identity. The narrative mediation in *How to be Good* is characterised by an autodiegetic narrator and

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. Merbitz (2005: 180). Applied to *How to be Good*, the aspect of listing as a means of structuring the characters’ opinions will be analysed in greater detail in chapter 3.2, which focuses on characterisation.

internal focalisation presented through Katie's perspective. The narrative transmission by the narrator at times retreats into the background in favour of long external dialogues and becomes transparent as in a drama or screen play. A frequent use of free indirect speech in a colloquial style constructs a synchronicity between the actions and their narrative account. The narrative is presented for the most part in chronological order and in the present tense, including only few retrospective observations, e. g. when Katie reflects on how David used to behave before his character change. Although the time of events seems to be close to the time of narration, prospective observations – as in the example quoted earlier explaining that Stephen would not play any role in the further course of the story – at times thwart this apparent proximity between events and narrative account.

When discussing how narrative strategies are deployed, the following questions that relate the story to an extra-textual level need to be considered: how is liberalism as a supposedly common ideology of the middle class pushed to its limits? What role do values and personal moral attitudes play for individual and national self-images? How are representatives of the middle class characterised, as the description of “*Guardian*-reading Labour voter[s]” (HTBG 82) implies? The following chapters seek to pursue these aspects of the novel that, among others, achieve the narrative mediation through the internal focalisation of one character that usually “confronts the reader with a narrator's attitude to the moral quality of characters and deeds committed and witnessed” (Baumbach et al. 2009: 4). This chapter investigates how the narrative situation constitutes a technique to construct individual characters and identities, and influences the character constellation. In 3.2.1 the protagonist's self-image is analysed in greater detail to explore what Katie's subjective identity reveals about her moral attitude, her self-images and her desired place in society. These personal characterisations and staged identifications can also shed light on the persistent images of the English middle class. The second subchapter focuses on the characters' relations to each other, regarding Katie and her husband David as antipodes who negotiate liberal values from opposite poles. In this context, cynicism plays an important role, and for the characterisation of David, the use of lists is an essential means to construct his character.

The use of Katie as a focaliser has a two-fold function. First, it works as a means to make the reader identify with the character and, secondly, as a strategy for keeping David's mysterious change as incomprehensible to the reader as it is to Katie. Since she is the focaliser, the reader is invited to identify with her and to wonder at David's mysterious transformation as well as the other characters' behaviours in her own terms. This narrative situation with Katie as internal focaliser and autodiegetic narrator together with the dominating use of present tense results in a proximity of the action for the

reader and creates suspense that allows for surprising changes and events. As an example, when Katie explains how she and David go out to see a theatre play by Tom Stoppard one evening, David's character change becomes apparent. This scene begins when both characters leave the theatre. Katie feels tired and wants to catch a taxi home:

We're looking for a cab, which is what we always do after a night in the West End – Tube in, treat ourselves coming home [...].  
And then something odd happens, and it becomes clear that something odd has happened to David, and the change in him is a result of something other than introspection and self-will. What happens is this. We pass a homeless kid in a doorway huddled up in a sleeping bag and David feels in his pockets, presumably for some change [...] and he proceeds to give the kid everything that's in there – about eighty pounds in notes [...]. As far as I know, we're left with nothing. (*HTBG* 57)

As the scene develops, Katie snatches the notes back from the homeless teenager and argues with David while they are watched by a couple walking by who had also been in the theatre. Here, social conventions of the middle class confronted with poverty are played off against each other. Additionally, the activity of enjoying a play and 'high culture' is explicated with a reference to the playwright Tom Stoppard. Through Katie's point of view, the change in David is presented as something odd and through the temporal proximity, which is supported by Katie's comments, a suspenseful event is created. The mode of emplotment thus elicits sympathy with a focaliser who presents a role model of middle-class Englishness and the value system associated with it – both of which are contested in the course of the novel.

*How to be Good* also negotiates Englishness through the way self-images of middle-class representatives are depicted. Generally, the values and the ideology associated with a rebranded version of Englishness are closely linked to liberalism, i. e. the values of freedom and equality. Some of the liberal values and ideas in *How to be Good* serve as premediated schemes that are reminiscent of those supported by New Labour rhetoric at that time. The novel takes up some of these values and puts them to the test,<sup>11</sup> and this highlights a potential in literature more generally: it can represent, debate and disseminate norms and values through aesthetic forms (cf. Baumbach et al. 2009: 5). These notions surface on different levels, such as on the personal level of the characters, which allows insights into questions of national identity. The issue of individual identity working as a mirror

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<sup>11</sup>In an interview, when asked if *How to be Good* is "a conservative acknowledgement of the failure of liberalism", Hornby replies: "If I had to summarise it in that way (and I don't really want to) I would say that it's a liberal acknowledgement of the contradictions of liberalism" (Martin 2002: n. pag.). Instead of speculating about Hornby's intentions, one should rather argue that the book can be read as negotiating an ideology that is closely linked to Englishness instead of dismissing it entirely.

of a collective is especially relevant in the case of *How to be Good* where the internal, autodiegetic focalisation sheds light on the individual view of a character.

### 3.2.1 “I’m a good person”: Staging Positive Self-Images

Owing to the fact that the narrative account is presented by an autodiegetic narrator, *How to be Good* first and foremost allows us to learn more about the character of the protagonist, Katie Carr. Focussing on her character provides insights into how the self-images of a representative of the English middle class are fictionalised. Katie’s identification with this social group is directly referred to when she characterises herself as a “*Guardian*-reading Labour voter” (*HTBG* 82), and when she describes herself and David as “a couple of middle-class, university-educated literalists” (68). Katie’s parents are introduced as the only Tories allowed in the house (cf. 81). Being a good person is one of the attributes that is one of the most important blue-prints of identification for Katie – not only on a personal level, but also in the sense of giving the impression of being a good citizen for society acting according to the generally accepted hierarchy of values.

The difficulty of being good presents a crucial problem for the protagonist. When Katie embarks on an affair with Stephen, her family life and her self-image as a good person become threatened. The reader finds out more about the protagonist’s assigned self-image and the attitudes she seeks to personify:

Listen: I’m not a bad person. I’m a doctor. One of the reasons I wanted to become a doctor was because I thought it would be a good – as in Good, rather than exciting or well-paid or glamorous – thing to do. I liked how it sounded: ‘I want to be a doctor’, ‘I’m training to be a doctor’, ‘I’m a GP in a small North London practice’. I thought it made me seem just right – professional, kind of brainy, not too flashy, respectable, mature, caring. [...] I’m a good person, a doctor, and I’m lying in a hotel bed with a man I don’t really know very well called Stephen, and I’ve just asked my husband for a divorce. (6)

The quotation introduced by the appellative “listen” followed by a colon, directly addresses the readers and actively attracts their attention, which signals the importance of the revelation and aims to evoke sympathy for the protagonist. It also expresses the need not to seem merely interested in earning money but to do something good for people and for society. The emphasis on “good – as in Good” with a capital letter implies the efforts to live up to the values that are widely associated with the “collective views of what constitutes a ‘good life’” (Baumbach et al. 2009: 6) in society. ‘Good’ with a capital

letter can be read as a label of goodness, which seems as though Katie longs to brand herself as Good. Interestingly, the capitalisation is also mirrored by the overall title of the novel, which capitalises the word ‘good’ but not the preceding ‘be’, although it would be grammatically correct to spell it with a capital ‘b’ in a title as well. Moreover, the identity of the protagonist is defined by her profession as a doctor, which also classifies Katie as a member of the middle class. The self-assuring statement that she is a good person is frequently repeated by the narrator in the course of the novel, like a mantra (cf. *HTBG* 75, 123, 178, 189).

However, Katie’s mantra can be – because of its frequent reiteration – perceived as a way of concealing her remorse about the affair. Indeed, the affair makes Katie feel guilty and the narrative reports on how she starts to reflect upon self-imposed punishments:

I want to look at blocked rectums and oozing warts and all sorts of things that would make the rest of the world sick to its collective stomach, and hope that by doing so I will feel like a good person again. A bad mother, maybe, and a terrible wife, undoubtedly, but a good person. (52)

Paradoxically, this quote first expresses Katie’s urge to punish herself with nauseating tasks in order to be able to feel good again and as a morally good part of society implied by “collective”. On second thoughts, however, she converts the idea that she is a bad person in general. Instead, she differentiates between her personality and her concrete roles as a mother and as a wife. In doing so, Katie reassures herself of the good intentions and personality expressed by her need to play the role of a doctor or therapist. However, the goodness that Katie seeks to incorporate appears as a mere façade, staged to impress other people and to reassure herself, which also highlights the difference between private and public space for the construction and negotiation of identity.

*How to be Good* includes several general reflections about Katie’s character that slow down the narrated time but provide insights into the representation of her personal identity. In the situation when David gives their son’s computer away to a home, the reader learns about Katie’s thoughts on her ideological views that constitute her character:

So what do I believe? Nothing much, apparently. I believe that there shouldn’t be homelessness, and I’d definitely be prepared to argue with anyone who says otherwise. Ditto battered women. Ditto, I don’t know, racism, poverty and sexism. I believe that the National Health System is underfunded, and that Red-Nose Day is a sort of OK thing [...]. And, finally, I am of the reasonably firm conviction that Tom’s Christmas presents are his, and shouldn’t be given away. There you are. That is my manifesto. Vote for me. (76)

The characterising features presented in this statement of faith clearly relate to a liberal ideology and New Labour politics at the turn of the century. That Katie's views are connected to a political agenda is highlighted through the reference to political campaigns and manifestos and, in particular, through the ironic final appeal of the narrator: "Vote for me". The listing of these values and opinions also relate to election pledges made by New Labour in the late 1990s and to the political discourses on the rebranding of Englishness.

However, the narrative is keen to dismantle some of the attitudes it stages. The quote can be read in relation to another scene described only four pages after the manifesto. In a scene in which Katie's parents are visiting, the couple start arguing since David wants to give the family's Sunday roast to homeless people. Katie shouts: "'FUCK YOUR POSITION! FUCK THE HOMELESS!' Fuck the homeless? Is that what has become of me? Has a *Guardian*-reading Labour voter ever shouted those words and meant them in the whole history of the liberal metropolitan universe?" (82). The scene creates irony because only a few pages earlier Katie had stated the very opposite: that she would be prepared to argue with anyone who disagreed with the idea that there should be no homelessness. In fact, the outburst demonstrates that Katie wants to keep her standards at home while appearing to be a good person in society, thus underlining the contrast of public and private. The scene, like the book as a whole, repeatedly underlines the difficulty of being able to live up to the values associated with liberalism.

When David makes a volte-face towards 'goodness', it is a turning point that threatens the self-images personified by Katie. The fear of losing the status as a good person emerges in the protagonist's reverie:

Later, half-asleep, I start to dream about all the people in the world who live bad lives – all the drug-dealers and arms manufacturers and corrupt politicians, all the cynical bastards everywhere – getting touched by GoodNews and changing like David has changed. The dream scares me. Because I need these people – they serve as my compass. Due south there are saints and nurses and teachers in inner-city schools; due north there are managing directors of tobacco companies and angry local newspaper columnists. Please don't take my due north away, because then I will be adrift, lost in a land where the things I have done and the things I haven't done really mean something. (123)

The geographical allusion to the compass and to directions of north and south almost literally refer to the idea of the antipode that will be further explored in the next subchapter. The quote voices Katie's need to embody good values, whereas she equates her antipode David – the "cynical bastard" or "angry local newspaper columnist" – with



bad people who do not act in agreement with standard social values. As she tries not to complain about the beneficial actions that David and GoodNews plan or realise, Katie takes up the cynical role which used to be David's. For instance, when Katie gets upset due to GoodNews's refusal to use dishwashers, she realises that she is slipping into "the most ludicrous form of class stereotyping" (101) when talking about Molly's working-class schoolmates. Similarly, David blames Katie for "stereotyping the homeless" (116) as thieves when David suggests society might be improved by taking in homeless teenagers. Nevertheless, since Katie increasingly takes on the cynical position, the oppositional relation between David and Katie remains balanced in a way.

The attributes constituting her characterisation are strategically staged by the narrator Katie. This becomes apparent in a later statement: "Later that night, when I'm back cocooned in my bedsit, I read the arts pages of the newspaper, like the rounded adult I am desperately trying to become" (196). Although the staging of self-images might even call for an unreliable narrator, the narrator in *How to be Good* remains reliable, as the quote demonstrates: Katie 'admits' to the reader that she tries to be someone else, which also underlines that the self-image she tries to personify is created by way of narrating. This, again, is supported by the kind of mantra that is repeated when Katie makes a mental list of what she feels guilty about: "I'm a doctor, I'm a good person, and yet there's all this stuff . . . Number one, top of the pops: staying here" (178), with which she refers to her bedsit. "Number two: Stephen. Or rather, David" (ibid.), and the list continues by noting that Katie feels guilty about her parents, her work and her children (cf. 179 f.). In one of her reflections, she also observes in one of the characteristic observations represented in brackets: "([...] Maybe I'm being a judgemental middle-class prig. Oh, God.)" (178). What is telling here is again Katie's assigned affiliation to the middle class, which is not described as a positive thing but highlights that being a representative of this very class does not necessarily convey positive character traits.

The difficulty of living up to one's good moral standards presents the crucial question that is increasingly negotiated. At some point, Katie resigns and gives in to her ideological self-identification: "I'm becoming heartily sick of liberalism. It's complicated, and tiring, and open to misunderstanding and abuse [...]" (125). This statement can be read as the quintessence of the whole novel: the rebranded Englishness incorporated by middle-class representatives is a by-product of liberal ideology, which is tested and deconstructed from Katie's point of view. Although Englishness is taken to stand for fairness, equality, democracy, liberalism and collective good values, living up to these standards proves difficult, if not unrealistic, as the mind-game played in *How to be Good* showcases through its characters, especially through the focaliser Katie. The novel thereby deconstructs

the feasibility of liberal values that are associated with the ideologies of the English middle class. However, these values are not only tested and contested by the narrator and focaliser, but also through the antipodal character structure resulting from the contrasts between Katie and David. The following section therefore concentrates on how identity and self-images are negotiated between the different characters.

### 3.2.2 “The Angriest Man in Holloway”: Antipodal Character Structures

As the quotation mentioning the compass and the opposites of north and south has already metaphorically indicated, David’s character functions as the antipode of the protagonist and narrator Katie. Consequently, David’s characterisation sets out from a different extreme of values in comparison to Katie’s, which, however, presents another version of self-identification that is bound to fail. That David serves as Katie’s negative, almost conservative counterpart, is emphasised in one of Katie’s digressions on David’s attitudes:

David, incidentally, is rabidly conservative in everything but politics. [...] Sometimes I think life would be easier for David and me if he experienced a violent political conversion, and he could be angry about poofs and communists, instead of homopaths and old people on buses and restaurant critics. It must be very unsatisfying to have such tiny outlets for his enormous torrent of rage. (*HTBG* 36)

The quote ironically foreshadows David’s change that occurs in the course of the story. It is ironic because at this point Katie still longs for David to experience a “violent political conversion”, although the statement here refers to the group of people David disapproves of. The cynic thus presents Katie’s counterpart from the beginning and as her inferior who is hyperbolically described as having “tiny outlets for his enormous torrent of rage”. What is more, the issue of politics is directly referred to here and links characterisation with a wider cultural context.

As indicated, the poles of the antipodes are reversed when David experiences his miraculous change. The reversal is highlighted when, after David donated Tom’s computer to a home, Katie recollects the time when they first gave their children the computers as presents:

It was David, of course, who insisted on the kids having a computer each for Christmas last year. I had wanted them to share, not because I’m mean, but because I was beginning to worry about spoiling them, and the sight of these two enormous boxes beside the tree (they wouldn’t fit under it) did nothing to ease my queasiness. This wasn’t the kind of parent I wanted to

be, I remember thinking, as Tom and Molly attacked the acres of wrapping paper with a violence that repelled me; David saw the look on my face and whispered to me that I was a typical joyless liberal, the sort of person who would deny their kids everything and themselves nothing. (73)

The scene underlines the way that the rows between the couple result from their different convictions and the differences between the couple's present and former situations: whereas Katie tries to teach their children modesty, David cynically makes a dig at Katie to make her feel even worse. The quotation shows that unlike in earlier situations, the character personifications as good and bad are reversed. While David rebukes Katie for embodying the negative habits of a "joyless liberal", it is David who imposes an embargo of luxury goods on the whole family after his transformation.

When regarding the characterisations in the novel, it is striking that David's character is to a great extent both structured and constructed by the use of lists. Together with his friend Andrew, David has – before his conversion – compiled a list of the people that the two men despise, and which is introduced through Katie's perspective: "Here is a list of the people that Andrew and David have hitherto regarded as talentless, overrated, or simply wankers" (129). The list, which stretches over about one page, includes mainly contemporary authors, artists, politicians, film makers, athletes, musicians, and other people related to popular as well as high culture, which situates the narrative in the extra-textual and cultural context. The logic in organising the enumeration is not conventional but rather reminiscent of a stream-of-consciousness association based on the signifiers, as some of the unreflected transitions indicate: "[...] Stevie Smith, Maggie Smith, the Smiths, [...]" (130). The common item in the list is the name 'Smith', which refers to a poet, an actress and a band. Another example of an equally surprising transition can be found in "[...] Bart Simpson (but not Homer Simpson), Homer, Virgil [...]" (ibid.), which jumps from fictional characters from the American animated TV series *The Simpsons* to the famous poets from classical high culture merely by the reference to the name 'Homer'. This form of compilation according to repetitive word-patterns is reminiscent of the anaphora that Umberto Eco identifies as an important rhetorical device dating back to classical literature (cf. Eco 2009: 137). Such associative enumerations can be understood as self-reflexive elements in two senses: as intertextual references on the one hand, and as a means to unmask the fictional illusion on the other (cf. Merbitz 2005: 180).

The list of persons despised by David and Andrew is resumed and commented upon in a derogatory way by Katie as "many others, so many others, too many to list here" (*HTBG* 130). Katie's comment corresponds to what Eco calls the 'etcetera' of the list

that marks its infinity. According to Eco, the list is not only a feature used by high cultures but also a typical form used in primitive cultures to describe their imprecise image of the universe (cf. Eco 2009: 18). This in turn can be applied to the unsystematic list in *How to be Good*, which refers to extra-textual persons mainly from the field of contemporary popular culture. The idea might be supported by Moritz Baßler's observation that popular literature employs lists since it has overcome the trend to coin words but rather to re-use archived labels by importing "existing, encyclopaedically charged words, expressions, discursive relations and imaginations into literary texts" (Baßler 2002: 186, my translation). This strategy also applies to the typical listing in the discourse of Englishness, which also refrains from defining in favour of presenting labels that are held to be self-evident.

Yet the list of people that David and Andrew despise is obviously also an instrument for a cynical self-identification and an expression of shared interests. After David's transformation, communication between the characters becomes strained, and fails. When Andrew tries to share a joke with David, the latter does not join in because of his newly assumed attitude. This behaviour puzzles Andrew and renders the whole situation absurd. Obviously, David is no longer capable of using the "shared language" (*HTBG* 131) related to a collective self-image of cynics. The list fictitiously created by the two characters in the novel can be read almost as an inversion of the lists that are typical for Englishness narratives since it reverses the idea of listing glorifying, typically English cultural icons. In contrast, the list presented in *How to be Good* lists people to whom the two characters ascribe negative attributes. Moreover, it combines high and low culture not only from the English background but also from an international context. In doing so, the list can be read as subverting the dominant representations of Englishness and rebranding popular culture in its own terms.

Apart from these direct representations, the list is also at times referred to indirectly. One example is the description of the book that David and GoodNews start writing and that David describes to Katie as follows:

'How to be Good', we're going to call it. It's about how we should all live our lives. You know, suggestions. Like taking in the homeless, and giving away your money, and what to do about things like property ownership and, I don't know, the Third World and so on. (210)

First, the idea of the 'how to' implies a listing of things you need to do if you want to be good similar to a guidebook. Since David's book is entitled just like the novel itself, the novel's title can be read as an ironical comment on the whole enterprise. Secondly, the quotation can be read in the light of Eco's notion of infinity or the 'etcetera' (cf.

Eco 2009: 7). The ‘etcetera’ resembles the ambiguity of David’s description through the open “and so on”, as if it were clear in the first place. Additionally, the vagueness is indicated by expressions such as “I don’t know” or “You know, suggestions”. The scene implies that although it should be clear what you need to do if you want to ‘be good’, the actual things to do are hard to pin down, which results in a vague enumeration and the even vaguer ‘etcetera’. Once more, the underlying idea of ‘being good’ appears to be a mere ideal for liberalism. After his reversal, David observes: “I’m a liberal worst nightmare” (*HTBG* 80). Recalling Katie’s observation that she has become “heartily sick of liberalism” (125), both characters fail in their attempts to be good.

Consequently, the novel not only tests whether ‘being good’ can work out properly, but also pushes the boundaries of liberalism that presents a value associated with Englishness. The characterisation involves the use of a structure whereby Katie and David are constructed as antipodes that change from good to bad and vice versa, with each personifying stereotypes of middle-class identity which are played off against each other. The novel challenges and even deconstructs the desire to, and the possibility of, living up to those values associated with the contemporary political agenda and *zeitgeist* that project a positive understanding of Englishness. The personal attitudes outlined in this subchapter relate to a collective level, represented by the main characters’ peer group, referred to as “couples who live within roughly the same income bracket and postal district” (19). The next chapter concentrates on the representation of this group, moving on from the level of individual identities to the level of the North London community.

### **3.3 North London, N7: Spatial Constructions of Middle-Class Identity**

Since *How to be Good* introduces Katie and David as representatives of the middle class, their characterisations allow insights into the self-images of the North London community as a collective. This aspect is illustrated in a quotation in which Katie describes the friends she and David regularly meet:

[W]e keep to the social arrangements we have already made, which means dinners at weekends with other couples with children, couples who live within roughly the same income bracket and postal district as ours. [...]  
We have a great belief, those of us who live in this income bracket and postal district, in the power of words: we read, we talk, we write, we have therapists and counsellors and even priests who are happy to listen to us and tell us what to do. (*HTBG* 19)

The quote implies that there is a consensus about a shared identity of those who belong to the middle class. The members are defined and characterised through their income and by their place of residence. The spatial dimension thus conveys meaning: the cultural references and the topography of London are used as a means of depicting the social and cultural milieu and its associated life-styles, and provides a complex representation of the quotidian culture of a certain period of time (cf. Gurr 2007: 186). Hence, the inhabitants of Holloway are represented as a peer group sharing certain attributes, which covers work, income and space, as well as their self-images as literalists who are open to get help from people.

Yet the novel again back-pedals from this positive image and provides a counter-example. Katie observes a trend in the identity construction of her peer group when she ponders the characterisation of David before his conversion:

David, incidentally, is rabidly conservative in everything but politics. There are people like that now, I've noticed, people who seem angry enough to call for the return of the death penalty or the repatriation of Afro-Caribbeans, but who won't, because, like just everybody else in our particular postal district, they're liberals, so their anger has to come out through different holes. You can read them in the columns and the letters pages of our liberal newspapers every day [...]. (*HTBG* 36)

These reflections underline the fact that Katie regards the people living in the same local area as a collective, expressed by her reference to “everybody else in our postal district”. These representatives are again described as sharing the ideological views of liberalism. Yet what is conspicuous about the remark is that the narrator Katie blames the middle class’s moral double standards: though they consider and stage themselves as liberals and although they act accordingly, they paradoxically nurture thoughts that contradict the new and positive version of an identity based on the values of liberalism. Thereby, the novel discloses the ways ideologies can merely be a way of staging a positive identity.

This tendency is exemplified by the description of Katie’s and David’s relationships with their friends Andrew and Cam – who belong to the peer group of “couples who live within roughly the same income bracket and postal district”. The couples meet one evening after David has made his volte-face. Before, Andrew and David had shared views that resulted in the already mentioned “list of people that Andrew and David have hitherto regarded as talentless, overrated, or simply wankers” (129). In the course of the evening, Andrew tries to share jokes with David, who now refrains from participating in such a cynical conversation. Katie observes that their once “shared language” (131) of cynicism is now lost. As a result, communication between David and Andrew begins

to break down and finally fails: “In other words, it is impossible: we cannot function properly, and the evening ends in confusion and awkwardness, and very early” (133). Since the consensus of acting according to a shared identity fails, Katie comments that “all is anarchy” (ibid.). This illustrates the crisis that results from David’s change: when David – who now personifies the values of a ‘fundamental’ liberal – is confronted with the kind of people who only *regard* themselves as liberals, their double moral standards are revealed. The group’s ideals thereby appear as a mere farce of staged self-images. The mini narrations depicting the positive self-images of the self-appointed liberals thus demonstrate what the novel as a whole puts to the test: the core problem of the liberal middle class is the impossibility of thoroughly putting the values that characterise liberal ideology into practice.

As the preceding chapters have shown, *How to be Good* represents Katie and David as antipodes with individual self-images and as representatives of the North London middle class. They are characterised – individually, and in their rather homogeneous peer group – by their ideological views of liberalism. The setting creates meaning by depicting North London as a kind of habitat of the middle-class characters. However, the ideology and the values attached to liberalism and a positive version of Englishness paradoxically become threatened by the characters’ endeavours to take these very values literally and to live up to them. In doing so, *How to be Good* demonstrates how difficult it is to put into practice positive self-images associated with middle-class Englishness. In other words, *How to be Good* presents an example of the function literature has in the process of negotiating national identity with respect to norms and values:

Instead of supporting dominant ideological fictions and those culturally sanctioned systems of ideas, beliefs, presuppositions, and convictions which constitute hegemonic mentalities, literature tends to critique the prevailing norms, values, clichés, and discourses of power, confronting them with alternative systems of thought and hierarchies of values. (Baumbach et al. 2009: 8)

This also holds true for the representation of individual and collective identities and their struggle to personify what is taken to be a positive version of a rebranded Englishness. What is more, the novel presents a – though not extremely satirical or influential – counter-discourse to the prevailing political agenda of the time. In fact, several speeches by New Labour politicians can be considered to function as premediations of the novel, as the following chapters aim to demonstrate.

### 3.4 *How to be Good* and “The Third Way”: The Deconstruction of Ideological Values of New Labour’s Political Programme

I challenge us to accept that a strong family life is the basic unit of a strong community. For strong families mean a strong Britain. [...] [T]he family is central to our vision of a modern Britain built on the kinds of rights and responsibilities that we learn in the home. [...] Accept that whatever our individual weaknesses, our collective strengths lies in making the institution of the family work for the good of Britain.

(Tony Blair, 1998)

In his speech at the 1998 Labour Party Annual Conference, Tony Blair takes stock of what his party has achieved during the first year in government. Blair sketches a political agenda for the years to come by pointing out where the challenges lie. The speech tackles some of the issues that *How to be Good* fictionalises and puts to the test. As the quote demonstrates, the aims of New Labour focus on strong families and of values embodied by the individual as a part of society (“The Third Way” 144 f.). Other aspects that are repeated throughout the speech are togetherness, the aim of “standing stronger together” (ibid. 157), community, good education, justice, peaceful co-operation and values, which presented New Labour’s challenge for the years to come. They are notions that are repeated in various speeches by New Labour politicians and thus part of their specific rhetoric.<sup>12</sup>

*How to be Good* can be read as a meta-commentary on or even as a challenge to the aims New Labour introduced in these speeches. Thomas Michael Stein (2003) demonstrates to what extent Hornby’s novel can be read in relation to Tony Blair’s speech on “The Third Way”. And although comments by authors should always be handled with care, a statement made by Nick Hornby in an interview with his publisher, Penguin, on his website can support the idea of reading *How to be Good* as a fictional work that challenges

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<sup>12</sup>New Labour politicians have mainly stressed Britishness and its associated values to maintain a political correctness (cf. also chapter 1.2). The rhetoric underlying Blair’s speech “The Third Way” has also been used by Gordon Brown in several speeches, e. g. in his “Spectator Lecture” (1997) or in “The Future of Britishness” (2006). A similar example is Tony Blair’s so-called “Britain Speech” (2000), in which he promotes a British national identity based on shared values as a reaction against the discourse on a break-up of Britain. MP David Blunkett is an exception in that he has also directly talked about Englishness in his speech “A New England” (2005). This said, all these speeches are based on the same rhetoric that stresses common values as the basis for a functioning society and national identity and promote an optimistic perspective on community.



New Labour's programme. When asked by the interviewer if it was his conscious effort to write a novel that can be regarded as political, Hornby answers:

I suppose the book's concerns are what a certain strain of politics comes out of – I'm sure the New Labour project was born out of some kind of sense of personal moral responsibility, and it all got lost in Government. But yes, it's a book about personal politics. ("Nick Talks" n.d.: n. pag.)

The idea of 'personal politics' highlights another construction of contrasts that are remarkable in the novel: the difference between private and public spheres.

Given how little research has been conducted on *How to be Good*, it is surprising that Paul Gilroy mentions the novel in passing in his *After Empire* (2004), in which he engages with the postcolonial British society and also links his observations to questions of Englishness. Gilroy observes:

The tension between public and private values supplied the central theme of Hornby's *How to Be Good*, an amusing novel that articulates his political outlook in a conclusion where the backdrop to responsible domesticity and parenting, its condition of possibility, is the effective disappearance of the world beyond the confines of home and family. The Thatcherite retooling of the nation – 'there is no such thing as society, there are men, there are women, there are families' – was tidily transposed into New Labour common sense. (Gilroy 2004: 128)

The aspects Gilroy mentions, i. e. domesticity, parenting, home and family, are interesting and should be considered in the light of political dimensions in the novel. Consequently, four themes need to be explored, which centre around the personal or private, and the collective or public. The next chapter first zooms in on the ways in which *How to be Good* deals with education and family values, and then moves on to representations of justice and community. When analysing how the novel refers to community, the problem of gentrification in North London will be essential. Bringing the research question back to identity constructions of the middle class, the second subchapter also aims to analyse how the characters associated with the middle class react when confronted with a working-class representative whose local area has become gentrified. The narrative techniques whereby *How to be Good* remediates these themes will be read against the underlying rhetoric of New Labour speeches, mainly exemplified in Blair's "The Third Way" speech, since it can shed light on the ways in which the novel challenges national identity as it is associated with the middle class.

### 3.4.1 “We are the ideal nuclear family”: Education and Family Values

As the quote of Blair’s speech that introduces the preceding chapter has already demonstrated, New Labour politics at the end of the twentieth century ascribed a high degree of importance to families as pivotal for a positive communal feeling in society. *How to be Good* even tackles the issue by starting the story with the protagonist’s wish to get a divorce and thus breaking up the “family unit” (*HTBG* 211). The overall story tells of Katie’s struggle to balance her own feelings and personal aims with her problematic relationship with her husband and the need to stay with her family for their children’s sake. Through Katie’s perspective, the reader learns about her hopeless views on being married:

Because here’s the thing: when you get into a mess like mine, your marriage is like a knife in your stomach, and you know that you’re in big trouble whatever you decide. You don’t ask people with knives in their stomachs what would make them happy; happiness is no longer the point. It’s all about survival: it’s all about whether you pull the knife out and bleed to death or keep it in, in the hope that you might be lucky, and the knife has actually been staunching the blood. You want to know the conventional medical wisdom? The conventional medical wisdom is to keep the knife in. Really. (204)

Comparing marriage to a knife in the stomach sheds a bleak light on togetherness, marriage and family life as it is promoted by “The Third Way” as a positive and necessary condition for a strong national community. Just as the liberal idea that being good is easy to achieve is brought into question, so too is leading a happy family life represented as problematic and as an ideal which is not realistic for everyone.

A strong family life also includes the ideals of being a good parent and passing on values to children. Another retrospective reflection describes what the couple has done to bring up Molly and Tom according to a liberal ideology:

The moral education of my children has always been important to me. I have talked to them about the Health Service, and about the importance of Nelson Mandela; we’ve discussed the homeless, of course, and racism, and sexism, and poverty, and money, and fairness. David and I have explained, as best as we can, why anyone who votes for Conservative will never be entirely welcome in our house, although we have to make special arrangements for Granny and Grandpa. (101)

The quotation underlines not only that the couple’s children have been educated according to generally accepted norms and values. It also again creates a link to politics through the adult’s aversion to people who vote for the Conservative party. In doing so, the quote

expresses their sympathy with Labour politics and the struggle to make exceptions for Katie's parents.

However, the education of the couple's children is ironically ridiculed at some point. At David's charity party, a neighbour who is homosexual arrives, though without his partner. When Molly tells him that she has heard that he acted in a TV series, Simon answers that this was Richard. Molly asks him who Richard is, whereupon the following scene evolves:

'Who's Richard?'

'My boyfriend.'

You may have thought that this was the first straight line (if you'll excuse both puns) that Simon has delivered since he arrived, but you'd be wrong because if something makes somebody laugh, then by definition it must be funny, and by referring to Richard as his boyfriend, Simon makes Molly laugh. A lot. Not immediately: first she blushes, and stares at her parents in awe; then she collapses into uncontrollable giggles and whoops. [...]

'That's not funny,' says David, but because he is looking at Simon sympathetically when he says it, Molly gets the wrong end of the stick, and thinks Simon is being told off.

'He was only being silly, Daddy. Don't be cross with him.'

'Go away now, Molly,' I tell her. [...] 'Just go.'

'I'm so sorry,' David and I say simultaneously, although neither of us offers any explanation as to why our daughter thinks that a man with a boyfriend is the best joke she has ever heard. (141)

Irony and humour are mainly constituted in two ways here: apart from the puns, irony is created by the misunderstanding that Molly thinks that her father blames Simon for a joke. Additionally, the aspects of the 'moral education' the couple's children have enjoyed is debunked and shown to fall short of some basic understanding of partnerships. What is more, David and Katie are unable to explain the embarrassing scene. Thus, *How to be Good* exposes the upbringing of the protagonists' children as being one-sided in the sense that it focuses on liberal issues more than on everyday relations between people. Education, which is one of the core challenges together with a strong family life in Blair's agenda as pointed out in his speech, is therefore given as an example of the difficulties in this field.

Another typical motif, mentioned twice, is the idea of the 'nuclear family', a term which originates in the field of sociology. After David's conversion, his change also influences the family life, while at the same time one can recognise how the relation between the couple becomes outbalanced: "We are the ideal nuclear family. We eat together, we play improving board games instead of watching television, we smile a lot. I fear that at any

moment I may kill somebody” (64). Although the impression first evoked is that the mood in the family has moved towards harmony, the short temporal distance between the events and the narrative accounts for a surprising change, in which the narrator contradicts herself, making clear that she does not enjoy this apparently happy family life at all. Apart from the fact that this suspense and conflict is created, the idea of the ‘nuclear family’ is exposed as an illusion, if not a farce.

The second instance in which *How to be Good* mentions the ‘nuclear family’ is towards the end of the story when GoodNews leaves the family and Katie moves back in, so that the family community appears to be re-established:

After much heart-searching, GoodNews has been given three months to find somewhere to live. He says he appreciates that he has been a burden on us; we are, after all, a middle-class nuclear family, he knows that, and he should respect our, y’know, our nuclearness. We know we are being insulted, but we don’t care very much – or at least, I don’t. David agonizes about it every night just before we go to sleep, wonders aloud whether we want to be nuclear, whether we should become a denuclearized zone, but much of his conviction has gone. (238)

What is interesting about this description is, first, that GoodNews’ speech is reproduced literally without being indicated except for the inclusion of “y’know” to echo his colloquial speech. Secondly, the association of middle class and ‘nuclearness’ constitutes a certain image of the family as the apparently model family. However, it is telling that Katie and David understand GoodNews’ statement as an insult, and the way David is described as pondering on it can be read as another ironical comment that renders it ultimately absurd through descriptions of “becoming a denuclearized zone”.

*How to be Good* generally creates a rather bleak image of family life and showcases that there are possible situations in which the ideas suggested by “The Third Way” – the family functioning as a foundation to build a stronger nation – might not be as easy as politics suggest. What Hornby’s novel does in regard to the political perceptions of that time is to dismantle the idea of a happy family unit and the middle-class nuclear family. This aspect is also supported by the overall ending of the book:

My family, I think, just that. And then, I can do this. I can live this life. I can, I can. It’s a spark I want to cherish, a splutter of life in the flat batters; but just at the wrong moment I catch a glimpse of the night sky behind David, and I can see that there’s nothing out there at all. (244)

What sets out like a reconciliatory ending is reversed in the last statement, which gives the novel an open and bleak ending. It demonstrates how on a personal level, images of

the happy family are eventually dismantled. The same is achieved, as the next chapter aims to show, on a public level.

### 3.4.2 Justice and Community: Gentrification and the Clash of Classes

In addition to family and education, *How to be Good* also negotiates justice and community as integral parts of a functional society. In Tony Blair's words, the aims of New Labour for a 'New Britain' in 1998 read:

The battle of values. The challenge we face has to be met by us together. One nation. One community. Social Justice; partnership; co-operation; the equal worth of all; the belief that the best route to individual advancement and happiness lies in a thriving society of others. [...] These are the values of today. [...] The crude individualism of the 80s is no longer. The spirit of the times is community. ("The Third Way" 153f.)

The key aims presented in this quote are, again, community and togetherness, values, justice and co-operation, which are introduced as way of rising to the challenge of contemporary life for everyone. *How to be Good* considers these aspects in the course of David's and GoodNews' project that involves trying to persuade their neighbours to give homeless teenagers the chance to live with them. At the charity party, then, most of the neighbours have come, and Katie observes: "You know – here we all are, black, white, gay, straight, a microcosm of swinging, multicultural, multisexual London, eating cheese straws and talking about traffic schemes and mortgages, and getting on and isn't this great?" (*HTBG* 142). At a first glance, the statement represents praise of the demographic diversity in North London by comparing it with the 'Swinging London' of the 1960s. It thus situates the times of a rebranded Englishness and 'Cool Britannia' in the premediated context of 'Swinging London', which has been generally used as a foil for pop music and celebration of lifestyles in the 1990s. On second thoughts, however, the last part questioning "and isn't it great?" appears not simply as a doubt in the previous observations but even as an ironic counter-comment to them.

As the ironic tone had already implied, the functioning community is not further celebrated but put to a test. This occurs when a character who functions as a stereotypical representative of the working class is introduced. Mike, "the seedy looking builder" (142), as he is described from Katie's point of view, and who, "as luck would have it, is A Character" (*ibid.*). With the latter statement, Katie expresses her hopes that Mike will thwart David's plans of holding a coherent speech to advertise his project. In fact, Mike tries to make fun of David's speech but, in doing so, he finally even helps David to get the audience on his side. Mike is obviously the odd one out in the circle of middle-class

representatives and renders himself a counter-example of being good by claiming that the homeless people are to blame themselves for living on the streets, that they take drugs while actually having a lot of money. Katie comments as an observer:

There are a couple of snorts, one or two tuts, a great deal of head-shaking and exchanged glances followed by raised eyebrows. Mike is surrounded by gay actors, Health Service professionals, teachers, psychoanalysts, people whose hearts bleed right through their Gap T-shirts, and even if, in the middle of the night, they catch themselves thinking that the homeless only have themselves to blame and they all take drugs and have bank balances bigger than ours, they would never ever say so out loud, during waking hours, and especially not at a party. Mike has misjudged his audience, and in doing so, he changes the dynamics in the room. [...] Mike certainly has a little more floor space than he did. (145 f.)

The reactions of the middle-class representatives, who are once again characterised through their professions, show that Mike has violated the socially accepted rules and norms by blaming the homeless for their situation. As much as Mike accuses the homeless of being unjust, the middle-class representatives accuse Mike of making unjust statements. What is more, the quote again illustrates the levels of private and public: through Katie's point of view, the reader is made aware that it is thoroughly possible that several other people share Mike's opinion, while they are wise enough to keep it private and not to speak it out loud in public, especially not among people of the same peer group who identify with liberal ideologies. Mike does not agree to the majority's views on justice in society, which might, as Katie's observations allude to, also be just another double moral standard of the middle-class representatives.

The situation gets out of hand for Mike but supports David's project when Mike calls his neighbours "ponces" – "the thing that most people in this room fear being called" (146). With this eventual outburst, Katie starts to reflect on community and social integration in general, which leads to the problem of gentrification in North London:

We want Mike to be one of us, and we want Mike to want us to be his neighbours. It is true that he probably paid a few hundred pounds for his house back in the late sixties, when nobody like us wanted to live here, and some of us paid a quarter of a million pounds for our houses a couple of years ago. (Not David and I, though! We paid a hundred thousand for our house ten years ago!) But does that make us ponces? After all, Mike's house is worth a quarter of a million, too, now. But of course that's not the point. The point is that we are the sort of people who can afford to pay a quarter of a million for a house (or rather, we are the sort of people to whom banks will lend a quarter of a million for a house); which makes us the sort of people who give money to beggars [...]. (146 f.)

What is represented as a community here, has meanwhile developed as a community of the middle class characterised by owning enough money to buy expensive houses in the area, thereby excluding members of the working class. A common identification is implied by the use of the pronoun “we” and “us” as in “nobody like us” or “some of us”. The representation through an autodiegetic narrator again creates a certain degree of humour when Katie tries to persuade herself that she and David are an exception to the rule since they had bought their house some years before the gentrification had further increased. Still, Katie gives in and accepts the class division although she also underlines that it is the members of the middle class who are ‘good’ since they can afford to give some of their money away. Again, the quote highlights the paradox and difficulty of liberal, communal living.

The issue of gentrification emerges even more clearly in the further course of the quotation mentioned above, now concentrating on the spatial relation in Holloway:

[...] and then there’s the pub at the end of the road, which once upon a time Mike might have drunk in, but which has now changed hands and clientele and serves Spanish sausages on a bed of something-or-other for ten pounds, and isn’t really a pub at all, and let’s face it, the ponces are responsible for that, as well as for other things, like the corner shop becoming an organic delicatessen ... (147)

The pub as an icon of Englishness is used as an example to describe the workings and results of gentrification. Creating a temporal gap through the use of “once upon a time” and the food’s description of “on a bed of something-or-other” again constitutes a humorous take on the subject but still underlines the consequences of gentrification in the area. Thus, the positive values of the middle class, exemplified by buying organic food, are used to highlight the negative influence that this lifestyle can have on a community.

What remains for the representatives of the middle class in the situation when Mike has stormed out, is a guilty feeling: “So Mike’s exit [...] is both a blessing and a defeat, because even though we all feel guilty about the homeless, we also feel guilty that we have failed to accommodate Mike, that he no longer feels a part of his own neighbourhood [...]” (147). What the novel does, then, is to unmask the “microcosm of swinging, multicultural, multisexual London”, describing it as only pretending to be inclusive, leaving no room for the working class in the apparently liberal and open community. In doing so, liberal ideals of the depicted middle-class representatives are thwarted. *How to be Good* also takes up other aspects of New Labour’s agenda, such as Blair’s claim for “One nation. One community. Social Justice; partnership; co-operation; the equal worth of all” or that “[t]he spirit of the times is community” (“The Third Way” 153f.); these are fictitiously

transferred to a North London ‘reality’ and applied in a neighbourhood in which the political rhetoric rings hollow. The novel can thereby also be read as exposing this liberal rhetoric as inapplicable to reality.

### **3.5 *How to be Good* and Other Contemporary Novels Negotiating Class Identities and Englishness**

*How to be Good* is not the only novel that represents or even challenges concepts of middle-class identity as a paradigm of Englishness. Other narratives referring to class as a significant factor to remediate national identity can be compared to Hornby’s novel. In order to round off the analysis of *How to be Good*, I will introduce six other novels that serve to show that the negotiation of class identity in relation to Englishness is not a singular phenomenon. To start with, class distinctions and the social milieu play fundamental roles in earlier novels like Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and Graham Swift’s *Last Orders* (1996). Maggie Gee’s *The White Family* (2002) also provides insights into perceptions of the working class presenting a counter-perspective on issues such as gentrification and images of the middle class. The clash of classes can be considered a recurring theme that also plays a role in contemporary novels such as Alan Hollinghurst’s *The Line of Beauty* (2004) and Ian McEwan’s *Saturday* (2005). Ultimately, Natasha Salomon’s *Mr Rosenblum’s List* (2010) is an example that most obviously and humorously engages with Englishness and the struggle of immigrants to overcome class distinctions.

Narratives dealing with discourses of Englishness often consider class to be an essential identity marker. An earlier novel, published before the rebranding of Englishness, is Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day*. The book stages the perceptions of a butler who worked for an aristocratic English gentleman in a country house. While the values and self-images of butler James Stevens are introduced through his perspective as an autodiegetic narrator, the reader also learns about the political influence of his employer, Lord Darlington, during the interwar period. As for the narrative mediation, then, it is interesting that the novel tells these events as a ‘history from below’ from the butler’s perspective. It implies Stevens’s wish to be a gentleman, which surfaces when he drives through Southern England and at times pretends to be a member of the aristocracy. In its mediations of memory discourses, Ishiguro’s historical novel thus also uses class as a typical identity marker for organising English society.

A novel that focuses on the social milieu of the English working class is Graham Swift’s *Last Orders*. Discourses of memory and identity are represented through different charac-



ters' perspectives functioning as narrators in every other chapter. In contrast to, e. g., Ishiguro's novel, *Last Orders* is not set in a rural, idyllic countryside but in Bermondsey, originally a working-class district in London. In regard to both of these earlier novels, it is conspicuous that fiction explores different perspectives: instead of concentrating on middle-class characters, the novels interweave issues such as politics, memory and national identity with the opinions and stories of working-class representatives. This might also be motivated by a desire to find voices to comment on political developments during the Conservative Government, which presents a different political context from that of the time around the millennium.

An example of a novel that offers different perspectives on class identity and London's heterogeneous society is *The White Family* by Maggie Gee. The novel is characterised by a multiperspectival narrative situation, thus allowing insights into the different characters' perspectives, which mainly revolve around questions of multiculturalism and the dangerous consequences of racism.<sup>13</sup> In the chapters narrated from the point of view of Dirk White, an angry young hooligan and racist who blames immigrants for his bad job situation and his failure to make a living, the reader learns more about the character's view on the middle class. Dirk is represented as a working-class representative since he works at a news agent's. The reader learns Dirk's thoughts through an internal monologue as he complains about a middle-class character: "*Guardian*-reader! Gobbler! Pansy! I hate the voices of people like him. Loving themselves. Too bloody loud. Totally ... self-competent" (*WF* 125). Although it becomes quite clear in the course of the novel that Dirk's hatred for middle-class people mainly results from his self-hatred and aimlessness, it is telling that this representation also draws on the premediated scheme of the *Guardian*-reader as a middle-class stereotype. However, in contrast to Hornby's novel, Dirk's character presents the counter-perspective of the working class to the perspective through middle-class representatives in *How to be Good*.

Another theme introduced in Gee's novel is gentrification. A quote highlights Dirk's prejudiced, radical opinion about immigrants, homosexuals and members of the middle class, and expresses his views on gentrification:

They come and live here. People like her. Middle-class people, who fancy themselves. They go down the end where the slums used to be. They ponce around in jeeps and things, I see them, couples, laughing together, talking in loud stupid voices, and fucking queers, fucking arse-bandits – I know they look down their noses on us. They're only here till they can afford to get out.  
(*WF* 114)

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<sup>13</sup>The novel will also be considered in chapter 4.7 since these themes are also important in the context of postcolonial writing.

The use of the expression “ponce” is reminiscent of Hornby’s novel, although it is used as a verb here. Gentrification is also introduced here, even if the way it is represented differs from *How to be Good*. The depiction from Dirk’s prejudiced working-class point of view introduces a counter-image to the one introduced by Hornby’s novel, and creates a depressed, bleak image of communal life in London, tainted by racism and separation. Both novels represent London’s inhabitants as coexisting groups identified through their class status, instead of as a functioning community as promoted in the optimistic rhetoric of politicians.

Although situated in a different temporal and social context, *The Line of Beauty* by Alan Hollinghurst tackles questions of the class system and its boundaries. The narration is represented in a traditional realist mode and tells the story of Nick Guest, who is a homosexual postgraduate student from modest circumstances. He comes to live with his student friend Toby Fedden’s rich family in London during the 1980s. Toby’s father Gerald Fedden works as a Minister for the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher. In the novel, the setting in Notting Hill and the upper-class surroundings are linked in the context of gendered or gay identity and the political developments within the Conservative Party during the 1980s. At first glance, the novel seems to take up a traditional plot and emplotment of the realist *bildungsroman* and is reminiscent of works such as *Great Expectations*; it is thus mediated in a similar way to canonised English classics. However, it not only challenges these conventions through creating an innovative character structure – in that Nick is characterised through his gay identity. It also inverts the fateful ending of Dickens’s classic novel, in that it does not reveal Nick to be a lost son of the upper middle class who gets re-integrated into society. Instead, the story develops in a way already implied by his telling name: he is and remains a guest in the upper class and in the Feddens’s house. After being diagnosed with HIV and getting involved in a scandal which also ends disastrously for Gerald Fedden’s political career as an MP, the protagonist’s wheel of fortune spins him back down, giving the story a tragic ending. In the context of contemporary novels challenging the class system, *The Line of Beauty* is thus an example of the workings of gendered and class identity linked to discussions of Conservative politics in 1980s London. Politics play a significant role as premediation and extra-literary contextualisation, e. g. by staging a fictitious dinner with Margaret Thatcher at the Feddens’s house.

A second example of a contemporary novel that stages conflicts between the members of different classes is Ian McEwan’s *Saturday*. Although the narrative does not deal with concepts of Englishness directly, it also combines the discourse of class differences with recent political developments, most notably the cultural developments after the terrorist

attacks known as 9/11. Moreover, the narrative introduces characters of a typically upper middle-class milieu with the family of Henry Perowne who works as a neurosurgeon in a North London hospital. The novel is narrated exclusively through Henry Perowne's perspective in a predominantly modernist mode, focussing on a single Saturday. In the course of the story, Perowne is confronted with a choleric working-class character called Baxter after a small car crash. Later, Baxter and his gang attack Perowne's family at their exclusive city house in Fitzrovia. McEwan's novel thereby evokes images of the middle class and questions of security both on a private level – when a violent gang intrudes Perowne's house – and a public and political level. The latter is introduced from the very beginning of the novel through discourses of the imminent threat of terrorist attacks. The more imminent threat for the family, however, originates in class divisions within Britain rather than any danger of terrorism from outside the country. Although *Saturday* has in fact little in common with Hornby's novel, it is striking that novels generally tend to interweave discourses of politics with identities marked by class distinctions and with space as a signifier of class milieus in London.

Natasha Solomons' *Mr Rosenblum's List* is a recent novel that engages with Englishness and the impossibility of overcoming class distinctions. Solomons' take on exclusion and identity differs from the representations in the other novels. *Mr Rosenblum's List* depicts the struggle of a Jewish-German immigrant to become an 'English gentleman' in post-war Britain, yet in a more light-hearted way than the other novels mentioned in this chapter. Englishness is not only implicitly alluded to through class identity and politics, as is the case with several of the other narratives, but also directly negotiated in the protagonist's struggle to become an Englishman while leaving his former Jewish-German identity behind. What is remarkable about *Mr Rosenblum's List* is, as the novel's title already suggests, the evident use of lists to remediate a counter-discursive story of minorities trying to settle in Britain. Moreover, spatial representations are used as a significant strategy to deal with Englishness, so that class is definitely not the only category to consider.

As for the question of how *Mr Rosenblum's List* deals with class distinctions, protagonist Jack Rosenblum is "only interested in one sub-species: the English middle class" (*MRL* 3). He meticulously follows a list that he was given as a pamphlet of useful information when emigrating from Germany at the time of the Second World War. He expands the list with his own rules and observations of what is typically English. The novel self-reflexively refers to the potential of literature in describing how Mr Rosenblum learns more about Englishness through the English literary canon, e. g. through texts by Winston Churchill and John Betjeman. Yet, it is a seemingly trivial episode that pushes the story on:

Jack Rosenblum is denied membership of a golf club for reasons of identity, or rather, because he lacks the identity of an English middle-class gentleman. As a consequence, Mr Rosenblum leaves London and his successful carpet factory behind and acquires a huge property with an old, run-down country mansion in Dorset. This setting in combination with the iconic country house conjure up traditional images of Englishness. On his new property he starts to build his own golf course, which parallels his struggle to artificially create his English identity. Although the question of class identity at first glance is not the most important topic of Solomons' novel, it is what initiates the turning point of the story that interweaves class identity with Englishness.

As this brief introduction of six selected contemporary novels has demonstrated, class represents an essential marker for identity constructions in general and in an English context in particular. Notions of class distinctions provide a fruitful basis for English fiction to contest identity constructions. This can be achieved by employing an uncommon counter-perspective 'from below' or by presenting competing perspectives of representatives for different classes in a conflict. What is more, class identity not only situates characters in a certain milieu but also frequently creates a link to the political developments that the novels negotiate. As the examples have served to demonstrate, the British class system provides a repertoire of cultural plots that novels remediate in relation to Englishness in different political environments. *How to be Good* is one example of how recent developments in politics can be fictionalised and challenged. Interestingly, there are also several instances in Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* that bear striking similarities to the representations of middle-class characters in Hornby's novel. However, the main identity marker that Smith's debut challenges in relation to Englishness is ethnicity, as the following chapter aims to show.

## 4 Rewriting Englishness in Postcolonial London: Zadie Smith's *White Teeth*

In 1996, Black British writer Andrea Levy voiced a manifesto that has been frequently quoted ever since: “If Englishness doesn’t define me, then redefine Englishness” (Jaggi 1996: 64). The statement seemed to become more pointed the closer the twentieth century drew to its close. The millennium is frequently regarded as the heyday of Englishness, which had become tightly linked to a positive reconceptualisation of the multicultural make-up of British society. This change was both observed and supported in political, journalistic and academic discourses. The governmentally commissioned Parekh report predicted that “England, Scotland and Wales are at a turning point in their history” (Parekh 2002 [2000]: xiii). The report promoted the idea of building a “community of communities” which would need to involve “rethinking the national story and national identity” (ibid.). Sociologist Stuart Hall observed that it was cosmopolitan communities that “were the ‘cool’ in that transient New Labour phenomenon, ‘Cool Britannia’” (Hall 2000: 221), and journalist and writer Yasmin Alibhai-Brown claimed that “2000 will go down in British history as the year when nationhood became the most emotionally charged, hotly debated topic in this country” (Alibhai-Brown 2001 [2000]: xiii). Apparently, the turn of the millennium was publicised in the media as the moment of multicultural Englishness.

It was at this very moment at the beginning of the year 2000 that Zadie Smith, a 24-year-old Cambridge graduate of Jamaican-English parentage from London, had her debut novel published. *White Teeth*, roughly speaking, is about the interrelations between characters of first- and second-generation immigrant families in the North London borough of Willesden, covering a number of themes that link up to and centre on questions of identity. The novel was taken to represent the vitality and creativity of contemporary London and praised by authors and critics alike, e. g. by Salman Rushdie, Caryl Phillips and Yasmin Alibhai-Brown (cf. McLeod 2004b: 161). Zadie Smith won several book prizes and was listed as one of the Granta Best of Young British Novelists in 2003.<sup>1</sup> What

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. “Best of Young British Novelists” (2003). The prizes *White Teeth* won include the Whitbread First Novel Award and the Commonwealth Writers Best First Book Prize (cf. Squires 2002: 15).

is more, she was branded by the media as the young, fresh voice of multiculturalism and diversity, which is a label she herself in fact rejected.<sup>2</sup> The novel had obviously struck a chord and was praised for its optimistic perspective on London's multicultural community. However, the optimism attributed to the novel is also one of the two aspects that have provoked criticism: first, some reviewers and critics found that the novel candy-coated reality.<sup>3</sup> Secondly, some scholars see the main cause for the novel's success in the intensive marketing strategies that supported it.<sup>4</sup> Either way, the reviews and the numerous academic analyses of *White Teeth* that have been published to date show a great interest in the novel and generally stress its positive perspective on communities in postcolonial London.

Although *White Teeth* is mainly set in the 1970s, 80s and 90s, the *zeitgeist* associated with a rebranded Englishness typical of the time around the millennium is palpable throughout. In line with this argument, Zadie Smith once explained in an early interview: "I suppose the trick of the novel, if there is one, is to transpose the kind of friendships we have now to a generation which was less likely to be friends in that way" (Merritt 2000: n. pag.). This transposition is apparently the reason why the spirit of the time of the novel's publication emerges in the narrative. In a way, the novel continues the tradition of postcolonial writing in Britain, established e. g. through works by Salman Rushdie and Hanif Kureishi, which were published during the Thatcher era and were thus still rooted in a culture of a different *zeitgeist*.<sup>5</sup> *White Teeth* has accordingly been read as an "apt

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. e. g. Merritt (2000), Hattenstone (2000), and Walters (2008: 2). In an interview with *The Guardian* at the end of 2000, the journalist explains Zadie Smith's position and her reaction to this labelling: "Suddenly, she was expected to be more than a novelist – a spokesperson for race, youth, women [...]. 'I was expected to be some expert on multicultural affairs, as if multiculturalism is a genre of fiction or something, whereas it's just a fact of life – like there are people of different races on the planet'" (Hattenstone 2000: n. pag.).

<sup>3</sup>For an overview of the novel's reception cf. Squires (2002: 69 ff.). In contrast, Katarzyna Jakubiak (2008) argues that the novel's perception as too 'optimistic' is a misreading since it ignores the underlying sarcasm, which is an important observation since the novel in fact also introduces identity crises and issues like racism.

<sup>4</sup>Numerous academic contributions engaging with *White Teeth* introduce the fact that Zadie Smith as a then still unknown young author was paid a quite high sum in advance by the publishing house. An early review states that the payment was rumoured to be approximately £250,000 (cf. Merritt 2000). In this context, cf. Tobias Wachinger's informative monograph (2003) on the 'commodification of hybridity' and the rewriting of Englishness in postcolonial novels from 1980s to mid-1990s. Wachinger mentions *White Teeth* in his postscript, arguing that Smith's novel does not provide an innovative perspective but only advertises itself as part of the literature that merely 'poses in-between' (cf. Wachinger 2003: 194 f.).

<sup>5</sup>To give an example, Yasmin Alibhai-Brown has spelled out the influence of the political change from her own immigrant perspective. In her provokingly entitled book *Who Do We Think We Are? Imagining the New Britain* (2001 [2000]) she explains in a personal statement that her book "was born out of that elation so many of us felt when New Labour finally brought this country out of the long Tory reign, which for me and countless others had been a throttling, excluding period. I could not have

summation of the triumphs and the limits of British multiculturalism at the end of the century” (Head 2003: 111) and a “summative portrayal of a *de facto* hybrid cultural life” (ibid.: 106). Dominic Head’s observations pin down some of the most important themes the novel engages with in the course of its rather complex plot structure.

The overall story of *White Teeth* is difficult to summarise since the multitude of characters and interwoven plot strands range from historical events like the Indian Mutiny to events in England during the 1980s and 1990s. It centres on the rather unusual friendship between the Englishman Archibald Jones and Bangladeshi Samad Iqbal, who survive the last days of the Second World War together. The story sets in with Archie’s attempted suicide after a failed marriage in London in the 1970s. After a fateful meeting, he shortly afterwards marries Clara Bowden, a Jamaican immigrant who is much younger than him. At the same time, Samad moves to London and also finally gets married to a long time promised, and also much younger woman, Alsana. Both couples settle in Willesden and soon expect offspring: Irie Jones and the twins Magid and Millat Iqbal. In a moment of personal crisis, Samad ‘kidnaps’ Magid in a coat-and-dagger operation and sends him to Bangladesh for education while Millat and Irie go to comprehensive school together. It is there that they get involved with their classmate Joshua’s white middle-class family, the Chalfens. The narrative then revolves around the interaction between the characters of the three families but gets interrupted by retrospective passages of family histories. The different plot strands surrounding the main characters are brought together in novel’s finale: scientist Marcus Chalfen publicly presents his genetically manipulated ‘FutureMouse©’, which is designed to die at the turn of the century.

In the midst of these plot elements and discourses, *White Teeth* critically deals with a wide range of themes that are more or less loosely related to perceptions of Englishness. Most remarkably, questions of identity are orchestrated on different levels and by means of different characters, in respect to ethnicity or ‘race’, culture, religion, generation, class and gender. Hybridity features as a key concept both on the level of individual identity in certain characters and as a motif that is linked to academic discourses in the field of postcolonial studies and that of Marcus’ genetic engineering. Similarly, the novel negotiates forms and consequences of multiculturalism as an attribute of British society in present-day London, and acknowledges it as an everyday phenomenon.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the narrative challenges the role of personal and national history, cultural memory

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written such a book when Margaret Thatcher and her acolytes were in power” (Alibhai-Brown 2001 [2000]: xiii). A similar situation is apparently true for fiction.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Laura Moss’ article (2003) that analyses how *White Teeth* represents a culture in which multiculturalism and hybridity have become quotidian attributes of society.

and historiography in regard to colonialism and racism but also fictionalises possible motivations for religious or political fundamentalism. Not all but most of these issues are linked to conceptions of national identity that balance Englishness against ‘otherness’. Consequently, *White Teeth* refers to icons as well as premediated schemes, plots and narratives that are inscribed in the English cultural repertoire.<sup>7</sup>

The ways in which the narrative mediates these themes are not only remarkably playful but also convey meaning and function as a means of fathoming what is typically English. Before turning to the significant themes that are linked to the overall topic of a rebranded Englishness, the focus of the following chapters will be placed on the ways in which national identity is narratively remediated. First, an investigation of genre and mode of emplotment in section 4.1 sheds light on the ways in which Englishness is rewritten. A second matter of interest is explored in 4.2: the special narrative situation, which includes an interfering omniscient narrator and variable focalisation, and which makes it possible to deal with the overall issue of multicultural conviviality from various perspectives, will be analysed. 4.3 zooms in on the icons of Englishness that *White Teeth* remediates in order to situate the narrative and several characters. Chapter 4.4 investigates the novel’s negotiations of ethnic identity, multiculturalism and hybridity in relation to Englishness, including notions of racism and fundamentalism. Additionally, history as an important marker for constructing identity as well as representations of space will be considered in greater detail, in 4.5 and 4.6. As a last point, 4.7 situates *White Teeth* in the vast field of other popular publications of British Asian and Black British Literature.

## 4.1 Reconfiguring Genre Conventions and Modes of Emplotment

*White Teeth* is characterised by different modes of writing and hybrid genre conventions. The dominant mode is classical realism, enriched by an often comical, satirical, ironical or humorous style, which places the narrative in a typically English tradition of writing (cf. chapter 2.3.1). In his convincing analysis, Nick Bentley argues that the realist quality manifests itself in the way the novel has an omniscient third person narrator describing

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<sup>7</sup>What is interesting in this context is that *White Teeth* in fact employs references to a specifically English tradition, while most of the public and political discussions associate multiculturalism with Britishness. This circumstance is also reflected in the research literature about the novel. Most of the literary studies about *White Teeth* refer to Britishness or do not clearly differentiate between Britishness and Englishness, such as Ball (2004), Walters (2005), Amine (2007), Cuevas (2008), Mirze (2008), Campbell-Hall (2009), Pérez Fernández (2009) and Gunning (2010). Exceptions are, however, the contributions by Wachinger (2003), Helyer (2006) and Bentley (2007) who acknowledge a redefined or rewritten version of Englishness.



recognisable characters and settings.<sup>8</sup> The novel also follows in the tradition of the *bildungsroman* since it covers issues connected to representations of families, generations or teenage angst. Additionally, it resembles nineteenth-century social novels and includes some picaresque elements.<sup>9</sup> Although these premediated schemes and modes would speak for a traditional genre classification, *White Teeth* is permeated by experimental features that argue against a ‘pure’ realism. To begin with, the novel includes some instances that can be identified as magic realism or as historiographic metafiction.<sup>10</sup> What is more, the “use of lists, tables and diagrams” (Bentley 2007: 497) may be associated with postmodern elements that tend to interrupt the immediacy or transparency usually created by realist writing. Ultimately, *White Teeth* also stands in the tradition of postcolonial writing (cf. Upstone 2007: 336), which affects the generic classification and the novel’s mode of emplotment. Together, these features create an overall hybrid generic make-up with a dominant traditionally realist mode.

Yet how do all these features eventually surface through the novel’s mode of emplotment and what is their role in challenging traditional notions of Englishness? To begin with, the realist mode is based on the deployment of an omniscient, heterodiegetic narrator who adds general comments to the overall account, varying from witty, humorous, ironic and mocking observations to more serious reflections.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the sociolects and idelects of the characters represented in direct speech provide a realistic reflection of everyday language variations. As an example, Abdul-Mickey, the owner of O’Connell’s, the pub where Archie and Samad are regulars, advises Archie about possible solutions of Samad’s crisis. He thereby makes the initial proposal to send Samad’s sons to Bangladesh to be brought up in their ‘original culture’, which in the rough idelect of Abdul-Mickey

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<sup>8</sup>Cf. Bentley (2007: 497). Peter Brooker e. g. also analyses the novel’s use of comic realism (cf. Brooker 2002: 89) and Jonathan P. A. Sell writes: “In tune with the *zeitgeist*, the novel’s fusion of ‘dirty realist’ aesthetics and the social politics of multiculturalism was laced with a savvy, at times rollicking humour” (Sell 2006: 28). Nick Bentley also argues that the novel is characterised by a comical and satirical style and modes of classic realism, comedy or Horatian satire (cf. Bentley 2007: 497).

<sup>9</sup>Roy Sommer points out that the popular genre of second-generation immigrant writing is the *bildungsroman* (cf. Sommer 2005: 297), which is also true for *White Teeth* (cf. Amine 2007: 75). Claire Squires identifies the theme of “adolescent angst” (Squires 2002: 8) as a hinge to the *bildungsroman* genre and Nick Bentley alludes to “elements of the picaresque” (Bentley 2007: 497). As for the negotiation of generations, Astrid Erll (2007a) analyses Smith’s novel according to the genre of a family chronicle or generational novel, and Kris Knauer (2008) traces Paul Gilroy’s concept of ‘intergenerational adaptation’. Jan Rupp has observed similarities of *White Teeth* to Charles Dickens’s writing: “The English comic or nineteenth-century social novel is no doubt a major influence for Smith’s eclectic combination of styles and genres [...]” (Rupp 2010: 119).

<sup>10</sup>Cf. e. g. Squires (2002: 66) and Erll (2007a: 120).

<sup>11</sup>The narrator’s appearance and functions will be further scrutinised in chapter 4.2. The following observations about the realist mode in relation to the narrative situation therefore remain on an introductory level for now.

reads: “‘Whereverthefuckitis. He can send ’em back there and have ’em brought up proper, by their granddads and grandmums, have ’em learn about their fucking culture, have ’em grow up with some fucking principles [...]’” (*WT* 191).<sup>12</sup> What is striking is the emplotment according to a realist representation of events, though with the focus on characters who function as representatives of different generations. The narrative gives accounts about an everyday life of characters who are to a certain extent average, thereby creating a kind of ‘history from below’ (cf. Erll 2007a: 117). However, the ways in which the characters become involved with each other’s lives both voluntarily or involuntarily provide a realistic perspective on contemporary English society, of representatives from different backgrounds regarding class, ethnicity, religion and generation.

The marker of generational identity, then, is specifically important for the generic categorisation as a *bildungsroman*. Several of the characters, especially the second-generation immigrant characters Irie, Magid and Millat, go through different stages of personal developments. The theme of “adolescent angst” (*WT* 33) is introduced towards the beginning in describing Clara’s youth, who is humorously compared with a “typical teenage female panopticon” (28). The topic is repeated at a later stage and commented upon by the narrator: “Four months in the life of a seventeen-year-old is the stuff of swings and roundabouts [...]. Never again in your life do you possess the capacity for such total personality overhaul” (404). Introducing the problems of teenage life with its constantly changing self-images thereby also exemplifies that identity is not an essentialist or stable but rather a volatile and fluent phenomenon. The narrative specifically concentrates on the character of Irie to trace the construction of her personal identity during her teenage years, e. g. exemplified in the chapter entitled “*The Miseducation of Irie Jones*” (265 ff.).<sup>13</sup> Characters like Irie are depicted in a detailed and realistic way, thus creating an overall comprehensible panorama of London’s inhabitants and multicultural communities. In adapting the premediated genre of the realist *bildungsroman* and enriching it with a representation of a postcolonial everyday conviviality, *White Teeth* contributes to the redefinition of Englishness at the turn of the century while at the same time creating a link to the English canon.

However, the overall realist mode is repeatedly thwarted by experimental features that also contribute to the aesthetic representation and to the construction of meaning. The appearance of fantastical elements has led to the assumption that *White Teeth* also

<sup>12</sup>Hereinafter in chapter 4, quotations with page numbers only refer to the novel *White Teeth*. If in doubt (e. g. after citations from other sources), the novel’s title will be abbreviated as *WT*.

<sup>13</sup>The title can also be read as an intermedial reference to a product of popular culture, i. e. to the title of the album “*The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill*” (1998) by black US rapper Lauryn Hill (cf. Sommer 2001: 186).

shares generic attributes of magic realism and that it can be regarded as a meta-narrative (cf. Squires 2002: 66). Two incidents in the novel seem to corroborate this theory: first, the narrator informs the reader that “miracles ran in the family” (*WT* 34) of the Bowden’s, and Hortense is described as “a miracle child herself” (ibid.), born during the Kingston Earthquake of 1907. Secondly, the bond between the twins Magid and Millat, who for a long time live on different continents, has characteristics of magic realism. When Magid informs his family in a letter that he broke his nose after he was hit by a falling vase, a misunderstanding with his father makes Millat laugh so much that he slips, hits the sink and breaks his nose (cf. 216). The brothers subsequently share the remarkable ‘Roman nose’ that makes Magid in the photograph he sent look “like a little aristocrat, like a little Englishman” (ibid.), which already foreshadows Magid’s transformation into a quintessential English gentleman. Further on in the story there are also hints at events in both twins’ lives that are related, e. g. when both barely escape being killed: whereas Magid miraculously survives a storm in Bangladesh, Millat is lucky not to catch AIDS when sleeping with a girl in London (cf. 220). Enriching the realist mode with elements associated with magic realism also links the mode of emplotment to a specifically non-Western, postcolonial generic feature reminiscent of earlier fiction like Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981). The formal representation of *White Teeth* thereby situates itself in the discourse both of the traditional English canon but also in the context of more recent postcolonial British fiction that challenges traditional images of the English.

Furthermore, the employment of postmodern features in *White Teeth* underlines its hybrid and experimental character. The narrative is enriched by numerous inclusions that create hypermediacy, i. e. they attract the reader’s attention of the novel’s very mediation strategies. These range from graphic representations, the use of different fonts to inclusions of other text forms.<sup>14</sup> It is also telling that these collage-like pastiches are increasingly used towards the chronological end of the story as markers of the postmodern *zeitgeist*. Moreover, Ruth Helyer has convincingly shown that such postmodern elements in *White Teeth* bear similarities to characteristics of postcolonial writing, which interrelates

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<sup>14</sup>Examples include Irie’s sketches of body shapes (cf. *WT* 267) or Samad’s name scratched into a bench on Trafalgar Square (cf. 504), the representations of signs, e. g. Samad’s “sign, a large white placard” (58) announcing his identity, a lamp-post advertisement (cf. 265), an announcement by London Transport about tube redirections (cf. 498), Ryan Topp’s calendar sheet (cf. 507) or information on bus ticket (cf. 510). Different text forms are e. g. Horst Ibelgauft’s letters, the time line of O’Connell’s (cf. 245), an inclusion of a dictionary entry (cf. 251) or dramatic dialogue structures (cf. 397, 401). In regard to the mode of emplotment, this also includes graphic representations of different fonts (cf. e. g. 317, 431, 518), an equation (cf. 244) or an enumeration of scenes happening at the same time (cf. 182).

both and has the effect that “the reader is obliged to re-think connections between events, actions and opinions” (Helyer 2006: 246).<sup>15</sup>

The postmodern character of *White Teeth* culminates in its finale on the level of emplotment as well as on that of content. The Perret Institute is described as a typically postmodern space in an increasingly fragmented way while at the same time situating the narrative in the fashionable rebranding discourse of the time:

[...] people can finally give the answers required when a space is being designed, or when something is being rebranded, a room/furniture/Britain (that was the brief: a new British room, a space for Britain, Britishness, space of Britain, British industrial space cultural space space); [...] and they know what is meant by national identity? symbols? paintings? maps? music? air-conditioning? smiling black children or smiling Chinese children or [tick the box]? world music? shag or pile? tile or floorboards? plants? running water?

they know what they want, especially those who’ve lived this century, forced from one space to another like Mr De Winter (née Wojciech), renamed, rebranded, the answer to every questionnaire nothing nothing space please just space nothing please nothing space (*WT* 518f.)

This quotation is interesting for different reasons: to begin with, its emplotment is highly fragmented and experimental, and is thus exceptional for the novel’s overall realist mode. Through the reiteration of “please” the quote reflects the earlier expression in the chapter that England usually says “*pleasethankyoupleasesorrypleasedidI?*” (491) and thus links the discourse to the quintessential English quality of good manners and politeness. Apart from that, the quote directly refers to the spirit of rebranding national identity in respect to the political entity of Britain and Britishness in regard to architecture and space. In doing so, it can be read as critically questioning politically marketed architectural constructions like the Millennium Dome or the Millennium Bridge in London as part of the celebrations of the British nation at the end of the century, and exposes the pointlessness of marketing such postmodern constructions as possibilities to construct national identification. What is more, the quotation denounces the marketing of multiculturalism involved in these processes through the expression of “smiling black children or smiling Chinese children”. Through the inclusion of “or [tick the box]” and the recurrent question marks, it exposes the randomness and eventual absurdity of such rebranding policies. However, it is the political dimension of these rebranding processes that is criticised here, since the space is

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<sup>15</sup>In fact, postmodern and postcolonial theories are interrelated on various levels (cf. Byrne 2005 [1998]).

Ruth Helyer explains that postmodern and postcolonial writing have in common that “both explore identities claimed through shared histories, often those of minorities, with ‘official’ versions of the past (usually white, western and male) being challenged” (Helyer 2006: 245 f.).

meant to represent Britishness, which is generally rather associated with the politically correct concept of national identity, as a contrast to Englishness. The passage thus also reflects an overall characteristics of *White Teeth*: it is critical about political rebranding endeavours while it rewrites the natural quotidian identity as it emerges in present times.

The criticism of a political rebranding in contrast to natural identification is also a characteristic of the passage. The individual is rebranded and renamed to fit into the space that projects an identity that all citizens could potentially adopt or share in. There are those who are eventually rebranded and renamed, such as Mr De Winter. The novel repeatedly challenges the idea that England is a neutral postmodern space, e. g. when in an earlier scene the narrator comments on the impossibility of leaving one's history behind:

Because we often imagine that immigrants are constantly on the move, [...] step into their foreign lands as *blank people*, free of any kind of baggage, happy and willing to leave their difference at the docks and take their chances in this new place, merging with the oneness of this greenandpleasantlibertarianland-ofthefree. (465)

The narrator challenges the idea of an unproblematic integration here. It is one of the recurrent notions in Smith's novel that have been rather neglected in research, which has instead tended to regard the novel's celebratory, positive and happy account of present-day multicultural England. The quoted passage also takes up the icon and canonised expression of the "green and pleasant land" which relates it to the discourse of Englishness, and deconstructs the idea of another homogeneous concept of '-ness', i. e. the idea of Englishness as "oneness". Instead, it highlights the fact that Englishness is not something into which immigrants are able to merge as easily as it is often implied. Immigrants are not "blank people", but rather bring their own historical backgrounds with them. What is important in the discussion of the postmodern emplotment employed in the novel is thus also the function postmodernism has on the level of content: the postmodern theme is related to that of postcolonialism and thereby challenges essentialist versions of national identity through counter-discourses.

The last part of *White Teeth* further underscores a typical reference on the level of emplotment. After the novel's finale in which all the main characters are assembled in one place, a prospective outlook informs the reader about possible developments dated to 1999: "If it were TV you would hear the saxophone around now; the credits would be rolling" (540). In fact, the narrative frequently refers to the medium of TV and thus

constructs intermedial references.<sup>16</sup> However, the overall ending is thus characterised by a remediation strategy, underscoring typical features of postmodern and postcolonial writing:

And is it young professional women aged eighteen to thirty-two who would like a snapshot seven years hence of Irie, Joshua and Hortense sitting by a Caribbean sea (for Irie and Joshua become lovers in the end; you can only avoid your fate for so long), while Irie's fatherless little girl writes affectionate postcards to *Bad Uncle Millat* and *Good Uncle Magid* [...]?  
But surely to tell these tales and others like them would be to spread the myth, the wicked lie, that the past is always tense and the future, perfect.  
(541)

Although the novel purports to provide an outlook on the future here, the description is marked by a high degree of uncertainty in which the ending remains open. This uncertainty results from the inclusion of questionmarks and by the references to tales, myths and even lies. What is also interesting here is that “the narrator points to a very distinct reading clientele and their ideas of how the story should continue” in this “ironic metanarrative commentary” (Schäfer 2009: 116).<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, it highlights characteristics for both postmodern and postcolonial writing since it is an example of narrators who tell their “stories erratically and eccentrically” (Helyer 2006: 245). The open ending thus also alludes to the possible audience of the book itself in a meta-commentary that permeates the overriding realist mode.

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<sup>16</sup>Further references to the medium of TV are introduced e. g. in the scene when the children travel through London for the Harvest Festival and Samad goes to meet Poppy Burt-Jones. The narrator observes, demonstrating again the magical elements of the novel: “Unbeknownst to all involved, ancient ley-lines run underneath these two journeys – or, to put it in the modern parlance, this is a rerun. [...] This is like watching TV in Bombay or Kingston or Dhaka, watching the same old British sitcoms spewed out to the old colonies in one tedious, eternal loop” (161 f.). Especially towards the end of the novel, references to TV become more frequent. Archie says about the Perret Institute: “It’s just like on TV! [...] It’s very modern” (520), and Millat is described how he handles the gun he had bought: “It’s all so familiar. It’s all on TV. [...] Fate. Which to Millat is a quantity very much like TV: an unstoppable narrative, written, produced and directed by somebody else” (526). How Millat’s fundamentalism is represented as a remediation of gangster and Mafia films will also be of interest in chapter 4.4.3.

<sup>17</sup>In her article about the ways in which fundamentalism and terrorism are represented humorously, Helga Ramsey-Kurz also rightly points out that there is a tendency to humour the audience in several contemporary novels including *White Teeth* (cf. Ramsey-Kurz 2005: 74).

## 4.2 Multicultural Polyphony: the Mocking Narrator and Strategies of Variable Focalisation

Consistent with the dominant realist mode, the narrator in *White Teeth* is a heterodiegetic or authorial narrator. This narrative mediation enables the narrator to comment on the story both in ironical but also in serious tones. Furthermore, the narrative is represented through different perspectives according to multiperspectivity which allows the characters to comment on their lives and to balance different self-images. Within this discourse structure, the diverse characters' points of view and the narrator's mocking comments create a polyphony of voices the function of which is to represent various, even competing identity concepts. This strategy also contributes to the ironical and satirical tone that the narrative situation is able to create. In several instances, the account slides from the narrator's overarching perspective into a character's point of view in free indirect speech, which can be classified as a 'double voiced discourse'.<sup>18</sup> These observations call for the question: how are these narrative strategies employed and how do they affect the negotiation and rewriting of Englishness in *White Teeth*?

To begin with, the mediation through an omniscient narrator makes it possible to include comments on the story and on the broader context. *White Teeth* is narrated "[...] by a heterodiegetic narrator who remains covert most of the time, but inserts cunning commentaries and displays the characters in a mocking, yet benevolent overall tone" (Schäfer 2009: 113). However, these typical commentaries can also be serious in their tone. A quote, which has been frequently cited in studies of the novel, depicts the sociological hybridity that has become an everyday fact in North London:

This has been the century of strangers, brown, yellow and white. This has been the century of the great immigrant experiment. [...] Yet, despite all the mixing up, despite the fact that we have slipped into each other's lives with reasonable comfort (like a man returning to his lover's bed after a midnight walk), despite all this, it is still hard to imagine that there is no one more English than the Indian, no one more Indian than the English. There are still young white men who are *angry* about that; who will roll out at closing time into the poorly lit streets with a kitchen knife wrapped in a tight fist. (*WT* 326 f.)

Although the narrator is clearly situated outside of the story, a technique used here is to create an identification through the use of "we". The tone of this passage also

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. Ertl (2007a: 123). Since free indirect speech is a typical feature of modernist literature, Matthew Paproth claims that the dominating mode of *White Teeth* is modernist rather than realist, permeated by postmodernist elements (cf. Paproth 2008).

underlines the seriousness of the topic, as implied by the last part of the quote, which shows that alongside a positive and everyday convivial community there is also racism. This demonstrates that the authorial comments negotiate a reality that does not blindly and optimistically celebrate the multicultural make-up of society. What is more, the narrator further comments that “it makes the immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist” (327), and explains how Alsana is afraid of losing the ‘Bengali-ness’ in her family. What the novel does, then, is neither to candy-coat multicultural reality nor to show its complete dysfunctioning but rather to highlight the struggles to come to term with hybrid communities observed from different perspectives.

Collective identity is not only signalled by the use of “we”, but also by the way the narrator humorously addresses the reader. For example, the narrator reminds the reader to be attentive about a detail that will later be elaborated on in regard to the scene when Magid breaks his nose, represented in brackets: “(and keep one eye on that vase, please, it is the same vase that will lead Magid by the nose to his vocation)” (213). In scenes like these, the narrator is at times undisguised, thus self-reflexively foregrounding the fictionality of the narrative (cf. Squires 2002: 62). Similar passages are employed when the miraculous bond between the twins is explained, when the narrator asks: “Ah, but you are not convinced by coincidence? You want fact fact fact? You want brushes with the Big Man with black hood and scythe? OK: [...]” (220) or in the course of the description of Millat’s good looks: “Now, don’t be jealous. There’s no point” (*WT* 368). In scenes like these, the narrator becomes rather overt, intrudes into the action and thus thwarts the transparency created through mimetic descriptions. Thereby, the narrative makes its readers aware of their reading process and the mediacy of the text. In doing so, the reader also gets involved in the story and is actively stimulated to reflect on the content of the novel.

The ironical tone of the narrator is an important strategy for dealing with questions of hybrid identities. Through this technique, the narrative is able to create humorous moments, often by employing dramatic irony. This results from the ways in which the narrator retreats in favour of foregrounding the characters’ points of view. As an example of how the narrator retreats even from an omniscient perspective, a scene commenting upon the school raid to find drugs is characteristic: “Taking the suggestion of Parent-Governor Archibald Jones, an ex-army man who claimed expertise in the field of ambush, they had resolved to come from *both* sides (never before tested) [...]” (298). This description is found long after the reader has learnt about Archie’s life and his rather meagre war experiences. Consequently, the reader can dismantle the fact that Archie does not have any special “expertise in the field of ambush”. What the narrator does,



then, is to step back from an omniscient perspective and introduce Archie as though he had not been introduced before, thus staging an unaware point of view of an outside group, such as that of other parents from school. This form of ‘double voiced discourse’ appears in several instances and creates a high degree of dramatic irony, playing with the knowledge of the reader and the individual characters. In doing so, the ironical tone of the narrator and the changing perspectives function to underscore the fact that there is only one valid opinion. Moreover, an important function of this representation is to undermine political correctness (cf. Bentley 2007: 497). This is an essential strategy for tackling issues such as ethnicity, identity and Englishness in not too didactic a tone.

The change in perspective from that of the heterodiegetic narrator to those of different characters creates a multiperspectival structure that allows different views on questions of national identity. The way in which Archie – as a representative of an Englishman – is introduced is significant in the context of Englishness in relation to characterisation: “No white knight, then, this Archibald Jones. No aims, no hopes, no ambitions. A man whose greatest pleasures were English breakfasts and DIY. A dull man. An *old* man. And yet . . . good” (48). It remains unclear in this scene if the voice is the narrator’s or Clara’s opinion about her new husband. Tellingly, though, Archie is described as a simple Englishman who shares several quintessentially English manners and opinions, such as a preference for the iconic English breakfast. Apart from that, however, he does not conform to the positive English self-image of a middle-class representative or even the typical image of the English gentleman, as he is “no white knight”. Additionally, Archie is characterised to be chronically undecided: “This was the man: never able to make a decision, never able to state a position” (53), which is why he tends to flip a coin in order to come to a decision.<sup>19</sup> As for Archie’s character construction, Nick Bentley points out: “Archie emerges as representing the unlikely hero of the book, but this unlikeliness is part of his English identity” (Bentley 2007: 498). Although Archie’s English origins are not critically questioned in contrast to e.g. the Chalfens’, he does not personify a quintessential Englishman in the traditional sense but a rather simple working-class representative. The idea of an essentialist version of Englishness is questioned in favour of individuals of different classes living in a heterogeneous society in regard to Archie’s character.

The use of multiple voices is also a significant strategy to introduce how the uncommon friendship between the Joneses and the Iqbals develop. When moving to North London,

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<sup>19</sup> Archie’s flipping of the coin is a symbol for the way themes like chance, choice and fate are dealt with in the novel. Cf. Squires (2002: 52ff.) and in greater detail Jonathan P. A. Sell’s articles (2006 & 2007).

Alsana is still critical and complains about Samad's English friend: "‘You fight in an old, forgotten war with some Englishman . . . married to a black! Whose friends are they? These are the people my child will grow up around? Their children – half blacky-white?’" (WT 61). Alsana's criticism voices prejudices and uncertainties that also exist between different groups of immigrant communities. However, the novel is keen to depict both sides to undermine such prejudices. The counter-perspective is depicted when Clara worries about what to cook when Archie has invited the Iqbals for dinner. Archie tries to calm down a doubtful Clara:

‘For God's sake, they're not *those* kind of Indians,' said Archie irritably, offended at the suggestion. ‘Sam'll have a Sunday roast like the next man. He serves Indian food all the time, he doesn't want to eat it too.' [...] Samad and Alsana Iqbal, who where not *those* kind of Indians (as, in Archie's mind, Clara was not *that* kind of black), who were, in fact, not Indian at all but Bangladeshi, lived four blocks down on the wrong side of Willesden High Road. (54f.)

Archie's opinion about Samad is influenced by a typically English perspective when he highlights that Samad prefers a Sunday roast, which represents a typical culinary icon of Englishness, to Indian food. In an act of dramatic irony, the narrator furthermore discloses that Archie is unaware of the cultural difference between Indian and Bangladeshi, and the origins of the Iqbals. What is more, the quote shows whom Archie regards as ethnically diverse. Archie's view is introduced as relatively unique for the 1970s, as the novel also highlights in a different scene that narrates how racism prevails e. g. at Archie's work.<sup>20</sup> John Clement Ball points out in his monograph about postcolonial London fiction that "[t]hrough the interpersonal, she [Zadie Smith] analogizes broader patterns of sociohistorical involvement" (Ball 2004: 237) in a heterogeneous society, which is an important strategy for the representation of how families of different ethnic backgrounds become involved with each other. The strength of the multiperspectival structure in *White Teeth* is that the narrative always offers "more than one version, more than one voice and different versions from the same voice" (Helyer 2006: 245) and thereby creates a polyphony of voices and opinions. This narrative strategy functions not only to negotiate but also to actively challenge prejudices and different identity concepts.

The creation of dramatic irony through authorial comments is an essential narrative strategy that *White Teeth* uses to undermine concepts of essentialist identity concepts. A paradigmatic scene for this strategy is a depiction of Irie's feelings for the Chalfen family,

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<sup>20</sup>The relating passages will be scrutinised in chapter 4.4.2 in relation to the ways in which *White Teeth* negotiates racism.

which starts with a representation from Irie's point of view and moves on to mocking observations from the narrator's perspective:

She just wanted to, well, kind of, *merge* with them. She wanted their Englishness. Their Chalfishness. The *purity* of it. It didn't occur to her that the Chalfens were, after a fashion, immigrants too (third generation, by way of Germany and Poland, née Chalfenovsky), or that they might be as needy of her as she was of them. To Irie, the Chalfens were more English than the English. When Irie stepped over the threshold of the Chalfen house, she felt an illicit thrill, like a Jew munching a sausage or a Hindu grabbing a Big Mac. She was crossing borders, sneaking into England; it felt like some terribly mutinous act, wearing somebody else's uniform or somebody else's skin. (*WT* 328)

Irie's fascination with Englishness, which she imagines to be a concept characterised by purity, is personified by the white, middle-class family of the Chalfens. Irie is dazzled by the Chalfens' identity and longs to acquire what she imagines as an Englishness characterised by whiteness and middle-class identity. Whiteness is a quality Irie cannot achieve in order to partake in what she considers to be quintessentially English: the reference to changing someone's skin indicates this idea. However, the narrator is keen to create a high degree of dramatic irony: the Chalfens are not quintessentially English, but, as Ruth Helyer rightly argues: "The truth is they are no more 'English' than she [Irie] is, demonstrating the depth of the cultural mix and diversity known as 'Englishness'" (Helyer 2006: 244). In this scene, *White Teeth* transposes Daniel Defoe's ideas into present-day England: there is no 'True-Born Englishman' and neither is there an essential purity of being white and English. Instead, through the use of dramatic irony, the narrative exposes the absurdity of an exclusive version of Englishness by dismantling traditional associations of Englishness with whiteness and the middle class, and thus humorously rewrites contemporary identity conceptions.

*White Teeth* also tends to satirise those white English characters who naively idealise otherness and diversity in a way comparable to the endeavours of political parties. Their naivety is exposed and ridiculed, as is manifested most prominently in the characters Joyce Chalfen, Poppy Burt-Jones and the headmaster of Glenard Oak (cf. Rogers 2008: 55). The dialogue between Joyce Chalfen, Millat and Irie when they first meet is symptomatic for this strategy:

'[...] you look very exotic. Where are you from, if you don't mind me asking?'

'Willesden,' said Irie and Millat simultaneously.

'Yes, yes, of course, but where *originally*?' [...]

‘Whitechapel,’ said Millat, pulling out a fag. ‘Via the Royal London Hospital and the 207 bus.’ (*WT* 319)

Joyce personifies the positive *zeitgeist* celebrating diversity when she says that Irie and Millat look ‘exotic’. In the same breath, Joyce also acknowledges political correctness in her tentative “if you don’t mind me asking”. However, her inquiry is ridiculed by the children’s responses who just say where they come from, which is Willesden. Irie and Millat are English like Joyce, who insists in inquiring their origins, which Millat then purposefully ridicules to expose Joyce’s folly. Dominic Head also agrees that “it is the Chalfens that bear the main brunt of Smith’s social satire” (Head 2003: 113). Similar scenes that ridicule characters for their tendency to highlight and expose difference include, e. g., a dialogue between Poppy Burt-Jones and Samad, when she tells him how interested she is in Indian culture, which she imagines as “much more . . . colourful” (*WT* 133). She starts to plan a teaching unit on Indian culture: “[...] It could be *really* exciting,’ said Poppy Burt-Jones, getting really excited” (ibid.). The narrator echoes or even apes her here, which creates a mocking and ironic comment on Poppy’s enthusiasm. However, this is dampened when Samad explains that he is not from India but from Bangladesh. Poppy comments “Oh, right. Same sort of ball-park, then” (ibid.), thus exposing her ignorance about the cultural differences between India and Bangladesh. Characters in *White Teeth* that are depicted as politically correct and enthusiastic about cultural differences thus tend to be mocked by the narrator. The narrative thereby supports the idea of accepting diversity as an everyday fact and making it a non-issue in favour of making it a big issue.

The heterodiegetic narrator not only exposes the follies of those characters that relate to ethnic but also to gendered identity. When Neena, Alsana’s homosexual ‘Niece-of-Shame’, visits the Chalfens together with her girl-friend Maxine, the narrative concentrates on Joyce:

Now, it wasn’t that Joyce was a homophobe. [...] But gay women . . . something confused Joyce about gay women. [...] So when Neena turned up for dinner, arm in arm with Maxine, Joyce just sat staring at the two of them over the starter [...], utterly fixated. (350)

The focalisation together with the narrator’s observations combine to ridicule Joyce’s ignorance, which is reminiscent of the naivety about homosexuality exposed in the scene in *How to be Good* (cf. 3.4.1). The mockery and satirical comedy of the situation is taken to extremes in *White Teeth* when the first and only thing Joyce comes up with to ask Neena and Maxine is: “Do you use each other’s breasts as pillows?” (350), which results in an embarrassing situation. The satirical style in *White Teeth* is thus often used

to ridicule those characters who overstate diversity.<sup>21</sup> It results from the polyphony of voices, both of the characters and the narrator, either in direct speech, in the thoughts of the focalisers or in the mocking comments of the heterodiegetic narrator who frequently undermines prevailing conceptions of and opinions on identity. Nick Bentley rightly claims that this satirical style “serves to avoid the didacticism of political correctness, whilst maintaining an underlying serious approach to the experiences of first- and second-generation immigrants to Britain” (Bentley 2007: 497). Avoiding political correctness functions to deconstruct essentialist identity concepts and to rewrite them as an everyday hybrid phenomenon.

### 4.3 Of Cricket and Gentlemen: Remediating Icons of Englishness

*White Teeth* is not only situated in a typically English tradition of writing, it also frequently refers to premediated icons and canonised narratives. In doing so, the novel strongly contributes to the remediation of Englishness and the iconisation of certain plots. This rewriting can occur in different ways: first, traditional icons can be critically negotiated and exposed as out of date for a rebranded version of Englishness. Secondly, some icons are appropriated by immigrants and are thus perpetuated. Thirdly, certain icons are reconsidered and eventually rebranded according to contemporary cultural developments. These three possibilities emerge through certain themes and motifs. To begin with, *White Teeth* negotiates typical English manners, sometimes by demarcating them from habits associated with other cultures. The novel also refers to specifically English icons and canonised narratives and rewrites them. A special role in regard to characterisation is occupied by Magid, whose character is represented with a recourse to colonial English stereotypes and to traditional icons. Finally, *White Teeth* also introduces the middle class as representatives of a quintessential Englishness, which becomes, however, questioned and even ridiculed.

The novel considers aspects of English manners and politeness almost at the beginning of the story. The chapter that introduces how Archie and Samad become friends during the last days of the Second World War takes up this issue. The narrator observes that the day

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<sup>21</sup> Apart from ridiculing Joyce’s characters, another aspect is interesting here in comparison to Hornby’s *How to be Good* and representations of families and partnerships. Most of the couples introduced in *White Teeth* like Katie and David go through some form of relational crisis, even the Chalfens. Devon Campbell-Hall points out that of all the couples depicted in the novel, the most stable and unproblematic one is ironically the homosexual partnership between Neena and her white partner, Maxine (cf. Campbell-Hall 2009: 177 f.).

Archie first saw Samad was “the day Archie involuntarily forgot that most fundamental principle of English manners. He stared” (*WT* 83). It is Samad’s foreignness that makes Archie forget the quintessential principle of politeness associated with Englishness. The passage in which Archie and Samad get to know each other better after their comrades have been killed brings up even more stereotypes of English manners, which are personified by Archie. That the two characters’ understanding of friendship differs is implied in two quotes. First, the narrator interprets Archie’s behaviour: “In short, it was precisely the kind of friendship an Englishman makes on holiday, that he can make only on holiday. A friendship that crosses class and colour [...]” (96). The relationship of the characters seems only possible in this special wartime situation, which is also stressed in a scene in which Samad declares the friendship:

‘When this is over, we will meet again in England, OK?’ said Samad [...].  
‘Yes,’ said Archie, trying to imagine walking along Brighton pier with Samad.  
‘Because you are a rare Englishman, Sapper Jones. I consider you my friend.’  
(103)

While Samad is the character who is open towards other cultures, the Englishman Archie has problems accepting the friendship. Archie tries to imagine how he could continue the friendship in a typically English surrounding – at Brighton pier. Although it is not clearly stated, imagining himself together with Samad in England does not work out in Archie’s inner eye.

However, the further course of the story both presents stereotypical English habits and critically contests them by playing them off against other cultural habits. When Archie and Samad talk about women, Samad tells Archie that his wife-to-be is not born yet, whereupon the following dialogue takes place:

‘Where I come from,’ said Archie, ‘a bloke likes to get to know a girl before he marries her.’  
‘Where you come from it is customary to boil vegetables until they fall apart.  
That doesn’t mean,’ said Samad, ‘that it is a good idea.’ (98)

The characters shed light on national mannerisms about marriage that they hold to be the best practice and a mode of identification. Archie does not understand how an arranged marriage makes sense but Samad is clever enough to divert the discussion to the practice of English cooking. In the light of the novel’s readership which is mainly British, the narrative thereby invites readers to rethink their own cultural practices in the light of foreign ones. In addition, the passage plays with the unfavourable stereotype of bad English cooking, which is confronted with Asian cuisine.

The account of war experiences also includes a paradigmatic reference to a premediated English narrative. After Samad and Archie have caught Dr Sick, Samad decides that the Nazi should be killed. They get drunk and take the doctor in their car away from the city. Samad wants Archie to shoot Dr Sick, and tries to affirm his decision by calling upon Archie's patriotism. Archie is finally convinced and utters the reasons for why the deed makes sense:

‘It’s England’s future we’ve been fighting for. For England. You know,’ said Archie, searching his brain, ‘democracy and Sunday dinners, and . . . and . . . promenades and piers, and bangers and mash – and the things that are *ours*.’ (120)

Archie's statement repeats two canonised national narratives he only vaguely remembers. He mixes up parts of Betjeman's poem which includes the verse "democracy and proper drains" (cf. epigraph of chapter 3) and Orwell's famous lines about "solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays" in his patriotic but hopelessly scrambled description of what it is one should be proud of about England. The remediation of these iconic representations of Englishness showcases an important function the narratives like those by Betjeman and Orwell have: they appear to offer a definition of Englishness and are easy to repeat. It is, however, only a feigned definition, which is no more than listing several iconic characteristics. Archie falls prey to such inadequate characterisations of Englishness when he naively repeats those half-remembered, national narratives. Their rhetorical peculiarity of listing characteristics found in these narratives, connected to their typical repetitive use of "and", is simulated in Archie's direct speech here. The quote thus plays with culturally premediated schemes that trigger a recognition in the readers who also share a knowledge about these icons and the list-making. Moreover, it humorously remediates a scrambled version of the cultural repertoire of English narratives and thereby also contributes to their continuation and stabilisation.

While *White Teeth* at first mainly uses Archie's character to remediate English icons, it also describes how immigrants in London appropriate and perpetuate certain icons and English habits. In doing so, the icons become refigured according to the rebranded version of Englishness. It is right at the beginning of the novel that such an appropriation and rewriting of an English icon appears. When Archie tries to gas himself in his car, he is eventually spotted by Mo Hussein-Ishmael, a halal butcher, who every morning pursues the sport of killing pigeons: "[...] Yes! SIX! It was cricket, basically – the Englishman's game adapted by the immigrant, and six was the most pigeons you could get at one swipe" (5). It is again the authorial narrator who directly links the character's action to a negotiation of immigrant culture and Englishness. Cricket – "the Englishman's game"

– is after all a typical icon that in this scene becomes a symbol for appropriating and mixing cultures in cosmopolitan London. Similar scenes that refer e.g. to the iconic oak tree also symbolise an appropriation of English space. Although a detail, it is telling that Clara knocks her teeth out on a “400-year-old oak tree” (43 f.) in a motorbike crash on Primrose Hill. It is not only the English who are ‘affected’ by icons and manners but everyone who is part of present-day English society – all have a share in these icons and constantly reproduce and perpetuate them. The allusion to the oak tree becomes even more pointed in a description of Samad’s thoughts during a storm. The Iqbals’ garden – “often ridiculed for its corrugated-iron surround, treeless interior and bed after bed of sickly smelling herbs” (222 f.) – has been miraculously spared by the storm which had felled several trees in the neighbourhood. As a consequence, Samad is reported to be “happily formulating some allegory regarding the bending Eastern reed versus the stubborn Western oak” (223). Variable focalisation allows an insight into Samad’s thoughts and represents his quick-witted readiness to contest cultural differences in favour of his Bangladeshi background. It is not a coincidence, then, that the quote relates to the “Western oak”; rather, it underscores its status as a cultural icon. Nationally premediated icons thus function as palpable *pars-pro-toto* elements to symbolise the abstract phenomenon of Englishness which is repeatedly tested and challenged in the novel.

*White Teeth* also introduces more recent icons of Englishness and remediates them. The novel explains that Samad’s cousin Ardashir’s restaurant serves “meals that do not exist in India” (59). Like the iconic Chicken Tikka Masala, which was invented in London, not every dish and also icons that seem authentic are nothing more than invented traditions. Another quote centres on Ardashir’s restaurant, when the narrator describes that theatre goers that come to eat there

inquired after the geography of the food – its Eastern origins, its history – all of which would be happily fabricated by the younger waiters (whose furthest expeditions East was the one they made daily, back home to Whitechapel, Smithfield’s, the Isle of Dogs) [...]. (203)

The narrative exposes the way icons and stories become invented in the course of repeating them. It is almost ironic that one year after the publication of Smith’s novel, New Labour Minister Robin Cook held a speech that was afterwards coined “Chicken Tikka Masala Speech”.<sup>22</sup> The newly established icon of Englishness, Chicken Tikka

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<sup>22</sup>Cook is one of the few politicians who actually refer to Englishness instead of Britishness. The very title of the speech is telling, and Cook obviously jumps on the bandwagon of celebrating multiculturalism. Colin Wright (2007) has studied Cook’s speech as a counterpoint to Powell’s infamous “Rivers of



Masala, also implicitly becomes remediated and thus perpetuated in *White Teeth* while at the same time the narrative exposes the often artificial and inauthentic quality that sticks to such processes of iconisation by way of inventing traditions.

The use of the English language is another feature that serves to critically deal with national identity. In a dialogue with his secret lover, Poppy, Samad asks: “What kind of phrase is this: ‘So what?’ Is that English? That is not English. Only the immigrants can speak the Queen’s English these days.” (181). The Queen’s English becomes a symbol for a traditional version of Englishness associated with royalty. Yet, immigrants have not only adopted this kind of speech but even more so, they outdo the English in using their language. The ways in which the second generation integrates into society is also explained according to their use of language. Magid and Millat use an increasingly different language, which underlines the characters’ functions as antipodes. While Magid is humorously described that he “spoke like the Prince of Wales” (212) and thus personifies a typically traditional perception of Englishness, Magid and his gang identify as so-called ‘Raggastanis’ who “spoke a strange mix of Jamaican patois, Bengali, Gujarati and English” (231). Whereas Magid is characterised as embodying notions of a traditional, almost colonial Englishness, Millat represents hybrid immigrant youth culture that mixes available self-images and establishes an innovative, rebranded identity.

Language and expressed politeness are also referred to as English identity markers in one of the last chapters, “The Final Space”, dated to New Year’s eve, 1992. The narrator explains:

It was the night when England stops saying *pleasethankyoupleasesorry-pleasedidI?* And starts saying *pleasefuckmefuckyoumotherfucker* (and we *never* say that; the accent is wrong; we sound silly). The night England gets down to the fundamentals. (491)

The narrative implies that there is a common usage and an established set of formulations that are distinctive features of politeness in England. The use of italics and compound words is a humorous way of introducing the issue. What is also interesting about the quote is the use of “we” by the narrator, which implies an identification of the narrator with the English culture. The general domination of politeness as a marker for Englishness thereby presents a common self-image that is less contested but rather perpetuated in

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Blood” speech, and argues that Cook’s speech underscores an enthusiasm for cultural hybridity and for fractured postmodern subjectivities but is in fact apodictic (cf. Wright 2007: 172 ff.).

this instance.<sup>23</sup> *White Teeth* thus not only remediates but also actively fosters the iconic image of English politeness.

Magid is a character who is represented as a personification of images traditionally associated with Englishness. This characterisation is achieved by attaching premediated English icons to his character. When he is sent to Bangladesh for his education, Magid develops an increasing identification with Englishness from the distance. In a letter, Magid writes to his parents: “*We must be more like the English. The English fight fate to death. They do not listen to history unless it is telling them what they wish to hear*” (288). Magid sees the ideal in the English character and refers to the empiricist tradition of the English which is set against fate or chance. Samad’s reaction to Magid’s letter follows immediately: “Tell me, did I send him to have his mind poisoned by a Rule-Britannia-worshipping Hindu old Queen?” (289). Samad’s statement again refers to a premediated narrative, i. e. the poem and song “Rule Britannia”. It is telling that this plot is linked to a colonial Englishness, and it already foreshadows Magid’s later developments. Unlike Millat, who personifies hybrid identity, Magid’s character in fact becomes increasingly associated with a traditional, colonial version of Englishness. When Magid is back, Samad paraphrases this idea when he complains about his sons: “There are no words. The one I send home comes out a pukka Englishman, white suited, silly wig lawyer. The one I keep here is fully paid-up green bow-tie-wearing fundamentalist terrorist” (407). In this quote, Samad describes Magid’s Englishness as “pukka”, which is an Anglo-Indian expression for ‘true’ or ‘first-class’. Again, this might be read as an ironical reference to Defoe’s “True-Born Englishman”, which still appears to be valid for contemporary society.

Magid’s personification of an exaggerated version of colonial Englishness is mainly achieved by linking the character’s description to several recognisable icons and narratives. For example, Magid simply exposes a ‘stiff-upper lip’ when he is told that Millat does not want to meet him again (cf. 424). Abdul-Mickey observes about Magid when he accompanies Samad and Archie to O’Connell’s: “Speaks fuckin’ nice, don’t he? Sounds like a right fuckin’ Olivier. Queen’s fuckin’ English and no mistake. [...] Cor, what a gentleman” (449). Again, the English language serves as a reference point that helps to depict how Magid transforms into what resembles an icon of Englishness: a gentleman.

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<sup>23</sup>A similar scene with the same way of representing the polite use of language through italics and as a compound word occurs when Samad is trying to persuade Hortense to keep quiet outside the Perret Institute: “He tries the full range of vocabulary available to an Indian man addressing potentially dangerous elderly Jamaican women (*ifIcouldpleasesorrypossiblypleasesorry* – you learn it at bus stops) [...]” (529). Again, English politeness provides the code in the heterogeneous English society, also between immigrants from different origins.

This is also expressed in descriptions of Magid's clothes, as one of the two other regulars of O'Connell's – the Jamaicans Denzel and Clarence – observes: “‘Dat a lovely suit you gat dere,’ murmured Denzel, stroking the white linen wistfully. ‘Dat’s what de Englishmen use to a wear back home in Jamaica, remember dat, Clarence?’” (450). Magid obviously dresses in a white linen suit which, not coincidentally, reminds Denzel of the former English colonisers in Jamaica. The white suit thus becomes an image of colonial England, which is the kind of Englishness Magid's character becomes associated with. Magid is, like the Chalfens, described as being “more English than the English” (406). According to Jonathan Sell, this phrase has become “a critical mantra in postcolonial studies” (Sell 2006: 28) that is taken up to characterise Magid. Consequently, it is not only an icon of Englishness but also an icon of postcolonial studies which is remediated here in relation to Magid's characterisation.

In the course of the story, premediated narratives are frequently used to contrast Englishness and otherness. The narrator elaborates on Alsana's point of view about cultural difference and ethnic identity:

To Alsana's mind the real difference between people was not colour. Nor did it lie in gender, faith, their relative ability to dance to a syncopated rhythm or open their fists to reveal a handful of gold coins. The real difference was far more fundamental. It was in the earth. It was in the sky.  
[...] Born of a green and pleasant land, a temperate land, the English have a basic inability to conceive of disaster, even when it is man-made. (*WT* 210 f.)

According to Alsana, ethnic difference is mainly rooted in people's environments. The narrative here refers to Blake's famous poem and the song *Jerusalem* as iconic presences in the discourse of Englishness. What is more, the allusion to “temperate” is even reminiscent of climate theories that were popular in the eighteenth century and were used to justify differences between national characters. A further reference to *Jerusalem* is also interwoven into an interior reflection by Archie about the past: “The funny thing about getting old in a country is people always want to hear that from you. They want to hear it really was once a green and pleasant land. They *need* it. Archie wondered if his daughter needed it” (517). The thoughts clearly link up to a nostalgia for the overcome, traditional version of Englishness and to perceptions of an older generation. Although *White Teeth* remediates the narrative, it is linked to the past which has little to do with versions of national identity as they have established in postcolonial London.

In fact, traditional icons rather tend to get mentioned in situations when it becomes clear that they are outdated. In one scene, the Iqbals and Joneses watch news on television together in 1989 and witness how the Berlin Wall comes down. Samad philosophies about

the massive immigration problem West Germany will have and states: “You just can’t let a million people into a rich country. Recipe for disaster” (241). It is ironic that it is Samad who comments on the immigration problem like this, thereby echoing typical post-war statements by Conservative politicians, which Alsana exposes when she says: ““And who does he think he is? Mr Churchill-gee?” laughed Alsana scornfully. ‘Original whitecliffsdover piesnmash jellyeels royalvariety britishbulldog, heh?’” (ibid.). Alsana’s quick-witted response also plays with several traditional icons which are clearly linked to a past version of English identity and remediates them in an ironical way to expose their outdatedness. Besides, Alsana has her personal icons of Englishness, which are introduced as her “favoured English institutions, among them: Princess Anne, Blu-Tack, Children’s Variety Performance, Eric Morecambe, Woman’s Hour” (221). Alsana’s personal English icons are closely related to popular culture and TV. On the one hand, then, Alsana has assimilated to an English culture, on the other hand, it is a culture characterised rather by popular culture than a culture marked by traditional icons of Englishness. What *White Teeth* does, then, is to remediate traditional icons but question them in regard to their contemporary value, and moreover rewrite icons in their ordinariness.

Apart from such English mini-narratives, great works of the English canon get rewritten from a postcolonial perspective. One passage describes how Irie’s class reads and interprets Shakespeare’s sonnets in school. The interesting aspect about the passage is that the classical pieces are remediated from Irie’s ‘mixed-race’ point of view. When Irie reads verses such as “If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun; If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head” (Shakespeare, “Sonnet 130”), she asks her teacher if the lady in the poem is black. The teacher is slightly taken aback and tells Irie: “She’s not black in the modern sense. There weren’t any ... Afro-Carri-bee-yans in England at that time, dear” (*WT* 271). The verbal representation of “Afro-Carri-bee-yans” stresses the teacher’s political correctness in this matter. The effect on Irie is, however, as the narrator observes: “And the reflection that Irie had glimpsed slunk back into the familiar darkness” (272). Irie had hoped to see a representative of her identity in the great English canon but becomes disappointed, which is ambiguously symbolised as a “familiar darkness”, conjuring up association with a traditional version of Englishness as related to whiteness. The scene thereby also exposes the difficulty immigrants experience in trying to identify with canonised narratives of such an old, white-dominated Englishness. At the same time, the novel thereby provides a counter-narrative that makes it possible to identify with at the turn of the millennium.

The negotiation of the canonical text also further affects Irie and contributes to her personal identity crisis. The “reflection” Irie had hoped to find is introduced before in

relation to beauty ideals: “There was England, a gigantic mirror, and there was Irie, without reflection. A stranger in a stranger land” (266), and even more pointedly: “She was all *wrong*” (268). From Irie’s perspective, she does not fit into the image of a white dominated society and considers herself “wrong” in regard to the prevalent white beauty ideals.<sup>24</sup> Irie eventually resolves to change: “intent upon transformation, intent upon fighting her genes” (273), she goes to a hair parlour. What she wants is “[s]traight hair. Straight straight long black sleek flickable tossable shakeable touchable finger-through-able wind-blowable hair. With a fringe” (ibid.). The ideals that are manifested in Irie’s mind are those of a stereotypical English complexion. They have contributed to Irie’s decision to “fight her genes” and to become what she thinks is more English. However, in the end Irie’s hair comes out due to the chemicals. In describing these endeavours and the fatal outcome for Irie, the novel questions the ideals and speaks up for a heterogeneity that needs to be accepted, also as a moral lesson for Irie.

What is more, *White Teeth* challenges the self-image of the middle class as typical representatives of Englishness. Especially for Irie and Magid, the middle class is what seems most English and attractive for them. When aged nine and still living in London with his family, the narrative zooms in on Magid. Already then, he longs to live in what he imagines to be a typically English family, which through his focalisation is tied to the image of the white, educated middle class. One day, Alsana and Samad find out that Magid has pretended to be called Mark Smith in front of some children, which culminates in the following scene:

‘I GIVE YOU A GLORIOUS NAME LIKE MAGID MAHFOOZ MURSHED MUBTASIM IQBAL!’ Samad had yelled after Magid when he returned home that evening and whipped up the stairs like a bullet to hide in his room. ‘AND YOU WANT TO BE CALLED MARK SMITH!’

But this was just a symptom for a far deeper malaise. Magid really wanted to be *in some other family*. He wanted to own cats and not cockroaches, he wanted his mother to make the music of the cello, not the sound of the sewing machine; he wanted to have a trellis of flowers groping up one side of the house instead of the ever growing pile of other people’s rubbish; he wanted a piano in the hallway in place of the broken door off cousin Kurshed’s car; he wanted to go on biking holidays to France, not day-trips to Blackpool to visit aunties; he wanted the floor of his room to be shiny wood, not the orange and green swirled carpet left over from the restaurant; he wanted his father to be a doctor, not a one-handed waiter [...]. (151)

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<sup>24</sup>Molly Thompson (2005) pays attention to the representation of beauty ideals in her paper about questions of belonging, home and roots, and the difficulty of ‘multiculturalism’.

It is a typical image of English middle-class identity that is implied through Magid's perspective. He longs for a family with a well-kept house and educated parents playing instruments. However, what Magid misses out is that his parents in fact are educated, but found only low-paid jobs in Britain – and that it is also due to the class system which prevents them from finding better positions. Magid's image of the middle class already foreshadows the characterisation of the Chalfens who are introduced at a later stage of the novel. The quote contrasts and balances Englishness against otherness, which in this quote is not linked to ethnic identity but to identity marked by class differences. A similar view on middle-class identity is shared by Irie but not by Millat, whose opinions are introduced at a later stage when they first meet the Chalfens: "Where Irie saw culture, refinement, class, intellect, Millat saw money, lazy money, money that was just hanging around this family not doing anything in particular, money in need of a good cause that might as well be him" (322). The quote provides competing perspectives on the middle class. Irie's idea that the middle class stands for culture is telling here since it repeats a traditional image of national identity.

Smith's novel also takes up proclaimed self-images of middle-class representatives that at points resemble those in *How to be Good*. Joyce is represented as a typical middle-class character who is specifically satirised by the narrative for her tendency to overestimate her own superiority, which often creates a high degree of irony. When her son Joshua is sulking, Joyce says:

'It's perfectly natural for well-educated middle-class children to act up at this age.' (Unlike many others around this time, Joyce felt no shame about using the term 'middle class'. In the Chalfen lexicon the middle classes were the inheritors of the enlightenment, the creators of the welfare state, the intellectual elite and the source of all culture. Where they got this idea, it's hard to say.) (435)

Again, the narrator's satirical comment undermines Joyce's exaggerated self-image. The narrator first explains what middle-class identity means for the Chalfens: it is the stereotypical view that equates the middle class with positive achievements that are part of a traditional, positive conception of Englishness. However, the narrator mockingly undermines this very idea in the last sentence of the quote and thus deconstructs the optimistic self-image of middle-class identity. Icons of Englishness, then, are a vital feature in *White Teeth*, which negotiates identity by confronting English habits, icons and images with 'otherness', testing them for their validity at the turn of the millennium.

#### 4.4 “Do you think anyone is English, really English? It’s a fairy-tale!”: Rethinking Postcolonial Identities

The quote included in this chapter’s title is a symptomatic example of the ways in which *White Teeth* negotiates Englishness in particular and national identity in general through the multiple voices of a variety of characters. In this case it is Alsana, who, in one of her verbal rows with Samad, claims that ‘pure’ national identity is no more than wishful thinking: “[Y]ou go back and back and back and it’s still easier to find the correct Hoover bag than to find one pure person, one pure faith, on the globe. Do you think anyone is English, really English? It’s a fairy-tale!” (*WT* 236). Before she comes to this provocative conclusion, in which she compares identities with the triviality of Hoover bags, Alsana has looked up the definition of ‘Bengali’ in their “24-set *Reader’s Digest Encyclopedia*” (*ibid.*). What she found there and mockingly read out to her husband was the insight that Bengalis have always mingled and mixed with different ethnic groups. What the scene demonstrates is that, in fact, there is neither a pure ‘Bengali-ness’ (though Samad still tries hard to cling to the idea that there is), nor a pure Englishness or anything like a “True-Born Englishman”.

It is this essentialist conception of Englishness that *White Teeth* questions and rewrites through its multi-voiced discourses about national identity. The novel contests who is English and what ethnic identity means today in an increasingly hybrid society. In this context, *White Teeth* depicts a community that is characterised by what Paul Gilroy called a ‘convivial culture’. Conviviality, in Gilroy’s terms, is taken to

[...] refer to the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculturalism an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas [...]. It does not describe the absence of racism or the triumph of tolerance. Instead, it suggests a different setting for their empty, interpersonal rituals, which, I suggest, have started to mean different things in the absence of any strong belief in absolute or integral races. (Gilroy 2004: xi)

Paul Gilroy’s sociological concept describes what *White Teeth* fictionalises in two respects: on the one hand, the novel highlights the achievements of a positive, ‘lived’ multiculturalism in London. On the other hand, *White Teeth* does not simply celebrate a multicultural everyday hybridity but highlights characters who find themselves in identity crises. These crises are represented through individuals but also conjure up notions of national identity. Additionally, the novel showcases moments of racism that immigrants have to face in England. Topics like racism are negotiated through different perspectives and mediated in a particular way which underscores the difficulties that various characters have to face.

Furthermore, some of the characters start to develop fundamentalist ideologies in their struggles to overcome these crises. All these issues are more or less loosely connected to old and new conceptions of Englishness and to the problem of essentialist notions of identity. The ways in which *White Teeth* tackles these issues has the effect of not sounding too serious about these indeed serious matters. The following subchapters will focus on the narrative strategies by which the novel achieves this effect and on how this affects the rewriting of Englishness.

#### 4.4.1 “We’re all English now, mate”: Englishness and Hybridity

While Alsana’s statement quoted in the previous chapter title contests the existence of fixed identities, the quote in this chapter heading expresses yet a different idea. In the aforementioned scene in which Abdul-Mickey advises Archie about what Samad could do to overcome the trouble with his sons, Mickey believes that Samad could either send them to Bangladesh to be brought up properly, or alternatively, as Mickey says: “*Accept* it. He’ll have to *accept* it, won’t he. We’re all English now, mate. Like it or lump it, as the rhubarb said to the custard” (*WT* 192). In contrast to Alsana’s anti-essentialist statement, Abdul-Mickey’s statement implies something else: everyone living in England is English, no matter where one’s origins lie. What the character utters here, consequently, is the idea of an inclusive hybridity, which is a foundational concept in postcolonial studies and a powerful motif or theme through which Englishness is effectively challenged and rebranded in Smith’s novel.

Challenging Englishness through the concept of hybridity works according to different modes: to begin with, hybridity is a means of overcoming an essentialist understanding of both personal and national identities. *White Teeth* strategically expands the discourse on different levels, thus using hybridity as a theme or motif within the narrative. The novel can thus be read as a fictional exploration and challenge of the concept of hybridity. *White Teeth* tests the prominent concept according to the understanding of a multiculturally rebranded Englishness, and centres on the characters who personify different forms of hybridity. Millat’s and Irie’s hybrid personalities allows the novel to negotiate both social and ‘racial’ hybridity and the consequences for individual characters. Second-generation immigrants as a collective are representative of the ways in which the novel stages conflicts and dismantles English anxieties.

Abdul-Mickey’s statement is one of the most concise examples of how *White Teeth* stages and voices hybridity in relation to Englishness. In fact, the pub owner’s character is also a representative of a generation *White Teeth* introduces at another point as people “with first and last names on a direct collision course. Names that secrete within them



mass exodus, cramped boats and planes, cold arrivals, medical checks” (326). Abdul-Mickey’s name, and the names of his male relatives who also combine Abdul with a second, typical ‘Western’ name like Abdul-Jimmy or Abdul-Colin, are also typical expressions of hybridisation. This is also palpable e. g. in Millat’s above mentioned Raggastani youth culture, which manifests itself in adopting and mingling different dialects and modes of speaking (cf. also Walters 2005: 317f.). Another example is Alsana’s iconisation of several English persons, items or TV shows, mainly connected to contemporary popular culture, which provides a ground for easy identification. These forms of hybridisation thus reflect what Stuart Hall had conjured up some years earlier when he referred to a “process of unsettling, recombination, hybridization and ‘cut-and-mix’ – in short, the process of cultural diaspora-ization (to coin an ugly term) [...]” (Hall 2005 [1996]: 448) as a contemporary phenomenon. This statement can also be read in context of an observation by Tracy Walters, who writes that *White Teeth* shows that “although in past times ethnic identity could be signified and maintained by cultural markers such as dress, food, specific cultural traditions or even language, today these distinctions are nebulous” (Walters 2005: 317). Through all these instances, the novel thus deconstructs essentialist identity conceptions and paves the way for new identity concepts.

However, *White Teeth* does not simply orchestrate the theme of hybridisation in relation to London’s society and individual characters through either authorial comments or the polyphony created through variable focalisation. It also inquires into the roots of the concept itself as it was originally used in biological discourses and later adopted by sociology. The middle-class characters Joyce and Marcus Chalfen introduce the original biological meaning of hybridisation in the fields of horticulture and genetic engineering. It is through an extract from Joyce’s fictional publication entitled *The New Flower Power* that the theme is brought to the fore:

The fact is, cross-pollination produces more varied offspring that are better able to cope with a changed environment. It is said cross-pollinating plants also tend to produce more and better-quality seeds. If my one-year-old son is anything to go by (a cross-pollination between a lapsed-Catholic horticulturalist feminist, and an intellectual Jew!) then I can certainly vouch for the truth of this. [...] [W]e need to create gardens of diversity and interest. (WT 309f.)

The quote demonstrates that the fictional book about gardening links the idea of “cross-pollination” to interpersonal hybridisation by Joyce’s allusion to her own son. What is more, the references to being “able to cope with a changed environment” and the appeal to “create gardens of diversity” metaphorically describes changes in society and

foreshadows Joyce's attempts to be political correct, which the narrator subsequently dismantles and ridicules (cf. chapter 4.2). Since Joyce is interested in horticulture, the discourse also links the efforts to create diversity to the typical English icon of gardening. Joyce's cross-pollination efforts and the allusions to horticultural issues thereby also satirise the discourses on 'race' (cf. Dawson 2007: 166) and on hybridity.

Apart from the excursion into horticulture, Marcus' work as genetic scientist also links hybridisation to the more current, widely debated discourse of genetic engineering. Marcus creates mice with manipulated genes like his so-called 'FutureMouse©' that is meant to develop cancer.<sup>25</sup> A satirical comment by the narrator lampoons this work in an observation about the Chalfens themselves: "The century was drawing to a close and the Chalfens were bored. Like clones of each other, their dinner table was an exercise in mirrored perfection, Chalfenism and all its principles reflected itself infinitely [...]" (*WT* 314). The ironical and hyperbolic description of "mirrored perfection" undermines the aims of biological hybridisation and cloning. In fact, what Joyce and Marcus have created does not present a positive diversity, which Joyce had predicted through her own "cross-pollination" appraisal and call for diversity, but rather about uniformity.

*White Teeth* also seems to echo another of the foundational theories that have been pivotal to the positive multicultural rebranding of Englishness. As an example, the above mentioned quotes can be read in the context of Homi Bhabha's conceptualisation of hybridity and the Third Space:

[...] the theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *international* culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. It makes it possible to begin envisaging national, anti-nationalist histories of the 'people'. And by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves. (Bhabha 2004 [1994]: 56)

If one reads Bhabha's quote in the light of the way in which *White Teeth* deals with hybridity, it seems as though the novel puts Bhabha's ideas into a kind of 'fictional practice'. It ridicules those characters who merely point out the 'exoticism' of immigrants, it negotiates the in-between space or Third Space, it engages with histories and it struggles

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<sup>25</sup>The FutureMouse© is apparently based on the real OncoMouse<sup>TM</sup>, "an engineered 'brand' of laboratory mouse bred for cancer research with a cancer-inducing bit of DNA" (Head 2003: 115), patented in 1988. The discourse on genetical engineering was a highly controversial topic of public interest, especially at the end of the 1990s, also fuelled when the first mammal, sheep Dolly, was cloned in Britain.

to overcome polarity. Although a fictional work, *White Teeth* puts these theoretical ideas into a 'lived practice' and to the test, as I will show in the following.

The first technique through which *White Teeth* deals with theoretical concepts is by depicting hybridity as lived experience. The narrative repeatedly implies that developments in a society, such as conviviality or hybridisation are natural processes and not merely abstract theories. When some of the characters realise how their families have become involved into each other's lives, the narrator comments: "It is just a consequence of living, a consequence of occupation and immigration, of empires and expansion, of living in each other's pockets ... one becomes involved and it is a long track back to being uninvolved" (*WT* 439). This quote can be read as a critical meta-comment on the public and academic discourses on multiculturalism and hybridity that elevate a phenomenon that has simply become an everyday experience to the level of a celebrated, but meaningless, topic. Although the narrator in one of the meta-comments points out that "[t]his has been the century of the great immigrant experiment" (326), the characters depicted in the narrative seem to be unaware of the "experiment". They simply struggle to make a living in the world that surrounds them. In fact, this is a point Zadie Smith once commented on in a similar vein, in an interview ten years after the publication of *White Teeth*:

The idea of multi-culturalism as an idea or an ideology is something I never understood. We don't walk around our neighbourhood thinking how is this experiment going – this is not how people live. It's just a fact. Once people are able to move freely in the world by plane or by boat it is an inevitability [...]. So instead of arguing about it as an ideological concept you might as well deal with the reality. ("Zadie Smith" 2010: n. pag.)

In line with the ideas expressed in these remarks, *White Teeth* fictionalises different versions of multicultural reality instead of elevating it to a merely abstract theoretical concept. What is more, the novel does not simply celebrate multicultural reality in England but also acknowledges the problems that hybridisation might cause for individuals.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Some literary scholars have also come to similar conclusions: most prominently, Laura Moss rightly argues that *White Teeth* "[...] is not an outright celebration of hybridity, but nor is it a denunciation of the processes that have led to the existence of such hybridity. Instead, Smith is part of a generation of writers who have written about hybridity – racial, cultural, and linguistic – as part of the practice of everyday life" (Moss 2003: 11). Elaine Childs also finishes her article by stating that "hybridity can become an everyday practice" (Childs 2006: 12), and Katina Rogers agrees that "Smith also presents hybridity not as an ideal, but as a simple reality, and, as such, reveals the foolishness of praising it or striving for it" (Rogers 2008: 55). Sara Upstone recognises the innovation in Black British Literature in the examples of *White Teeth* and *Brick Lane* when she writes: "Rather than alienation, these novels are seen to offer self-assurance, dwelling rather than diaspora, and a new hybridity less about being 'in-between' cultures and more about the fact that culture is now, in essence, 'in-between!'" (Upstone 2007: 336)

The second way in which *White Teeth* tests postcolonial concepts is to showcase the consequences of in-betweenness and hybridisation in a multicultural society through personal crises. The novel zooms in on the experiences and thoughts of second-generation immigrant representatives, mainly on Millat and Irie, but also on Magid to some extent. When a meeting is arranged to bring the Iqbal twins together after Magid is back, the narrator comments upon their conflict, which also results from their feeling of being in-between cultures. The passage starts with a general observation by the narrator:<sup>27</sup>

Because we often imagine that immigrants are constantly on the move, footloose, able to change course at any moment [...], free of any kind of baggage, happy and willing to leave their difference at the docks and take their chances in this new place, merging with the oneness of this green and pleasant libertarian-land of the free.  
[...] Whatever road presents itself, they will take, and if it happens to lead to a dead end, well then, [...] [they] will merrily set upon another, weaving their way through Happy Multicultural Land. Well, good for them. But Magid and Millat couldn't manage it. (*WT* 465)

The first part of this quote describes England as a celebrated, migrant-friendly country, e. g. by the exaggerated expression “Happy Multicultural Land” and the idea that immigrants can easily settle anywhere without the load of their own national histories. The serious undertone emerges in the last part when the narrative zooms in on Magid and Millat. The twins are counter-examples to the kind of hyperbolic immigrants and simplistic multiculturalism promoted in politics. Magid and Millat cannot easily merge into the “oneness” of Englishness but try to occupy a Third Space, which also entails problems. Elaine Childs rightly observes that hybridity “is less a utopia than a source of anxiety for many of *White Teeth*'s characters” (Childs 2006: 8). As the passage exemplifies, the authorial comments do not simply celebrate diversity but critically question it by linking it to individual characters.

Being in-between cultures is examined most prominently in the case of Millat's and Irie's characters. Irie can be seen as an example of ‘genetic hybridity’ and Millat of ‘sociocultural hybridity’ (cf. Erll 2007a: 121). While Irie feels wrong in her body and tries to fight her genes by e. g. having her hair straightened, Magid and Millat feel wrong in terms of sociological belonging (cf. Thompson 2005: 129), which they try to overcome by sympathising with different ideologies. Millat's problematic in-between identity in particular is metaphorically introduced by the novel in a straight-forward way: “[...] Millat didn't need to go back home: he stood schizophrenic, one foot in

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<sup>27</sup>This quote was introduced before in chapter 4.1 in a different context.

Bengal and one in Willesden. In his mind he was as much there as he was here” (*WT* 219). Another quotation adds: “Millat was neither one thing nor the other, this or that, Muslim or Christian, Englishman or Bengali; he lived for the in between [...]” (351). Both quotes can be read as alluding to Bhabha’s concept of the Third Space, as the reference to the way that “he lived for the in between” most obviously underlines. However, in contrast to a generally positive understanding of hybridisation, *White Teeth* also draws attention to the difficulties that these developments can have, e. g. by saying that he “stood schizophrenic”. Especially Millat’s character is an important example here, since he eventually becomes a fundamentalist Muslim, ready to use armed violence (cf. chapter 4.4.3). These examples demonstrate that reading *White Teeth* as merely humorously in support of the celebrational marketing of hybridity or a demonstration of Bhabha’s Third Space as a positive concept would be too one-sided.

In most instances, the novel also reconciles with these negative consequences of hybridisation. It does so through strategically employing irony in discourses that contest anxieties of the English and of immigrants. After the narrator had discussed racism, the narrative slides into Alsana’s perspective through the novel’s typical use of a double-voiced discourse:

But it makes the immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, miscegenation, when this is small fry, *peanuts*, compared to what the immigrant fears – dissolution, *disappearance*. Even the unflappable Alsana Iqbal would regularly wake up in a puddle of her own sweat after a night visited by vision of Millat (genetically *BB*; where *B* stands for Bengali-ness) marrying someone called Sarah (aa where ‘a’ stands for Aryan), resulting in a child called Michael (*Ba*), who in turn marries somebody called Lucy (aa), leaving Alsana with a legacy of unrecognizable great-grandchildren (Aaaaaaa!), their Bengali-ness thoroughly diluted, genotype hidden by phenotype. It is both the most irrational and natural feeling in the world. (327)

The quote refers to genetic hybridity again and satirically dismantles ideas of a traditional image of Englishness that is characterised by whiteness. The reference to “Bengali-ness” refers to this discourse about national identity, while Alsana’s thoughts represent the counter-perspective to such English anxieties. The emplotment with its explicit referencing to ‘genes’ that are characterised by a national identity (like ‘Bengali-ness’ as the single letters a and B), humorously results in the climax of Alsana’s panicked outbreak “(Aaaaaaa!)”. The heterodiegetic narrator returns with a demure comment that pretends to be understanding of this national anxiety. *White Teeth* uses this and similar

scenes,<sup>28</sup> then, to expose English anxieties and to satirise concepts of hybrid national identity.

A reconciliatory yet uncertain outlook on increasing hybridisation is provided at the end of the novel with regard to the third immigrant-generation. It remains uncertain if Magid or Millat is the father of Irie's daughter, and the hybridisation between different ethnic groups is continued, as Nick Bentley points out: "Irie Jones, with her complex 'racial' background (and even more so her unborn child) becomes, therefore, symbolic of this new kind of ethnicity, one that the text presents as the emerging model for contemporary Englishness" (Bentley 2007: 496). Especially Irie's child is iconic for the future of a hybridised Englishness. *White Teeth* does not only dismantle concepts of essentialist national identities and Englishness but also critically rewrites more contemporary concepts that are connected to a rebranded version of Englishness. Concepts like hybridity, in-betweenness or the Third Space become remediated in the context of Englishness and thus interrelated. However, the novel self-consciously negotiates these concepts and strategically relates them to the lived experience of its cast of characters. As a result, the remediation of these concepts creates a new perspective on Englishness and invites sympathy with its different representatives.

#### 4.4.2 Counter-Discourses to 'Rivers of Blood': Negotiating Racism

Although *White Teeth* has been criticised for being too optimistic, the way it negotiates national identities is not a one-sided celebration of multiculturalism. Apart from showing that hybridisation can have difficult consequences for individuals who stand in-between cultures, the novel also explores the presence of racism. As Sara Upstone observes, there is only little improvement in the tensions represented in the novel, although the narrated time spans several decades (cf. Upstone 2007: 336). The novel remediate narratives that are connected to a specifically English cultural-historical context and thereby challenges some racist ideologies as a narrative counter-discourse. It does so by strategically employing a certain amount of humour which avoids the didacticism of political correctness (cf. Bentley 2007: 497) and functions to write against racist ideologies.

Especially those parts of the novel that are set in the 1970s represent the exceptionality of multicultural friendships and the prevalence of racist ideologies in some minor characters. In an interview, Zadie Smith said that she had transposed the friendship between Samad

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<sup>28</sup>There is a similar account e. g. about how some helpless immigrants ask themselves why their children are mutinous if they have all they need to make a good living and to enjoy a good education in England (cf. *WT* 218 f.).

and Archie to a time in which they were less likely to become friends (cf. Merritt 2000). For example, the descriptions of Archie's colleagues at work shows them as having a racist attitude when they find out that Archie has married a Jamaican. The narrative technique of variable focalisation allows insights into the perspective of Maureen, a colleague of Archie's:

[...] she had always fancied Archie a *bit* but never more than a bit because of this strange way he had about him, always talking to Pakistanis and Caribbeans like he didn't even notice and now he'd gone and married one and hadn't even thought it worth mentioning what colour she was until the office dinner when she turned up black as anything and Maureen almost choked on her prawn cocktail. (*WT* 69)

From Maureen's point of view, Archie's habit of talking to immigrants is "strange", and she feels it would have been appropriate to have mentioned that Clara was black before Archie brought her to the office dinner. That such an opinion as Maureen's is one that is thought rather than said aloud becomes clear in the following scene, when Kelvin Hero, Archie's boss, wants to exclude Archie from the next official office dinner because of Clara, and clumsily tries to explain his decision:

'That company dinner last month – it was awkward, Archie, it was unpleasant. And now there's this annual do coming up [...] nothing fancy, you know, a curry, a lager and a bit of a boogie ... as I say, it's not that I'm a racist, Archie ...'

'A racist ...'

'I'd spit on that Enoch Powell ... but then he does have a point, doesn't he? [...] And there's some people around here, Arch – and I don't include myself here – who just feel your attitude is a little *strange*. You see [...] when they're sitting down to a company dinner with their lady wives, especially when she's ... *you know* ... they don't know what to make of that at all.'

'Who?'

'What?'

'Who are we talking about, Mr Hero?' (71 f.)

This dialogue creates a certain degree of humour in spite of its serious content. The humour is mainly achieved through the clash of Archie's naive lack of understanding with Kelvin Hero's attempts to avoid a delicate issue. Moreover, the narrative subtly exposes Mr Hero's moral double standards. On the one hand, he stresses that he is not a "racist" and plans to go out for a curry with his staff. On the other hand, he does eventually exclude Archie and Clara from the dinner to avoid trouble with his employees who think it "awkward", "unpleasant" and "strange" to have dinner with black-skinned

Clara. What is more, the scene conjures up a time in which Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech was still influential and which had marked, according to Simon Featherstone, a "racial turn of Englishness" (Featherstone 2009: 111). Although Kelvin Hero claims that he is not a "racialist", he still admits that he sympathises with Powell's opinions on immigrant policy. The dialogue thus achieves an ironical perspective on a serious issue by first exposing Hero's moral double standards and secondly by pitting them against Archie's rather naive perspective. As Archie does not understand what Hero tries to tell him, the scene reveals his innocence and openness. Archie's naivety is also underlined at the end of the scene when he is happy that his boss gives him lunch vouchers, not understanding this to be a tactic to keep Archie from coming to the dinner with Clara.

The reference to Enoch Powell's speech and its consequences is also repeatedly taken up in order to situate the narrative in a specific historical context. To give an example, Alsana and Samad move to Willesden because it is meant to be safe there, which refers to the obvious existence of racism. When Alsana walks through the streets of Willesden, the reader learns through her perspective that Willesden was unlike Whitechapel,

[...] where that madman E-knock someoneoranother gave a speech that forced them into the basement while kids broke the windows with their steel-capped boots. Rivers of blood silly-billy nonsense. [...] Though it was the same here in a way: they all looked at her strangely, this tiny Indian woman stalking the high road in a mackintosh [...]. She was shrewd. She saw what this was. 'Liberal? Hosh-kosh nonsense!' No one was more liberal than anyone else anywhere anyway. It was only that here, in Willesden, there was just not enough of any one thing to gang up against any other thing and send it running to the cellars while windows were smashed. (*WT* 62 f.)

This passage presented through Alsana's perspective is interesting for several reasons. First, it is characterised by Alsana's typical rhyming word-plays, which adds a humorous tone to the in fact serious issue of racist violence against immigrants in Whitechapel. Especially the reference to Powell's name, "E-knock someoneoranother" as an allusion to the pronunciation of his first name Enoch, is employed humorously. Yet, despite the ironical representation, Willesden is not a safer place because of its assigned liberalism in Alsana's opinion. Through her perspective, then, the issue and problem of racism is introduced, but through a humorous representation that aims to expose the danger but also the relativity of racist ideologies and violence.

Reference is made again to Powell's speech, but in a completely different context: that is, in a passage that concentrates on Hortense and Clara, who are Jehova's Witnesses. They are waiting for the end of the world to come, when they will be saved while the



infidels will be damned: “They had waited so long for the rivers of blood to overflow the gutters in the high street, and now their thirst *would* be satiated” (32). The allusion that the Jamaican family wait for the “rivers of blood” turns the narrative around on behalf of the black characters. *White Teeth* remediates Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” speech in these different occasions with the aim to challenge nationalist or racist ideologies. The novel thereby creates counter-discourses to this narrative, which has become a typical reference for the nationalist dimension in the old understanding of Englishness. *White Teeth* thus critically remediates this narrative and turns it around in its rewriting of Englishness.

The critical topic of racism – apart from the references to Powell’s infamous speech – is also represented at other points. These mainly link racist comments to the opinions of an older generation, who thus become representatives of a colonial identity and an outmoded conception of Englishness. When Magid, Millat and Irie are on their way to their Harvest Festival mission, the narrator explains how they get off the bus:

‘*If you ask me*’, said one disgruntled OAP to another, ‘*they should all go back to their own ...*’

But this, the oldest sentence in the world, found itself stifled by the ringing of bells and the stamping of feet, until it retreated under the seats with the chewing gum. (163)

The prejudice that immigrants should go back to their own countries is ridiculed here through the way it is narratively represented. The expression ‘said one [person] to another’ is reminiscent of the structure used in jokes, which thus adds humour to the situation. That it is voiced by an OAP, which stands for ‘Old Age Pensioner’, clearly signifies an older generation. Additionally, the sentence is personified – it “found itself stifled” and drowned by the children’s activity, and eventually retreats “under the seats”. The novel thereby dismantles and ridicules nationalist prejudices through the metaphorical description and suggests that such prejudices have been overcome.

Compared to this overheard statement, the further course of the passage adopts a more serious tone as it confronts the children with the racist attitude of an old English war veteran. Magid, Millat and Irie go to see Mr Hamilton to bring him goods for the Harvest Festival: “To Irie he was reminiscent of a genteel elderly eagle [...], he was well-dressed, as one might expect of an elderly English bird in Wonderland [...]”, with “a voice that even the children sensed was from a different class, a different era” (168 f.). The narrative introduces Mr Hamilton by referring to another canonised narrative: the allusion to “in Wonderland” is strongly reminiscent of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), which is a canonised narrative that has also been voted an icon in the governmentally commissioned online Icons Project. Apart from strategically linking

the character to a canonised English narrative, Mr Hamilton's appearance is described as "well-dressed" and of a different class and generation. The narrative thus evokes an image of the English gentleman, which is associated with a traditional image of Englishness. Mr Hamilton's persona is strategically depicted as a representative of a traditional version of Englishness by references to the English canon and culturally premediated icons.

The tone, however, changes when the veteran expresses his xenophobic and racist thoughts. In the conversation, Mr Hamilton tells the children of his war experiences in the Congo, and he explains that he used to "identify the nigger [...] by the whiteness of his teeth" (171) – in order to shoot the natives. The scene underscores the veteran's racist vocabulary and at the same time links it to the novel's overall leitmotif of the prominent teeth metaphor, which also appears in the novel's title.<sup>29</sup> While Irie quietly starts crying, Magid and Millat retort to Mr Hamilton's racist opinions:

'My dad was in the war. He played for England,' piped up Millat, red-faced and furious.

'Well, boy, do you mean the football team or the army?'

'The British army. He drove a tank. A Mr Churchill. With her dad,' explained Magid.

'I'm afraid you must be mistaken,' said Mr Hamilton, genteel as ever. 'There were certainly no wogs as I remember – though you're probably not allowed to say that these days are you? But no ... no Pakistanis ... what would we have them? [...]' (172)

The narrative again employs a pinch of humour here, i. e. when Millat confuses the discourses of war and football. However, the overall scene is serious about Mr Hamilton's precarious views and reflects how the issue of non-white soldiers still used to be hushed during the 1980s.<sup>30</sup> Mr Hamilton, who is a representative of an older generation and of a traditional conception of Englishness, voices abhorrent racist ideas that appal the children and drive them away from his house. The quote thus indicates that there has been a change in perceptions of otherness in the last century. Although mainly restricted to older generations or to an earlier time – that of the 1970s and 1980s – *White Teeth* does not ignore the existence of racist or nationalist ideologies but rather pursues the strategy

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<sup>29</sup>Molly Thompson convincingly traces the leitmotif of 'white teeth' in her article. She points out that the narrative uses teeth as a synecdoche which can stand for the contrasts of rootedness and rootlessness (cf. Thompson 2005: 125 f). What is more, the metaphor is highly significant since white teeth are an attribute all ethnic groups share and make people equal (cf. *ibid.*: 124). Elaine Childs agrees and adds that teeth as a recurring symbol "can be interpreted as emblems of [a] commitment to generosity" (Childs 2006: 12), which prevails in the end, together with humanism (cf. *ibid.*).

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Barbara Korte's essay (2007), which outlines the representation of non-white British soldiers in political and literary discourses during the governmental eras of Thatcher and Blair. Korte mentions *White Teeth* and *Small Island* as examples of contemporary literary accounts (cf. Korte 2007: 35 f.).

of writing against them. This either functions by ridiculing the characters that voice such racist ideas or by negotiating premediated nationalist plots like Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech through the perspective of immigrants, which exposes such ideologies as absurd. Far from ignoring the matter, *White Teeth* clearly writes against racism and remediates it as a folly or an outmoded phenomenon that is, like a traditional image of Englishness, stuck in the past and not compatible with the rebranded version of national identity for the twenty-first century.

#### 4.4.3 Identity Crises: Configurations of Fundamentalist Ideologies

In the course of representing how the individual characters go through their identity crises, *White Teeth* negotiates clashes of different ideologies and developments towards fundamentalism. These ideologies can be more or less loosely connected to concepts of Englishness, or pitted against them.<sup>31</sup> As Ruth Helyer explains,

the immigrant families struggle to align their origins with English society [...]. The mimicked English identity [...] between a celebration of difference and outright confusion as changing ideas of what makes 'Englishness' evolve, with religion, animal rights, even vegetarianism joining the equation. (Helyer 2006: 245)

In line with this argument, such ideologies can also be seen as the results of the struggle with hybridity and in-betweenness. Moreover, several of the ideologies are linked to religious identity, which adds another factor to constructions of identity. For characters like Samad, Millat and Hortense religion is a means of preserving their culture.<sup>32</sup> Religious identity and the development of a fundamentalist attitude are most prominently displayed in the representation of Millat's character. Millat increasingly turns towards a fundamentalist Islamism which gives the novel the possibility of negotiating both the motives and the consequences of this process. In doing so, *White Teeth* even foreshadows discussions that followed after 7 July 2005, known as '7/7', when British-born suicide bombers

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<sup>31</sup>As Nick Bentley has pointed out, several of the characters in Smith's novel personify versions of fundamental ideologies in a broader sense, such as

Magid's retro-colonial Englishness, Millat's growing support of Islamic fundamentalism and Marcus Chalfen's experiments in genetic engineering [...], Hortense Bowden's following of the Jehovah's Witness movement, Joyce Chalfen's application of horticultural practices to the 'nurturing' of the wayward Millat' [sic] and Joshua Chalfen's involvement with a radical Animal Rights group. What stands in opposition to all these fundamentalisms is Archie's flipped coin [...]. (Bentley 2007: 498)

One could add to this list Samad's determined cultural determinism (cf. Sell 2006: 30).

<sup>32</sup>Cf. Childs (2006: 8). Esra Z. Mirze (2008) also mentions religion as an important identity marker and analyses the contrastive relation of religion and secularism in *White Teeth*.

attacked London.<sup>33</sup> However, as with the representation of racism, the ways in which *White Teeth* deals with the serious issue of fundamentalism contains several instances of humour. The humour frequently results from the special way Millat's fundamentalism is narratively remediated, which opposes different cultural identity concepts.

That *White Teeth* concentrates on religious fundamentalism in regard to Millat's identity does not seem to be a coincidence but should be seen in relation to the discourse of English national identity. British Muslims and Islam have developed as key constituents in the debates of British ethnicity politics in recent years (cf. Gunning 2010: 49). As I have argued elsewhere, there are several episodes that represent turning points for convivial culture and the positive understanding of multiculturalism for Englishness.<sup>34</sup> One of these instances in the novel is introduced when Millat starts turning towards a fundamentalist Muslim ideology in the course of the so-called 'Rushdie Affair', i. e. the debates and riots that followed after the publication of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1989. *White Teeth* takes up the event and reports how Millat and his gang travel to Bradford to participate in the book burning. The narrative explains that Millat does not actually know the book, has not read it and would not even be able to identify the cover or the author. However, the scene proceeds by explaining Millat's motivation:

But he knew other things. He knew that he, Millat, was a Paki no matter where he came from; that he smelt of curry; had no sexual identity; took other people's jobs; or had no job and bummed off the state; or gave all his jobs to his relatives; [...] that he should go back to his own country; or stay here and earn his bloody keep; [...] that no one who looked like Millat, or spoke like Millat, or felt like Millat, was ever on the news unless they had recently been murdered. In short, he knew he had no face in this country, no voice in the country, until one week before last when suddenly people like Millat were on every channel and every radio and every newspaper and they were angry, and Millat recognized the anger, thought it recognized him, and grabbed it with both hands. (*WT* 234)

The novel elaborates on Millat's motives in a tone both empathetic and serious. It introduces some xenophobic prejudices against immigrants but links them to Millat's individual perception. England is not represented as a homely country for Millat and immigrants in general. Instead, Millat feels he has no "voice in the country". In fact, as

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<sup>33</sup>Cf. also the article by Sheila Ghose (2007) that focuses on the deployment of radical fundamentalist or fanatic tropes in Hanif Kureishi's novels. Ghose takes up the headline "The Brit Bomber" by *The Sun* from 13 July 2005, several days after 7/7 and questions how Kureishi's texts engages with the contrasts between liberal, multicultural tolerance and dogmatism (cf. Ghose 2007: 125).

<sup>34</sup>Apart from *White Teeth*, my article (Rettberg 2012) considers Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* and Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus*. These novels will also be discussed in chapter 4.7.

critics and academics have pointed out, the Rushdie Affair in 1989 was the first time that politics “shifted the focus of minority-majority relations from the Atlantic to ‘the orient’” (Modood 2011: n. pag.) and to Muslim political agency. What is more, the Bradford book burning and other riots in Northern England are described as being rooted in ‘culture racism’ rather than ‘colour racism’ (cf. Kumar 2003: 259). It is thus significant that *White Teeth* describes Millat’s motivation for eventually joining a fundamental Islamistic group as racism against a cultural or religious community.

With Millat’s growing fundamentalism, however, *White Teeth* is also keen to employ a subtle humour when the Islamistic group is introduced. To begin with, the group calls itself “*Keepers of the Eternal and Victorious Islamic Nation*” which results in an “acronym problem” (*WT* 295): the group is called ‘KEVIN’, which is a typical English, and thus Western name. Additionally, KEVIN’s founder, Brother Ibrāhīm ad-Din Shukrallah, is introduced as a bad speaker and “physically disappointing” (468), who “converted to Islam after a ‘vision’ at the age of fourteen” (469) and came to England where he lived in the garage of an aunt in Birmingham. As the mocking narrator further explains, KEVIN’s founder was described by the newspaper as “‘The Guru in the Garage’ (in view of the large Birmingham Muslim population, this was thought preferable to the press-desk favoured suggestion, ‘The Loony in the Lock-Up’)” (*ibid.*). It is clear, then, that the omniscient narrator’s comments contribute to lampooning the fundamentalist group in various instances. Ridiculing it not only has the effect of presenting it as less harmful and dangerous but also exposes fundamentalism as a folly that should have no place in the positive understanding of a multicultural version of Englishness.

What is more, *White Teeth* represents Millat’s personal fundamentalism as a remediation of Mafia and gangster films. In doing so, Millat’s point of reference lies in Western popular culture and becomes a paradox for his Islamist aims. The novel explains: “As for KEVIN’s more unorthodox programmes of direct action, Millat was [...] the first into battle come jihad, cool as fuck in a crisis, a man of action, like Brando, like Pacino, like Liotta” (445). Not only does the narrative compare Millat with these Hollywood actors; it is also Millat’s direct speech that refers to the genre: “‘If Magid stays,’ said Millat (De Niro, this time), ‘I go’” (425). The medium of film presents the reference point for Millat’s belief. The narrative observes that “[...] he believed he was being watched by the great camera in the sky” (461), which reminds of the popular programme of *Big Brother*. However, Millat knew “that the ‘gangster’ movie, the Mafia genre, was the worst example [...]” (445) to follow since KEVIN’s manifesto prescribed to “purge oneself of the taint of the West” (444). It is a struggle between ideologies associated with the West and Muslim identity respectively that troubles Millat. Rather than being depicted

as dangerous, “Millat’s Islamism appears as a rebranding in a boy’s quest for identity, community and coolness” (Erl 2007a: 127, my translation). His fundamentalism is aimed against English culture but at the same time it depends on the narratives provided by Western, and also English, cultural elements.

The way the novel remediates “Millat’s fundamentalist Mafia-Islam” (Childs 2006: 9) even through graphical, extra-textual signifiers is remarkable. In one scene, the narrative represents Millat’s thoughts that express his self-image most pointedly:<sup>35</sup>

**As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a gangster.**  
He even saw it like that, in that font, like on the movie poster. [...]  
**As far back as I can remember, I always wanted to be a Muslim.**  
(*WT* 446)

Millat’s self-image and identity is constructed through a quotation he takes from a Hollywood film which he adjusts to match his ideology. The novel graphically represents these quotes in a bold font and centred alignment to imitate the way Millat remembers the movie poster. The intermedial reference to the film genre thereby works on different levels: first, through the graphic representation, which also relates to a postmodern generic feature, and secondly to the content. On the level of content, however, there is an element of ridicule, in that Millat uses the typical Western genre of Mafia and gangster movies to construct his fundamental Islamist identity. The naivety underlying Millat’s belief – as when it is highlighted that he imagines God as “the great camera in the sky” (461) watching him – thereby contributes to ironically ridiculing Millat’s fundamentalism. It is the novel’s strategy of – literally – remediating the Hollywood film genre in Millat’s paradoxical fundamental ideology that renders this attitude absurd in the light of a rebranded Englishness at the turn of the millennium.

#### 4.5 “Past Tense, Future Perfect”: Challenging History and Collective Memory

The role of history, national historiographies and collective memory are further essential themes that *White Teeth* uses to negotiate Englishness. In these discourses, it is made explicit that repetition is one of the important conditions for a remediation, as exemplified in the quote “past tense, future perfect”, which recurs, in variations, throughout the novel.<sup>36</sup> *White Teeth* remediates and rewrites national histories, historiographies and

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<sup>35</sup>The bold font of the quote is imitated here.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. *WT* 18, 98, 459, 541.

memories from a postcolonial perspective. It introduces counter-memories and counter-histories, thereby rewriting homogeneous versions of English history as it is associated with a traditional version of Englishness. This chapter considers two major counter-histories: first, it focuses on the Bowden family and their Anglo-Jamaican roots, conjuring up questionable notions of an ‘English education’. The second instance, which is important since it also includes the notion of repetition, is the negotiation of national history writing about the Indian Mutiny and the role of Mangal Pande.<sup>37</sup> Since Pande is fictionalised as Samad’s ancestor, the historical moment is linked to family history and the individual characters. *White Teeth* employs various narrative strategies to represent these themes, which can have different effects on the negotiation of national identities.

To begin with, the novel introduces an interesting relation between the Bowdens’ family history in colonial Jamaica and Irie’s and Millat’s fictitious school in Willesden. The narrator tells the story of Glenard Oak Comprehensive School that is named after Sir Edward Glenard, who brought Jamaican tobacco workers to London at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, to enable a positive mutual influence: Glenard wanted the Jamaicans to teach the English a more positive form of Christian worship, and the English to educate Jamaicans in how to work more efficiently (cf. *WT* 305 f.). The omniscient narrator implies in a foreshadowing comment that there exist “old secrets” that “will come out like wisdom teeth when the time is right” (306). Following this reference to the leitmotif of teeth, the narrator then almost teases the reader and thus incites their curiosity:

Glenard’s influence [...] ran through people’s blood and the blood of their families; it ran through three generations of immigrants [...]; and it even ran through Irie Jones and Jamaica’s Bowden clan, though she didn’t know it (but then somebody should have told her to keep a backward eye on Glenard [...]). (307)

In fact, the heterodiegetic narrator emerges more overtly as an omniscient authority here and it is less Irie who functions as an addressee to “keep a backward eye on Glenard” than it is the reader, as he or she will learn more about the relationship in the course of the story. Besides this, the strategy of dramatic irony is once again used here, since the reader knows more about the family secret than the characters. What is even more

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<sup>37</sup>Two monographs that also take *White Teeth* into consideration will be especially helpful in this chapter: Astrid Erll investigates how the novel remediates the Indian Mutiny (cf. Erll 2007b: 234 ff.), and Jan Rupp’s study of genre and memory in *Black British Literature* focuses on this event as ‘alternative history’ (cf. Rupp 2010: 120 ff.). Rupp also inquires the ways in which *White Teeth* employs the “narrative rhetoric of counter-memory” (ibid.: 119). In addition to the event of the Indian Mutiny, I will also analyse the representation of the Anglo-Jamaican family history of the Bowdens, which has not been considered yet in literary studies.

ironic is that it remains unclear whether anyone except for the reader will actually get to learn any details of the family secret about Sir Edward Glenard.

At a later stage of the novel, the narrator reveals more about the family secret in a chapter appropriately entitled “The Root Canals of Hortense Bowden”. The chapter brings up the theme of a questionable education, which is associated with a typical notion in relation to colonial times. In fact, the chapter starts with the observation: “A little English education can be a dangerous thing” (356), and only a little later it introduces the main issue of the chapter, i. e. the dubious moment “when all of a sudden an Englishman decides you need an education” (ibid.). The way the narrative introduces the issue of education is suspiciously ironical, which is further elaborated in the course of the passage. It concentrates on how Ambrosia – Hortense’s mother or Clara’s grandmother respectively – is ‘educated’ by a white colonialist, Captain Charlie Durham:

Ambrosia learnt a lot of wonderful things from the handsome captain. He taught her how to read the trials of Job and study the warnings of Revelation, to swing a cricket bat, to sing ‘Jerusalem’. [...] How to kiss a man’s ear until he wept like a child. But mostly he taught her that she was no longer a maidservant [...]. *A maid no more, Ambrosia, a maid no more*, he liked to say, enjoying the pun. (357)

The quote satirically comments on the English colonialists’ practice of sexually exploiting Jamaican women, which implies that ‘education’ is merely used as a candy-coated cipher. In addition to foregrounding this sexual dimension, the character of English education is represented through premediated icons such as a reference to cricket and the unofficial English anthem *Jerusalem*. The satirical quality is achieved by confronting different perspectives with each other: the positive impression created by the reference to having learnt “a lot of wonderful things” is brought into question by the list of things Ambrosia actually learnt. The mean pun at the end, which plays on the fact that the word ‘maid’ can mean ‘virgin’, represents Captain Durham’s point of view and underscores the climactic structure of the account.

After the true nature of the controversial notion of ‘education’ is introduced, the narrative returns to the family secret that connects the histories of Jamaica and England, and the Bowden’s personal family history: “[...] Durham entrusted the continued education of Ambrosia Bowden to his good friend Sir Edmund Flecker Glenard, who was, like Durham, of the opinion that the natives required instruction [...]” (358). The description ironically subverts the “history, spirit and ethos of Glenard Oak” (303) that the school master in Willesden praises, as it is founded on Glenard’s perception of education, which has few honourable or gentlemanly implications. The further course of the passage



introduced retrospectively by the narrator reveals even more scandalous facts about Sir Edward: Ambrosia is at an advanced stage of pregnancy when she meets Glenard in the street. He pursues her into a church and tries to blackmail her, saying: “*The Captain told me your little secret. But naturally all secrets have a price, Ambrosia. [...] It will only take a moment, my dear. One should never pass up the opportunity of a little education, after all*” (360). Again, the evil implication of ‘education’ as it was misused by some English colonists is repeated. However, when Glenard starts to touch Ambrosia, the ground starts to shake. The narrative refers to the historical event of the Kingston Earthquake of 1907, situating the scene in a real context. During the earthquake, Ambrosia gives birth to Hortense while Durham gets crushed by a statue, “his teeth scattered on the floor, trousers round his ankles” (361). This dishonourable exit Durham makes is, in the history of Glenard Oak school, written out of the history. What *White Teeth* does here, then, is to rewrite colonial and English history from the perspective of the colonised, which is a typical feature of postcolonial literature. It thereby provides a counter-history and counter-memory not only of the Bowden family but also of Anglo-Jamaican relations, and showcases the fact that there is no such thing as national history but only entangled histories.

The second remediation of a historical event is the Indian Mutiny. Mangal Pande, the sepoy who shot the first bullet that sparked off the mutiny is introduced as Samad’s ancestor. The novel’s remediation of the real event thus functions as a means of identification and identity construction for Samad (cf. Erl 2007a: 125). What is more, the way *White Teeth* remediates history includes a negotiation of national historiographies, mainly by confronting English versions with those of the formerly colonised Indian subcontinent. The story of the Indian Mutiny is first introduced when, during the Second World War, Samad tells his fellow soldiers about his famous ancestor:

‘I mean, I am educated. My great-grandfather Mangal Pande’ – he looked around for the recognition the name deserved but, being met only with blank pancake English faces, he continued – ‘was the great hero of the Indian Mutiny!’

Silence.

‘Of 1857! [...]’

A longer, denser silence. (*WT* 87)

Through the metaphor “blank pancake English faces”, the readers learn from Samad’s perspectives that he starts to doubt that the English properly remember important historical events that took place in the former British colonies. The quote continues with the observation that Samad inwardly curses “the English goldfish-memory for history”

(ibid.). While the Indian Mutiny presents a crucial event for the construction of Samad's personal and national identity, the English seem to be ignorant of the incident. This passage is the first implication in the novel of how English and Asian knowledge and interpretation of historical events are at odds.

*White Teeth* repeatedly takes up the story of Mangal Pande and also represents it as a means to humorously underscore the clash of generations. Samad celebrates the story but the other characters merely use it to mock Samad. In a passage in which the Joneses and the Iqbals meet during a storm, Alsana proposes that someone tell a story. The story told is another version of the story of Mangal Pande:

‘Go on, Sam,’ said Archie with a wink. ‘Give us the one about Mangal Pande. That’s always good for a laugh.’

A clamour of *Nooo*’s, mimed by slitting of throats and self-asphyxiation went round the assembled company.

‘The story of Mangal Pande,’ Samad protested, ‘is no laughing matter. He [...] is why we are the way we are, the founder of modern India, the big historic cheese.’ [...]

‘Look,’ said Millat, ‘I’ll do the short version. Great grandfather –’

‘*Your* great-great-grandfather, stupid,’ corrected Alsana.

‘*Whatever*. Decides to fuck the English –’

‘Millat!’

‘To *rebel* against the English, all on his Jack-Jones, spliffed up to the eyeballs, tries to shoot his captain, misses, tries to shoot himself, misses, gets hung –’

‘Hanged,’ said Clara absent-mindedly.

‘Hanged or hung? I’ll get the dictionary,’ said Archie [...].

‘*Whatever*. End of story. *Bor-ing*.’ (226)

This scene has several remarkable aspects. First, the characters are mocking Samad by implying that he has been repeating the story over and over again. While Samad persistently tries to defend the event's historical importance for India's history and independence, Millat gives a counter-history from his British-born perspective, presenting it in his own strong language. The insignificance of the story for the other characters becomes clear when the discussion quickly diverts to the question of whether ‘hanged’ or ‘hung’ is the right grammatical form. The scene transposes the narrative of a historical event that is still only relevant for Samad at this point, to the present multicultural or even hybrid English society and critically questions the importance of such historical events for contemporary society.

However, Samad's obsession with the Indian Mutiny is not only ridiculed by the other characters. The event is also seriously negotiated when Samad tries to rehabilitate the importance of it for his personal identity. As it does not affect the younger generations –

Alsana and Clara as well as their children – Samad and Archie are left to discuss the matter in a special surrounding that gives them the possibility of leaving their families out of the matter: O’Connell’ pool house, which as a pub represents another quintessentially English icon or topos. Although the pub still has its traditional name and is a premediated English space, it has become hybrid through its ethnically diverse clientele. In the process of revising the event of the Indian Mutiny, eventually Samad even convinces Abdul-Mickey to put up a picture of Mangal Pande in the pub (cf. 247 ff.), which contributes to the redefinition of this iconic English space. In these surroundings, Samad and Archie revise the history and historiographies of the Indian Mutiny.<sup>38</sup> In one scene, they question if Pande wanted to kill somebody or only give a warning (cf. 260 f.), thus reflecting their own war history, which included their mission to kill Dr Sick. In one scene, the characters discuss the definition of the expression ‘pandy’ which derives from ‘Pande’, and the novel graphically imitates an entry of the *Oxford English Dictionary* as a source of English knowledge. One of the definitions reads: “Any fool or coward in a military situation” (*WT* 251). Ironically, it is only at the end of the novel that Archie is revealed as an English version of such a ‘pandy’ for having failed to kill Dr Sick during the last days of the war.

Because the characters deal with the event in the first place, *White Teeth* itself even provides a meta-commentary on the Indian Mutiny. Archie and Samad discuss the representation of the Indian Mutiny in English and Indian historiography, thus becoming representatives for both versions. The prevalence of fact and fiction in history writing is an essential issue here: “But when Archie was in school the world seemed far more open to its own fictionalization. History was a different business then: taught with one eye on narrative, the other on drama, no matter how unlikely or chronologically or inaccurate” (254). Through this observation, the novel deconstructs the idea of an essential truth in historiography. As an example of English history writing, *White Teeth* cites the historian William Henry Fitchett’s 1901 *The Tale of the Great Mutiny* (cf. Erll 2007b: 237). An extract of Fitchett’s text is included in the novel: “The scene is Barrackpore, the date 29 March 1857 [...]. Some thirty yards in front of the line of the 34th swaggers to and fro a Sepoy named Mangal Pande. He is half drunk with bhang, and wholly drunk with religious fanaticism” (*WT* 254). For Archie, then, it is clear that “the Great Indian Mutiny of 1857 began when a drunken fool called Mangal Pande shot a bullet” (*ibid.*). This English version of the historical event is contested by Samad’s perspective in his

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<sup>38</sup>Astrid Erll (2007b) analyses Samad’s and Archie’s mutual revision of history in relation to the involvement of media cultures. She notes that characters of different classes and cultural backgrounds participate in negotiating what kind of medial representations of the Indian Mutiny should be visible in their surroundings, i. e. in the pub (cf. Erll 2007b: 241).

effort to rehabilitate his ancestor. Samad eventually finds evidence in an Oxford library that supports his version of the event, in a text by A. S. Misra, who explains the effect of Mangal Pande's action: "*Though the effort failed in its immediate consequences, it succeeded in laying the foundations of the Independence to be won in 1947*" (WT 259). The different versions of the same event as they are negotiated by Samad and Archie come to show that national history seems to be less about representing the truth than it is about an interpretation of events tainted by a culturally premediated perspective. In a list that Samad compiles, the differing versions of Mangal Pande's role are represented in a condensed chart: according to Samad, Pande is an "unrecognized hero", while for all the multicultural characters of the novel and for "British scholarship from 1857 to the present day" the whole incident is a "palaver over nuffin" (250). *White Teeth* therefore places in opposition different versions of national historiographies and shows that historical events are always subject to selection, interpretation and construction from different perspectives. The inclusion of the Indian Mutiny in the fictional text thereby presents a counter-history from a postcolonial perspective. *White Teeth* thus questions the 'truth' of events that lay foundations for collective memory constructions. By remediating Mangal Pande's story and the incidents that sparked off the Indian Mutiny, the novel itself actively contributes to rewriting English national history and canonised English narratives.

The remediation of the Indian Mutiny serves as an aesthetic means in the novel to underline the notion of repetition.<sup>39</sup> The idea of repetition is linked to memory and its stabilisation, as the omniscient narrator states in one of the meta-narrative comments:

Because immigrants have always been particularly prone to repetition [...]. Even when you arrive, you're still going back and forth; your children are going round and round. There's no proper term for it – *original sin* seems too harsh; maybe *original trauma* would be better. A trauma is something one repeats and repeats, after all, and this is the tragedy of the Iqbals – that they can't help but re-enact the dash they once made from one land to another, from one faith to another, from one brown mother country into the pale, freckled arms of an imperial sovereign. It will take a few replays before they move on to the next tune. [...] It is a visitation of repetition. It is a dash across continents. It is a rerun. (161 f.)

Through the allusion to "trauma", the narrative situates itself in the discourse of memory theories. It links trauma to the notion of repetition, which is aesthetically employed in the course of the novel. Additionally, the narrative is again linked to postcolonial

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<sup>39</sup>Astrid Erll's argumentation also presumes a repetition of cultural plots for an intermedial remediation of the Indian Mutiny. While her analysis of *White Teeth* (Erll 2007b: 234-342) considers medial transformations and media cultures, my analysis of the narrative concentrates on the concepts of Englishness and national identity.

discourse as it inquires into the consequences of immigration. The humorous description that the Iqbals move from their native country “into the pale, freckled arms of an imperial sovereign” clearly takes an ironical immigrant’s perspective. Without being aware, Samad had also repeated his ancestor’s history during the war, when he wanted to see Dr Sick killed but made Archie fire the bullet. Like Pande, who was, as English historiography has it, “half drunk with bhang” (254) at the time of firing the bullet, Samad “had eaten an absurd amount of morphine” (115) the night he wanted Archie to kill Dr Sick. However, Archie fails to assassinate the doctor and thereby becomes, as the OED entry had indicated, a ‘pandy’ in Samad’s place.

The Iqbal’s trauma of Mangal Pande is orchestrated throughout the novel, repeating their history in postcolonial London, thus entangling national histories. The situation culminates at the end of the novel when Millat decides to take armed revenge and thereby repeats the Iqbal’s family history. Just as Pande and Samad were to a certain degree intoxicated, Millat too is “*very very* cained” (499) as he makes his way to the Perret Institute in Central London, thus repeating a history that haunts the family through generations (cf. Gunning 2010: 54). In fact, Millat is aware and convinced that he is about to repeat Pande’s deed, since he first goes to the statue of Henry Havelock in Trafalgar Square before joining the KEVIN group at the Perret Institute.<sup>40</sup> The narrative explains that Millat wants to “come face to face with his great-great-grandfather’s enemy, Henry Havelock on his plinth of pigeon-shat stone” (*WT* 503), and he declares that he will take revenge about 150 years after the Indian Mutiny: “‘Ding, ding,’ said Millat out loud, tapping Havelock’s foot [...]. ‘Round two’” (507). Again, Millat’s thoughts are permeated by references to popular culture, i. e. to boxing sports in this instance, when he calls out the second round for his revenge, thereby repeating history in a contemporary English context.

Millat, then, plans to rewrite his own and therein also national histories. His persuasion surfaces when the narrative zooms in on his focalisation:

Because Millat wanted to finish it. To revenge it. To turn that history around. He liked to think he had a different attitude, a second-generation attitude. If Marcus Chalfen was going to write his name all over the world, Millat was going to write it BIGGER. There would be no misspelling *his* name in the history books. There’d be no forgetting the dates and times. Where Pande misfooted he would step sure. Where Pande chose A, Millat would choose B. (506)

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<sup>40</sup>General Henry Havelock ordered the execution of Mangal Pande, as the novel also explains. In another scene, the influence of the monument on Samad is introduced: “[...] General Henry Havelock (a man honoured, much to Samad’s fury, by a statue just outside the Palace Restaurant, Trafalgar Square, to the right of Nelson) [...]” (*WT* 255).

The passage highlights that Millat's megalomaniac aim is to fundamentally rewrite history by contrasting his actions with those of Mangal Pande. In fact, he sees himself as the true hero to set things right by opposing the English dominance. However, the novel actually ends with Millat failing to kill Dr Perret, who is revealed as Dr Sick whom Archie had spared about fifty years earlier. Instead, Millat's bullet hits Archie, who spares Dr Sick again and thus also repeats his part in his personal history. What *White Teeth* does, then, is to rewrite personal, family and national histories, demonstrating that there are no distinct and different national histories but rather one entangled transnational history of which only different national versions and fictions exist. What is more, *White Teeth* questions the 'truth' or authenticity of memory as a basis for national identity. Thereby, both Sir Edward Glenard's and Mangal Pande's story exemplify, in a postcolonial manner, how English and other national historiographies can be opposed, and thus undermine the dominance of English versions on which concepts of national identity are founded.

#### **4.6 Willesden, NW2: Appropriating Space in Postcolonial London**

As the characters' movements through Central London and their feelings about the monuments on Trafalgar Square analysed in the previous chapter show, notions of collective memory, national history and identity are closely related to space. And yet, although the journey into the heart of the capital towards the finale of the novel might imply an important configuration of setting, it is striking that most of the story does not take place in the centre of London with its imperial history but in the outskirts, in the suburb of Willesden (cf. Sizemore 2005: 65). The intricate relations between space, history, memory and identity are frequently taken up by the narrative and negotiated by the characters. Spatial dimensions can have different implications, e. g. the lack of a 'neutral' space, the appropriation of English space by the heterogeneous cast of characters or the ways in which traditional English topoi are remapped from a postcolonial perspective in London. Furthermore, *White Teeth* introduces the discrepancy between the character's living environment and their 'imaginary homelands', including notions of dystopia and utopia and feelings of belonging.<sup>41</sup> Ultimately, these aestheticised negotiations of space remediate London as the heart of a rebranded Englishness in favour of traditional perceptions associated with national identity, such as the image of the landscape and countryside with its rolling hills. This chapter will first focus on the role of the setting in

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<sup>41</sup>The expression 'imaginary homelands' refers to Salman Rushdie's collection of essays with the same title (1991 [1982]).

Willesden, including representations of the pub as an icon of Englishness. It will then move on to the relations between both individual and collective memory, history and space, including the way the characters deal with specifically English *lieux de mémoire*. A third matter of interest is the characters' feelings towards home and belonging, which includes notions of utopian and dystopian space between England, Bangladesh and Jamaica. Finally, this chapter investigates how English space is appropriated and rebranded in a postmodern and postcolonial context.

The North London suburb of Willesden presents the space in which the greatest part of the novel is set. It is the space the characters appropriate as a living environment and through which they move habitually. As Claire Squires points out, "Willesden Green and its abutting suburbs are an area relatively unhymned either in literature or by estate agents" (Squires 2002: 8). *White Teeth* thereby introduces a kind of counter-space to typical images of Englishness both on the level of setting and on the level of the English canon. However, North London is also associated – with similar implications to those in *How to be Good* – with liberalism: as the narrator explains, Samad and Alsana decide to move from Whitechapel "to North London, north-west, where things were more . . . more . . . liberal" (*WT* 59). Willesden conveys only little premediated meaning, e. g. in contrast to Central London or the English countryside, so it presents a space that can be easily appropriated by the multicultural cast of characters. What is more, it is the realistic, ordinary space that provides the setting of the novel, which has the following effect, as John Clement Ball points out in his monograph in which he analyses postcolonial narratives set wholly or partly in London:

One way London's oceanic magnitude is made less daunting and more navigable is through fictional narrative's capacity for rendering the human experience of taking possession – of distilling the chaotic, boundless city down to what can be known, comprehended, and (re)claimed. Within those narrative representations there is a recurring impulse to create microcosmic images of a smaller, more manageable city, which take many metaphorically suggestive forms: a house, a club, a family, a community, a neighbourhood, a shop, a body of water, a ride on the tube. (Ball 2004: 245)

What is more, the concentration on those spaces that can be pinned down create a setting for an aesthetic, literary account that makes the story more probable and realistic, and, finally, more palpable for the reader. The characters' identity crises that are often situated in the conflict between Englishness and 'otherness' become more comprehensible and naturalistic in this setting, which constitutes a high degree of sympathy for the characters' struggles with their identity crises.

In the spatial surrounding of Willesden, the setting in pubs plays a significant role for the narrative. *White Teeth* thereby takes up the quintessentially English topos of the pub as a premediation but actively rewrites it as a hybrid space according to postcolonial developments.<sup>42</sup> The first obvious example is the pub in which Archie and Samad are regulars: O’Connell’s Pool House. The pub’s post-war history is introduced in the course of the story, which highlights the importance the narrative assigns to this place. The time-line “*The Post-War Reconstruction and Growth of O’Connell’s Pool House*” (WT 245) explains that in 1972 Abdul-Mickey’s father Ali bought and rebuilt the pub: “So despite his Middle Eastern background and the fact that he is opening a café and not a pool house, Ali decides to keep the original Irish name” (246). The narrative reveals that O’Connell’s has never been a quintessentially English space but that it was originally Irish and was then owned by Ali, who puts “fragments of the Qur’ān on the wall, so that the hybrid business will be ‘kindly looked upon’” (ibid.). The pub is thus explicitly introduced as a hybrid space, instead of a topos of Englishness. As Susanne Cuevas points out, O’Connell’s is also more than a hybrid space in regard to the characters who appropriate it: while for Archie and Samad O’Connell’s presents a private space and a refuge, a pub is also in its original meaning a ‘public house’ and thus combines lived and symbolic space, which presents a paradigmatic example of what Edward Soja defines as a ‘Thirdspace’ (cf. Cuevas 2008: 183).

There is another example which showcases the remediation of the topos of the pub as a hybrid space, corresponding to the novel’s postcolonial perspective. Joshua meets with the animal rights group FATE in the Spotted Dog, which is a real location in Willesden. The Spotted Dog is included in the fictional narrative as

[...] a famous Willesden landmark, described in 1792 as ‘being a well accustomed Publick house’ (*Willesden Past*, by Len Snow), which became a favourite resort for mid-Victorian Londoners wishing a day out ‘in the country’, then a meeting point for horse-buses; later still a watering hole for local Irish builders. By 1992 it had transformed again, this time into the focal point of the huge Australian immigrant population in Willesden, who [...] had been leaving their silky beaches and emerald seas and inexplicably arriving in NW2. (WT 481)

The narrator first introduces the pub as an English original by even including an intertextual reference to a real text in order to verify the pub’s history as a fact. What is more, it chronologically situates the pub in an era often associated with a traditional version of Englishness – the Victorian era – when the pub was not located in an urban

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<sup>42</sup>The pub has also been remediated as a quintessentially English space in contemporary fiction, e. g. in Graham Swift’s *Last Orders* (1996), which centres on a pub as an important setting.



but still in a rural environment. Thereby, the quotation establishes a link to the typical association of Englishness with the countryside. However, it also states that the pub has since been populated by immigrants from Ireland and more recently even from Australia, which renders the space culturally hybrid.<sup>43</sup> *White Teeth* thus deconstructs the status of the pub as a quintessential English topos or icon and rewrites it as an appropriated space in a hybrid society.

Spatial dimensions also play a fundamental role in the fictionalisation of memory and history, both on a personal and a collective level. The narrative puts forward the discourse of memory theories in an instance concentrating on Irie's thoughts:

If someone asked her just then what memory was, what the *purest definition* of memory was, she would say this: the street you were on when you first jumped in a pile of dead leaves. She was walking it right now. With every fresh crunch came the memory of previous crunches. (458)

Irie's perspective is used to come to terms with the abstract phenomenon of memory in relation to space. In fact, the definition is not a definition *per se* but rather an observation of an everyday action related to familiar space. The narrative defines memory as a personal experience and thus also exposes the constructedness of collective memory. That personal and national memory and history are always entwined is also aesthetically paraphrased by the narrator who describes the meeting between Magid and Millat in a 'neutral' space, which had been difficult to find in London. When the twins meet, "[t]he brothers begin to argue. It escalates in moments, and they make a mockery of that idea, a neutral place; instead they cover the room with history – past, present and future history (for there is such a thing) [...]" (464). The scene dismantles the idea that something like a 'neutral' place exists because space is infected or influenced by personal and national histories people carry with them. The perception of space is thus also represented as an individual process, which is exemplified by the characters' appropriation of, and movements through, the metropolis.

The interrelations between memory, history and space on a collective level are most pointedly negotiated in regard to English *lieux de mémoire*, which are concentrated in imperial topoi. Central London presents a counter-space to Willesden with imperial history represented by monuments on Trafalgar Square. However, *White Teeth* considers

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<sup>43</sup>Two articles also point out that *White Teeth* rewrites space as hybrid locations: Pilar Cuder-Domínguez observes that depending on their generation, characters meet in a pub or at school, "both of them depicted as temples of hybridity and complexity" (Cuder-Domínguez 2004: 183). And according to Irene Pérez Fernández, *White Teeth* is one example in the field of British Asian and Black British Literature that attempts to redefine "space as a hybrid location that is an inherent part of British contemporary society" (Pérez Fernández 2009: 144).

the influence and importance of national monuments from the immigrant's perspective, e. g. in a scene when the KEVIN brothers arrive at Trafalgar Square on their way to the Perret Institute:

In the distance, Big Ben. In the square, Nelson. Havelock. Napier. George IV. And then the National Gallery, back there near St Martin's. All the statues facing the clock.

'They love their false icons in this country,' said Abdul-Colin, [...] 'Now, will somebody please tell me: what is it about the English that makes them build their statues with their backs to their culture and their eyes on the time?' [...] Because they look to their future to forget their past. [...] They have no faith, the English. They believe in what men make, but what men make crumbles. Look at their empire. This is all they have. Charles II Street and South Africa House and a lot of stupid-looking stone men and stone horses. The sun rises and sets on it in twelve hours, no trouble. This is what is left. (503 f.)

Abdul-Colin ironically voices the immigrant's perspective when confronted with national imperialist topoi. The passage takes up the notion of loving icons, which reflects the continuous remediation of the icons of Englishness that define national identity. However, these icons specifically refer to national topoi that are taken to encapsulate history. The way the monuments are situated on Trafalgar Square, however, is wittily ridiculed by Abdul-Colin's observation that the statues face towards the clock that symbolises time and turn their backs on the National Gallery, which is equated with culture. The implication that the English try to forget their past also clearly situates the narrative in the discourse of national rebranding policies which seem paradoxical and anachronistic in the context of a glorification of historical figures who are eternalised in statues. However, as the counter-history of Mangal Pande has also shown (cf. chapter 4.5), the history of war heroes such as General Havelock who personify England's imperial past can be open to dispute. Besides, the passage represents a typically postcolonial perspective when it mockingly describes the national heroes as "a lot of stupid-looking stone men and stone horses". Especially this last observation dismantles the idea of national *lieux de mémoire* itself by hinting at the materiality of the monuments that are in fact nothing more than made of cold stone. The description thus also creates a possibility for the characters to claim the space of Central London as much as the ordinary space in Willesden.

Processes of claiming or reclaiming space in the light of national memory are also represented as a possible way to create further counter-histories. The novel describes how Samad created a kind of counter-monument shortly after he arrived in England and was feeling especially lost. Samad had carved his name 'IQBAL' into a bench on Trafalgar

Square in view of General Havelock's monument, thus constructing his own memorial space in a very individual sense, and opposing the national English heroes displayed in the square. However, that such a perpetuation might present a negative performance is interpreted from Samad's perspective as a "deed": "It meant *I wanted to write my name on the world*. It meant *I presumed*. Like the Englishmen who named streets in Kerala after their wives, like the Americans who shoved their flag in the moon" (505f.). Samad regrets having copied the colonialist 'deed' of renaming and appropriating space. In the end, Millat comes to the bench before he aims to take revenge against Havelock for his ancestor Mangal Pande, and thus eventually makes Samad's own monument a true memory space of the Iqbal family. The instance exemplifies how *White Teeth* represents the creation of a counter-history 'from below' in the postcolonial space of London.

Literary and fictional space is also an essential dimension when it comes to the representation of utopia and questions of belonging. Ruth Helyer elaborates on the analogies of postmodern and postcolonial characteristics in *White Teeth* and points out that "both reconfigure the world in spatial terms" (Helyer 2006: 243). It is a typical postcolonial phenomenon and a consequence of migration that *White Teeth* fictionalises, which becomes most prevalent in the developments in Irie's character. When Irie stays at her grandmother's house, she reconstructs fragments of her past. The narrative explains that Irie "laid claim to the past, her version of the past [...]. So *this* was where she came from. This all belonged to her [...]" (*WT* 400). For Irie's individual character construction, which is at times in crisis in her efforts to sort out her hybrid Anglo-Jamaican roots and identity, it is a feeling of belonging that initiates her version of a utopian space. Irie longs to conjure up a "map to an imaginary fatherland" (516). The expression is reminiscent of the title of a book of essays by Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands", which becomes even more palpable in another scene:

No fictions, no myths, no lies, no tangled webs – this is how Irie imagined her homeland. Because *homeland* is one of the magical fantasy words like *unicorn* and *soul* and *infinity* that have now passed into the language. And the particular magic of *homeland*, its particular spell over Irie, was that it sounded like a beginning. The beginningest of beginnings. Like the first morning of Eden and the day after apocalypse. A blank page. (402)

For Irie, Jamaica becomes the unknown utopia of belonging, and thereby a counter-site to England, or, more specifically, to London. The narrative explains Irie's feelings of belonging and makes them comprehensible to the reader. At the same time, however, it also exposes these ideas as the mere fantasy of a paradise or a utopia. Irie's homeland cannot be a "blank page" either, as the story told by the omniscient narrator about

Sir Edward Glenard's involvement with the Bowden family, which remains unknown to Irie, demonstrates. The novel thereby rather implies the existence of an entangled transnational history that stretches over different spaces, in favour of national histories on which conceptions of national identities are based.

*White Teeth* also juxtaposes notions of utopian and dystopian spaces related to England and the immigrants' 'homelands'. While Irie sees Jamaica as a utopia, Samad voices his version of a dystopian reality occupying a space 'in-between':

‘These days, it feels to me like you make a devil’s pact when you walk into this country. You hand over your passport at the check-in, get stamped, you want to make a little money, get yourself started . . . but you mean to go back! Who would want to stay? Cold, wet, miserable; terrible food, dreadful newspapers – who would want to stay? In a place where you are never welcomed, only tolerated. Just tolerated. [...] . . . it drags you in and suddenly you are unsuitable to return, your children are unrecognizable, you belong nowhere. [...]

And then you begin to give up the *very idea* of belonging. Suddenly this thing, this *belonging*, it seems like some long dirty lie . . . and I begin to believe that birthplaces are accidents, that everything is an *accident*. [...]

As Samad described this dystopia with a look of horror, Irie was ashamed to find that the land of accidents sounded like *paradise* to her. Sounded like freedom. (407 f.)

The quotation represents two versions of 'belonging' that are linked to the perspectives of different immigrant generations. Samad's opinion reflects his disappointed view of England, as the narrative makes clear through the reference to a "dystopia". It includes listing different negative aspects about England from an immigrant perspective. For Samad, a first-generation immigrant, the original vision of England as a utopia has been reversed, and England is now viewed as a dystopia, not only for him but even more so for his children, who stand in-between and have been unable to create a sense of belonging. Samad thus voices the idea that there is neither a homeland nor a utopian space left in cosmopolitan times. However, the narrative also presents Irie's understanding as another version of England that contributes to the polyphony of voices represented in *White Teeth*. Spaces of belonging are thus affectively charged as utopian or dystopian, and pit England against the characters' 'imaginary homelands'.

A final aspect regarding the way *White Teeth* strategically employs narrative representations of space is the way it links up to postmodernist implications and the discourse of rebranding national identity. In the postmodern emplotment of the chapter entitled "The Final Space", the novel describes the Perret Institute, which is designed as a neutral space to match the *zeitgeist* at the turn of the millennium and which is meant to provide

a kind of blank projection screen for Britain's multicultural society.<sup>44</sup> The rebranding efforts also manifest themselves in the literary representation of space, such as in the description of the Perret Institute:

The final space. [...] [A] corporate place [...] used for the meetings of people who want to meet somewhere neutral at the end of the twentieth century: a virtual place where their business (be that rebranding lingerie or rebranding lingerie) can be done in an emptiness, an uncontaminated cavity; the logical endpoint of a thousand years of spaces too crowded and bloody. This one is pared down, sterilized, made new every day by a Nigerian cleaning lady with an industrial Hoover and guarded through the night by Mr De Winter, a Polish nightwatchman [...]. (517f.)

It is ironical that the neutral, blank space is described as being guarded and sterilised by immigrants who should have a space of projection in this place. Yet, the examples of the Nigerian cleaning lady and the Polish guard also refer to the reality of many immigrants in London. Like Samad, who is university-educated but works as a waiter, England is represented as offering only limited opportunities for advancement for immigrants. What is more, the idea of a rebranded space as a blank or neutral place is mockingly dismantled here and with them all the contemporary rebranding efforts. In doing so, *White Teeth* writes against this sterilised form of rebranding and contrasts it with the chaotic but human reality that takes place in Willesden. In line with this argument, John Clement Ball argues that in Smith's novel the accidental, randomly human element dominates over the planned, controlled future (cf. Ball 2004: 240).

In sum, the novel both remediates and constructs new spaces of Englishness. First, it remediates the setting in a London suburb as it was introduced in other postcolonial English novels such as in Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) as a new space of Englishness. In contrast to this urban space, the rural English countryside associated with traditional images of Englishness is remarkably absent as a setting and only finds its way into the novel through traditionally canonised narratives such as through Blake's image of England as a "green and pleasant land".<sup>45</sup> *White Teeth* thereby actively rewrites

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<sup>44</sup>Cf. *WT* 517f. and the analysis of the corresponding quote in chapter 4.1.

<sup>45</sup>It is not too surprising that traditional images of the countryside are absent and implied to be less compatible with postcolonial reality in contemporary Britain. Rather, the lack of rural England in *White Teeth* can be regarded as a part of a broader artistic discourse – if one thinks of artistic photography e.g. by Martin Parr (cf. also Tönnies 2006), or even more strikingly by Ingrid Pollard. Additionally, the observation can be read along with a statement by Zadie Smith in an interview when she remembers her childhood: "When I was little, we'd go on holiday to Devon, and there, if you're black and you go into a sweetshop, for instance, everyone turns and looks at you" (Merritt 2000: n. pag.). It seems right then, as Julian Mischi points out, that ethnic heterogeneity is something that rather has a place in the metropolis or in urban space than in rural England (cf. Mischi 2009: 115).

topoi of Englishness in a postcolonial setting, and proposes that Willesden matches the *zeitgeist* more easily than other places. In fact, the new space of Englishness is pitted against several other spaces: it is a counter-site to utopian ‘imaginary homelands’ for several characters with an immigrant background, it is a counter-site for Britain’s imperial history as manifested in topoi in Central London such as the monuments in Trafalgar Square, and it also contradicts the efforts to redefine a neutral space in the process of rebranding national identity, which is evaluated as too sterile and inhuman and thus as incompatible with cosmopolitan reality.

#### **4.7 *White Teeth* in the Context of British Asian and Black British Literature**

[Y]oga exercises, going to Indian restaurants, the music of Bob Marley, the novels of Salman Rushdie, Zen Buddhism, the Hare Krishna Temple, as well as the films of Sylvester Stallone, therapy, hamburgers, visits to gay bars, the dole office and the taking of drugs.

(Hanif Kureishi, 1986)

This epigraph stands as a paradigmatic example of the playful appropriation of English narratives in the context of postcolonial writing.<sup>46</sup> British Asian author Hanif Kureishi’s list rewrites a canonised piece of Englishness, reading as it does like an updated version of T. S. Eliot’s reflections about England: “Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, 19th century Gothic churches and the music of Elgar” (Eliot 1962 [1948]: 31.). Kureishi uses the list, a paradigmatic formal feature for dealing with Englishness, and adjusts it to his reality in late 1980s London. As the quote demonstrates, it is not the music of Elgar but the music of Bob Marley, not boiled cabbage or beetroot but hamburgers and Indian dishes that the British Asian writer takes to represent Englishness in the late twentieth century. This short example – as well as Kureishi’s novels – can thus be read as precursors for Smith’s novel, which builds on the tradition of British Asian and Black British Literature.<sup>47</sup> In fact, this kind of fiction has been highly popular in recent years and has made a tremendous contribution to the contemporary redefinition of Englishness. It would therefore be problematic to consider *White Teeth* without also introducing examples of similar novels.

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<sup>46</sup>Hanif Kureishi in *My Beautiful Laundrette and Other Writings* (1997 [1986]: 143).

<sup>47</sup>For elaborations on British Asian and Black British Literature cf. also Murphy & Sim (2008) and M. Stein (2004) respectively.

Drawing on the huge field of British Asian and Black British writing, this subchapter aims to introduce six selected novels that contextualise Zadie Smith's debut. Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1990) is the first example that will be examined, since similarities exist between *White Teeth* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* in regard to themes, techniques and tone (cf. Squires 2002: 19). A second example is Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), which unlike most of the other novels in question is set in an earlier period. Its story takes place in the Second World War and the immediate post-war years and focuses on Jamaican immigrants who settle in London. A third example is a novel that not strictly speaking belongs to the field since the author does not have any immigrant background. However, Maggie Gee's *The White Family* (2002) also negotiates racism and 'mixed-race' relationships in contemporary London, though in a more serious tone compared to *White Teeth*. A British Asian novel which has received a lot of public and scholarly attention in recent years and is often discussed in comparison with Smith's novel is Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003). The novel zooms in on first-generation Bangladeshi immigrants in the London borough of Tower Hamlets, taking gendered and British Muslim identity into consideration. Two comparatively less known examples of British Asian writing will also be introduced: Saumya Balsari's *The Cambridge Curry Club* (2004) shifts the setting away from the capital to a smaller student's town. Ultimately, Robin Yassin-Kassab's *The Road from Damascus* (2008) presents an example of how Muslim identity becomes an important marker for individual identification in contemporary Britain after religiously motivated terrorist attacks like 9/11 and 7/7.

Hanif Kureishi's *The Buddha of Suburbia* is an early piece of British Asian Literature that can be regarded as a forerunner to Smith's novel.<sup>48</sup> *The Buddha of Suburbia* centres around protagonist and autodiegetic narrator Karim Amir in a plot that can be characterised as a coming-of-age novel or *bildungsroman*. Karim is of mixed Anglo-Indian parentage and developing a sense of his character and identity, when his parents break up. The very first sentence of the novel sets the tone of the whole narrative and has been frequently quoted since its publication: "My name is Karim Amir, and I am an Englishman born and bred, almost" (*BOS* 3). It is the little word "almost" which undermines the idea of 'born-and-bred Englishmen', and introduces the topic of Karim's attempt to create an identity. In the character's quest to find his identity and his own

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<sup>48</sup>Claire Squires even sees a prototype of *White Teeth* in Zadie Smith's earlier short story "Mrs Begum's Son and the Private Tutor", which apparently refers to the writing of Hanif Kureishi (cf. Squires 2002: 11 ff.).

voice in England, Kureishi's protagonist resembles characters like second-generation Magid, Millat and Irie in *White Teeth*.

Karim's movement from the suburbs of London into the heart of the metropolis is an essential performance for the construction of his identity.<sup>49</sup> Karim is engaged by a theatre group as an actor and he plays Mowgli in *The Jungle Book* faking an Indian accent. The first sentence of the novel is echoed at a later stage when his mother tells him: "[...] you're not an Indian. You've never been to India. You'd get diarrhoea the minute you stepped off that plane, I know you would", and she continues "Who gave birth to you? You're an Englishman, I'm glad to say" (*BOS* 232). The novel therein already implies an awakening to a conception of Englishness that is inclusive rather than exclusive. Moreover, it does not seem to be a coincidence that the novel is set in London, of all places, where multi-ethnic conviviality has become an almost everyday phenomenon; an idea that is expanded ten years later in *White Teeth*.

Yet it is not only on the level of content that Kureishi's and Smith's novels bear resemblance to each other. Both can also be classified as *bildungsromane*, which is a genre convention often made use of in novels dealing with second-generation immigrant experiences.<sup>50</sup> Although *The Buddha of Suburbia* focuses on its autodiegetic narrator, whereas *White Teeth* is represented through different perspectives held together by a heterodiegetic narrator, both novels are characterised by a dominantly realist mode, which links them to a typically English tradition. What is more, both novels have the effect to provoke and to entertain (cf. Squires 2002: 19); aims which they achieve through playfully rewriting concepts of national identity. The playfulness is also rooted in the humorous or ironic commentary on premediated plots associated with a traditional version of Englishness while at the same time situating the narratives in a specifically English tradition of writing. Kureishi once stated the idea that his writing is closely related to an English tradition: "I've always written about England, usually London. And that's very English. Also the comic tradition, I think, is probably English, the mixture of seriousness and humour. [...] Everything I write is soaked in Englishness, I suppose" (quoted in Wachinger 2003: 31). Kureishi's statement includes two significant points: first, the author refers to the importance of London for English writing, which is not in its strict sense typical for traditional representations of Englishness as they are frequently linked to images of the English countryside. Secondly, Kureishi voices a major feature of English postcolonial writing: while such narratives negotiate multicultural diversity and

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<sup>49</sup>Anna Tomczak's article (2009) also addresses the contrast between the suburbs and London. On the role of Englishness in Kureishi's novel, cf. also Ray (1996).

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Sommer (2001) and M. Stein (2004).



postcolonial reality as counter-discourses, they are also “soaked in Englishness”, thus firmly incorporated in an English literary and cultural tradition.

This also seems to be true for other contemporary writers and narratives. Black British author Andrea Levy, whose novel *Small Island* also plays an important role in the field of British postcolonial literature, once commented on the role of English national identity for her writing:

I am English. Born and bred, as the saying goes. (As far as I can remember, it is born and bred and not born-and-bred-with-a-very-long-line-of-white-ancestors-directly-descended-from-Anglo-Saxons.) England is the only society I truly know and sometimes understand. I don't look as the English did in the England of the 30s or before, but being English is my birthright. England is my home. An eccentric place where sometimes I love being English. (Levy 2000: n. pag.)

The quotation is remarkable since Levy not only implies the need for an inclusive identity in postcolonial Britain. She also explains that it is apt and possible for her to identify with Englishness. Apart from that, the statement also introduces the main aspect through which Englishness is negotiated in her novel *Small Island*: the definition of national identity through the colour of one's skin, i. e. through the opposition of whiteness and blackness. Additionally, the quotation refers to the time in which the novel is set, which distinguishes it from most of the other contemporary novels discussed here: *Small Island* is a historical novel set during the Second World War and in post-war times, in which old conceptions of national identity as well as racist attitudes were more widespread than today. Like most of the novels introduced in this chapter, *Small Island* is a realist novel, which also offers different perspectives on the narrated events. The autodiegetic narrators vary in the chapters, indicated by the chapter heading. The novel focuses on the perspectives of Queenie and Bernard Bligh, a white English couple, as well as on the Jamaican newly-weds Gilbert and Hortense Joseph who one after another come to Britain and stay in Queenie's house while Bernard is still at war in India. Queenie is pregnant from an affair with a black soldier and gives birth to a 'mixed-race' baby. The Josephs eventually agree to bring up the boy because the Blighs are afraid of losing their face if they have a non-white child that was obviously not fathered by Bernard.

Being a black British citizen in dominantly white England is the major reference point through which Englishness is contrasted with otherness. This is e. g. achieved by referring to an already frequently cited, premediated icon when Gilbert notes: “I was a sore sight in this green and pleasant land” (*SI* 489). It is Gilbert's blackness that makes the predominantly white society exclude him. In the end, when Gilbert and Hortense

accept Queenie's child, the discussions between the characters revolves around the colour of one's skin and questions of superiority. Gilbert stands up to Bernard, who remains stubbornly prejudiced against blacks until the end:

'You know what your trouble is, man?' he said. 'Your white skin. You think it makes you better than me. You think it give you the right to lord it over a black man. But you know what it make you? You wan' know what your white skin make you, man? It make you white. That it all, man. White. No better, no worse than me – just white.' (*SI* 525)

Gilbert goes on to tell Bernard that they have fought on the same side in the war: "You and me, fighting for empire, fighting for peace. But still, after all that we suffer together, you wan' tell me I am worthless and you are not" (*ibid.*), and he eventually voices an appeal to Bernard: "Stop this, man. Stop it now. We can work together, Mr Bligh. You now see? We must" (*ibid.*). Gilbert's statement at the end of the novel is emphasised in its importance because it is the first moment Hortense is proud of her husband whom she regarded as a good-for-nothing before. Through this means, the statement presents an important counter-perspective on prevailing racist ideas in post-war Britain while at the same time it pronounces an outlook for the inclusive concept of Englishness as it indeed evolved towards the end of the century.<sup>51</sup>

*Small Island* also orchestrates some of the themes introduced in other novels and remediates and stabilises these narrative plots. Apart from responding to the dominant discourse of whiteness and blackness in regard to national identity, *Small Island* also repeats some of the themes and motifs that appear in *White Teeth*. One example is the representation of cooking as a cultural practice. When Gilbert gets English rationing during the war, he reflects on food and the English empire:

I was not ready, I was not trained to eat food that was prepared in a pan of boiling water the sole purpose of which was to rid it of taste and texture. How the English built empires when their armies marched on nothing but mush should be one of the wonders of the world. [...] Why the English come

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<sup>51</sup>Cf. also another quote from Levy's newspaper article in this context which expresses the importance of a redefinition of national identity according to questions of 'race':

Englishness must never be allowed to attach itself to ethnicity. The majority of English people are white, but some are not. If we say otherwise, it is in tacit agreement with the idea of racial purity, and we all know where that dangerous myth can lead. Let England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland be nations that are plural and inclusive. (Levy 2000: n. pag.)

It is this very "dangerous myth" Levy writes against in *Small Island*, which especially surfaces at the end of the novel. In the discourses about a rebranded Englishness, it is important that writers like Andrea Levy also comment on the issue in other medial forms beyond fiction, as the example of Levy's article published in *The Guardian Weekend* demonstrates.

to cook everything by this method? Lucky they kept that boiling business as their national secret and did not insist that the people of their colonies stop frying and spicing up their food. (*SI* 126)

The example represents one of the ironical comments that presents a counter-discourse in the context of cultural habits. It is highly reminiscent of the statement in *White Teeth* voiced by Samad who complains about bad English food. *Small Island* humorously perpetuates this discourse of bad English cooking from a postcolonial counter-perspective that dismantles ideas of an English superiority.

A concentration on whiteness and blackness in the discourse of Englishness is also a central theme in Maggie Gee's *The White Family*. Although the author herself is not from an immigrant background, the novel displays several similarities with the other novels discussed in this section.<sup>52</sup> Apart from the understanding of Englishness characterised by whiteness, *The White Family* represents different forms, motives and dangerous consequences of racism. It is not in the least humorous, but is instead entirely serious about the topic and thus presents another way of dealing with difficult issues like 'race' and racism in a critical but politically correct tone. The novel focuses on an English family called White, as the title implies. Alfred White is the former park keeper of 'Albion Park', which is a fictitious place with a telling name, linked to the old denomination of England. Alfred is a family tyrant and has dangerous racist attitudes. His wife May backs away rather trying to keep the family together. Their eldest son Darren lives in the US and daughter Shirley rebels against her father because she used to have black partners. She was married to Kojo who died young and lives with Elroy when the story sets in. These relationships create the main conflict in the novel, especially since the White's youngest son Dirk has taken up his father's racism and developed it into a dangerous and aggressively violent extreme.<sup>53</sup> The conflicts culminate at the end of the novel when Dirk murders a black man who turns out to be Elroy's little brother.

*The White Family* is characterised by multispectival representations of the characters, which are still linked by a covert heterodiegetic narrator. With its numerous internal monologues, it incorporates modernist features. The story is set in the fictitious London suburb Hillesden, which evokes real names like Willesden but also makes a reference to hills and to the park in which Alfred used to work and which becomes an important spatial symbol. Although set in a London suburb, 'Albion Park' functions as an image of quintessentially English rural space to which Alfred clings in his imagination, in

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<sup>52</sup>Mark Stein also questions why white authors like Maggie Gee should be excluded in the discourse of Black British Literature (cf. M. Stein 2004: 174). He also points out that Black and White British writing have become increasingly entangled (cf. *ibid.*: 183).

<sup>53</sup>Cf. also chapter 3.5 about Dirk's prejudiced views on the middle class.

which he subscribes to a traditional, white and male-dominated Englishness. One scene describes Alfred's war memories by representing them in brackets to indicate the process of remembering. When he arrived back at home in London after the war, he remembers how he first went to the park, which symbolises home for him: "(It was green, so green, and the smell of cut grass, and the shade of the oak trees, dappled shade, rippling over the hill in the breeze [...]. And [...] walking feet, not crunching boots but peaceful feet, those wonderful sounds said I had come home [...])" (*WF* 244f.). The scene clearly remediates the English real-and-imagined topos of the green countryside, also referring to the iconic oak tree and England's hilly landscape. The synecdoche "walking feet" on green grass and hills conjures up the beginning of Blake's verses and the anthem *Jerusalem*: "And did those feet in ancient time. Walk upon England's mountains green" (Blake, "Milton a Poem"). Alfred's memories evoke images associated with traditional perceptions of Englishness which is achieved through references to premediated icons, narratives and topoi that form part of the English cultural repertoire.

Racism is the main issue that Gee's novel negotiates in relation to different conceptions of Englishness. This topic of racist attitudes manifests itself in the characters Alfred and Dirk. The narrative focuses on Dirk's motivations for his aggressive racism in internal monologues, and explains e. g. how he picks up ideas he had read in *Spearhead*, a far-right magazine connected to the National Front and the British National Party (cf. *WF* 188). Shirley presents the counter-example to the men's racism and embodies inclusive values. Her deceased husband Kojo, whose character is introduced retrospectively, was an intellectual university lecturer and thus not a member of the working class like the Whites. Alfred's opinion about Kojo underlines his racism when he says: "Cheeky black bastard! I know what they're after. Why can't she find herself a normal fellow?" (*WF* 41), and the outside perspective of the heterodiegetic narrator further informs the reader about Alfred: "He went to their wedding because May said she would never forgive him if he didn't, and sat in a corner, he and Dirk, only talking to each other, morosely drunk" (*WF* 42). The picture the novel creates of these racist English characters is a highly unfavourable one. What is more, Alfred's racism is used to discuss national identity in contemporary times, as a dialogue between him and Shirley demonstrates. When Shirley mentions that her black partner, Elroy, works in a hospital, the dialogue proceeds as follows:

'This is medicine according to Elroy, is it? Well thank you very much, I want English medicine, English medicine from English doctors.'  
 'Elroy is English,' said Shirley, 'Well – British. Elroy is as British as me or you.'

‘Oh yes?’ said Alfred, now alarmingly red, blue eyes alight, clawing at the bedclothes. ‘He’s about as British as bananas, is Elroy.’ [...] ‘He was born in Peckham!’ Now they were both shouting. ‘Will you leave it?’ said May. ‘People are looking at us.’ (*WF* 63)

The scene underlines Alfred’s prejudices and racist attitude. What is more, Shirley indicates her political correctness when she back-pedals, calling Elroy British instead of English. This correlates to the political use of ‘British’ and refers to a differentiation between British as citizenship and English as a cultural identity. In this episode, then, the difference between Gee’s narrative and novels like *White Teeth* in regard to political correctness and humour becomes most palpable.

A novel which shifts the focus from concepts of ‘race’ to ‘ethnicity’ and from Black British to British Asian writing is Monica Ali’s both praised and disputed *Brick Lane*.<sup>54</sup> Instead of negotiating Englishness through references to whiteness and blackness, it rather concentrates on religion and gender as identity markers. *Brick Lane* is also mediated in a realist mode, and is narrated by a heterodiegetic narrator focussing on the protagonist, Nazneen, as a focaliser. The story is about a young woman, who in the course of an arranged marriage leaves her home in Bangladesh and moves to London where she meets her new husband, Chanu. Chanu is described as a physically ugly, but good-hearted and educated character. The story focuses primarily on the story of Nazneen’s domestic life in a foreign country, set in metropolitan London in the borough of Tower Hamlets. The accounts of these quotidian incidents are disrupted by letter exchanges between Nazneen and her sister Hasina in Bangladesh. In the course of the story Nazneen meets Karim, an energetic, politically active young man with whom she starts an affair. While Chanu increasingly feels the need to take his family back home to Bangladesh, Nazneen realises that her home, and especially the home of her daughters, is London. In these discourses, the novel also hints at the consequences of fundamentalist events like the race riots or 9/11 for British Muslim communities in London. The multicultural space of *Brick Lane* represents an important spatial marker to deal with national identity.

*Brick Lane* fictionalises the intergenerational problems between first- and second-generation immigrants that also reflect problems of national identity. In a discussion with Dr Azad, Chanu observes that there is a “clash of cultures” (*BL* 112) and of generations when he explains:

‘I’m talking about the clash between Western values and our own. I’m talking about the struggle to assimilate and the need to preserve one’s identity

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<sup>54</sup> *Brick Lane* is most frequently analysed in comparison to *White Teeth*, cf. e.g. in Campbell-Hall (2009) and Upstone (2007).

and heritage. I'm talking about children who don't know what their identity is. I'm talking about the feelings of alienation engendered by a society where racism is prevalent. [...]' (*BL* 113)

The complicated search for identity made by the second generation, navigating between assimilation and preserving one's identity, is another issue that links the novel with *White Teeth*. However, it is in this same scene that Mrs Azad remarks: "Some women spend ten, twenty years here and they sit in the kitchen grinding spices all day and learn only two words of English.' She looked as Nazneen who focused on Raqib" (*BL* 114). It is telling here that Nazneen avoids Mrs Azad's eye since she hardly learns any English at the beginning but only leads a domestic life with no possibility of emancipation. The rebellious second generation personified by Nazneen's daughter Shahana is different: "Shahana did not want to listen to Bengali classical music. Her written Bengali was shocking. She wanted to wear jeans. She hated her kameez [...]. If she could choose between baked beans and dal it was no contest" (*BL* 180). It is not only the Western culture but also a specifically English culture, indicated by the reference to "baked beans" that underlines the appropriation of Englishness by immigrants and an increasing hybridisation of English culture. In the end, England remains open with possibilities: Nazneen's friend Razia voices the last sentence of the book that gives it a special emphasis: "This is England,' she said. 'You can do whatever you like'" (*BL* 491). The novel's ending is thus comforting and provides a positive outlook on communal life in England.

However, *Brick Lane* also deals with topics such as racism, race riots and religiously motivated terrorist attacks. It elaborates on the processes through which Karim radicalises and explores how quarrels and riots develop between the BNP and Islamic Jihadists. These conflicts culminate in a fictitious riot that takes place in Brick Lane in the novel's finale. The scene develops shortly before Chanu wanted to fly the family to Bangladesh, when Shahana runs away because she wants to stay in London. Nazneen tries to find her and gets right into the midst of the riots. The heterodiegetic narrator describes the area as being cordoned off by police and observes through Nazneen's perspective: "A white couple came up to the cordon and asked something. They looked disappointed. They wanted curry. More people were arriving, expecting curry and lager" (*BL* 470). Like the descriptions in *White Teeth* of Samad's experiences as a waiter in the Indian restaurant, *Brick Lane* hints at the popularity of going out for a curry. The space in central east London around Brick Lane is thereby configured as the popular culinary centre of a newly emerging national identity in England that celebrates Chicken Tikka Masala as a new icon of Englishness. Monica Ali's novel remediates these new icons and

topoi. Since *Brick Lane* is mainly set in a domestic setting, preparing and eating food plays an important role that symbolises national identity through cultural practices.<sup>55</sup>

References to food symbolising an increasing hybridisation also play a role for another British Asian novel, *The Cambridge Curry Club* by Saumya Balsari. The novel shifts its setting from London and its suburbs to the university town of Cambridge. The story concentrates on a charity shop called IndiaNeed, where four women of different age, origin and character work for their English, aristocratic boss. Swarnakumari, Heera and Durga, who are from diverse parts of India, and Eileen, who is Irish, subversively rebel against the shop-owner Diana Wellington-Smythe. The latter is described as a representative for the English upper middle class. Her father had been in colonial India (cf. *CCC* 86) and the women in the shop call her Lady Di. Heera is married to Bob, an Englishman. At the end of the story, the charity shop is closed and the four women open a restaurant together. The story, like many British Asian novels, deals with Englishness by negotiating different individual and national identities and describes multiculturalism and hybridisation as established phenomena in contemporary Britain. As initially implied, *The Cambridge Curry Club* uses food to symbolise this hybridisation as an every-day practice. Moreover, theoretical concepts and approaches that originate from postcolonial studies are discussed by the characters, which creates an academic meta-discourse that is also typical of some of the novels mentioned so far.

Traditional versions of Englishness are personified by several characters in Balsari's novel, of which three examples will be given. First, the narrative depicts Diana Wellington-Smythe as a representative of Englishness because she has some typically English habits and characteristics, as evidenced when the heterodiegetic narrator explains that she "[...] lived in England and dreamed of Tuscany. Summers were spent in their grape-laden villa outside Florence [...]. The Scrabble, draughts and chess were never unpacked, and returned to England in pristine condition during the last week of August" (*CCC* 82). In order to characterise Diana, the novel draws on the popularity of holidays in Tuscany among the English middle class, and also refers to typical English items such as the board game Scrabble and English draughts. A second personification of Englishness – resembling Magid in *White Teeth* to some extent – is an immigrant character who adopts a typically English identity. Mr Chatterjee, Swarnakumari's husband, appropriates some English mannerisms: the narrative explains that, in his position as a Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator, he has "recorded a private image of English life in the neighbourhood with

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<sup>55</sup>Monica Ali's third novel *In the Kitchen* (2009) is another great example that orchestrates the topic of food from the perspective of a chef working in a multicultural staff in a London hotel. It describes processes of mixing, mingling and hybridising on different levels, such as in reference to taste, ingredients, recipes but also society that symbolises to the inclusive redefinition of Englishness.

his customary powers of observation” (CCC 70). Mr Chatterjee has acquired a sense of what it means to be English, and “extolled the English way of life with enthusiasm” (CCC 221). One of the instances that relates the character’s actions to English icons is when the narrator observes that “[...] Swarnakumari had few complaints after the renovation of the kitchen with its stainless steel double sink, the building of the conservatory and the landscaping of the garden” (CCC 65). The narrative implies that the Chatterjees have settled in typical English surroundings including a landscaped garden and a conservatory. A third example surfaces when the novel introduces the American student Roman Tempest who wants to learn more about England and the English: “Now he was ready. He would learn about civility and tea, crumpets and horses, rain and tweed, the grumble and apple crumble, ale and Britannia, conservatories and the colour magnolia, country rambles and brambles” (CCC 141). The novel clearly repeats and remediates the typical English manner of listing icons to introduce the American’s endeavour to learn more about the English. What is more, it is through several culinary icons that Englishness is narratively represented in the list.

*The Cambridge Curry Club* frequently uses references to food and national culinary cultures to engage with national identity. Most obviously, the inclusion in the book’s title of the word ‘curry’ flags up the importance of this symbolic reference. In the course of the story, the narrator humorously describes Bob’s present for Heera on their first wedding anniversary: “On the advice of his aunt he had presented Heera with English cookery books [...], and Heera had dutifully noted the recipes for Yorkshire pudding and mince pies. On the second anniversary he took her to a caravan site in Cornwall” (CCC 22). The narrative subtly implies that Bob’s traditional concept of Englishness dominates Heera, as symbolised by the cookery books that make her note down quintessentially English dishes. Additionally, the description of the holiday in Cornwall can be read as a counter-destination to Diana’s holidays in Tuscany in regard to class differences. That said, the references also allude to the appropriation of an English culture by the immigrant character Heera. A second example of the way that food presents a symbolical means of describing hybridisation is when the novel explains in one scene: “The latest craze was for Chinese-Indian food [...] – spicy Chinese food with a touch of Punjabi. Mr Chatterjee shuddered” (CCC 64). It is not a coincidence that it is Mr Chatterjee who is appalled by this new ‘cut-and-mix’ culture (cf. Hall 2005 [1996]: 448), since he has appropriated typical characteristics associated with a traditional perception of Englishness.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>It is also worth noting that Mr Chatterjee’s character bears some resemblance with the protagonist of Natasha Solomons’ *Mr Rosenblum’s List*. Both characters cherish habits and manners related



A particularity that surfaces not only in *The Cambridge Curry Club* but also in other contemporary novels is to include academic meta-discourses in the narrative. In Balsari's novel, e. g., the American student Roman talks about New Historicism (cf. *CCC* 132) and Durga puzzles another character by mentioning Baudrillard's simulacrum (cf. *CCC* 214). These meta-discourses frequently focus on concepts that have developed in postcolonial studies, e. g. by mentioning that "[t]he subaltern speaks" (*CCC* 189). The characters also repeatedly discuss the differences between immigrant generations (cf. *CCC* 45, 47, 90, 191) and explicitly negotiate consequences of the diaspora (e. g. cf. 41, 46, 195). To provide an example, a discussion develops between Durga and Swarnakumari:

‘Tell me, Durga, who are you without your roots, *hanh*? It is because of our roots that we can survive in this society. Why do you want to deny our Indian culture, that's what I don't understand.’ Swarnakumari matched Durga's passionate outburst with one of her own.  
‘Don't you see that you seize upon “Indian culture” out of desperation and fear? Fear of erosion and erasure of identity. Why not welcome the churn of the East-West encounters instead, take the plunge into the flow and see what happens? Diaspora isn't only about displacement; it's a progression, a moving to a new location of the liberated self.’ (*CCC* 46)

Although the direct discussion of these issues seems slightly mouthpieced in this dialogue, it is still interesting that the novel directly discusses concepts like roots, culture, identity and the diaspora, and voices a positive perception of multiculturalism. In fact, postcolonial hybridity is taken to be an opportunity rather than a threat, thus remediating some notions that have been propagated in different media and in public around the millennium. However, Balsari's novel is not the only one that remediates such meta-discourses. Further examples are e. g. that the intellectual character Thomas in *The White Family* is described as writing a book entitled “*Postmodernism and the Death of Meaning*” (*WF* 34). Both postcolonialism and postmodernism constitute references to research, and these references are used both to aestheticise and to test associated theoretical concepts within fictional form. Another example is that *Brick Lane* describes how Chanu has enrolled at the Open University and studies “in the subsection on Race, Ethnicity and Identity” (*BL* 38). The inclusion of postcolonial or postmodern themes in several novels shows that it is not a singular phenomenon that *White Teeth* puts some concepts into a fictitious yet ‘lived

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to a traditional version of Englishness, which even sheds a positive light on this conception since it provides an identificational foil for their self-images. In addition to this parallel between the novels, *Mr Rosenblum's List* also uses the discourse on food and recipes, even to introduce discourses of memory: Sadie Rosenblum keeps her mother's recipe book like a treasure and her performance of baking a ‘*baumtorte*’ comes to symbolise the act of remembering the past, her lost relatives and her home in Germany.

practice' (cf. chapter 4.4.1). Instead, the inclusion of such academic meta-discourses even seems to be a self-reflexive tendency in British Asian and Black British Literature.

Robin Yassin-Kassab's debut novel *The Road from Damascus* is yet another example of the negotiation of academic discourses in the field of British Asian fiction. The novel mainly revolves around themes like the religious identity of British Muslims and takes up issues such as fundamentalism and the aftermath of terrorist attacks like 9/11 while focussing on the personal identity crisis of its protagonist, Sami. The narrative provides interesting insights into representations of the traditional and the rebranded versions of Englishness with regard to, e. g., space including notions of homeland as a utopia, and the role of the urban and the rural. The academic meta-discourse is brought into the novel through the fact that Sami is working on a PhD project. The story sets in when Sami returns from a field trip to Syria where he met family members who allude to a family secret that worries Sami. When he comes back, he finds out that his wife Muntaha has decided to wear the hijab, which Sami disapproves of. The self-reflexive discourse on academic theories is introduced in the context of Sami's unsuccessful PhD that allows the narrative to introduce concepts related to postcolonial and postmodernist theories (*RFD* 33). It also reports how Sami discusses aspects of a multicultural society with his academic friend, Tom (cf. *RFD* 105). What is interesting about the plot structure is that *The Road from Damascus*, like *Brick Lane*, takes up the issue of riots but even fictionalises that a riot starts in an academic setting after a disputed lecture. In a predominantly realist mode characterised by a frequently elliptical style, a heterodiegetic narrator focuses on Sami as the focaliser and accompanies him through his identity crisis which involves problems of standing in-between cultures in regard to personal, national as well as religious identity.<sup>57</sup>

The novel deals with immigrant identities and comments on immigration in similar ways to the other novels considered. The heterodiegetic narrator e. g. makes observations about English culture and its influence on colonised people: "They had cricket and church and English names long before they reached England. It was only when they arrived in the Mother Country they learnt how alien they really were, how black their faces, how strange their speech" (*RFD* 27). *The Road from Damascus* repeats this theme and confronts English culture and identities with otherness, also by discussing the relation between Black British and British Asian cultures (cf. *RFD* 60 f.). What is more, it introduces different characters from second- or even third-generation immigrants, e. g. Muntaha's colleague Gabor Vronk whose grandparents were a Jewess and a Russian. It is interesting

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<sup>57</sup>In fact, religion seems to be the main identity marker for many British Asian people, as studies recently found out (cf. Thomas 2011).

that they named their son Richard, “a name Vronsky considered Englishness itself” (*RFD* 135) and changed his surname to Vronk: “Richard Vronk. A real Englishman” (*ibid.*). The theme of struggling between an appropriation of Englishness through naming on the one hand, and the increasing hybridisation of society on the other, is again exemplified in this scene. What is more, in the discussions between Sami and Muntaha arguing over her decision to wear the hijab, the characters voice the idea that cultural and also national identity melt into a British Muslim identity (*RFD* 98 f.). This issue becomes more pointed in the account of how Muntaha’s brother Ammar turns increasingly towards a fundamentalist ideology that resembles Millat’s ‘Mafia-Islamism’, as the reader learns from Sami’s perspective: “Ammar was just a bit of an enthusiast, was all. Hip hop last year and radical Islam this” (*RFD* 118). Ammar’s youth culture seems equally hybrid and complicated in that he adapts a rather ‘black’ nationalism in favour of Englishness, since “there was no hardcore Arabist rap” (*RFD* 218). It is thus mainly through religious identity that national identity is negotiated in Yassin-Kassab’s novel.

That religious identity is the main theme of *The Road from Damascus* is also reflected in its representations of space. In one scene, the characteristics of mosques in England are described: “London mosques. This usually meant the suffocating lethargy of suburban living rooms, or maybe the neon vacancy of a disused warehouse. [...] Instead of dry air swirled by ceiling fans, the stagnant soupy stuff of central heating. [...] It didn’t work. It didn’t fit” (*RFD* 57). The quote underlines how the space for Muslim worship is transposed into the cold English space e. g. of warehouses that seems incompatible with images of typical mosques and their surroundings. A similar tone is adopted when at the end of the novel Sami and Muntaha go to see Tom, a friend of Sami’s, who has emigrated to northern England and gone into hiding in a mountain hut. The scene is striking since it represents one of the rare instances in which a Black British or British Asian novel transfers its setting from the city to the countryside: “Sami, with Muntaha headscarfed beside him, was driving [...], into a rural, pre-apocalyptic zone of varied green” (*RFD* 344). Interestingly, the rural space is introduced as “pre-apocalyptic”, which resembles traditional concepts of the countryside as a *locus amoenus* unspoiled by industrialisation. The narrative proceeds with a description how Sami and Muntaha stop in a village: “Then they had to ask the staid, slow villagers who squinted quizzically at their foreignness – English foreignness – for directions to the mountain” (*ibid.*). The paradoxical expression “English foreignness” paraphrases that the depicted immigrants are still perceived as being in-between. What is more, the quotation underscores the alienation experienced by a representative of a hybrid, multicultural version of Englishness in rural spaces as a contrast to the rebranded English space of London.

The importance of space as a marker for Englishness in contrast to foreignness also becomes obvious in regard to the sacred space of a mosque. One scene outlines how Sami is on his way to a mosque in a meanwhile premediated space: “He’d turned into Brick Lane, land of blood and beer. The tall brick chimney, a red reminder of imperial pride, behind him. To his right the mosque. Formerly synagogue. Formerly Methodist chapel. Formerly Huguenot church” (*RFD* 329). First, the mosque is a space that was used for worshipping of different religious communities – Jewish, Methodist, Huguenot – before it became a mosque. The narrative thereby interrelates the theme of religious identity with English space that is used as a marker of hybridity. Secondly, it is conspicuous that *The Road from Damascus* remediates the real, condensed hybrid space of Brick Lane as a paradigm for the synthesis of a complicated and multi-layered English colonial and postcolonial history.<sup>58</sup> Obviously Brick Lane has – supported by the publication of Monica Ali’s novel – been repeatedly fictionalised and remediated as a quintessentially hybrid space in London and therefore contributed to the topicalisation of the real street. In other words, it is a perfect example of how literature has contributed to the creation of a new topos in the discourse of a rebranded Englishness.

All of these novels demonstrate that identity discourses, which are an essential theme in British Asian and Black British Literature, are largely influenced by negotiations of Englishness. The often depicted hybrid identities of the characters are pitted against or placed between conceptions of Englishness and otherness, between appropriation and rootedness. Englishness is frequently mediated through recourse to the classical realist mode as a traditional English form to negotiate postcolonial issues and concepts. Discussions of identity even surface in academic meta-discourses about postcolonial theories, which are voiced or represented by the multicultural or hybrid cast of characters. It is a typical feature of these novels, then, that they self-reflexively introduce intellectuals who discuss postmodernism or postcolonialism as a meta-commentary about emerging identities in contemporary Britain. What is more, the novels enact a negotiation of Englishness and otherness by referring to typical icons, narratives and topoi of Englishness, either exposing them as outdated or perpetuating them – or even creating new ones. This happens, e. g., with references to food or cultural practices on the level of icons, to canonised narratives or to newly appropriated space. In relation to space it is obvious that London, as the urban, cosmopolitan centre of hybridity, has replaced traditional images of the countryside. The novels have remediated these spatial references and thereby contributed to creating new topoi like Brick Lane. That said, most of the novels in the

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<sup>58</sup> Another novel that takes up the setting of Brick Lane is *Mr Rosenblum’s List* focussing on the Jewish community that had settled in the East End in post-war times.

field of British Asian and Black British fiction not only represent a positivistic image of an English heterogeneous society but also refer to the existence of interrelational difficulties, identity crises, racism, riots, and the aftermath of terrorist attacks. In summary, the novels in question, like *White Teeth*, do not idealise England as a “Happy Multicultural Land” (*WT* 465) but rather represent both the conflicts *and* the positive merits of an increasingly hybrid society as two sides of the same coin.



## 5 Deconstructing Rebranding Processes: Julian Barnes' *England, England*

Britain is seen as a backward-looking has-been, a theme park world of royal pageantry and rolling green hills, where draughts blow through people's houses.

(Mark Leonard, 1997)

When Mark Leonard's pamphlet *Britain<sup>TM</sup>* was published in 1997, he aimed both to denounce Britain as it had developed under the Conservative government, and to support the New Labour party in its endeavours to 'rebrand' the country as a forward-looking, modern nation. However, the epigraph can in retrospect also be read as an ironic parallel to Julian Barnes' novel *England, England*, which takes the idea of the country as a "theme park world" to its satirical extremes.<sup>1</sup> *England, England* can be regarded as one of those contemporary novels that directly and straightforwardly fictionalise and negotiate the rebranding of Englishness. That Barnes' novel hit a nerve at the time of its publication is apparent in its being shortlisted for the Booker Prize. In contrast to earlier fiction, *England, England* does not reconstruct old images of Englishness in the way that earlier novels such as Peter Ackroyd's *English Music* (1992) or Graham Swift's *Last Orders* (1996) had done. Neither does it challenge national identity in the ways British Asian or Black British Literature does by rethinking versions of Englishness in a contemporary society. Instead, it questions the very mechanisms and processes that were at work in the rebranding policies of the late-1990s and challenges discourses on memory and identity that were fashionable at that time in politics, in the media and in academia.

Most of the literary studies that have engaged with *England, England* so far consider how the novel negotiates Englishness, since that is the obvious main theme of the novel. Several studies link their discussions to the importance of postmodernism in *England, England* or Barnes' fiction in general and highlight the influence of Baudrillard's concept

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Leonard 1997: 1. Tom Nairn also refers to the relation between Barnes' novel and Leonard's claims, when he demands that the "necessity of English reaffirmation as part of the constitutional process [...] has to be more than the rebranding advocated by Mark Leonard's Demos pamphlet *Britain<sup>TM</sup>* (1997), which would amount to acquiescing in Jack Pitman's futurescape" (Nairn 2000: 86).

of the simulacrum (2002 [1981]), or French philosophy in general. Another interest lies in the ways in which memory and identity are represented, which demonstrates the novel's self-conscious negotiation of the key concepts that were popular and of great interest in research at the time.

Contributions that discuss *England, England* in relation to Julian Barnes' work, to genre and to postmodernism include a chapter in Bruno Zerweck's monograph (2001) that considers *England, England* as an example of a synthesis of experimental and realist narration in contemporary novels. Matthew Pateman (2002) interprets *England, England* in rather general terms with particular interest in the question whether Barnes is a postmodernist author. Barbara Korte (2002) focuses on the aspect of tourism, thereby also drawing on questions of authenticity in a postmodern age, while Thomas Michael Stein (2003) reads *England, England* along other novels as social criticism of Blairite politics.<sup>2</sup> Ryan S. Trimm (2005) investigates the concept of cultural heritage in a post-Thatcher England, and Sarah Henstra (2005) hermeneutically analyses the novel concentrating on the protagonist Martha Cochrane, while unfortunately ignoring basically all existing studies on the novel. In a monograph, Vanessa Guignery (2006) provides an overview on the criticism of Barnes' work. Richard Bradford considers *England, England* in his general overview of contemporary novels dealing with Englishness, although he paradoxically sets out to show that fiction engages with the topic merely "tangentially and obliquely" (Bradford 2009: 335). In a further monograph about the author, Frederick M. Holmes (2009) discusses existing studies on Barnes' fiction to date.

While these studies provide a helpful basis for considering genre questions in *England, England*, those contributions which focus on memory and identity – and Englishness in particular – will be specifically relevant for my analysis. To begin with, Christoph Henke (2001, 2002 & 2003) considers Barnes' overall fictional work and analyses the novels according to the concepts of memory and identity construction. Vera Nünning (2001a & 2001b) provides a reading from a cultural historical perspective concentrating on the representation of authenticity and invented traditions. One of her main assumptions is that *England, England* does not simply reconstruct but in fact *deconstruct* notions of Englishness, which will be of special importance for my analysis. What is more, Vera Nünning acknowledges the novel's "self-conscious reflections upon the process that has come to be known as the invention of traditions" (V. Nünning 2001a: 59). A similar relevance has Silvia Mergenthal's chapter about Barnes' novel (2003) because Mergenthal is primarily interested in the novel's representation of Englishness. In addition, Nick

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<sup>2</sup>Cf. chapter 3 in which Stein's analysis provides a helpful point of departure for an analysis of the representation of Blair's political agenda in Nick Hornby's *How to be Good*.



Bentley's article (2007) about Englishness in *White Teeth* and *England, England* is again an invaluable resource. Similar to Bentley, Birgit Neumann (2007) approaches the issue of Englishness by relating it to questions of cultural memory and national identity. Christine Berberich has engaged with *England, England* in different ways with a focus on Englishness: with regard to memory creation (2008) as well as to the use of lists (2009a), and as a comparison to James Hawes' *Speak for England* (2009b). Since all these contributions also focus on the ways in which *England, England* deals with notions of Englishness, they will be seminal for my analysis of the novel.

Although the representation of national identity in *England, England* has been widely discussed in research, I aim to focus on notions and passages in the novel that can provide new insights. According to the overall topic of my study, I will analyse to what extent *England, England* makes use of culturally premediated plots and how in turn the novel remediates discourses of Englishness. Three questions will be considered in the analysis: First, how do narrative genre conventions and focalisation contribute to the construction of memory and identity? Second, in what ways is the popular formal feature of the list employed and how does this technique affect the narrative? And third, how does *England, England* negotiate concepts and discourses of 'invented traditions', history, the commodification of culture, cultural memory, collective identity and space?

Before proceeding with a detailed analysis, a brief summary of the novel will help to situate the narrative within its cultural background. The first subchapter 5.1 focuses on how Barnes uses genre conventions as an aestheticising strategy to negotiate discourses of memory and identity and to undermine schemes associated with Englishness. Following up on these formal features, the use of lists as a typical technique of representing Englishness will be investigated on two levels: first, by analysing how listing is employed as a way of constructing a character and personal identity, and, secondly, by examining how this is achieved on the level of national identity. 5.3 will then consider the roles of the heterodiegetic narrator and of focalisation, which are used to stage individual and collective memory construction and as a strategy to create satirical implications. The intricate relations between inventing traditions and the workings of history as they are staged and deconstructed in *England, England* will subsequently be scrutinised in 5.4, first focussing on an invented myth, then on the ways in which Englishness is commodified and turned into a dystopia. The penultimate subchapter inquires how space is mediated both in regard to the quintessentially English countryside and to the artificial environment of the theme park. 5.6 finally provides comparisons with other contemporary novels that bear certain similarities in the ways in which *England, England* deals with Englishness.

Divided into three parts, *England, England* tells the story of its two main characters: Martha Cochrane and England. The first part, entitled “England” depicts Martha’s childhood memories, influenced by the rural English environment in which she grows up. The link between personal and national spheres is symbolised by Martha’s favourite jigsaw puzzle of the counties of England. When Martha’s father leaves her family and thus destroys the happy family Martha remembers, not only her father but also a piece of her jigsaw puzzle get lost. The first part ends with Martha who is in her early twenties and has been trying to develop a ‘character’ of her own. The second, and by far the longest part of the novel, is set in the near future when Britain has become part of the Euro-zone.<sup>3</sup> Although different in tone and setting, this part is linked to the others through the character of Martha Cochrane and the discourses on England. Martha, who is now in her forties, has started working for Sir Jack Pitman, a rich entrepreneur who plans to build an England theme park on the Isle of Wight.<sup>4</sup> The theme park called “England, England”, like the novel itself, is planned by a committee for which Martha works as an ‘appointed cynic’ together with project manager Mark, concept developer Jeffrey, ‘ideas catcher’ Paul and ‘official historian’ Dr Max. Although several years older than him, Martha starts a love affair with Paul. They discover Sir Jack’s secret sexual preference, spy on him and keep the incriminating evidence which they use when the tycoon wants to dismiss Martha. She thus becomes CEO of the theme park island that, meanwhile, is in full swing and enjoying increasing popularity in the ‘quality leisure’ sector. Sir Jack has even persuaded the Royal Family to abandon their palace in London and to move to a more comfortable copy of the palace on the island. As a result, real England is meanwhile seen collapsing and to degenerating into an agricultural state that is renamed “Anglia”. Under Martha’s administration, the situation in the flourishing park gets increasingly out of hand when the characters acting e. g. as Dr Johnson, smugglers and Robin Hood and his Merry Men adopt character traits of the figures they are actually only meant to stage. After a disastrous clash between Robin Hood’s gang and the island’s special forces that was meant to overthrow the mutineers, Martha is finally dismissed from the island. In the third part of the novel entitled “Albion”, an ageing Martha has settled in a small village in old England, now a run-down and anachronistic state in

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<sup>3</sup>The narrative frequently stresses that the story is set in the third millennium (cf. *EE* 37, 124, 253). Hereinafter in chapter 5, quotations with page numbers only refer to the novel *England, England*. If in doubt (e. g. after citations from other sources), the novel’s title will be abbreviated as *EE*.

<sup>4</sup>Several of the studies on *England, England* have pointed out that Sir Jack’s character can be read as a parody of real persons like Rupert Murdoch or Robert Maxwell (cf. Henke 2001: 271; Nünning 2001a: 7; Korte 2002: 285; Pateman 2002: 77; Mergenthal 2003: 109). Gary Day also names Lord Alan Sugar and refers to intertextual similarities to the character Josiah Bounderby in Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* (cf. Day 2011: 238, 253).

which people have gone back to live without technological advancement. However, this seemingly idyllic nation is also described as having lost a sense of national memory and identity. In all three parts, the central question of the authentic value of the past is remodelled while memory and history are expressly regarded as phenomena of identity construction (cf. Henke 2001: 262).

As this short summary already implies, the story includes several hyperbolic events and diverse formal techniques that have led to the overall assumption that *England, England* is another example of Julian Barnes' postmodernist style of writing. The author, only recently awarded the Booker Prize for his novel *The Sense of an Ending* (2011), is regarded as an influential representative of British postmodernism.<sup>5</sup> In particular, Barnes' novel *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984) is widely regarded as a paradigm of postmodernist writing, and *England, England* has been acknowledged as continuing this tendency. However, the narrative work of the author can hardly be subsumed under only one heading since almost every other one of his novels is characterised by a different theme, form or mode of emplotment (cf. Henke 2002: 30). Nevertheless, some recurrent elements and motives can be traced in Barnes' work, such as "numerous intertextual references, [...] a particular affinity to French literature and culture, a typical English sense of humour and subtle irony [and] stylistically a proximity to an essayistic form and epigram" (ibid.: 30 f., my translation), which are also characteristic features in *England, England*. Frederick M. Holmes has rightly observed that the main theme of *England, England* is "the commodification of culture" (Holmes 2009: 21), and Gary Day claims that in the theme park, history is a commodity (cf. Day 2011: 238). In sum, the novel presents a highly condensed and self-reflexive take on the discourse of Englishness and thus provides a fruitful basis for a closer examination of how the novel contributes to discussions of rebranding national identity.

## 5.1 Subverting Genre Conventions: Realist, Postmodern and Pastoral Configurations of England

Genre conventions and modes of emplotment represent one way in which *England, England* self-reflexively deals with notions of Englishness. Several slightly different genre classifications have been ascribed to the novel. While the greatest share of studies questioning to what extent Nick Hornby is a typical representative of popular literature,

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<sup>5</sup>Julian Barnes has published eleven novels and various short stories and essays so far (cf. "Julian-Barnes.com" 2011). He is also the author of four crime novels published under the pseudonym Dan Kavanagh in the years between 1980 and 1987.

most of the studies about Julian Barnes' fiction address the issue of Barnes' postmodernism. *England, England* is characterised by a postmodern style in the second and longest part which engages with the theme park island 'England, England'. The novel might thus be seen, overall, as an example of postmodern writing, which is not ingrained in a typically English literary tradition but has instead been quite popular in French and US American literature (cf. chapter 2.3.1). Far from being a typical negotiation of Englishness, the postmodern configuration of *England, England* is a critical negotiation of Englishness. It contradicts traditional formal premediations, calling strategies of narrative emplotment into question.

Due to its hyperbolic and negative outlook and its setting in the future, *England, England* can also be classified as a satirical novel with dystopian and farcical elements.<sup>6</sup> Although Barnes himself claimed that his writing would not succumb to the label of satire (cf. Guignery 2006: 106), there are several satirical elements in *England, England*. The *Oxford Dictionary of English*, defines 'satire' as "the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues" ("Satire" 2010: n. pag.). This definition applies to Barnes' novel as far as the exposure of problems in the political context is concerned. What is more, satire, dystopia and farce are established ways of writing embedded in the English literary tradition, which via literary mediation reflects the novel's engagement with Englishness.

In addition to its satirical and farcical elements, *England, England* displays a self-reflexive form of narrative, and can thus also be seen as an example of historiographic metafiction (cf. V. Nünning 2001b: 5). Vanessa Guignery observes that apart from being regarded as postmodern, Barnes' writing "both resorts to and subverts realistic strategies; [...] is essentially self-reflexive; and [...] celebrates the literary past but also considers it with irony" (Guignery 2006: 1). The observation that the novel subverts realistic strategies deserves attention and will be further explored in relation to the first part of the novel that has been interpreted to be realist. What seems most convincing, then, is that *England, England* is characterised by a hybrid structure. With its farcical and philosophic reflections (cf. Henke 2003: 93), it oscillated between a prevalingly postmodern and modern or realist modes, permeated with satirical and dystopic elements. If the novel is

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<sup>6</sup>Researchers have categorised the novel as a "satirical dystopia" (Korte 2002: 285), "farcical dystopia" (Henke 2003: 90), "dystopian farce" (Mergenthal 2003: 101), "farcical novel" (Guignery 2006: 3), "satire" (Neumann 2007: 231) or "satiric fantasy" (Holmes 2009: 91). However, Barnes himself dismisses the categorisation as a satire in an interview and characterises *England, England* as a "semi-farce" ("He's turned towards Python" 1998: n. pag.).

characterised by such hybrid genre conventions, then how do these conventions come to affect the remediation of Englishness and the commodification of culture?

Scholars have pointed out that the aesthetic, stylistic devices in *England, England* construct an analogy between content and form.<sup>7</sup> These studies judge the first part of *England, England* to be mediated in a classical realist mode, the second to be postmodernist and the last one to be pastoral elegy, which results in an overall hybrid genre (cf. Bentley 2007: 493 f.). Although I agree with the observation that the overall generic classification is hybrid, I would argue that the analogy between content and form is only acceptable at first glance. In fact, as Vanessa Guignery's argues, the realist mode is resorted only to be subverted (cf. Guignery 2006: 1) in the first and last parts of the novel. Moreover, while the setting is paralleled by the narrative mode, both remediating persisting versions of Englishness, the content undermines this analogy.

The first part of the novel, "England", introduces Martha's childhood in a rural English county mediated in what has been identified as a "classic realist mode" (Bentley 2007: 493). However, according to Bruno Zerweck's analysis of synthesising experimental and realist narration, the first part is primarily a retrospective modelling of reality (cf. Zerweck 2001: 268). The narrative does not depict past events but rather the unreliable memories of them. Readers are therefore left to wonder whether what Martha remembers is true or whether it has been changed due to her temporal distance from the actual events: "This was a true memory, but Martha was still suspicious; it was true, but it wasn't unprocessed" (*EE* 6).<sup>8</sup> The ironic understatement evoked by the litotes "wasn't unprocessed" adds to the questioning of the reliability of memory. The quotation is emblematic of the ways in which memory, both as a process and its narrative reliability, is being questioned in the first part of the novel.

The reliability of memory and its representation is introduced in the first part on numerous occasions. The reader learns what happened when her father left the family through Martha's perspective. The episode gives an account of Martha's memory of the moment when her father took a part of the jigsaw puzzle away with him, which he would usually have kept for Martha until she had almost finished the puzzle:

Three days after the Agricultural Show – and this was a true, single, unprocessed memory, she was sure of that, she was almost sure of that – Martha was at the kitchen table; her mother was cooking, though not singing, she remembered – no, she knew, she had reached the age where memories harden into facts – her mother was cooking and not singing, that was a fact,

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<sup>7</sup>Cf. Henke (2001: 295) and, more elaborately, Bentley (2007: 493 f.).

<sup>8</sup>Hereinafter in chapter 5, quotations with page numbers only refer to the novel *England, England*. If in doubt (e. g. after citations from other sources), the novel's title will be abbreviated as *EE*.

and Martha had finished her jigsaw, that was a fact, there was a hole the size of Nottinghamshire [...], that was a fact, her father was not in the background, that was a fact, her father had Nottinghamshire in his pocket, that was a fact, she looked up, that was a fact, and the tears were dripping off her mother's chin into the soup, that was a fact. (14)

The temporal distance between the real, past events and their remembered, narrative account is highlighted by the statement "she had reached the age where memories harden into facts", which also implies the unreliability of 'facts' as such. The dichotomy between fact and memory, or between the real and the imagined, is thus brought to the fore and is directly debated. Although the events are insistently claimed to be factual through the repeated statement, "that was a fact", the modifier "almost" at the beginning of the quote counters all pretence of absolute truth and of reliable memories, thus questioning the overall reliability of the narrative account.

However, the account is not exclusively put forward in terms of 'memorised facts'. Soon after the scene above, the focalisation shifts to Martha's perspective and the narrative style turns to an interior monologue imitating Martha's point of view as a child: "To Martha it was perfectly simple. Daddy had gone off to find Nottinghamshire" (ibid.). The consequences of this event are reported from a more distanced and external perspective several pages later: "As winters passed, it slowly became clear to Martha that neither Nottinghamshire nor her father were going to return" (17). Indeed, only a few passages in the chapter "England", such as that indicated by the last quote, are characterised by a mode of emplotment that resembles a realist mode, which is achieved through the use of devices such as mimetic descriptions that aim to create an effect of reality and authenticity.<sup>9</sup> However, many descriptions in this part of the novel do not imitate a mimetic reproduction, which would be typical of the realist mode. Instead, the personal process of remembering, like a fiction of memory, is created in a way that resembles modernist writing since it includes such characteristic as the staging of personal perspectives and the reproduction of subjective consciousness (cf. A. Nünning 1998: 52). Therefore, the first part should not simply be evaluated as a narrative written in the typically English mode of the realist novel.

A further aspect of the first part of the novel that supports the argument that it should not too hastily be regarded as realist is the inclusion of lists. In particular, the list of the Agricultural Show (*EE* 8f.) which is represented self-reflexively draws the

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<sup>9</sup>The definition of 'realism' of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* reads accordingly: "A mode of writing that gives the impression of recording or 'reflecting' faithfully an actual way of life" ("Realism" 2008b: n. pag.). Moreover, characteristics of realist novels of the Victorian age include the representation of an empirical truth and external actions while psychological aspects are less significant (cf. A. Nünning 1998: 23).

reader's attention to the mediality or the mediacy of the text itself. While the list is itself a signifier for Englishness that stages an authentic perspective on the enumerated items, it still contradicts the idea of an overall realist mode in the first part.<sup>10</sup> Hence, although the first part is set in the premediated space of the countryside, the mode of emplotment as well as the content of the narration – represented in retrospect, as an unreliable reconstruction of memory that relativises and even dismantles the truth of a remembered past – is rather juxtaposed to realist conventions.

In contrast to the first part, the second does in fact present an analogy between mode, content and setting which is typically postmodern. The description of Sir Jack's property which is immediately introduced in the first pages of the second part is a prime example. Pitman House is introduced as "true to the architectural principles of its time" while "[i]ts tone was secular power tempered by humanitarianism" (28). The narrative continues by describing the opinions of the team of architects who designed Pitman House:

Slater, Grayson & White had tried to point out that building the past was, alas, nowadays considered more expensive than building the present or the future. Their client had deferred comment, and they were left to reflect that at least this sealed sub-baronial unit would probably be considered Sir Jack's personal folly rather than an element in their own design statement. As long as no-one congratulated them on its ironic post-post-modernism. (28 f.)

The quote, then, implies that the prevailing time and style is implied to be still the 'age of' postmodernism since the hybrid architectural layout includes stylistic elements of different epochs. The dominance of postmodernism on the level of content is also clearly alluded to when a French intellectual is invited to speak to Sir Jack's project committee. Having stated that the island project is "profoundly modern" and that "nowadays we prefer the replica to the original" (53), the intellectual puts a climactic end to his speech: "We must demand the replica, since the reality, the truth, the authenticity of the replica is the one we can possess, colonise, reorder, find *jouissance* in, and, finally if and when we decide, it is the reality which, since it is our destiny, we may meet, confront and destroy" (55). The intellectual's enthusiasm about the "authenticity of the replica" conjures up associations with French philosophers such as Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze or Jean Baudrillard and theories of the simulacrum and of the copy without an original (cf. Henke 2001: 263). What is more, the figure of the French intellectual not only directly refers to postmodernism. It can also be read as the most obvious manifestation of "a critique of postmodernism's love affair with surfaces, replicas and the modified present" (Bentley

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<sup>10</sup>Chapter 5.2 will deal with the deployment of lists in *England, England* in greater detail.

2007: 491). The self-conscious use of postmodern features in *England, England* thus itself challenges traditional English genres on the level of mediation.

As for the narrative emplotment, listing and inclusions of other textual forms support the content's negotiation of postmodernism, with its hybrid styles and pastiche-like character. An example is the enumerated representation of the "Brief History of Sexuality in the Case of Martha Cochrane".<sup>11</sup> A similar brief history follows for Paul at a later stage. Unlike the list of items at the Agricultural Show in the first part of the novel, these lists are written out in full to provide mini-narratives of the characters. While the lists in the first part could still be read as an immediate representation, the 'brief histories of sexuality' are typical examples of a postmodern hybrid collage. Additionally, a fictional newspaper report by the *Wall Street Journal* is included in the second part as a hypertextual pastiche (cf. Zerweck 2001: 261), which describes the success of the theme park (cf. *EE* 178-185), and an interview with a subject for Dr Max's survey, which is represented in the form of a report of the test (cf. 80 ff.). The second part of the novel thus not only deconstructs traditional versions of Englishness but also satirises the rebranding endeavours that were fashionable in political contexts at the time of the novel's publication. In line with this idea, Krishan Kumar has observed of Mark Leonard's pamphlet *Britain<sup>TM</sup>*: "Somewhat unwisely, New Labour sought to promote its vision of the new Britain under the adman's slogan, 'Cool Britannia'. Britain was to be hip, cool, youth-oriented, innovative and entrepreneurial – hyper-modern if not actually post-modern" (Kumar 2003: 254). Read with this quotation in mind, it can be claimed that *England, England* both fictionalises the projects of an entrepreneurial, hyper-modern reformation of the nation and challenges the whole process of rebranding enterprise on a self-reflexive meta-level.

The third and last part of the novel, "Albion", again seems to belong to a traditional genre, i. e. the genre of a pastoral elegy, as research has pointed out.<sup>12</sup> This section starts with the description of a villager sharpening his scythe, which evokes images of an old-fashioned, traditional life in the country. Moreover, the reader learns about the preparations for a village fête, which refers to traditional, elegiac ongoings in a countryside and to images of pre-industrialised, unspoiled nature as in the premediated

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<sup>11</sup>*EE* 48 ff., my capitalisation.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Bentley (2007: 493 f.) and Berberich (2009a: 85). According to the definition of *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, a pastoral is

[a] highly conventional mode of writing that celebrates the innocent life of shepherds and shepherdesses in poems, plays, and prose romances. [...] A significant form within this tradition is the pastoral elegy, in which the mourner and the mourned are represented as shepherds in decoratively mythological surroundings [...]. ("Pastoral" 2008: n. pag.)



image of a *locus amoenus*. However, the content again counters the setting of the idyll and the generic attributes of the pastoral by explaining how England has lost its cultural memory and national identity (cf. *EE* 251). Again, the content contradicts typical features associated with the pastoral genre and the setting. Emphasis is placed on how the nation has become worthless and on how the loss is mourned, even if not from the perspectives of the characters, who seem happy in the world they live in. The postmodern second part of the novel thus overshadows the third one on the level of content and in regards to the negotiation of national identity. In fact, the last part only at a first glance celebrates a regained traditional version of Englishness, which is unmasked as a mere illusion. Thereby, the content deconstructs the associations with the pastoral genre since the nation is presented as having lost its meaning.

Consequently, the relations between genre conventions, content and setting or story-world are only apparently paralleled in *England, England*. While it is often held that the first part takes a traditionally English form, in which the realist style corresponds with a rural setting, the way in which the protagonist's childhood memories are questioned in terms of their truth undermines this analogy. On closer inspection, the first part is not so much dominated by realism as it is permeated by experimental modernist features such as interior monologues in which the focaliser reflects on her childhood memories. It is therefore rather characterised by a hybrid mode that already foreshadows the postmodern emplotment of the second part of the novel.<sup>13</sup> The postmodern part "England, England" engages with issues of national identity and cultural memory in a directly postmodern way on all three levels of mediation, content and setting. In doing so, it not only questions an old version of Englishness but also self-reflexively exposes – and challenges – the constructedness of contemporary discussions about redefining or rebranding the nation. This narrative strategy also affects the third part, "Albion", where the pastoral elegiac mode conveyed by a conventional narrative style and by the rural setting is countered and jeopardised by the content: the story of a lost culture and identity results in a collage of absurd and mixed-up traditions. By self-consciously employing traditional genre conventions only to undermine them through what is narrated, *England, England* underscores the deficiencies of a political and ideological system, pointing to the existence of personal and collective self-alienation. *England, England* thus stands out as a powerful example of how literary strategies can contribute to a novel's meaning and to the aim

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<sup>13</sup>Although Nick Bentley sees a parallel of form and content in Barnes' novel, he also recognises that the second postmodern part alerts the reader to the constructedness of the first part and that it also "contaminates the third" (Bentley 2007: 493f.).

to subvert genre conventions and modes of emplotment that are held to be specifically English.

## 5.2 Agricultural Shows and “Fifty Quintessences”: Remediating Englishness through Listing

In addition to its self-conscious employment of generic features, *England, England* is characterised by a strategic use of lists as a means to represent Englishness.<sup>14</sup> In doing so, the novel incorporates a mode of emplotment that is symptomatic for the representation of English national identity while it is also taken to be a typical feature of postmodern genre conventions. To that effect, the list in *England, England* shares associations with both notions, and both should be investigated in greater detail. As in other novels,<sup>15</sup> lists in *England, England* also play a role for the construction of identity on a personal and a collective level, and they can also be taken to possess various functions according to the genre in question.

Consequently, the emplotment of listing will be analysed on two levels: first, on the level of personal identity-construction, which is at stake in the first part of the novel, which has been identified as generically hybrid, with a dominating realist mode. Needless to say, this generic classification influences the ways in which lists are represented, but also their aestheticising functions. Secondly, the construction of national identity is achieved by taking up the premediated form of the list to deal with Englishness in a direct way. The novel’s representation of the “Fifty Quintessences of Englishness” is a case in point, but not the only instance in which Barnes’ novel remediates this mode of emplotment. In fact, this list is not employed as a means of celebrating a positive image of Englishness but rather as a means to deconstruct it.

### 5.2.1 Constructing Characters and Personal Identity

The lists in the first part of the novel primarily serve to construct the character of the protagonist Martha Cochrane. As the analysis of the generic features has shown, the fact that *England, England* parallels certain aspects of content and setting has a bearing on the construction of character and identity. This comes to the fore in one of the depictions

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<sup>14</sup>Christine Berberich (2009a) also investigates the use of lists in *England, England* in relation to Pierre Nora’s concept of *lieux de mémoire*. In my analysis, I will understand listing as a strategy of remediation in the discourse of Englishness.

<sup>15</sup>Such as in *How to be Good* (cf. chapters 3.1 and 3.2.2) and in *Mr Rosenblum’s List* by Natasha Solomons.

of Martha's memory: "[...] she had kept the book of lists for many decades, knowing most of its strange poetry by heart. The District Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Schedule of Prizes. [...] [A] prompt-book of memory" (*EE* 8). That this quote is narrated as a retrospective account is expressed by the reference to the temporal distance of "many decades". Interestingly, a factual list enumerating plants, vegetables, flowers and animals for the Agricultural Show is used to construct memory and identity. The list is characterised as "strange poetry", which is reminiscent of the distinction which Robert E. Belknap has made in regard to pragmatic and literary lists (cf. Belknap 2004: 2f.): through its inclusion into a literary narrative, the pragmatic list of the agricultural show is turned into a literary, poetic one that has aestheticising functions, thereby influencing the narrative content.

That the list of the "District Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Schedule of Prizes" is included as a means of character-construction related to notions of memory and identity does not seem to be a coincidence, then: it gives the impression of a setting in a typically English countryside, which is iconic of traditional rural images of Englishness (cf. also chapter 5.5). Supported by the formal representation as a list, the narration establishes a double reference to the construction of personal and national identity. Focussing on Martha's response to this list, the narrator specifies that "Martha did not understand all the words, and very few of the instructions, but there was something about the lists – their calm organisation and their completeness – which satisfied her" (*EE* 9). Besides foreshadowing Martha's work in the theme park committee, the reference to Martha's pleasure at organisation and completeness also highlights attributes of listing – selection, organisation and hierarchisation – that serve to construct both a nation's cultural memory and Martha's personal memory.

The second part of *England, England* also takes up the form of the list, though in a different way from that in the first part. To further construct Martha's character, a list is used to introduce Martha's "brief history of sexuality" (48). As for its form, it includes a "Paranthesis" (51), and a "6 a) Appendix" (50). This technique not only provides a selection and hierarchisation of events, constructing Martha's character through her sexual affairs and experiences. On the level of discourse, the list also draws the reader's attention to the mediation process itself, which in this context seems to be a typical feature of postmodern writing. According to Jay David Bolter's and Richard Grusin's theory of remediation, such a method of narrating is characterised by hypermediacy, which means that the medium self-reflexively refers to its own mediacy and mediation (cf. Bolter & Grusin 2000: 272f.). Martha's "brief history of sexuality" is mirrored by the one for Paul Harrison (cf. *EE* 98 ff.), which thus provides a comparison between

both characters' past that are played off against each other through the same narrative mode of emplotment. That list-making is used as a means to construct characters and identities is paraphrased by the novel at a later stage: "Martha knew what she wanted: truth, simplicity, love, kindness, companionship, fun and good sex was how the list might start. She also knew such list-making was daft; normally human, but still daft" (134 f.). This list can be read as a counterpoint to a later list that enumerates the things she would have loved to say to Paul but was not able to say (cf. 226 f.). Moreover, Martha's observation can also be read as a critical meta-comment on this established formal feature in which Englishness is often defined.

The lists introduced in the first part of the novel are taken up again in the last part, which reflects the similarity between the two parts on the level of mediation and setting. When the villagers try to re-establish a village fête, Martha goes back to her list of the 'District Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Schedule of Prizes': "It was known that she, unlike most of the village's current occupants, had actually grown up in the countryside. Over mugs of chicory and shortbread biscuits they petitioned her for memories" (246). Martha is able to recite the list by heart to the schoolmaster who is interested in the nation's past and engaged in re-establishing the village fête. The narrator observes: "The frail book of lists seemed like a potshed from an immensely complicated and self-evidently decadent civilization. [...] Despite his respect for book-learning, the schoolmaster was unconvinced" (247). As a result, they start to plan the event from scratch. What is also conveyed by these passages, however, is the close relation between the construction of personal and of national memory. Listing is thus used to re-establish or reconstruct identity retrospectively. However, in the end Martha's list of personal memories and the icons of a former character-construction prove useless for creating a sense of national identity. It underscores the dystopian take on the future, which is marked and influenced by the dominating postmodern dimension. What is more, the boundaries between personal and national – or, in other words, between private and public – are blurred, which also hints at the remarkable use of lists as a means of constructing and eventually deconstructing images of Englishness.

### **5.2.2 Constructing National Identity**

Apart from lists that construct or deconstruct versions of individual identity, there are also several remarkable examples of lists that negotiate notions of national identity in *England, England*. Such enumerations take different forms in the different parts of the novel and they are used to serve different purposes. A scene in the first part of the novel describes how Martha learns history at school. Her history teacher makes the pupils

repeat short and rhythmic chants in order to learn the most important dates of English history by heart:

55BC (clap clap) Roman Invasion  
1066 (clap clap) Battle of Hastings  
1215 (clap clap) Magna Carta  
1512 (clap clap) Henry the Eighth (clap clap)  
Defender of Faith (clap clap)  
[...] And so the chant proceeded, down to  
1940 (clap clap) Battle of Britain  
1973 (clap clap) Treaty of Rome (*EE* 11)

That these chants share some characteristics with lists is apparent: the dates of events have played an important role for the constitution of the English nation and have become part of its collective memory.<sup>16</sup> In these chants, condensed narratives of iconic events come to stand for the whole of English history. The list-like, chronological representation of history is thus subject to a high degree of selection and hierarchisation. In this context, it can even be seen to link up to the English empiricist tradition. The first part of the novel thereby stresses that a nation's past is an integral part of cultural memory which is constantly perpetuated.

However, this tradition of learning history by heart is called into question in the second part of the novel, when Dr Max, the island project's 'official historian', conducts a survey of the knowledge of historical events among the English. This passage is narrated from a distanced perspective in a way that resembles minutes, with an introduction to the set-up of the experiment and then a description of the subject interviewed:

The Subject was asked what happened at the Battle of Hastings.  
Subject replied: '1066.'  
Question was repeated.  
Subject laughed. 'Battle of Hastings. 1066.' Pause. 'King Harold. Got an arrow in his eye.'  
Subject behaved as if he had answered the question. (80)

Not only does Dr Max' survey show that educated subjects have no more than a vague idea of the key events of English history. The scene also deconstructs the perception and the shared understanding of a national past. The way in which Martha learned history by heart is thereby shown to have taught people no more than an ability to recall hollow dates and meaningless icons.

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<sup>16</sup>Christine Berberich also qualifies the recital of dates as "a clearly prescribed list" (Berberich 2008: 173).

Listing is also a significant literary strategy for representing the set-up of the theme park island. Mark, the project manager of the team, informs the committee of his trip to the Isle of Wight, where he has taken stock of the attractions the island has to offer, and which can be re-used in the theme park:

‘What’s it got we can use? A little bit of everything, I’d say, yet, at the same time nothing too mega. Nothing we can’t dispense with if need be. So. One castle, rather nice: ramparts, gatehouse, keep, chapel. No moat, but we could bung one in easy enough. Next, one royal palace: Osborne House [...]. Italianate. Opinions differ. Two resident monarchs: Charles the first, in captivity at the said castle before his execution; Queen Victoria, [...]. Cowes Regatta [...]. King Charles’s bowling-green, Tennyson’s tennis-court. A vineyard or two. The Needles. Various obelisks and monuments.’ (74f.)

This list-like enumeration presents information on existing places on the island that have some historic value. The function of this list is to take stock and to archive events, iconic figures and landmarks or topoi that play a role in English history. However, these short-hand references to various items each stand for their own tradition, but the theme park renews these traditions with attractions that have little to do with their original history. The quoted list is later complemented by another list that represents the attractions that are finally installed in the theme park (cf. 142), with only the Royal Family missing. Both lists, the first one depicting the original status of the island and the second regarding the replica of England on the island, still have the same function, which is to take stock.

Later on, lists feature prominently when the icons of Englishness that are planned to be replicated on the island are enumerated. A case in point is the list of culinary treats to be provided in the theme park:

Roast beef of old England was naturally approved on the nod by the Gastro-nomic Sub-Committee, as were Yorkshire pudding, Lancashire hotpot, Sussex pond pudding, Coventry godcakes, [...]. A swift tick was given to fish and chips, bacon and eggs, mint sauce, steak and kidney pudding, [...]. Approved for their picturesque nomenclature (contents could be adjusted later if necessary) were London Particular, Queen of puddings, Poor Knights of Windsor, [...]. The Sub-Committee banned porridge for its Scottish associations, faggots and fairy cakes in case they offended the pink dollar [...]. Welsh rarebit, Scotch eggs and Irish stew were not even discussed. (90f.)

The culinary discourse presents a significant way of dealing with identity since cooking is a cultural practice closely interwoven with a culture, thus representing a cultural premediation of national identity. This list underlines the importance of an English

culinary tradition, that is clearly distinguished in the theme park from items and dishes that are connected to other British nations. The specific case of English food, together with its representation through an enumeration of its diversity in a list, again creates a parallel between form and content in its negotiation of Englishness.

A similar list of what is held to be typically English appears in *England, England* when the project planners search a logo for the ‘Island Breakfast Experience’:

The design section produced scores of them, mostly unacknowledged revisions and quiet steals of familiar symbols. Lions in various numbers and various stages of rampancy; assorted crowns and coronets; castle keeps and battlements; a skewed Palace of Westminster portcullis; lighthouses, flaming torches, silhouettes of landmark buildings; profiles of Britannia, Boadicea, Victoria and Saint George; roses of every kind, single and double, tea and floribunda [...]. (120)

Again, icons stand as *pars-pro-toto* elements with the aim to represent the gist of what makes England special. The list draws from the repertoire of cultural plots that allow identification and provide a high degree of recognition, as the expressions “revision” and “familiar symbols” imply. What becomes obvious therein is that the repertoire of premediated schemes of Englishness is relatively fixed. In repeating them again in the typical form of the list, *England, England* thus remediates these schemes and itself thereby contributes to their stabilisation.

The most prominent and striking example of listing, combining most of the functions discussed so far, is also included in the second part of the novel. The “Fifty Quintessences of Englishness” (83 ff.) can be regarded as a paradigm of the strategy of listing in contemporary fiction. It is a counterpart to the survey of educated English subjects, in that this list focuses on wealthy international visitors that the island project aims to attract: “Potential purchasers of Quality Leisure in twenty-five countries had been asked to list six characteristics, virtues or quintessences which the word England suggested to them” (83). Jeff, the committee’s concept developer, submits the list to Sir Jack, from whose perspective the reader learns about the content that is represented in the form of a numbered, full-length enumeration of items in capitalised letters, starting as follows:

1. ROYAL FAMILY
2. BIG BEN/HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT
3. MANCHESTER UNITED FOOTBALL CLUB
4. CLASS SYSTEM
5. PUBS
6. A ROBIN IN THE SNOW
7. ROBIN HOOD AND HIS MERRIE MEN

## 8. CRICKET

### 9. WHITE CLIFFS OF DOVER [...] (83)

As Nick Bentley rightly has observed, most of the items on Barnes' list are invented but "clearly recognizable as representing Englishness in the public imagination" (Bentley 2007: 486). What is more, these culturally premediated icons construct a version of Englishness that responds to icons that have been selected in a real search for English icons by the British Government.<sup>17</sup> On the level of mediation, the list in the narrative produces a twofold effect. On the one hand, it creates immediacy for the reader since he or she is directly confronted with what the characters in the novel see, read and perceive. On the other hand, however, the list works as a means of hypermediacy: the numbering of the list diverts the reader from the reading process and disturbs the mimetic effect that the narrative has produced so far. Capitalised words enhance the reader's awareness of the medium – the book, the writing, or even the font. By calling attention to its mediacy, the list representing the "Fifty Quintessences of Englishness" is itself again put forward as an icon of Englishness. What is more, including it in the narrative actively remediates this form as a typical configuration in the discourse on Englishness, which thus contributes to its iconisation.

At first glance, the positive reconstruction of Englishness continues in the narrative in which the list is embedded. Sir Jack functions as the focaliser of this scene, so it is his perspective and his thoughts on the list that are reproduced:

Alone, Sir Jack considered the printout again. [...] Many had been correctly foreseen: there would be no shortage of shopping and thatched cottages serving Devonshire cream teas on the Island. Gardening, breakfast, taxis, double-deckers: those were all useful endorsements. A Robin in the Snow: where had that come from? All those Christmas cards, perhaps. (*EE* 85)

Emphasis on the character's perspective highlights an essential process of list-making, which underlies the general construction of events, memory and identity. To begin with, Sir Jack makes a personal selection of the listed icons, thus embedding the items in a personalised narrative. Apart from that, the "Robin in the Snow" exemplifies the workings of remediations on the small scale of a mini-narrative: "[...] as 'markers' of Englishness

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<sup>17</sup>Cf. "Icons" (2005) and the opening of the introductory chapter 1. The following icons are presented both in *England, England* and the real Icons Project mentioned earlier: Big Ben, pub(s), the robin (in the snow), cricket, cup of tea, Stonehenge, Tower of London, Bowler hat, Oxford/Cambridge (Oxbridge), double-decker/red (Routemaster) buses, *Alice in Wonderland*, Magna Carta and, interestingly, the rather negative 'stiff upper lip'. Some further icons are relatively similar, e.g. Royal Family and Queen's head stamp, TV classic serials and *Pride and Prejudice*, gardening and the rose, (warm) beer and the pint. The analogy of these icons can be explained by the fact that they are mainly quite obvious, objective, unproblematic and emotionally uncharged icons.



they have, inadvertently, become misleading ‘makers’ of Englishness” (Berberich 2008: 174). In other words, the fictional international hetero-images are composed of icons of Englishness that would not have come to mind from the fictional English point of view, but seem to be remediations of Christmas cards.

As the scene develops, it exemplifies further processes underlying the construction of lists. Yet, the following quotation exemplifies the way in which the island project team generally handles English icons to make them become attractions:

The Magna Carta was currently being translated into decent English. *The Times* newspaper was no doubt easily acquired; [...] and the White Cliffs of Dover relocated without much linguistic wrenching to what had previously been Whitecliff Bay. Big Ben, the Battle of Britain, Robin Hood, Stonehenge: couldn’t be simpler. (*EE* 85)

Many of the listed icons are obviously not difficult to replace or replicate. However, the inclusion of the Royal Family and of Buckingham Palace, which Sir Jack pejoratively nicknames “Buck House” (86), presents a major problem for Sir Jack and his project committee. As for the way the list is represented, the selection and hierarchisation, along with the inherent transformation according to the project’s megalomaniac standards is still performed by the focaliser as a mindgame, which also foreshadows the dystopian dimensions of the story.

The selective manipulation involved in the process of list-making is introduced in a straightforward way. The first thing Sir Jack does with the list is the following: “He crossed off items he judged the result of faulty polling technique and pondered the rest” (85). Sir Jack’s justification for selecting only the positive items is that the negative items are the “result of faulty polling techniques”, which, obviously for good reasons, are not specified. The negative items include:

12. SNOBBERY [...]
21. PHLEGM/STIFF UPPER LIP [...]
31. HYPOCRISY [...]
33. PERFIDITY/UNTRUSTWORTHYNESS [...]
42. WHINGEING [...]
46. EMOTIONAL FRIGIDITY[...]
49. NOT WASHING/BAD UNDERWEAR (84f.)

The list of the Fifty Quintessences is evidently not meant to remediate a generally positive perception of a rebranded Englishness that had been popular in the 1990s. Instead, the novel uses the established, premediated scheme of listing to highlight deficiencies and to satirically lampoon this very formal feature. It becomes clear that “[...] the construction

of Englishness and its concomitant deconstruction are intricately intertwined in the novel” (V. Nünning 2001a: 63). What is more, Barnes’ novel deconstructs contemporary efforts to create positive self-images of the English by including several negative items in the list of these fictional hetero-images. By highlighting Sir Jack’s selection process, a fundamental and significant characteristic of the list is exposed: its rootedness in an empiricist tradition. The function of the list of the Fifty Quintessences in *England, England* is thus not simply to remediate a positive version of Englishness reflected through form and content. Instead, it highlights the unreliability of a seemingly empiricist list and the manipulation involved in the processes of forming a positive national self-image.

If the selection process underlines the manipulation of iconic representations of Englishness, the perspectivation of the scene is also an important feature that contributes to staging national self-images and stereotypes. The scene has a climactic structure, and Sir Jack is seen to burst out in anger:

Sir Jack prodded a forefinger down Jeff’s list again, and his loyal growl intensified with each item he’d crossed off. This wasn’t a poll, it was barefaced character assassination. Who the *fuck* did they think they were, going around saying things like that about England? His England. What did *they* know? Bloody tourists, thought Sir Jack. (*EE* 86)

Concentrating on Sir Jack’s point of view, the narrative presents the character’s reflections on the negative items in the list through an interior monologue. This narrative strategy thereby allows for a negotiation of the unflattering aspects of England from the perspective of a rather unpleasant character with whom the reader is not likely to sympathise. In contrast, through the focalisation strategies the narrative even creates a feeling of *schadenfreude* instead of feelings of sympathy with the character. As the following chapter will show, this is not the only scene where focalisation is used as a literary strategy to dismantle the authority of focalisers and functions as a means of negotiating Englishness.

### **5.3 Contesting Perspectives and Authenticity: Narration and Focalisation**

In addition to listing, focalisation and character perspectives are also used as an aesthetic means to construct and deconstruct notions of personal and collective memory and identity. These different perspectives enable a negotiation of different conceptions of Englishness. In this process, *England, England* repeatedly questions the authenticity of remembering or the truth of memory. The novel explicitly associates the prevalent

phenomena of memory and identity, most prominently in the declaration that “memory is identity” (*EE* 251). The heterodiegetic narrator in *England, England* makes general comments on the quality of memory and identity while the varying focalisers provide different insights into these issues related to Englishness. Moreover, the reader is invited either to sympathise, or clearly not to sympathise, with certain focalisers. This strategy frequently helps to dismantle self-images and national stereotypes. In order to trace these characteristics in greater detail, this subchapter will concentrate on two aspects: firstly, it will consider the ways in which the heterodiegetic narrator emerges, and, secondly, it will examine what effects this technique has for the representation of Englishness. Martha’s personal perspective plays a role in this context since she is the protagonist and the most frequent focaliser. However, since the text plays with variable focalisation, the strategies through which the reader is invited to dislike certain characters will also be considered.

The mediation of events in *England, England* is characterised by an interaction between the narrator and the perspectives of focalisers. The very beginning of the novel is telling since it demonstrates how this strategy works:

‘What’s your first memory?’ someone would ask.  
And she would reply, ‘I don’t remember.’  
Most people assumed it was a joke, though a few suspected her of being clever.  
But it was what she believed.  
[...] But no: she didn’t mean that either. [...] A memory was by definition not a thing, it was ... a memory. A memory now of a memory a bit earlier of a memory before that of a memory way back when. (3)

The discourse of memory as an essential supplement to identity is introduced from the very beginning and staged as Martha’s perspective. That these reflections are meant to be Martha’s point of view becomes clear from the inclusion of the consideration “But no” followed by a colon, as in an internal monologue. What is more, the reflection about memory peters out mid-sentence and thus stages an ad hoc or simultaneous representation of the character’s thoughts. The shift from the heterodiegetic narrator to the focaliser resembles a mediation through a ‘double-voiced discourse’. The issue of the reliability and the truth of memories is thus put forward straight away from the very beginning as one of the novel’s main concerns.

At the same time, however, reflections on abstract phenomena like memory as a concept are mouthpieced through Martha. In the course of the first part of the novel, the focalisation and personal perspective more frequently recede in favour of reflexive passages by the heterodiegetic narrator:

If a memory wasn't a thing but a memory of a memory of a memory, mirrors set in parallel, then what the brain told you now about what it claimed had happened then would be coloured by what had happened in between. It was like a country remembering its history: the past was never just the past, it was what made the present able to live with itself. The same went for individuals, though the process obviously wasn't straightforward. (6)

This quote orchestrates the relation of memory and identity as well as the connection between personal and collective remembering in a direct way.<sup>18</sup> Martha's perspective retreats, although the presence of the heterodiegetic narrator is not made explicit either but rather disguised in line with the dominant mimetic transparency. The novel's effort to implant reflections like this in a character seems to aim at making the issue more comprehensible for readers. The focus on Martha is possibly meant to arouse the reader's sympathy with this character and provide an insight into her comprehension, especially in the first part of the novel.<sup>19</sup> On closer inspection, however, the personal perspectivation at times retreats in favour of rather a patronising and educational heterodiegetic discussion of issues like the reliability of personal and national memory, identity and history.

In order to evoke a more personal view on the narrated events, the novel strategically concentrates on personal perspectives through variable focalisation. Various techniques are used to create positive or negative reader responses. The introduction of Martha's past in the first part is mainly used to create a positive image of her character, and to pave the way for the second part in which first she contributes to the planning of the project, and eventually runs the theme park herself. To that effect, Martha plays the role of an 'appointed cynic' in the project team, with the effect that her opinion on the enterprise remains critical during the planning stage. Apart from that, she has a dismissive opinion about Sir Jack,<sup>20</sup> which makes readers most likely to sympathise with her. Since Martha's feelings about the project are not represented directly but rather

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<sup>18</sup>Passages like this might have been a decisive factor for Matthew Pateman's criticism of *England, England* in his monograph about Barnes:

The essayist of *Letters from London* could have written convincingly on the themes of simulacra, Englishness, and the contemporary state of theory. The short-story writer of *Cross Channel* could have written a number of tales that included the same characters in more condensed situations. The novelist, in trying to do both things at once, for once failed to produce a novel that moved and provoked. Its inclusion on the Booker Prize shortlist remains, for me, at least, a mystery. (Pateman 2002: 81)

<sup>19</sup>On the literary strategies to trigger certain reader responses that also appear in *England, England* cf. V. Nünning (2002).

<sup>20</sup>As an example, when Martha and Paul privately talk about Sir Jack, it is usually Paul who supports Sir Jack while Martha expresses her resentment for him (cf. *EE* 95). What is more, Martha applied for the job with Pitco for reasons of earning good money rather than of ideological sympathy with the project (cf. 48).

obscured through a distanced perspective, Martha's personal opinions on the issues help to make readers identify with her.

The first part of the novel should therefore not be considered as a dispensable introduction to the long second part but as a strategic means to create sympathy for the protagonist who later collaborates with Sir Jack. Were it not for the protagonist, the rather experimental second part of the novel would be dominated by characters who are depicted unpleasantly in a hyperbolic manner, and with whom readers would most probably not sympathise. It is therefore important to keep Martha's character in quite a positive light even when she becomes CEO of 'England, England'. This is also achieved at the end of the second part when Martha seeks authentic experiences in an abandoned church on the Isle of Wight and thereby expresses her criticism against the overall project, even if, on the whole, Martha's opinions about Englishness and political issues remain rather undecipherable.

While the novel employs strategies to create sympathy for Martha, the novel also makes use of conspicuous tactics to render certain other characters as unpleasant as possible. This is mainly achieved through variable focalisation combined with the creation of dramatic irony on different levels. As shown in unflattering descriptions by the heterodiegetic narrator, the character who is most obviously meant to be regarded as an unlikeable figure is Sir Jack:

'Is my name . . . real?' Sir Jack considered the matter, as did his two employees. Some believed that Sir Jack's name was not real in a straightforward sense, and that a few decades earlier he had deprived it of its Mitteleuropäisch tinge. Others had it on authority that, though born some way east of the Rhine, little Jacky was in fact the result of a garage liaison between the shire-bred English wife of a Hungarian class manufacturer and a visiting chauffeur from Loughborough, and thus, despite his upbringing, original passport, [...] his blood was one hundred percent British. (32 f.)

Apart from the fact that authenticity is questioned once again – here in relation to Sir Jack's name – the character's personal identity and his origins are revealed as fake. The scene highlights that Sir Jack is not a member of the upper class by birth but has worked his way up from a working class background. What is more, the observation that "his blood was one hundred percent British" might be read as a critical comment to the contested discussions about defining national identity through concepts of 'race'.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>This idea can be supported by a reference to the debated notions in the 'race' discourse when Martha is interviewed by Sir Jack and the meeting is described as "some benign *Führerkontakt*" (EE 44). The expression nastily links the disputed concept of race as it was abused by German Nazis and Hitler to the megalomaniac figure of Sir Jack, thereby rendering his character even more unappealing.

Moreover, the fact that the heterodiegetic narrator feigns not to be omniscient, but voices rumours, speculations and opinions about Sir Jack's origins, adds to the sense that the character is thus widely held in low esteem. The tycoon's way of dealing with England and the nation's past is thus criticised through a strategic use of authorial comments and focalisation.

The effect of Sir Jack's unfavourable presentation is also achieved through variable focalisation, which paves the way for the creation of dramatic irony. As an example, a scene depicts Sir Jack's love for country walking, which he also regards as a typically English activity. On their way to the starting point in the countryside his driver, called Wood, plays a CD of a Beethoven Symphony.<sup>22</sup> To undermine Sir Jack's self-proclaimed glamour, the focalisation shifts to his driver, and when Sir Jack asks Wood if he recognises the piece they are listening to, Wood responds: "Could it be the mighty Pastoral by any chance, sir?" The chauffeur still pretended a little uncertainty, earning his employer's nod and a further display of connoisseurship" (40). Sir Jack's sense of superiority is increasingly critiqued in the course of the scene and of his tour through the countryside. The reader learns that "Wood drove off slowly towards the rendezvous at the other end of the valley, where he would pay the pub landlord to give his employer drinks on the house" (ibid.). The focalisation then shifts again to Sir Jack's point of view, and to how he enjoys his walk and how he feels when he arrives at the pub: "The Dog and Badger, whose mutton-chopped host would patriotically waive the bill – 'A pleasure and an honour as always, Sir Jack' – then the limo back to London" (44). What is clearly exposed here is the fact that even Sir Jack lives in an artificially created world in which he is given the impression that he is superior to others. By allowing the reader to know more than the character, the shifts in focus downplay Sir Jack's complacent self-regard and underscore his ignorance.<sup>23</sup>

Variable focalisation is frequently used, together with dramatic irony, to expose Sir Jack's follies. A high degree of dramatic irony can be found in the scene where Sir Jack

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<sup>22</sup>The scene also presents an example of the self-conscious intermedial references in the novel: Sir Jack is described as an admirer of Beethoven's work, which he enjoys in his megalomaniac moods. In this scene, the intermedial reference creates an analogy between narrative and music: the first movement of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony is appropriately entitled *Erwachen heiterer Empfindungen bei der Ankunft auf dem Lande* (Awakening of cheerful feelings upon arrival in the country), cf. Beethoven (1998 [1808]). Vera Nünning also points out that intermedial references to music are more frequent in *England, England* than intertextual references (cf. V. Nünning 2001a: 67).

<sup>23</sup>There is a similar representation in a scene in which the perspective of the King is undermined by the narrative: while the King believes that he is steering the Royal jet to the Isle of Wight, the narrator observes that the aircraft is controlled by an override system (cf. *EE* 159). The description from the King's perspective – "He was barely concentrating; there were long stretches when this plane almost seemed to fly itself" (160 f.) – is thereby ironically exposed at the expense of the character.

goes to see ‘Auntie May’, an alias for the madam of a brothel frequented by Sir Jack. Inside the house, he is welcomed by a girl introduced as Lucy. However, the reader learns that, unbeknown to both her employer and her client, Lucy is not who she pretends to be: “[...] her real name was Heather; unknown to Auntie May, she was preparing her doctorate in psycho-sexual studies at Reading University” (154). Apart from the fact that *England, England* again plays with notions of the real and the fake or truth and replica, the narrative increasingly ridicules Sir Jack’s character. This strategy is taken further expands as the scene develops: during his stay in the brothel, Sir Jack is eavesdropped on and recorded by Gary Desmond, a private investigator employed by Martha and Paul to collect material that they hope to use in order to blackmail Sir Jack in the future. While Sir Jack is entertained by a girl, the narrator observes: “Two metres above her head, Gary Desmond gave himself a joyous thumbs-up about the sound quality” (155). The narrator’s distanced and omniscient description here again lampoons Sir Jack’s figure and shows the extent to which he is deceived by several persons at the same time. Since the mogul is generally represented as an unappealing character, the exposure of his follies might even induce *schadenfreude* in readers. In any case, narrative strategies do affect the perception and sympathy of the reader, who is no doubt brought to identify more with the adversaries than with the supporters of the project of ‘England, England’.

## 5.4 Exposing Processes of Inventing Traditions and Rebranding a Nation

*England, England* criticises processes of rebranding Englishness not only on the level of narrative mediation but also in relation to extra-literary, cultural concepts that are negotiated fictitiously. In fact, the novel deals with memory and identity as well as with concepts such as invented traditions, the processes of national rebranding and the commodification of a nation’s past in a self-conscious and straightforward way. In an interview, Julian Barnes himself declared his interest in these matters, when saying that *England, England* is “about the idea of England, authenticity, the search for truth, the invention of tradition, and the way in which we forget our own history” (“He’s turned towards Python” 1998: n. pag.). What is remarkable about this quote is that Barnes does not mention the process of remembering, although it is an essential theme that *England, England* refers to directly numerous times. Instead of memory, the author mentions forgetting, which should thus also be considered along with the other themes. This chapter consequently zooms in on the techniques through which *England, England* not only represents these issues and concepts but also actively remediates them on various

levels, and points out how such remediations can affect perceptions of Englishness. First, 5.4.1 traces how Eric Hobsbawm's concept of 'inventing traditions' is fictionalised in the example of the 'Betsy myth', which is made into a story, mediated and remediated by the narrative. 5.4.2 will then focus on how the novel represents the workings of the theme park that underlie a rebranding and commodification of the nation's past, including the subsequent decline and deconstruction of the nation into a dystopia. As a last point, the subchapter will address the reinvention of traditions, culture and identity through the example of the village fête, which takes place in the last part of the novel.

#### 5.4.1 "Heavens to Betsy": Taking an Invented Tradition to Its Extremes

Allusions to Hobsbawm's concept of 'inventing traditions' surface on several occasions in the novel. A characteristic example is the description of the invention processes of the 'Betsy myth', which has not attracted a lot of interest in academic analyses of *England, England* so far.<sup>24</sup> The story is invented when the advisory board plans the set-up of the theme park and seeks a possibility to stage "the island breakfast experience" (*EE* 119) in relation to a traditional tale. Sir Jack rejects all the drafts of logos that the designers have come up with, including lions, landmark buildings and profiles of Saints and mythical figures, since according to him they all relate too much to the past.<sup>25</sup> What is expressed here is the idea that the past does not suffice as an object of representation for the theme park, and that premediated schemes should be considered from the perspective of the present. Sir Jack states this idea when he claims: "It's all too *then*. Give me *now*. [...] What we want [...] is *magic*. We want *here*, we want *now*, we want the *Island*, but we also want *magic*" (120). In other words, what Sir Jack demands is a remediation, a new way of staging the familiar past to evoke feelings of recognition, but in a new formation or configuration that might transfer old myths into the present. This idea can be related to Jan Assmann's approach to the workings of cultural memory, which also holds true for the overall cyclical structure underlying the processes of remediation in the novel: configurations of cultural memory usually depend on the point of view from the present, and reconstruct an updated version by referring to an archive of narratives, images and schemata.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Barbara Korte's study (2002) is an exception as it considers the Betsy myth, although from a different perspective, i. e. with a focus on tourism. Vera Nünning has analysed invented traditions in *England, England* with a focus on the reinvention of the Robin Hood myth and the traditions in Anglia in the third part of the novel.

<sup>25</sup>The scene was also quoted in chapter 5.2.2.

<sup>26</sup>Cf. J. Assmann (1988: 13 ff.) and chapter 2.1.



The result of this enterprise is the invention of a tradition designed to combine topicality with a plausible myth consisting of recognisable, premediated elements. The committee's historian, Dr Max, provides the idea for the new installation: he tells the tale of a woman who supposedly went to the market in Ventnor on the Isle of Wight in the mid-nineteenth century. When walking on the clifftop with a basket of eggs for the market, she is caught by a gust of wind and carried over the edge. Luckily she carries an umbrella that works as a parachute helping her to land safely on the beach below the cliff with only a few eggs broken. The way the story is narrated by Dr Max follows the conventions of a fairy tale, in tune with the magic flavour demanded by Sir Jack. The report, quoted at length in direct speech, is suggestively represented in an anecdotal TV style, which hints at the constructed remediation and commodification of the tale.<sup>27</sup> Sir Jack loves the story since it has the attributes he has longed for: while combining the present with tradition, it retains a magic aura. The historian's tale fills the gaps and the blank spots in history through a seemingly authentic but unrealistic story, embedded in the generally ironical tone of the narration. Irony is enhanced by Dr Max's digressions on what the woman in his tale was meant to be wearing, which might suggest that he is making the story up on his feet. This instance, then, creates a parody of remediation on a self-reflexive meta-level.

The creation and implementation of the tale, together with the ways in which it is commodified, is narrated from the distanced perspective of the heterodiegetic narrator, which leaves room for more ironical statements. Moreover, the narrative sums up some events with the result that the narrated time is accelerated. What is accounted for is the search for an iconic logo much in the same way as the brand of a corporation would be looked for:

The logo was drawn and redrawn, in styles from pre-Raphaelite hyper-realism to a few expressionist wrist-flicks. Certain key elements persisted: the three echoing sweeps of umbrella, bonnet and spread skirts; the pinched waist and full breasts indicating a woman of the earlier period; and the hemispherical rustic basket whose circle was completed by the rounded pile of eggs. Outside Sir Jack's hearing the motif was referred to as Queen Victoria Showing Her Knickers [...]. (122)

The icons that are evoked through the logo are clearly situated in the discourse of traditional versions of Englishness by references to the Victorian period. Barbara Korte rightly points out that the woman bears a resemblance to figures such as Mary Poppins (cf.

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<sup>27</sup>This idea can also be supported by the implication that Dr Max is rather a TV figure than a historian. Cf. *EE* 68, Day (2011: 238).

Korte 2002: 295). However, the logo is also subject to the rebranding and configuration in the present, as it is shown by the references to styles of hyper-realism and expressionism, resulting in a playful hybrid of epochs in the branding process. The aim of the project to create authenticity and to ensure a familiarity with traditional versions of Englishness through some icons is ridiculed through literary depiction, e. g. through the humorous nickname given to the motif behind Sir Jack's back. Through the narrator's report, the description of how the invented tale is branded according to icons that are typical in the discourse of Englishness together with modern styles thus lampoons the whole branding process.

These observations are also supported by the way in which the novel further explores the processes involved in inventing traditions. When describing the task of finding an appropriate name for the woman, the narrative again points to the uncertainty of memory: "Someone remembered, or discovered, that there had once been a phrase 'Heavens to Betsy', which seemed to make her christening appropriate, even if no-one knew what the expression meant" (*EE* 122). This is a passage that accounts for the emphasis on forgetting that Julian Barnes had expressed in the interview: the process of remembering is always accompanied by an act of forgetting, which thus questions the reliability of memories. The narrative proceeds with an account of how the project planners pursue the set-up of the attraction in the theme park: "They had their logo, which contained both the *here* and the *magic*; it was Techno-development which supplied the *now*. Their initial, logical proposal was that Betsy's jump be replicated [...]" (*ibid.*). The quote indicates the commodification of the invented tale through the creation of the logo and its construction by "Techno-development". The process contributes to the replication of the tale, which again plays with Baudrillard's concept of the replica. In this instance, however, there is no original to be replicated but only the replication of an invented tale.

From the narrator's rather unemotional descriptions, the refinement of the tale's implementation is lampooned, for the performance proves to be problematic. After having found a place for the attraction, the executive board has a male stuntman imitate the descent of Betsy in a "first live-action test" (123), the results of which are narrated from the distanced voice of the narrator:

Three-quarters of the way down, the heavily-built 'Betsy' seemed to lose crinoline-control, eggs cascaded from his basket, and he landed on the beach beside an impromptu omelette, breaking an ankle in three places.  
'Dunderhead,' commented Sir Jack. (*ibid.*)

The ironic tone of the narrator is achieved through humorous expressions like "impromptu omelette", the paradoxical use of gendered pronouns and the description of

losing “crinoline-control”, which plays with the anachronistic use of old Victorian garments as a potential flying instrument. The matter-of-fact remark about the stuntman’s injuries as the climax of the sentence is followed by zooming in on Sir Jack, who is dismissive and comments on the incident as though it were the injured stuntman’s fault alone. A second trial is summoned with “the lightest stuntman they could find, in an attempt to counterfeit womanhood” who “kept his eggs intact but cracked his pelvis” (ibid.). Since the story is invented, the outcome of the trials satirically punishes the violation of Sir Jack’s handling of the past, and thereby criticises the very possibility of remediating an invented tradition.

The whole report of the implementation of the Betsy myth in the theme park is based on a climactic structure. The narrator sums up the outcome of the trials and of the project planning in a description of the final performance of the attraction:

Marketing provided the clinching refinement: the Heavens to Betsy Bungee Experience would become the Island Breakfast Experience. [...] [T]he Visitor would descend to the beach with a clip-on Betsy Basket. Then he or she would be led by a mob-capped waitress to Betsy’s All-Day Breakfast Bar, where the eggs would be taken from the Basket and fried, boiled, scrambled or poached, according to choice, before the jumper’s very eyes. With the bill would come an engraved Certificate of Descent stamped with Sir Jack’s signature and the date. (123)

The quotation showcases several features here: first, the narrator wraps up the action and thus accelerates the narrative again in a condensed representation. Marketing is again shown to serve the purpose of commodifying the attraction, as implied through the expression “clinching refinement” that hints at the construction of a brand. Additionally, capital letters point to the branding process. The narrative configuration thus humorously exposes the anachronistic mix of a modern extreme sport – bungee jumping – with the invented tale about Betsy. What is more, these aspects are linked to another traditionally premediated icon of Englishness, namely the English breakfast. The combination of these elements for the sake of marketing creates a highly satirical criticism of the issue and brings the whole attraction and endeavour to a point of complete absurdity.

The outcome of the established attraction is ridiculed at a later stage by a shifting focalisation and the use of dramatic irony. In this case, it is the King’s perspective through which the absurdity of the ‘Heavens to Betsy’ experience is exposed. The King is seen to be led on a tour around the island in the opening ceremony of the theme park. He observes an unspecified event, which the reader, however, is able to recognise: “Now these SAS men, or whatever they were, all dressed up in women’s clothing, and carrying baskets of eggs, were parachuting down in front of his eyes to some patriotic soundtrack”

(165). The performance remains incomprehensible to the King, who ironically mistakes the Betsy actors for quite another group of people: “Sir Jack remained gazing down at the SAS transvestites stowing their chutes” (166). The ironic misinterpretation of the Betsy stuntmen as “SAS transvestites” is again achieved through the narrative strategy of variable focalisation. The King’s perspective but even more so the hyperbolic ‘Betsy event’ as such is ridiculed through playing with dramatic irony, which works since the reader knows more about the attraction than the focaliser.

The invented Betsy myth also serves the purpose of addressing the issue of forgetting, or the results of only half remembering. At the end of the second part of the novel, Martha is dismissed from the island, and before she leaves, she goes to a disused church. It is through her perspective that a memory about the island comes to the fore:

Into her mind came an image, one shared by earlier occupants of these pews. [...] A woman swept and hanging, a woman half out of this world, terrified and awestruck, yet in the end safely delivered. [...] A short, eternal moment that was absurd, improbable, unbelievable, true. [...] The richness of all subsequent life after that moment.

Later the moment had been appropriated, reinvented, copied, coarsened; she herself had helped. But such coarsening always happened. The seriousness lay in celebrating the original image: getting back there, seeing it, feeling it. [...] Part of you might suspect that the magical event had never occurred, or at least not as it was now supposed to have done. But you must also celebrate the image and the moment even if it had never happened. That was where the little seriousness of life lay. (238)

The change of atmosphere ensuing from Martha’s failure emerges in the stylistic break with the otherwise postmodern part, foreshadowing the ‘pastoral’ third part of the novel. The change is e.g. highlighted through Martha’s elliptical thoughts, which resembles representations of a stream of consciousness. On the level of content, it is telling that Martha misremembers the Betsy myth since she has apparently forgotten that the story was invented: there had been no earlier church-goers who had shared the image of the woman hanging in mid-air since the church had been closed when the theme park was established. On a text-internal level this means that the Betsy myth has been remediated, repeated and thus established. The use of words in a list, like “appropriated, reinvented, copied, coarsened”, embodies these very processes. That Martha thinks that she is “celebrating the original image” is thereby exposed as delusional, and the readers are made aware that in her serious reflections Martha herself has fallen prey to a hoax she herself originally helped to create. By staging the act of Martha’s misremembering, the novel attacks the invention of traditions designed to promote and commodify positive

images of a nation, and hints at the risks of forgetting a nation's history. *England, England* uses the 'Betsy myth' to showcase how the workings of such an invented tradition can threaten reality by staging the consequences in a highly satirical and hyperbolic way.

#### 5.4.2 Dystopian Commodifications and Reinventions of Englishness

While the 'Betsy myth' is a prominent example of the staging of an invented tradition, *England, England* also fictionalises and questions further concepts such as the unreliability of memories and the commodified rebranding of Englishness. Such representations share dystopian characteristics to a certain extent and underline the novel's function as a critical commentary on prevailing cultural developments. Especially in the planning stage of the theme park at the beginning of the second part of the novel, the reference to economic interests becomes palpable. Jerry Batson, Sir Jack's lawyer and consultant, advises the tycoon: "It's a question of placing the product correctly, that's all" (*EE* 39). Batson further elaborates on the commodification of England:

You – we – England – my client – is – are a nation of great age, great history, great accumulated wisdom. Social and cultural history – stacks of it, realms of it – eminently marketable [...]. Shakespeare, Queen Victoria, Industrial Revolution, gardening, that sort of thing. If I may coin, no, copyright, a phrase, *We are already what others may hope to become*. [...] We must sell our past to other nations as their future! (39f.)

The discourse on product-placement, marketability and references to coinage and copyright relate the fictional endeavours to the actual rebranding policies of the late 1990s. Nick Bentley describes the commodification process in 'England, England' as "a paradigm of a pure capitalist environment" and points out that "the novel parodies the postmodern effects of a total victory of the market economy" (Bentley 2007: 491). *England, England* takes the marketing efforts of England to the extremes and depicts the *zeitgeist* as a bleak vision of greed and superficiality.

As well as addressing the ways in which the theme park commodifies Englishness, the novel showcases the dystopian consequences of such a commodification. A critique of the developments in the theme park surfaces when the narrator sums up the workings of 'England, England' that has become a new state by then:

Everything on the Island worked, because complications were not allowed to arise. [...] So there was no crime [...] and therefore no judicial system and no prisons – at least, not real ones. There was no government – only a disenfranchised Governor – and therefore no elections and no politicians. There were no lawyers except Pitco lawyers. There were no economists except

Pitco economists. There was no history except Pitco history. [...] [A] locus of uncluttered supply and demand [...]. Wealth was created in a peaceable kingdom: what more could anyone want, be they philosopher or citizen? (*EE* 202)

This external perspective takes stock of the seeming perfection of ‘England, England’. While the items that work well are listed first, the almost rhetorical question at the end of the quote challenges the preceding observations. The climactic structure constructs a positive image that is eventually contested by the question. In fact, the newly founded nation that is meant to replicate the quintessences of Englishness only seems, at first glance, to be a perfected state.

In spite of the announced perfection, the “peaceable kingdom” is increasingly threatened by a number of incidents: the smugglers make trouble because they indeed start smuggling (cf. 199) and the King of England shows “lewd behaviour and sexual harassment” (187) against Nell Gwynn. Since Nell was originally the mistress of King Charles II, the novel ironically alludes to the repetition of history. When the actor who plays Nell is summoned to Martha’s office, she also troubles Martha by saying that Connie Chatterley, the protagonist of D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, is running the ‘Nell Juicery’ in her absence, since Nell’s official replacement is sick. Furthermore, Dr Johnson no longer provides good company at the dinner experience since he has turned into a grumpy and uncivilised fellow. Finally, Robin Hood and his Merry Men get out of control when the gang start hunting the animals on the island which are meant to be a visitor attraction. In short, the actors who were meant to stage certain historical characters start to identify with their roles and adapt the character’s habits.

Real and fake elements become ultimately confused when the cave of Robin Hood is raided by gymnasts and former security men who now act as the Island SAS. The event is marketed as a “cross-epoch satire” (222) for high-paying visitors. The raid gets out of hand since Robin Hood and his gang defend the cave for real, which the audience mistakes for a well-organised performance: “[...] three arrows whizzed over them and pierced the ground a few feet in front of row AA. Huge applause acknowledged that such precise realism was what a double supplement was all about” (230). Through its emphasis on “precise realism”, the narrative not only ironically undermines the notions of real and fake. It also points to the fact that the performance is not precise at all but rather coincidental, since it is getting out of hand – even if, ironically, the visitors do not seem to be aware of what is really going on. The novel thus double-crosses the levels of real and fake once more, and ultimately blurs them: the replicated gang act like the

original and stick to their ‘real’ ideology, defending the fake SAS and ironically creating a real performance for the audience. In the end, actors are really injured:

Later, it was hard to decide who had screamed first: the members of A-Group who between them sustained two broken ankles and eight severely jolted knees on the Cave’s reinforced double-glazing; or the members of B-Group when they saw half a dozen arrows coming into their direction. One struck Mad Mike in the shoulder; another took his Number Two through the thigh.

‘Go, go GO!’ shouted the recumbent Colonel as his team of athletes and actors gave most realistic flight in the opposite direction. (231)

As in the case of the ‘real-life tests’ of Betsy’s descent, the narrator humorously dismantles the processes in the theme park as increasingly absurd. The narrative representation thereby deconstructs the theme park version of Englishness and creates a highly satirical and dystopian effect.

While ‘England, England’ is the place where Englishness is commodified, Old England – which is eventually renamed ‘Anglia’ – is where national identity is reinvented. Renaming England means, in a way, to relabel or rebrand England once more. While the telling name of ‘England, England’ replicates and repeats the nation’s name, Anglia goes back to the ancient denomination of England.<sup>28</sup> The story in the last part of the novel mainly focuses on Martha’s life in the rural environment and on the reintroduction of the village fête. There are also discussions on the state-of-the-nation, both in regard to ‘England, England’ and to Anglia, which provide critical insights into the rebranding processes. In an account of the further developments in ‘England, England’, the reader learns what happened after Martha left the island: “The king had been given a firm reminder about family values” and Sir Jack was made “first Baron Pitman of Fortuibus” (248). However, Sir Jack had died and come full circle with the question of Englishness, as the narrator observes: “The last words he spoke had been in praise of the English” (249). Since Sir Jack’s mausoleum with time has become a less profitable visitor attraction, his persona is also soon replicated and used to fill in for Dr Johnson: “The Pitman Dining Experience at the Cheshire Cheese proved a jolly Visitor option” (250). The outlook on ‘England, England’ is a negative one since the new country seems to continue to run the theme park for their foreign visitors. On the island, the commodification of Englishness is continued successfully.

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<sup>28</sup>Interestingly, the third part of the novel is entitled “Albion” (239) although the text explains that Old England had its name changed to “Anglia” (253). While the latter is part of the medieval denomination ‘East Anglia’, which also covers 1066 in its historical period, ‘Albion’ is the oldest name known to designate England.

At the same time, Old England regresses into a pre-industrialised agricultural state. The narrator comments on this development from a distanced perspective:

[...] modernising patriots felt that it was the last realistic option for a nation fatigued by its own history. Old England banned all tourism except for groups numbering two or less, and introduced a Byzantine visa system. The old administrative division into counties was terminated, and new provinces were created, based upon the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxon heptarchy. Finally, the country declared its separateness from the rest of the globe and from the Third Millennium by changing its name to Anglia. (253)

The narrator informs the reader about the developments in a report-like style, which, however, becomes sharply critical in the last sentence: not only does Old England become isolated from international politics, it also regresses into the past. The pre-industrialised zone, which is conventionally taken to be an idyllic utopia in the traditional mediations of Englishness, is here not represented as an ideal, but rather as another form of dystopia.<sup>29</sup> That Barnes should include a fictional account of an isolated nation does not seem arbitrary in the novel's context: discussions of England's and Britain's status in Europe have been crucial in the discourse of the so-called 'English question', which thus finds its fictional remediation in *England, England*. The novel alludes to the EU's fictional punishment against Old England, which has been politically abandoned: "Symbolic punishments were also introduced: the Greenwich Meridian was replaced by Paris Mean Time; on maps the English Channel became the French Sleeve" (252). The renaming of the English Channel as "the French Sleeve" is a satirical punch against Euro-criticism in the debate about Englishness and hints at the danger of isolating Britain from Europe.

Apart from the political dimension in the remediation of Englishness, the last part of the novel makes the discourse of interrelations between memory and identity explicit once again. The narrator observes that "Old England had lost its history, and therefore – since memory is identity – had lost all sense of itself" (251). This is probably the most obvious instance that equates not only memory and identity but also the idea that these concepts are vital for the sense of a nation. However, national identity can also be strategically

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<sup>29</sup>Vera Nünning also rightly states about the third part of the novel that it would be a misreading to see Anglia as "an idealized version of authentic rural Englishness" (V. Nünning 2001a: 70). That such a misreading is not too far-fetched is demonstrated by Roger Scruton's publication *England, an Elegy* (2000), in which the author laments that the good old England is lost, and names publications that also deal with that 'loss'. In his line of argument, Scruton remarks about *England, England*: "Unique among the many obituaries is that of Julian Barnes, whose witty account of a represented and re-presented England [...] contains a strangely moving evocation of the old tranquillity" (Scruton 2000: viii). However, since *England, England* including its last part is clearly not a homage to the good, bygone days but a dystopian vision of an isolated England, Scruton obviously misses the satirical tone and the deconstruction of such a version of Englishness.



staged. The novel takes up this idea in regard to one of the villagers, the character Jez Harris:

Jez Harris, formerly Jack Oshinsky, junior legal expert with an American electronics firm obliged to leave the country during the emergency. He'd preferred to stay, and backdate both his name and his technology: nowadays he shoed horses, made barrel hoops, sharpened knives and sickles [...]. Marriage to Wendy Temple had softened and localized his Milwaukee accent; and his inextinguishable pleasure was to play the yokel whenever some anthropologist, travel writer or linguistic theoretician would turn up inadequately disguised as a tourist. (243)

As Vera Nünning states, the persona of Jez Harris shows that “this replica of a villager telling self-made copies of legends serves the purpose even better than the real thing” (V. Nünning 2001a: 70). Additionally, the description involves a twofold criticism: the first one fictionally ridicules the work of anthropologists and linguists who seem too gullible to be fooled by Jez Harris. On the other hand, the fact that Jez Harris is originally an American again mirrors the second part of the novel since Jez is yet another replica. What is more, this passage can also be read as a subtle warning of the danger of an Americanisation of contemporary English culture.

That said, the figure Jez Harris provides a vital basis to construct a conflict in the interpersonal structure of the villagers. His antipode is the schoolmaster Mr Mullin, who “had been an antiquarian dealer in his previous life” (*EE* 244). The conflict between the two characters revolves around the handling of traditions and folklore:

From time to time Mr Mullin the schoolmaster would chide Jez Harris, suggesting that folklore, and especially invented folklore, should not be subject of monetary exchange or barter. [...] Others in the village put things more plainly: for them, Harris's fabulation and cupidity were proof of the farrier's unAnglian origins. (ibid.)

Again, the issue of invented traditions is taken up and discussed by the oppositional characters, which is further developed in the discourse of establishing the village fête. What is remarkable about this quotation is the description of the character's “unAnglian origins”, which might be read as one of the few instances in which *England, England* alludes to the discourse of ethnic origins as a marker for national identity. The villagers seem to equate Englishness with a concept reminiscent of ‘the true-born Englishman’ and thus also seem to embody the backward thinking of a time before the redefinition of Englishness. Nevertheless, it is striking that such a reference to ethnicity and, even more so, implications of the whole discourse of multiculturalism as an essential feature

of a rebranded Englishness are conspicuously absent from Barnes' novel. This aspect has been criticised by researchers,<sup>30</sup> such as by Nick Bentley, who rightly claims: "There are, in fact, no Black or Asian characters anywhere in the book. Given the multicultural make-up of contemporary England, this is an unsettling omission for a novel that takes the nation as one of its main themes" (Bentley 2007: 495). Obviously, it is only the old-fashioned version of a white, male, backward-thinking Englishness that *England, England* satirises and denounces.

In the course of the story, the narrative continuously elaborates on the issue of invented traditions, which becomes vital for the planning of the village celebrations. Mr Mullin and Martha discuss Jez Harris' tendency to invent stories, and Mr Mullin explains:

'[...] I wish he wouldn't *invent* these things. I've got books of myths and legend he's welcome to. There's all sorts of tales to choose from. [...]'  
'They wouldn't be *his* stories, would they?'  
'No, they'd be *our* stories. They'd be ... *true*.' He sounded unconvinced himself. 'Well, maybe not true, but at least recorded.' (*EE* 245)

The subject of the discussion is another configuration that is obviously similar to those in the second part of the novel. Again, the novel orchestrates issues of inventing traditions, the truth contained in traditional stories and tales, the importance of recording or archiving and the role of individuals and the collective. The narrative further depicts these issues in a direct way, when the narrator remarks, again reminding the reader of the unreliable quality of memory: "It had been Mr Mullin's idea to revive – or perhaps, since records were inexact, to institute – the Village Fête" (246). Once more, the narrator underlines the uncertainty of tradition and historiography through the inclusion of "or perhaps", which again dismantles the idea of a consistent understanding of Englishness.

What is more, the village fête as it is eventually performed apparently parallels the occurrences in the theme park in establishing a tradition. The celebration is a potpourri of premediated schemes, traditions and half-knowledge: "The band – tuba, trumpet, squeezebox and fiddle – began with 'Land of Hope and Glory' [...]" (262 f.), a dressing-up competition mingles myth and reality, featuring a Queen Victoria, "Lord Nelson, Snow White, Robin Hood, Boadicea and Edna Halley" (264). Traditional instruments play the typically English patriotic hymn composed by Edward Elgar, who himself is regarded as a representative of Englishness. The characters represented in the dressing-up competition are taken from real persons from a variety of backgrounds, from myths like that of Robin

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<sup>30</sup>Both Nick Bentley and Birgit Neumann have criticised that national identity as it is depicted in *England, England* is a monocultural, 'white' Englishness that does not take the country's immigrant culture into account (cf. Bentley 2007: 458, 495; Neumann 2007: 237, 240).

Hood, or Edna Halley, who was invented by Jez Harris. Again, discussions of who is real and who is not are provoked when the figure of Edna Halley is disputed: “Jez Harris counterclaimed by challenging the real existence of Snow White and Robin Hood. Some said you were only real if someone had seen you; some that you were only real if you were in a book; some that you were real if enough people believed in you” (ibid.). The resemblance to the island committee’s discussions of, e. g., the Robin Hood myth create an analogy with the second part of the novel. The villagers reconstruct traditions and history in a similar way to the people in ‘England, England’, which, however, had been the actual reason for the loss of identity in Old England. The novel thus ends with the negative outlook typical for a dystopia, even though the almost last observations in the novel seem slightly comforting: “It had been a day to remember. The Fête was established; already it seemed to have its history” (266). As with the Betsy myth, the village fête is instituted as a half-invented tradition. Thereby the third part of the novel, which has several times been misread as a comforting pastoral, in fact only continues, like the first and second parts of *England, England*, to engage with issues of history, tradition, heritage, memory and identity: it constructs and orchestrates these themes only to dismantle and deconstruct the endeavours of rebranding or redefining Englishness.

## 5.5 Topoi of English Cultural Memory and the Theme Park

*England, England* self-consciously employs spatial descriptions to give meaning, e. g. by analogising them to the mode of employment (cf. also chapter 5.1) in all three parts of the novel. Since pastoral landscape is taken to represent “an undisputed signifier of Englishness” (Puschmann-Nalenz 2009: 268) it is an influential topos in the traditional understanding of English national identity. *England, England* takes up this real-and-imagined space not only to situate the narrative but also as an aestheticising feature to convey meaning. This said, topoi of Englishness have different functions if one compares the novel’s first and third parts with the longest second part. While the countryside tradition is taken up at the beginning and at the end in a parenthetical structure, the postmodern part in-between satirically deconstructs these images. In the course of these negotiations, the opposition of authenticity and artificiality endures. The following questions can help to analyse the role of spatial representations in *England, England*: how are concepts of authenticity and the replica dealt with in relation to traditional topoi and also to time? What role does the premediated space of the theme park play as an artificial environment? And finally, how can the literary-spatial representations be read alongside theoretical concepts, such as in relation to Foucault’s heterotopia?

Both the first and the last parts of *England, England* stage an image of an authentic, pre-industrial English countryside. However, the idyllic setting only seems to exist at first glance and already functions to introduce aspects that prevail in the second postmodern part. To provide an example, one of the essential memories that construct Martha's character is the event of the Agricultural Show, which is set in a pastoral environment:

What could be clearer and more remembered than that day at the Agricultural Show? A day of frivolous clouds over serious blue. [...] The white marquees with striped porticos, as solidly built as vicarages. A rising hill behind, from which careless, scruffy animals looked down on their pampered, haltered cousins in the show ring below. The smell from the back entrance to the beer tent as the day's heat rose. (*EE* 7)

Narrated in an elliptical style that stages Martha's memories as fragments, the show's setting is represented as a typically English countryside with rolling hills. In fact, the agricultural show itself closely relates to images of Englishness, as Roy Strong points out in his book *Visions of England* (2011). According to Strong, the following public events are "quintessentially English: the fruit and flower show, the open garden days in towns and villages, and the flower and harvest festivals in cathedrals and country churches" (Strong 2011: 127). The agricultural show depicted in *England, England* refers to such an event that is associated with a specifically English concept of the countryside. However, the quote from the novel already foreshadows the story as it is continued in the postmodern part: it underlines the contrast between the artificial and the natural in regard to the animals, probably sheep. While some of them are "scruffy" and inhabit the rolling hills, those prepared for the show are domesticated and thus less 'authentic'.<sup>31</sup> Although the setting of the first part is associated with the pastoral version of a traditional concept of Englishness, the narrative already foreshadows the postmodern second one with references to the contrast of the authentic and the fake.

The fact that *England, England* alludes to Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum in relation to authenticity on numerous occasions has already attracted attention in several studies about Barnes' novel.<sup>32</sup> The narrative refers to such theories most obviously through the appearance of a French intellectual who claims to favour the replica over the original (cf. *EE* 55). However, the concept of the simulacrum can also be traced in relation

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<sup>31</sup>This aspect also surfaces in the description of the prize-winning beans by Mr A. Jones that Martha admires (cf. *EE* 10). The beans are grown with the aim to look perfect and do not serve any purpose other than being aesthetically pleasing.

<sup>32</sup>Cf. most prominently Christoph Henke (2001, 2003) and Matthew Pateman, who states that the contrast of authenticity and simulacra is one key issue of the novel (cf. Pateman 2002: 73). Bruno Zerweck also refers to Walter Benjamin's theories (cf. Zerweck 2001: 262), and Christine Berberich elaborates on Baudrillard's three stages of hyperreality (cf. Berberich 2009a: 84).

to space. Silvia Mergenthal e.g. observes that the novel's title "certainly invites the reader to expect a congruence of space and place" while the narrative "radically unsettles these expectations [...]" (Mergenthal 2003: 32). In fact, the second part, about the theme park, which aims to represent the quintessences of Englishness, rather undermines the existence of such images, which is also valid in respect to spatial relations. What is more, the relation between time and space as it is reflected in the theme park appears to be paradoxical. In this context, Barbara Korte notes that the past "becomes a mere space (a park) in which everything is present-ed and time levels have been radically compressed; in perpetual simultaneity, elements of the past become a spectacle for the present moment" (Korte 2002: 294). The topoi connected to England's collective memory are remediated as updated copies fitting to the present time in the theme park and thereby losing their original historical value.

It is therefore little surprising that the paradoxical use of original and replica that is repeatedly negotiated in *England, England* also affects representations of space. The theme park itself presents a disputed project, as Sir Jack informs his team while still in the planning stages:

‘We are not talking theme park,’ he began. ‘We are not talking heritage centre. We are not talking Disneyland, World’s Fair, Festival of Britain, Legoland or Parc Astrix. [...] No [...], we are talking quantum leap. We are not seeking twopenny tourists. It’s world-boggling time. We shall offer far more than words such as Entertainment can possibly imply; even the phrase Quality Leisure, proud though I am of it, perhaps, in the long run, falls short. We are offering *the thing itself*.’ (EE 59)

Sir Jack is obviously not satisfied with the conception of common theme parks that only imitate reality. Instead, he declares the experience of authenticity to be a central aspect of the planned park. He makes demands for the establishment of an experience that goes beyond merely staging Englishness and paradoxically represents "*the thing itself*". The statement can, first, be read against Baudrillard's elaborations on Disneyland (cf. Baudrillard 2002 [1981]: 97). Secondly, the description of the park also relates, as Christine Berberich rightly argues, to the English predilection for 'landscape gardening', which aims to create artificially a seemingly natural garden (cf. Berberich 2008: 174). Sir Jack's theme park project of England thus reflects the premediated iconised activity of gardening on a huge scale. The artificially charged space of the theme park thereby provides an English topos through which Englishness is further commodified.

The paradoxical relation between authenticity and the copy is also considered in respect to the eventual set-up of the theme park. The above-quoted scene can be read as a

fictional account of an idea introduced by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin in their theoretical approach to remediation: “In the highly mediated spaces of amusement parks and theme parks, the logic of hypermediacy predominates” (Bolter & Grusin 2000: 169). In other words, this means that the park creates a self-reflexivity that attracts the visitors’ awareness to its very artificiality. However, according to Sir Jack’s statement, his theme park is meant to create immediacy in favour of hypermediacy: ‘England, England’ is meant to provide a transparent perspective on icons and topoi of Englishness instead of exposing their mediality. Bolter and Grusin also point out how theme parks can achieve effects of transparency and authenticity: “What they offer is not the transparency of a plausible story, but rather the transparency and authenticity of emotion” (ibid.: 173). It is significant for the representation of Englishness in the theme park that the authentic value becomes less important, and elevates the relevance of the emotions triggered by the attractions instead. As an example, the Betsy myth works according to this principle since it is first invented and then combined with a bungee-jumping experience which underscores its emotional quality. Space is thus affectively charged for an experience of Englishness rather than geared towards the authentic representation of traditional icons and topoi.

Nevertheless, *England, England* describes the attempt to create a feeling of authenticity in the spatial reconstruction of the Robin Hood myth on the Isle of Wight. The way the park is created is telling:

Parkhurst Forest easily became Sherwood Forest, and the environs of the Cave had been arboreally upgraded by the repatriation of several hundred mature oaks from a Saudi prince’s driveway. The rock-style facing to the Cave was being jack-hammered into aged authenticity [...].” (*EE* 147)

The renaming of the forest and the description of “jack-hammering” undermine the claim of “aged authenticity” in the theme park. The oaks, which present an icon of Englishness themselves, are described as being imported from Saudi Arabia, where they have been artificially grown in an unnatural climate for the trees, and then ‘repatriated’ in England. The prefix ‘re-’ in ‘repatriated’ implies that the oaks are taken back to their native country from abroad, which means that the trees are claimed to be English by origin, implying the oak’s status as an icon of Englishness. The novel thus also uses space as an essential dimension in the deconstruction and satirical denunciation of the ways in which Englishness is manipulated in the ‘England, England’ project.

While many of the available studies analyse the relation of *England, England* to Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra, the novel can also be read alongside the theories of another French philosopher: Michel Foucault. His conception of ‘heterotopia’, which also

triggers ideas of real and imagined space, can be drawn on to analyse literary-spatial representations in Barnes' novel. According to Foucault, the role of heterotopias "[...]" is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. This [...] type would be the heterotopia, not of illusion, but of compensation [...]" (Foucault 1986 [1984]: 27). As an example, the philosopher mentions the garden as "a sort of happy, universalizing heterotopia" (ibid.: 26), and refers to colonies that are constructed as "absolutely perfect other places" (ibid.: 27). 'England, England', which is at first constructed as a theme park with elements resembling the tradition of landscape gardening, becomes an independent country in the end. Thus, it is not unlike a colony, which imitates a perfected and regulated version of Englishness. Sir Jack's utopia of replicated England, which is meant to exceed the original, is characterised by a well-arranged, perfected condensation of quintessential qualities of Englishness.

However, the heterotopia of an imagined and replicated England develops into a dystopia – a process which might also be traced in the novel along the lines of another Foucauldian theory. The perfected independent nation of 'England, England' works as a result of the high degree of regulation that it enforces, which also includes the permanent surveillance of all sites and attractions simultaneously: "From her office Martha could experience the whole Island. [...] She could track the Battle of Britain, the Last Night of the Proms, The Trial of Oscar Wilde and the Execution of Charles I" (*EE* 185). The surveillance strategy described here is reminiscent of Foucault's elaboration on the panopticon introduced in his seminal *Discipline and Punish* (1977 [1975]), which was also taken up by Baudrillard (cf. Baudrillard 2002 [1981]: 105 ff.). The panoptical surveillance not only provides a critical commentary on the island's working but might also be read as a critical allusion to extra-literary reality, i. e. the increasing use of CCTV in Britain at that time.<sup>33</sup> A further space that relates to Foucault's theories is the brothel Sir Jack visits, which presents a typical example of heterotopias (cf. Foucault 1986 [1984]: 27). The scene is intensified by the description of Sir Jack being eavesdropped upon by a private investigator, which takes up the motif of surveillance once again.

Moreover, the ways in which the novel relates time and space plays a significant role. In the theme park's structure, which bears some resemblance to a panopticon, Martha not only observes different places at the same time; she also watches events that were

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<sup>33</sup>In this context, the aforementioned scene also explains: "There were sights on the Island Martha knew so intimately from a hundred camera angles that she could no longer remember whether or not she had ever seen them in reality" (*EE* 185). The quotation is another example of the ways in which *England, England* repeatedly considers prominent themes such as the unreliability of memory, the consequences of forgetting and the contrast between real and fake.

crucial for the history of England but took place at different times, which makes it possible to construct a synchronic view of English history. In Foucauldian terms, this incident might be called an example of the ‘heterochrony’, which describes a heterotopia that on the one hand perpetually accumulates time as in a general archive (cf. *ibid.*: 26). The theme park ‘England, England’ thereby becomes a typical example of such a Foucauldian heterochrony. On the other hand, heterotopias that are characterised by fleeting, transitory time exist only for the present moment (cf. *ibid.*). It is worth noting that Foucault mentions festivals, fairgrounds and vacation villages as examples of this version of heterotopias, which finds its fictitious reflection in the village fête in Anglia. According to Foucault, heterotopias accumulate time, while heterochronies rediscover time in its immediate moment (cf. *ibid.*). In the novel, then, the staged version of England in the surroundings of the theme park is accumulated but has come to a stand-still, which is metaphorically represented in the synchronicity that the surveillance of the island allows. In contrast, the village fête in Anglia accordingly represents an experience that allows for a rediscovery of time, and also of tradition and national identity.

In sum, the narrative representation of space in *England, England* is self-consciously employed to create meaning: it relates the narrative to the image of an idyllic, pastoral countryside that is a powerful topos of Englishness. However, the novel dismantles the positive memories of the agricultural show in a way that foreshadows the ways in which notions of the real and the fake, original and replica, authenticity and representation are taken to their extremes in the theme park. The first part thus already subtly contests the positive image of rural England as a utopian *locus amoenus*. The theme park, and later independent nation, ‘England, England’, in contrast, represents a heterotopian space which resembles a perfected colony of Englishness. However, the dystopian qualities of the state are clearly criticised as it also bears resemblance to Foucault’s concept of the panopticon. What is more, ‘England, England’ abolishes historical chronology and creates heterochronies that affect the space of the island. The historical chronology is only slowly rediscovered in the Anglian village. The effects these literary-spatial representations or remediations have, then, are again to expose and deconstruct the very attempts to find quintessentially English topoi and icons, and to criticise these workings in the theme park surroundings.



## 5.6 *England, England* in the Context of Contemporary Fiction Deconstructing Images of Englishness

*England, England* is a novel which reconstructs and deconstructs versions of Englishness in a self-conscious way. Although it is such a prominent example, there are also several other contemporary novels which – to some extent – negotiate Englishness in similar ways. This chapter considers four novels that can be read in the context of Barnes' postmodern configuration. To begin with, I will compare *England, England* to two earlier novels. Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) only bears a very subtle resemblance to the way in which versions of Englishness are questioned, and will therefore be discussed only in passing. Christopher Hope's *Darkest England* (1996) is a fictitious and satirical account of an African bushman travelling to England and bears resemblance to *England, England* in its satirical quality. A third novel sharing the generic features of a bleak – though less satirical and humorous – dystopia is Rupert Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* (2005). Although the book is less interested in conceptions of Englishness, it can be read as tackling the politically charged issue of the 'English Question'. Lastly, James Hawes' *Speak for England* (2005) shares several features with Barnes' novel. It is also characterised by a postmodern, humorous and satirical approach to the negotiation of Englishness, and it also culminates in a dystopian ending. Because of these parallels, Hawes' novel will be considered more closely than the other three examples.

Although *The Remains of the Day* clearly differs in many ways from the hyperbolic postmodern representation in *England, England*, both novels still have some aspects in common. Ishiguro's novel, like Barnes', does not simply represent or perpetuate traditional conceptions of Englishness but critically and "consciously attacks political movements of the 1980s and 1990s that tried to encourage a reconsideration of Britain's past 'greatness'" (Berberich 2006: 219), i. e. tendencies that were supported by Margaret Thatcher and John Major. Christine Berberich further describes the similarities of the narratives:

Both Ishiguro's and Barnes' novels, it can be argued, consequently stand in direct opposition to the attempts of spin doctors to market England solely as the green and pleasant land. They point out the shortcomings of marketing a country according to a mythical image, and they warn, especially in Barnes' case, of the potential consequences of doing so. (ibid.: 221)

*The Remains of the Day* – similarly to *England, England* – does not simply perpetuate traditional notions of Englishness. Instead, it negotiates the discourse by employing creative narrative strategies which affect the literary representation. These strategies

include, first, the novel's focalisation, i. e. the counter-perspective of a butler who explains his version of historical events in the sense of a 'history from below'. Secondly, an unreliable narrator also questions the authenticity of his memories, similar to Martha in *England, England*. Ultimately, Ishiguro's novel contributes to the topicalisation of the English landscape, in that it repeats typically English icons like the country house or the gentleman. Although *The Remains of the Day* also refers to icons and stabilises them, it ultimately questions the existence of nostalgic images of Englishness.<sup>34</sup>

While *The Remains of the Day* is clearly not a satire, Christopher Hope's *Darkest England* lampoons the nation's self-image and exposes the qualities of its 'Little Englandism'. The novel's protagonist, David Mungo Booi, is a Bushman from an African tribe of the Karoo. In order to meet the Queen and "to explore England as a site suitable for settlement and to assess if the natives are friendly and capable" (*DE* blurb), Booi travels North sponsored by money the tribe has collected for this expedition. In a foreword, the author, Christopher Hope, explains that the book is an edited publication of the notebooks of David Mungo Booi, which were delivered to him. This explanation is reminiscent of the fictive publisher in Defoe's prototypical epistolary travel account *Robinson Crusoe* as a strategy to feign authenticity.<sup>35</sup> The satirical effect in the novel is mainly achieved through the autodiegetic narrator David Mungo Booi, who tends to interpret the English culture and mannerisms from his point of view, which often results in misinterpreting situations, people and cultural practices. Roy Sommer points out that Booi is perceived as an unreliable narrator because the reader's knowledge contradicts Booi's naive observations (cf. Sommer 1998: 211). How this effect is used to remediate Englishness will be demonstrated with the help of two representative passages from the novel.

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<sup>34</sup>In an interview, Kazuo Ishiguro comments on the representation of traditional images in his novel: "[T]he kind of England that I create in *The Remains of the Day* is not an England that I believe ever existed. I've not attempted to reproduce, in a historically accurate way, some past period. What I'm trying to do here ... is to actually rework a particular myth about a certain kind of England. I think there is this very strong idea that exists in England at the moment, about an England where people lived in the not-so-distant-past, that conformed to various stereotypical images. That is to say an England with sleepy, beautiful villages with very polite people and butlers and people taking tea on the lawn. Now, at the moment, particularly in Britain, there is an enormous nostalgia industry going on ... trying to recapture this kind of old England. The mythical landscape of this sort of England, to a large degree, is harmless nostalgia for a time that didn't exist. The other side of this, however, is that it is used as a political tool" (quoted in Berberich 2007: 137 f.). What is striking, then, is that Ishiguro dismisses the idea that the images connected to Englishness, which are represented in his novel, ever existed. Instead, the author mentions the influence politics have in the discourse of rebranding national images.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. also Roy Sommer's article about *Darkest England*, which concentrates on the functions of unreliable narration in the novel. Sommer also points out that the fictive publisher is similar to those of Victorian travel and adventure novels (cf. Sommer 1998: 210).

After his arrival at the airport in London, Booi's odyssey through England starts in a home for people seeking asylum. He interprets the place as a "Royal Guest-house" (*DE* 46) where he is meant to wait until he can see the Queen. He is later taken away from the home and hosted by the cleric Edgar Farebrother in the small village of Little Musing. Farebrother eventually gets angry with Booi since the cleric's daughter, Beth, is sexually attracted to the bushman. Farebrother therefore takes Booi to the country house of an English upper-class gentleman where he is meant to learn English manners. The Bushman observes the English hunting habits on the estate with a critical eye:

And there the peasants and yeomen and matrons re-enacted an age-old ceremony for the benefit of accompanying the Lord of the Big House upon an ancient English hunt; they chased birds and shot them out of the sky, and killed foxes and even deer, and by this traditional blood-letting they felt themselves to be, once again, part of a chosen race whose feet did, in ancient times, walk upon England's mountains green. (*DE* 117)

In this manner, the narrator evaluates English habits and self-images in an admiring way, embedding his account in premediated plots such as, in this case, Blake's verses which are part of the anthem *Jerusalem*. However, through the Bushman's naively positive perspective on his hosts, the behaviour of the English is harshly criticised as the story unfolds: the 'Lord of Goodlove Castle' is only interested in the Bushman's hunting skills and lets him live among his selection of wild beasts in a hut. Later, the novel repeats the difficult aspects of an 'education' when the lord uses Booi literally as game. The hunted man is saved by a group of vagabonds and eventually ends up with Farebrother again, who then promises him to take him to London to meet the Queen.

On the train to the capital, another remarkable scene develops, which exemplifies the satirical quality that results from the strategy of employing an unreliable narrator. Farebrother and Booi are trapped in a crowd of English football fans on the train, and the narrator gives an account of the events:

Love for the country among these young men was unashamed, as they repeatedly chanted the beloved name of their sceptred isle, which they pronounced with a curious double beat, accentuating both syllables, ENG-LAND! ENG-LAND! [...]

On catching sight of me, they became very excited. Some leaped from their seats, lifting their arms and scratching in their armpits as if troubled by furious itching [...].

Good Farebrother, seeing my perplexity, assured me that it was all quite normal, really, a regular occurrence, I should not mistake ceremonial displays of aggression for anything more than healthy high spirits. [...] Certainly I

need have no fear for myself, since bloodshed was something they generally preferred to pursue abroad [...]. (*DE* 222 f.)

The scene is both pointed and symptomatic for the novel as a whole. First, the narrator persistently admires the English. Shakespeare's canonised expression of "the sceptred isle" is ironically used to describe the greatness of a nation whose inhabitants, on the contrary, exhibit appallingly xenophobic manners. Booi does not understand these signs, e. g. that the hooligans imitate a monkey, by which they aim to offend the foreign-looking bushman. Booi, however, perceives the behaviour as the follies of the English and is unable to interpret their behaviour as an affront against himself. This way of narrating presents a form of dramatic irony since the reader is aware that the racist hooligans offend the stranger in a most ignoble way. What is more, Farebrother explains that the xenophobic actions of the hooligans is normal behaviour, which gives an extremely negative image of English football fans as violent racists.

As the examples taken from *Darkest England* aimed to show in an introductory manner, Hope's novel is a highly satirical account dealing with English national identity in the mid-1990s, exposing an unfriendly and even primitively xenophobic strain of behaviour. It thereby functions to highlight the delusions involved in the positive self-image of the English as educated, gentle people. What is more, it presents the perspective of the colonised on the former colonisers. The latter are, in the sense of the former imperial expression of 'the white man's burden', all but a nation to look up to as the novel critically exposes these negative aspects. *Darkest England* can thus be understood as an 'imaginative counter-discourse', since it confronts fixed self-images with the perspective of the previously 'repressed', in accordance with Salman Rushdie's famous observation that 'the empire writes back', and thereby renders absurd the feelings of superiority on the part of the English.<sup>36</sup> In comparison to *England, England*, however, Hope's satire, published in 1996, aims its criticism more at the deficiencies of Thatcher's Britain than the rebranding processes which were put into action by New Labour shortly afterwards. Accordingly, a reviewer remarks that "as the book first appeared in 1996, Booi's findings are beginning to seem out of date" (Hickling 2009: n. pag.). Nonetheless, it is a representative example of how satirical fiction can pointedly challenge persisting images of Englishness and of England's greatness.

In comparison to the aforementioned novels, Rupert Thomson's *Divided Kingdom* belongs to the genre of political dystopia. The theme of the narrative, as the title implies,

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<sup>36</sup>Roy Sommer classifies *Darkest England* as a parodistic travel novel and, according to a classification introduced by Tobias Döring, as a 'travelogue in reverse' that strategically employs a distancing effect through unreliable narration in order to revise the reliability of English travellers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century (cf. Sommer 1998: 214).

is connected to the ‘English Question’ within the UK. It might also rather be read as a fictional version of the ‘break-up of Britain’ as it has been discussed in relation to questions of Englishness and the devolution. The state-of-the-nation is represented in a dystopian tone as a negative example by a heterodiegetic narrator:

It had become a troubled place, [...] obsessed with acquisition and celebrity, a place defined by envy, misery and greed. Crime was rampant: the courts were swamped, the prisons overflowing. [...] Racism was more widespread and more firmly rooted than ever before. [...] For decades, if not for centuries, the country had employed a complicated web of manners and convention to draw a veil over its true nature, but now, finally, it had thrown off all pretence to be anything other than it was – northern, inward-looking, fundamentally barbaric. (*DK* 8)

Through descriptions such as this, *Divided Kingdom* not only criticises British politics and self-images but also “sheds an uneasy light on the multiculturalism debate of recent years” (Eckstein et al. 2008a: 11). As a result of these social deficiencies, the novel reports on how the nation is divided into four parts according to the ancient system of humours: choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic and sanguine. The different parts of the new ‘divided kingdom’<sup>37</sup> are separated by defence walls surrounded by death strips that conjure up images of the former inner German border. The division itself again conveys criticism: the choleric quarter, which is characterised by violence and racism, has the largest population. The narrative alludes to the fact that in the melancholic quarter – which is tellingly colour-coded green and where a lot of writers and artists are said to reside – people yearn for a traditional form of Englishness (cf. *DK* 43).

In contrast to Barnes’ novel, *Divided Kingdom* is less about the challenging of a re-branded Englishness than about the developments of devolution in Britain as a whole. National identity is not made an issue in the way it is represented in the other novels mentioned here. Rather, *Divided Kingdom* concentrates on the different humours according to the new quarters. Another contrast is that Thomson’s narrative does not ignore the discourse on multiculturalism which is conspicuous by its absence in *England, England* (cf. Bentley 2007: 485). After all, *Divided Kingdom* introduces a multicultural society in its new quarters: Thomas Parry, the protagonist who goes underground and eventually visits every quarter of the ‘divided kingdom’, makes acquaintances with people with surnames such as Fernandez, Rinaldi, de Vere, Horowicz, Friedriksson or Vishram. A diplomat from the choleric quarter even refers to the issue directly when he says that the old racism “is dead and gone”, and the “new racism is psychological” (*DK* 195 f.).

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<sup>37</sup>The country’s new name is intentionally spelled in lower case letters, which thereby conveys pejorative implications.

Whereas it shares the dystopian take on social and political developments with Barnes' novel, *Divided Kingdom* is generally characterised more by its dystopian perspective on the consequences of the break-up of Britain than a focus on Englishness. At the same time, however, it represents a multiethnic society that is more up to date and realistic than Barnes' version of monocultural England.

Compared to the novels mentioned so far, James Hawes' *Speak for England* has most in common with *England, England*. It is a humorous and satirical take on Englishness which also provides a dystopian perspective on the nation's future. It is also characterised by postmodern generic features<sup>38</sup> and engages with themes such as authenticity, the reliability of history and remembering, the reinvention of traditions, the commodification of culture and the reconstruction of English space. The story sets out with a description of the protagonist Brian Marley, who participates in a reality TV show called *Brit Pluck, Green Hell, Two Million* broadcast by the private 'Channel Seven'. Brian is close to winning the two million pounds for surviving in the jungle of Papua New Guinea after all other participants have either given up or died. When his last competitor gives up, the helicopter that is meant to get them out of the jungle crashes, so Brian is left alone and nobody is aware that he has survived. With the last bit of battery remaining in his electronic receiver he tries to record a message for his son at home, but he fails and blacks out. The first thing he hears when regaining consciousness is like an auditory 'mirage', so to speak:

There was now, however, a different noise, a noise so thoroughly impossible that Marley immediately decided that he was not just possibly, but very certainly dead. [...] Interesting, thought Marley's brain. He had never played cricket with a real leather ball and real bats and real pads; he had hardly ever watched a cricket match with any great emotion [...]. He had never truly heard the sounds of willow on leather, nor the ripple of polite, knowledgeable applause from a small English crowd. And yet he knew instantly that this was exactly what he was hearing.

*Cthwock! clappetyclappetyclap.*

Marley breathed and smiled. So this was what death was like, after all: a warm homecoming to something we have never truly known but yet missed all our lives, the end of all that strange, shadowy homesickness and yearning that haunts us all over our years like the long, still shadows on a lonely summer evening. (*SFE* 28)

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<sup>38</sup>Christine Berberich has pointed out the postmodern characteristics, which are, e. g., that the novel "merges high and low culture by including, among other things, 1950s boys' comics' illustrations, [...] it shows both narrative fragmentation as well as narrative self-reflexivity [...]" (Berberich 2009b: 395). What is more, the story is frequently advanced through direct speech and dialogues, which are represented without an explicit indicator of who is talking, thus resembling dramatic structures.

In fact, Marley is found after the cricket ball lands next to him by the ‘Colonists’, a group of English people who survived a plane crash some fifty years earlier, and have since been living in Papua New Guinea without anyone knowing. In the scene, it is telling that cricket, a typical English sport and icon, is used as a sign to introduce the English ‘Colonists’. From the perspective of the heterodiegetic narrator and Marley as the focaliser – a similar structure of narrative transmission as in *England, England* – the reference to England as home is established.

As Marley recovers, he learns more about the life in the colony, which bears a resemblance to a traditional Scout’s camp. The Colonists are ruled by the Headmaster, who is one of the original inhabitants and pursues a disciplined education for the Colonists.<sup>39</sup> Brian gets to know George, who is actually called Georgina,<sup>40</sup> and is surprised by her taking the sexual initiative. An interesting scene evolves when Brian and George have sex, and George starts ecstatically listing the English place names she has heard of, while Brian repeats her name:

—Windsor, Oxford, Stratford-upon-Avon, she whispered. [...]  
Oh, Hadrian’s Wall and Offa’s Dyke, Ullswater, Long Mynd, Simmon’s Yat.  
[...]  
Marley did not listen and did not care. As she recited the book-read names of England, her chant to her unknown homeland, he simply chorused her name again and again, like a prayer. [...]  
[A]nd he cried —George, George, George! and she cried, —White City, Shepherd’s Bush, Holland Park, England, oh England! Oh! (*SFE* 150 f.)

The narrative here takes up the premediated scheme of the list, which is e. g. reminiscent of Vita Sackville-West’s narrative: “England, Shakespeare, Elizabeth, London; Westminster, the docks, India, the Cutty Sark, England; England, Gloucestershire, John of Gaunt; Magna Carta, Cromwell, England” (*The Edwardians* 341). However, George repeating the names here refers to a utopian space she only imagines since she has never set eyes on the real England. Marley, who the narrator generally describes as a rather mediocre character, is not only the attraction of a ‘real Englishman’ for her, but also a personification of

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<sup>39</sup>The Headmaster takes his responsibilities as a patriarch literally, as he informs Brian at a later point: “Well, who do you think has the first bash to see if a girl’s good stock? *Droit de seigneur*, old boy. [...] Half these chaps are *my* natural sons, whoever’s name they have. Or grandsons. I rather forget who’s which sometimes” (*SFE* 229). The colony is consequently influenced by inbreeding so Brian is an attraction for several reasons.

<sup>40</sup>This name apparently refers to the androgynous character Georgina or George in Enid Blyton’s famous children’s adventure series *The Famous Five* (cf. also Berberich 2009b: 398). In one scene, the novel even directly refers to this intertext (cf. *SFE* 257). Moreover, the plot and themes conjure up additional intertextual references to classics such as Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness*, and, of course, to William Golding’s *The Lord of the Flies*.

England, her unknown home country. As Christine Berberich humorously observes, George “takes the saying ‘lay back and think of England’ to the literal level” (Berberich 2009b: 398). The use of listing here is not a coincidence but a conscious strategy of critique, continuing the remediation of listing English icons and topoi.

In addition from the scheme of listing, *Speak for England*, like *England, England, England*, tackles questions of remembering or forgetting a nation’s past and the authenticity of history and historiography. The Colonists have tried to keep English traditions alive and in order to prevent their history being forgotten, they write everything down in ‘The Book’, as George explains:

It’s so we don’t *forget*, you see? He [i. e. the Headmaster] says that’s the real difference between us and the locals. They forget. [...] It all gets muddled up into funny legends and myths. [...] But *we* don’t forget. We write it all down, and we remember. So we know all about England [...]. (*SFE* 155)

George’s comment puts historiography and archiving against the oral history of the local tribes as a means to remember. From the colonist’s point of view, the natives’ practices present an inferior way of dealing with national identity. However, this idea is ridiculed on two levels: first, as the Colonists eventually get back to England with Brian’s help, they have problems fitting into society since they live according to an absurdly anachronistic version of Englishness. Secondly, the effect of the narrative mode of emplotment, like that in Barnes’ novel, is to ridicule this opinion. Against the characters’ knowledge, the heterodiegetic narrator explains that the local tribes “possessed a unique and ancient language, in which they could recount the endless genealogies of their forefathers, [...] and sing vast encyclopedias of long-garned forest lore” (*SFE* 252). The narrator thus undermines what the characters take to be the truth through which they justify their superiority, which creates the effect of dramatic irony to ridicule English self-images.

It becomes increasingly obvious that the Colonists have maintained and perpetuated an absurd and old-fashioned image of England. They did not experience the redefinition of national identity as it emerged during their absence from their home country. Marley has to give the Headmaster a summary of what had happened in all the years the Colonists were trapped in the jungle (cf. *SFE* 177 ff.). It turns out that the Headmaster had expected a completely different version of political and social developments: he expects that England would have fallen to pieces as a result of a Third World War. When Brian tells him what really happened, the Headmaster hardly believes him – neither that the threat of Communism has vanished, nor that the Conservative Party used to have a female Prime Minister or that a Labour Government is now in power. So the Headmaster concludes: “Sounds like England needs us” (*SFE* 210). When the Colonists



try to establish contact to the outside world with the help of the almost flat batteries of Brian's electronic device by sending a message in Morse code, the colonists sing *Jerusalem* to calm themselves down, with "stiff but shivering upper lips" (*SFE* 218) – a scene which humorously repeats and remediates two premediated icons of Englishness. They do indeed finally get an answer by Morse code saying "w8 4 us 2 cum 2 u" (*SFE* 219). The Colonists are unsure if the message is in English at all and are unable to understand the modern shorthand way of talking, which had been established over recent years on the internet. The narrative thereby alludes to the Colonists' lack of experience and foreshadows the problems they will face in reintegrating into English society.

Another point that critically questions the positive self-image of the Colonists is the contact they have with the local tribes, which reflects and to some extent repeats negative notions of Britain's imperial history. The Colonists have collaborated with a peaceful tribe, who have to deliver food from their farming to the English in exchange for protecting them from another riotous tribe (cf. *SFE* 249). Marley finds out how the Colonists have prevented the aggressive tribe from invading their camp: they have erected "The Gate", where they have put the heads of the attackers they have killed on stakes to scare off other intruders. The Headmaster calls this their "little trophy room" (*SFE* 241). He continues: "Bit much, I admit, but our own grandfathers were doing much the same thirty generations ago, no doubt. The point is, best not to mention it back home, eh?" (ibid). The Headmaster further detracts from the atrocities when he says that "if you're going to have an empire, [...] then you can't expect your chaps to do it without getting their hands a bit dirty, going a bit native occasionally" (ibid.). The Headmaster forces Marley to help the Colonists burn 'The Gate' to disguise their deeds, and demands: "Pick up that stake and chuck the head into the fire. Do it, man. Behave like a white man" (*SFE* 242). The novel presents an image of the colonists that is characterised by their violent repression and exploitation of the natives. The Colonists have retained an obsolete racism, which becomes especially apparent when they are finally taken back to England, and George complains about the inquiry in the immigration procedure: "I mean to say, what on earth could we be *but* English? And one of the inspectors was a nigger, can you believe that? He had the nerve to *question* us. Tom Devereux nearly laid the black bugger out" (*SFE* 268). Several scenes of the like demonstrate that the Colonists have a racist opinion which contradicts the positive *zeitgeist* of the country which they come back to. Through such descriptions, the novel reminds Britain of its history, which has in fact not always been characterised by a positive perception of an inclusive Englishness.

Another issue introduced in *Speak for England* that is similar to *England, England* is the way culture is commodified. The private TV channel that had broadcast the reality show in the first place makes another media event out of the search for Marley, called *Brit Pluck 2: The Rescue Mission*. The narrative continues with a focus on the Prime Minister who wants to use this media event for his own profit. While Channel Seven sells the story of rediscovering the Colonists, the Prime Minister wants to shake hands with the rediscovered Colonists but is intimidated by the Headmaster in front of the live cameras. It is again ironical that the reader learns, shortly before this incident, of how the adviser had told the Prime Minister to call for the General Elections as soon as possible (*SFE* 244). What is conspicuous about this commodification is that both TV and media representatives as well as politicians constantly have to be reminded to talk about ‘Britain’ instead of ‘England’ (cf. e.g. *SFE* 171), which refers to the fact that Englishness is a rather difficult issue in politics for reasons of separatism, while Britishness is generally more often referred to in political and official discourses.

In relation to the representation of space in *Speak for England*, it is apparent that England represents a utopian place for the Colonists. England is frequently referred to as a lost home and paradise. When they fly back to Britain, “as they crossed the Channel at last [...] the excited Colonists, George among them, crowded the windows to catch their first sight of the White Cliffs they had all read about but most of them never seen” (*SFE* 266). One of the landmarks of England, the White Cliffs of Dover, herald the homecoming for the Colonists. The narrative additionally converts ideas of the Foucauldian concept of heterotopia: while Foucault understands a colony as a heterotopia, the Colonists who were forced to stay in their camp, which of course also plays with the premediated plot of *Robinson Crusoe*, have projected all their hopes and utopian ideals into what they imagine to be the real England, which most of them have never seen. The novel depicts the downside this glorification can bring, as exemplified when George describes her first impressions of England:

‘I mean, when we were driving along that autobahn thing, and then through all the wretched places, what were they called? Southall and Ealing and Acton and Shepherd’s Bush. Well, I must admit I felt a bit funny. You know, as if England wasn’t at all like the books after all. Actually, I know it sounds funny, but I got rather *depressed*.’ (*SFE* 275)

Upon arrival, George has to face the fact that what The Book had told her about England, what she thought herself to “know all about England” (*SFE* 155), was a mere glorified image of a nation which does not exist as such.

What is more, the ending of *Speak for England* also has dystopian characteristics that are similar to the ones in *England, England*. Two months after the Colonists have come to England, the Headmaster runs for the new Prime Minister, with the slogan “*Let Us Sort Things Out*” (SFE 289). He is elected for reasons the narrator speculates about, remediating former political changes: “[...] perhaps England was simply bored and fed up and ready for change, as it had been in 1945 and 1979 and 1997” (SFE 290). The further narrative account wraps up the consequences for the nation: discipline through military background is enforced in the educational system (cf. SFE 293), and all “single unemployed were now assigned to the Territorial Army or to the new Civil National Service programmes, where they [...] spent their days planting oaks and beeches [...]” (SFE 295).<sup>41</sup> The innovations introduced by the Headmaster and now Prime Minister are based on the disciplinary measures of the former Colony. As the reader knows how the Headmaster had reigned the camp and how he had exploited the natives, this incident gives a bleak outlook on developments. Additionally, the government has a “Neighbourhood Foot Reserve” (SFE 299) introduced, who patrol the streets like an additional surveillance measure, asking people to present the newly introduced ID cards (cf. SFE 300). The introduction of a new ID has indeed been a delicate and debated issue in Britain in reality during the last few years.

The dystopian events come thick and fast at the end of the novel. The new ID cards in fact replace the EU passport, “for England had withdrawn from the EU ten days before” (SFE 302), which has consequences that are again highly reminiscent of the descriptions in *England, England*:

It had been England only which had withdrawn, for when the Welsh and Scots Nationalists and their allies had mounted a constitutional objection to the UK’s withdrawal (backed, of course, by the French), the National Government in London had unilaterally declared Wales and Scotland to be independent, Ireland to be reunited and itself henceforth to be simply the Government of England, Anguilly, Bermuda, [...]. The British Commonwealth had been dissolved, but most present members had already applied to join the new English Language Community. (SFE 302)

The similarity to *England, England* is obvious and the passage makes a similar criticism to that made in Barnes’ novel, i. e. that of the potential danger of England’s isolation in Europe, also in contrast to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Again, the topic of Britain’s break-up contributes to a dystopian outlook as it does in *Divided Kingdom*

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<sup>41</sup>The reference to oaks is, again, not coincidental but marks the allusion to the overall topic of Englishness. The scene is thus also reminiscent of *England, England* in the way that the Headmaster ‘arboreally upgrades’ England, to borrow a quote from Barnes’ novel.

and *England, England*. However, Hawes' novel goes one step further: the Headmaster confides in Brian that England will cooperate with the US, which wants England to "run the EU for them" (*SFE* 319), and England will even become part of the US as a new state that will be called 'Old England'. Although the dystopian quality of *Speak for England* unfolds only at the end of the novel, it presents a negative outlook on the fictive political developments. In contrast to the ways in which other novels challenge Englishness, Hawes' is the one which has most in common with *England, England*.

While Barnes' novel, then, is maybe the most praised and aesthetically ambitious account, the comparisons to other contemporary novels have demonstrated that the discourse of the rebranding of Englishness also surfaces in other fictional accounts. Although represented in a completely different mode, both *The Remains of the Day* and *England, England* question the authenticity of memory and of idealised images of England. Hope's novel resembles Barnes' in its satirical quality, which in both novels presents a means of attacking prevailing deficiencies. The brief analysis of *Darkest England* has already served to indicate how English canonised texts, topoi and icons are taken up to situate the story in an English literary tradition. *Divided Kingdom* shares the bleak dystopian view on political changes caused by discussions about national identity with *England, England*. Ultimately, *Speak for England* has more in common with Barnes' novel than a satirical perspective and a dystopian ending: it has a similar structure of narrative transmission and fictionalises similar concepts and problems. In sum, then, all these examples serve to demonstrate that contemporary fiction continues to negotiate Englishness in different literary-aesthetic ways and that literature thus presents a powerful medium to deal with concepts of national identity.

## 6 Literature Challenging Englishness: Conclusion and Outlook

As the analyses have demonstrated, Englishness remains a popular and influential discourse in contemporary English fiction. This conclusion aims to sum up the findings with a special focus on the main literary strategies and the extra-literary concepts that the novels use to remediate Englishness. The functions of these techniques underline how fiction can challenge persisting identity concepts. The findings thus also allow insights into the potential that medial representations, and literature in particular, can have to disseminate and influence images rooted in a national culture. An outlook on further fields of interest that investigate interrelations between literature and Englishness will be provided with the aim of rounding off this study.

To begin with, generic and stylistic features present crucial literary strategies to convey meaning in negotiations of Englishness. A mediation through the classical realist mode situates a narrative in the literary tradition of the English canon. Most of the novels under scrutiny resort to realism as the dominant mode while interweaving innovative generic conventions that at the same time undermine this classification. In particular, *How to be Good* is characterised by a realist mode but obviously has a strong relation to popular writing. This overriding generic convention makes it possible to situate the story in the context of contemporary popular culture, thus reflecting the specific *zeitgeist* of the early twenty-first century. In this context, Hornby's novel challenges liberal values that were publicly supported by New Labour at that time. *White Teeth* is dominated by the English realist tradition and genre conventions of the *bildungsroman* but also strongly influenced by postcolonial writing. It also employs postmodern features, especially towards its finale, as the narrative moves towards the end of the century. The use of these contrastive conventions juxtaposes Englishness and otherness on the level of genre conventions. What is more, the genre therein appears as a hybrid, which is also reflected on the story level and thus contributes to making meaning. Ultimately, *England, England* most obviously uses the English realist tradition only to subvert it through its prevailing postmodern

configuration. In doing so, Barnes' novel pointedly challenges a traditional concept of Englishness by drawing on postmodernism as an innovative means.

Additionally, all three novels and many of the other mentioned examples are characterised by varying degrees of humorous, ironical and satirical tonalities. These stylistic features also contribute to situating the narratives in a typically English literary and cultural tradition. *How to be Good* is a playful, humorous and lightly satirical take on a middle-class representatives' struggle to put into practice a liberal ideology and liberal values, associated with a rebranded Englishness. *White Teeth* embraces all three qualities: it includes humorous episodes and character descriptions, ironical and serious meta-comments, and satirical counter-perspectives, e. g. on historical events. In comparison, *England, England* has the sharpest satirical edge of the three novels. Similar to Barnes' narrative in this respect are Hope's *Darkest England* and Hawes' *Speak for England*. It might be no coincidence, then, that all three novels refer to England in their titles. In its highly farcical design, *England, England* challenges the postmodern rebranding processes of national identity in a straightforward and self-conscious way. The narrative strategies in relation to the novel's mediation thus appear as a balancing act between referring to traditional structures and styles to conjure up associations with Englishness on the one hand, and turning away from these traditions by innovative generic features on the other hand. In other words, these examples of contemporary fiction remediate these traditional schemata and thereby contribute to literally rewriting and challenging concepts of identity and Englishness.

In terms of modes of emplotment in the novels dealing with Englishness, lists are a paradigmatic formal feature. At the same time, listing relates to individual genre conventions and to narrative mediation. To that effect, lists in *How to be Good* also have functions that are typical of popular literature in general, such as to take stock, archive and structure the characters' lives, but also to construct identities both on a personal and a collective level. Yet list-making in Hornby's novel mainly affects individual characterisations rather than national identity. In the context of *White Teeth* and other postcolonial narratives, lists are self-consciously employed as intertextual references to canonised lists like those by Orwell, Baldwin or Betjeman. Apart from these references, lists can have different functions depending on the generic environments in which they appear. They can either contribute to a realistic description in accordance with the English empiricist tradition, creating immediacy and transparency, or they can thwart the transparency of the mediation in a postmodern manner to attract attention to the text's hypermediacy. These situations can be found both in Smith's and in Barnes' novels. Especially *England, England* takes the premediated formal feature of list-making to its

extremes, which does not seem to be a coincidence. The narrative most pointedly lampoons the whole list-making business in its fictional “Fifty Quintessences of Englishness”: the list highlights negative aspects of English manners and exposes the arbitrary selection processes inherent in list-making. It thereby also contributes to the overall satirical representation in the novel. Listing, then, works to disseminate icons associated with national identity and is itself a typically English formal feature that self-reflexively refers to Englishness. Contemporary fiction repeatedly refers to this scheme and at the same time further fosters and stabilises this quintessentially English form.

A further literary technique that determines different perceptions of national identity is the mediation through different narrators and focalisers. Autodiegetic narrators, such as those in *How to be Good* but also those in, e.g., *The Remains of the Day*, *Saturday* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*, stage personal identity constructions that allow insights into representatives of a certain class or ethnicity. In Hornby’s novel, it is the perspective of a female middle-class representative who depicts the self-understanding and the self-images of the class. Autodiegetic narrators have a limited perspective on the events in the story and their world views remain rooted in a single character. However, this form of mediation stages personal experiences that make readers sympathise with the protagonist and thereby render collective self-images and individual crises more palpable.

Omniscient, heterodiegetic narrators like those in Smith’s and Barnes’ novels open up other possibilities. Both shift the perspectives between different focalisers, which influences the narratives and their effects. This technique allows to get competing insights into the thoughts of characters, and it offers various versions of the narrated and past events. In *White Teeth*, the variable focalisers from different cultural backgrounds provide counter-perspectives on English manners, icons, memories and topoi. It thereby achieves a polyphony of voices that reflect the heterogeneous, multicultural make-up of contemporary society. What is more, the novel provides various perspectives not only on postcolonial discourses but also on Englishness, since English culture remains the necessary basis against which otherness is pitted. The heterodiegetic narrator keeps these voices together and at times interferes in an overt way by commenting on general contextual issues. In these humorous but also frequently serious meta-comments, the narrator discusses issues like migration or anxieties on a broader scale. At times, the mediation then shifts back into a personal perspective in a ‘double-voiced discourse’, thereby exemplifying the general observations by reference to individuals.

Furthermore, the narrative mediation by omniscient narrators employed in *White Teeth* and *England, England* allows for the creation of dramatic irony. It is through this literary strategy that *White Teeth* ridicules and satirises characters who tend to celebrate diversity

in an exaggerated manner as exoticism. Especially *England, England* is characteristic of this strategy that functions to ridicule characters, particularly the megalomaniac Sir Jack. As his persona is associated with aggressive attempts to commodify Englishness, this process is criticised by way of rendering his character as negative and unpleasant as possible. The effect of this mediation strategy is to create a reader response that might even evoke *schadenfreude* about Sir Jack's adversities. It contributes to the ironical and satirical quality of the novel that can be read as a critical meta-comment on the rebranding processes of the late 1990s. Thus, narrative situation and focalisation are not simply literary techniques with which to mediate a story; they actively foster or criticise perspectives and opinions about Englishness through the characterisation of which they are a part.

In addition to these mediation strategies, contemporary fiction refers extensively to canonised texts, icons and topoi to situate the narrative in the literary and cultural discourse of Englishness. One popular example of a canonical English mini-narrative that reappears in various novels is the image of England as the "green and pleasant land". The intermedial variation of Blake's poem in the anthem *Jerusalem* is itself regarded as a typical icon of Englishness (cf. "Icons" 2005). A reference to this narrative in a novel not only exemplifies how a premediation affects contemporary fiction but also how it becomes perpetuated and remediated. The relatively fixed canon of English literature also makes it possible to renegotiate and rewrite national narratives. *White Teeth* effectively takes up this strategy in order to reconsider English classics such as Shakespeare's sonnets from a postcolonial counter-perspective. Similarly, *Darkest England*, *Speak for England* and *Mr Rosenblum's List* establish intertextual references to English classics by authors who provide projections of Englishness as premediated plots and schemata. In comparison to other novels, *England, England* constructs relatively little intertextual references but strongly builds on myths and extra-textual icons, topoi and concepts. Hornby's novel, in turn, only creates a strong link to contemporary popular culture and politics, instead of making references to the English canon. In general, *How to be Good* refers relatively little to cultural premediated schemes except for those connected to the class system and to New Labour's agenda.

Icons of Englishness present influential extra-textual references for contemporary fiction that are frequently remediated through listing. If one considers icons such as the gentleman, oak trees, gardening, the stiff-upper lip, cricket, *Jerusalem*, English breakfasts and other culinary icons, or spatial icons like the countryside, the pub and the country house, these function as obvious references which embed the narratives in a particular English cultural context. Yet the novels deal differently with these icons: they either support and



perpetuate them, rewrite them in a different context or dismantle them as outmoded constructs. *England, England* mainly deconstructs traditional perceptions, rather than creating new ones. It mocks the very process of glorifying manners, landmarks and things as a possible means of national identification and thereby ridicules the whole idea of list-making and iconisation. *White Teeth* and other postcolonial novels deal with icons in a more complex way. They rewrite icons but mainly showcase how specifically English phenomena and manners have become appropriated by immigrants and thus increasingly hybrid. While these appropriated icons are remediated as means of identification for everyone in an inclusively multicultural English society, other icons are represented as obsolete, such as English culinary icons or the image of the idyllic countryside. However, British Asian and Black British fiction does simply deconstruct several traditional icons but productively creates new ones. If one scrutinises the literary remediation of them, it does not seem to be a coincidence that recent English icons such as Chicken Tikka Masala or Brick Lane have emerged as markers of a rebranded Englishness. In fact, literature plays a significant role in the processes of disseminating and continuing national icons in the discourse of Englishness.

Topicalisation, then, ties in with these processes of iconisation. The literary redefinition of quintessentially English space is frequently linked to icons and results in the development of new topoi of Englishness, as the example of Brick Lane demonstrates. Space undoubtedly presents an essential dimension in the negotiation of identity, since perceptions of Englishness are closely associated with spatial images. In *How to be Good*, North London presents a semanticised setting and a space with which representatives of the middle class identify. Hornby's novel remediates this aspect by discussing the consequences of gentrification and feelings of community and justice. Although *White Teeth* is also set in North London, its implications of space differ due to its focus on ethnic identity rather than class. In fact, space presents a means of appropriation and identification to create postcolonial counter-discourses as well as to evoke feelings of belonging and utopian imaginations. However, these 'imaginary homelands' mainly remain utopias for the characters who dwell in the convivial space of Willesden. Smith's novel also semanticises space according to national *lieux de mémoire*, which functions to dismantle connotations of colonial memories, as descriptions of commemorative sites in Trafalgar Square make clear. The image, e. g., of the pub as an icon of Englishness is dismantled in favour of the creation of hybrid spaces. In addition to *White Teeth*, it is striking how many contemporary novels redefine London as an integral part of a rebranded identity in favour of more traditional associations of England with the countryside. This observation also highlights how *England, England* satirises efforts to commodify a traditional version of

Englishness, since the countryside constitutes its semanticised setting. Barnes' novel also fictionalises concepts introduced by French philosophers as a means to deconstruct notions of a postmodern rebranding of Englishness, which can also be analysed in relation to the artificial space of the theme park. However, while *England, England* deconstructs images through its farcical representation on a meta-level, *White Teeth* and other postcolonial English novels seek to create new spaces of a redefined Englishness.

Processes of identity construction are also related to negotiations of extra-literary contemporary developments. These developments include political, ideological and cultural processes. *How to be Good* links popular culture to the politics of New Labour at the turn of the millennium. This works especially in regard to the liberal values politicians propagated at that time. The novel puts this ideology into a 'fictional practice' to challenge its feasibility from the personal perspective of the autodiegetic narrator. Another instance of how an earlier political statement is brought to the fore in fiction is the counter-discourse to Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech in *White Teeth*. The literary strategy of Smith's novel, then, is to ridicule this nationalistic and racist attitude that recalls discourses of English nationalism. The narrative offers different perspectives on racism, mainly with the aim of exposing this ideology as obsolete or even absurd in contemporary cosmopolitan London. The novel strikes a similar tone in its negotiation of fundamental ideologies, which are also humorously rendered absurd through different narrative strategies. One technique is that of intermedial representation through film, with references to Millat's 'Mafia Islamism', which also links the discourse with references to popular culture. Ultimately, New Labour's rebranding endeavours themselves are contested in both Smith's and Barnes' novels. Towards the end, *White Teeth* challenges the processes of rebranding Britain for the millennium as a country with possibilities for immigrants by means of a postmodern description of the Perret Institute. The blank space only provides an abstract, sterile and useless space for immigrants in contrast to the convivial neighbourhood in Willesden, which is grown organically and permeated by complicated histories. In these passages, the thin line between Englishness and Britishness comes to the fore. The critique in *White Teeth* can thus also be read as contesting political efforts corresponding to notions of Britishness, while every-day cultural conviviality is linked to an understanding of Englishness. The mirroring of aesthetical representation and content as a meta-comment on a postmodern rebranding resembles the prevailing theme in *England, England*. Through its postmodern mediation, its hyperbolic story and representation, Barnes' novel deconstructs rebranding policies. The function of challenging Englishness and the rebranding processes of national identity through

postmodern (and postcolonial) features is therefore clearly of paramount importance for these contemporary novels.

Furthermore, contemporary fiction productively fictionalises concepts and factors connected to notions of identity, such as memory construction, historiography and invented traditions. To begin with, collective or cultural memory as constitutive factors of national identity is self-consciously negotiated in several novels, particularly in *White Teeth* and in *England, England*. Both novels link personal and national memory to processes of identity construction and critically question the truth of past events. They dismantle the idea of historical 'facts' in favour of created 'fictions' and self-reflexively contest the reliability of narrative accounts. *White Teeth* narrates counter-memories in a typically postcolonial manner and rewrites English historiography through counter-histories of events in Jamaica and of the Indian Mutiny. In doing so, it also actively remediates these national histories and highlights their transnational interrelations. In turn, *England, England* perpetually questions memory, identity and practices of remembering in a direct, even straightforward way. It repeatedly negotiates the dichotomy of authenticity and the simulacrum as a paramount postmodern theme throughout, which also affects the negotiation of national identity. According to its self-reflexive and critical discussions of identity constructions, Barnes' novel also takes up Eric Hobsbawm's idea of inventing traditions and puts it into 'fictional practice'. It exemplifies possible consequences on the basis of the invented 'Betsy myth' that presents a paradigm of how national identity becomes commodified in the theme park. Since contemporary novels remediate concepts connected to theoretical approaches to identity, literature functions to provide self-reflexive meta-commentary on processes of identity construction.

It is also striking how *White Teeth* and other examples of British Asian and Black British Literature present academic meta-discourses about influential theories and concepts from the field of postcolonial studies. Most prominently, hybridity as a concept that originates from the field of biology and genetics is tested in Smith's novel for its feasibility according to postcolonial theory. Bhabha's ideas of the Third Space and in-betweenness are questioned in representations of the crises of second-generation immigrant characters. What is more, hybridity serves to deconstruct essentialist identity constructions, which also includes traditional concepts of Englishness associated with white, middle-class Englishmen. Other novels like *The Cambridge Curry Club* or *The Road from Damascus* also fictionalise discussions about postcolonial identities, the diaspora, and questions of belonging through self-reflexive discourses about these academic concepts and theories. Consequently, these issues are not only fictitiously reflected but also put into 'fictional practice' in regard to mimetically represented characters who challenge the feasibility of

the concepts. While *England, England* also self-consciously employs postmodern ideas in its aesthetic, *White Teeth* and other postcolonial novels show the effects on individuals in a less hyperbolic but realistic and therefore more palpable way. This observation also points to the novel's cultural functions, which are an essential component of the remediation process.

The three novels under scrutiny share their cultural functions as 'cultural-critical meta-discourses'.<sup>1</sup> All of them fictionalise prevailing follies in sociological, ideological, political and cultural processes. This works according to their humorous, ironical or satirical qualities, which also explains their function to *challenge* contemporary identity constructs. That said, the degree to which the novels challenge Englishness still differs. *How to be Good* is certainly the less provocative narrative and rather exposes the difficulties in living up to liberal values associated with an inclusive, positively rebranded Englishness in a benevolent, playful and humorous way. Since the novel refers to only a few premediated cultural schemes apart from those of popular culture, the degree of remediating Englishness remains relatively low. *England, England*, in contrast, presents a sharply satirical, dystopian and highly critical take on the rebranding processes of Englishness. Through its highly aestheticised, postmodern emplotment, its critique on cultural developments is highlighted on a self-reflexive meta-level with the aim of deconstructing traditional concepts of Englishness and its commodification. It thereby takes part in discussions of national identity and influences public discourses about this issue. Ultimately, *White Teeth* also provides an 'imaginative counter-discourse' of historical events in colonial times and exposes follies attached to identity constructions through its ironical comments and descriptions. What is more, it also creatively renegotiates traditional English icons, topoi and canonical texts. Some premediated plots and schemata become perpetuated, some are exposed as outdated, and, most importantly, several are created and then continued. In doing so, *White Teeth* is a paradigm of narratives that exceed the functions of a 'cultural-critical meta-discourse', since it embraces further roles. It relates cultural plots and schemata not to a highly sterilised postmodern production, which it contests in its critique of a blank, postmodern, rebranded space. Instead, it creates mimetically depicted characters that embody different identity markers, and it delineates a hybrid community. It thereby functions as a 'reintegrative inter-discourse' since it includes postcolonial subjects into a community that is characterised by a convivial, inclusive Englishness. What is more, the novel integrates the concept of hybridity into its fictional world by discussing the notion in discourses of biology and genetics but also in its multicultural cast of characters. Its impact is – as demonstrated by the great interest in and discussions

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<sup>1</sup>These cultural functions refer to those introduced by Hubert Zapf, cf. chapter 2.3.

of *White Teeth*, but also by the popularity of the whole discourse of British Asian and Black British Literature generally – a highly productive means with which to challenge *and* to creatively rewrite identity concepts.

Class and ethnicity are the main identity markers that contemporary literature uses to challenge images of Englishness, although religion and gender also join in at times, especially in British Asian fiction. In fact, postcolonial writing appears to be one of the areas of literature that have been most effective in challenging Englishness through counter-discourses. It has influenced discussions of redefining and rethinking national identity in recent years, also by creating new perceptions of Englishness. British Asian and Black British Literature has made a notable contribution in literary discourses to rebranding London as the multicultural centre of an inclusive, liberal, democratic and cosmopolitan Englishness. Hence, the discourse of national identity around the millennium has obviously exerted a tremendous influence on the production of literature, while fictional narratives have also played a role in these discussions, providing a means of commenting on these developments. Contemporary fiction, then, emerges out of a dialogue with cultural, political and ideological changes that evolved at the turn of the century.

In sum, the analyses of the novels have shown the literary techniques and approaches that have contributed to configuring and remediating Englishness in contemporary fiction. The choice of genre conventions and of a narrative situation as well as the employment of formal features such as listing represent essential literary strategies with which to give meaning to representations and negotiations of Englishness. Through aestheticising features, fiction actively takes part in the continuous processes of iconisation, topicalisation and canonisation since it produces and reproduces images and concepts associated with national identity. Dealing with concepts of national identity in fictional narratives makes it possible to comment on factual political developments from a perspective which allows us to think about the impossible, and thus to foster discussions. Although literature is of course not the only medium in the discourse to comment on changes, it has arguably taken a notable share in questioning, negotiating and eventually challenging contemporary ideas and constructions of Englishness.

After all, a number of questions remain open for future research about Englishness. Although the turn of the millennium has frequently been regarded as a heyday of a rebranded Englishness, national identity continues to be of great interest more than a decade later. It is remarkable that the discourse of Englishness is still perpetuated in different spheres: recent examples include Natasha Solomons' novel *Mr Rosenblum's List* (2010), Roy Strong's non-fiction book *Visions of England* (2011) and the reprinted edition

of Victor Canning's *Everyman's England* (2011 [1936]). And there are also academic studies like *These Englands* (2011b), edited by Arthur Aughey and Christine Berberich, which demonstrate a continuous occupation with the topic. It will therefore be interesting to see how literature configures and remediates political changes and how it comments on national identity in the course of the Conservative government under David Cameron. Only recently, the media discussed Cameron's 'GREAT Britain' campaign (cf. e.g. "London 2012" 2011) in the approach to the Olympics in London in 2012. It remains to be seen how such recent manifestations of national identity, and such events as the Olympics – which put an emphasis on a shared British identity – will influence perceptions of Englishness, and how literature will evaluate and negotiate these developments. Literary and other creative productions will certainly make use of their function to critically comment upon political, cultural and ideological changes, and thereby they will challenge and fuel the discussions.

For all the discourse on literary remediations of Englishness, some aspects of the topic remain open for further investigation. Future research might trace how the quintessentially English penchant for listing icons surfaces throughout the English literary canon to further explore its foundations.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, it would also be enlightening to inquire into how postcolonial novels create culinary counter-discourses and how they affect traditional perceptions of English national identity. This aspect of postcolonial literature might also entail a consideration of these remediations in comparison with the English "gastronomic chauvinism" (Duffy 1986: 34) that figured so prominently in eighteenth-century literature (cf. Neumann 2009). Another issue that has attracted increasing interest in the humanities but still requires some closer attention in regard to contemporary fiction is the literary representation and the roles of English space, and particularly of London. In the wake of cosmopolitan exchange and globalisation, it would also be productive to inquire how literature dealing with constructions of Englishness has affected the image of the English outside of England. This includes literature from other British nations such as Scottish literature, literature from the former British colonies, from Europe, the US, and beyond. It would be enlightening to consider how the efforts of rebranding Englishness as an inclusive and open concept are perceived abroad, and, in turn, how these evaluations might again provoke reactions from within England. Ultimately, in addition to the interrelations between literature and culture, it would be enlightening to further scrutinise academic meta-discourses in literature. The main questions could be: by what means and with what effects does fiction refer to research as a discourse in relation to discussions about

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<sup>2</sup>In their "Afterword", Christine Berberich and Arthur Aughey also draw attention to listing as a significant aspect in the discussions of Englishness (cf. Berberich & Aughey 2011: 278).

national identity? And how does fiction interact with scientific or academic discourses and concepts? As this brief outlook implies, interdisciplinary approaches are invaluable when analysing the interrelations between literature and culture.

In the final analysis, Englishness is and remains an intriguing field of study. The same is true for literature as an art form that represents cultural phenomena through aesthetic practices and that can have an impact on processes in society at large. Considering Englishness *in* literature, then, also helps to expand interest in literary studies from a cultural perspective. The processes introduced through mechanisms of premediation, configuration and remediation help to grasp the potential fiction can have for cultural developments. Like academic research, literary texts strive to consider changes in society and are keen to make up new ideas that might still seem impossible at the time of their publication. Would Daniel Defoe have dared to think that his satire “The True-Born Englishman” would be discussed in the context of English national identity in the first decades of the twenty-first century, more than three hundred years after its publication?





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## Abbreviations

*BL* – Brick Lane  
*BOS* – The Buddha of Suburbia  
*CCC* – The Cambridge Curry Club  
*DE* – Darkest England  
*DK* – Divided Kingdom  
*EE* – England, England  
*HTBG* – How to be Good  
*MRL* – Mr Rosenblum’s List  
*RFD* – The Road from Damascus  
*ROTD* – The Remains of the Day  
*SFE* – Speak for England  
*SI* – Small Island  
*WF* – The White Family  
*WT* – White Teeth

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