

Annona Nova VII.

A Kerényi Károly Szakkollégium évkönyve



Pécsi Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar
Kerényi Károly Szakkollégium
Pécs, 2015

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NTP-SZKOLL – 14-0024



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ISSN: 2061-4926

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Minden jog fenntartva.

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Albert Noémi vagyok, a PTE BTK Anglisztika szakának másodéves, azaz végzős MA-s hallgatója, angol irodalom szakirányon. Fő kutatási területemet a modern, posztmodern, illetve a kortárs brit irodalom képezi. Emellett irodalomelmélettel (és filozófiával) is kacérkodom, ezért a kettő ötvözetét próbálom elérni tanulmányaimban. Jelenleg Julian Barnes prózája és a szimulákrum-elmélet áll kutatásaim középpontjában.

NOÉMI ALBERT

“Are You Real?”¹

Simulated Identity in Julian Barnes’s England, England

Sir Jack Pitman, the creator of the Island Project he named “England, England,” questions not only the authenticity of artifacts, or the reality of his creation, but also the very nature of every person’s identity. Pitman’s words, a character inhabiting the world of Barnes’s novel entitled *England, England*, raise one of the greatest problems of the postindustrial society, resulting in an overwhelming anxiety: “What is real? This is sometimes how I put the question to myself. Are *you* real, for instance – you and you?”². However, Pitman’s tone seems highly ironical, which makes his relation to the simulacrum ambivalent for the reader. Throughout the novel, he is one of the few characters who attempt to define the simulacrum through their own subjective view, but Barnes does not provide any clear definitions, allowing the reader to identify “the greater *frisson*”³ for himself/herself in the web of simulacra.

England, England is a novel with a topic clearly delineated in its title, and having three parts: “England,” “England, England,” and “Albion.” The sections outline a process of great changes in England, which becomes “Old England” when Sir Jack Pitman’s project on the Isle of Wight creates a miniature replica of the coun-

1 BARNES, Julian: *England, England*, Vintage, New York, 1998/2000, 31.

2 i. m.

3 i. m., 54.

try: England, England. The central character who links together the three distinct parts is Martha Cochrane, whose childhood memories comprise the first section and foretell her character traits, her search for her identity throughout the novel, and her relation to her home country. The second part presents the creation of England, England based on a survey named “The Fifty Quintessences of Englishness,” resulting in the inclusion of such figures and sites pertaining to the English heritage as Robin Hood, Manchester United, the Buckingham Palace, Big Ben, King Arthur, and so on. Martha Cochrane first becomes an important member of the team working on the project, but ultimately returns to her homeland (Albion) where she will adapt to the new ways of life, however, simulated they may be.

“We Prefer the Replica to the Original”

A French philosopher, invited by Sir Jack Pitman to present the theoretical basis of his grandiose project, confidently affirms that “in the modern world we prefer the replica to the original because it gives us the greater *frisson*”⁴. This *frisson*, this excitement, and thrill is what animates the entire project and what stands at the core of the simulacrum of the island: this *frisson* brings tourists from all around the world to experience a new kind of England (at first the replica of the old country, but gradually becoming a distinct entity with no relation to its model). The simulacrum becomes more appealing, “more real than the real”⁵, providing the longed-for *frisson* for every visitor, and even for its actors who also choose the simulacrum over the model.

The novel gradually abandons every link to a supposed original: what it presents ceases to be a mere representation, it becomes the thing itself, the simulacrum. As Gilles Deleuze remarks, “[t]hings are simulacra themselves, simulacra are the superior forms, and the difficulty facing everything is to become its own simulacrum, to attain the status of a sign in the coherence of eternal return”⁶; a

4 i. m.

5 BAUDRILLARD, Jean: *Simulacra and Simulation* (trans. GLASER, Sheila Faria), Michigan UP, Michigan, 1994, 1.

6 DELEUZE, Gilles: *The Logic of Sense* (trans. LESTER, Mark – STIVALE, Charles, ed. BOUNDAS, Constantin V.), Athlone P, London, 1990, 67.

difficulty which in the novel is turned into a goal: the island with its every inhabitant becomes its own simulacrum in the eternal repetition of roles and performances. When the island achieves this state, it becomes the perfect simulacrum its creator dreamed of, and thus ceases to be a representation of the "Old England." As Baudrillard claims, "representations stem from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and of the real"⁷, whereas simulation "stems from the Utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversions and death sentence of every reference"⁸. The simulation incorporates the representation, thus producing a simulacrum, distancing it from all referents, ultimately comprising an entirely new system.

This new system is what Baudrillard calls the hyperreal: an entity which exceeds the real, surpasses it, and results in the degeneration of the real, in its total disappearance. Simulacra precede reality and hyperreality is born. However, Deleuze considers the simulacrum as a distinct entity from its appearance. He states that "the copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance"⁹. Thus, in his understanding, the simulacrum undermines the very distinction between copy and model, and bears only an external resemblance to a model: "a thing, in order to become apparent, is forced to simulate structural states and to slip into states of forces that serve it as masks... underneath the mask and by means of it, it already invests the terminal forms and the specific higher states whose integrity it will subsequently establish"¹⁰. Deleuze does not agree with the view that simulacra replace reality, but he claims that simulation "appropriates reality in the operation of despotic over coding, it produces reality on the new full body that replaces the earth. It expresses the appropriation and production of the real by a quasi-cause"¹¹.

The main point at which theories clash in the novel is realized through the French philosopher who, while bearing visible similarities with Baudrillard, criticizes his views on the simulacrum

7 BAUDRILLARD: *Simulacra and Simulation*, i. m., 25.

8 i. m.

9 DELEUZE: *The Logic of Sense*, i. m., 257.

10 DELEUZE, Gilles - GUATTARI, Felix: *Anti-Oedipus* (trans. HURLEY, Robert), Continuum, London, 1984/2004, 91.

11 i. m., 228.

and, ironically, he is also criticized and rejected by Sir Jack Pitman, the great entrepreneur of England, England. Sir Jack finds the French philosopher disappointing, since he speaks of reproductions, while they “are not talking Disneyland, World’s Fair, Festival of Britain, Legoland, or Pare Asterix. Colonial Williamsburg? ... We are offering the thing itself”¹². Sir Jack is conscious of the simulacrum as being the new reality, with no connections to any original whatsoever, creating a new world, being itself the new world.

“A Memory of a Memory of a Memory”

Jean Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum comprehensively analyzes the different aspects of the individual in general who undergoes changes due to the emergence of simulacra. At the centre of his interest, just as at the centre of Barnes’s novel, stands the “self,” and every change, every impact of the simulacrum is filtered through this. The emergence of hyperreality entails both challenges (and anxieties) and thrill (“frisson”) for the individual. One of the sites at which these great changes become overt, and which both Baudrillard’s theory and Barnes’s novel share, is the memory and its unreliability, resulting in nostalgia. Baudrillard draws attention upon the appearance of a heightened sense of nostalgia, which results from losing the real (understood as the opposite of the hyperreal) and our sense of the past:

“When the real is no longer what it was, nostalgia assumes its full meaning. ... Panic-stricken production of the real and of the referential, parallel to and greater than the panic of material production: this is how simulation appears in the phase that concerns us – a strategy of the real, of the neoreal and the hyperreal that everywhere is the double of a strategy of deterrence.”¹³

These issues are of primary importance because simulacra comprise in a perfect manner the relationship between past and nostalgia, our relationship to history. The sense of nostalgia is heightened in the course of a life lived surrounded by simulacra, by an altered history. Recent years presented the emergence

12 BARNES: *England, England*, i. m., 87.

13 BAUDRILLARD: *Simulacra and Simulation*, i. m., 6.

of memory as a key cultural concern, which implies, contrary to earlier tendencies, a turning towards the past, a clinging to past events, a return to something which almost imperceptibly slides into oblivion. Andreas Huyssen reflects the change in understanding the memory, claiming that today memory becomes something very present, since the act of remembering itself always happens in the present and focus shifts onto the act. As he states, "[t]he past has become part of the present in ways simply unimaginable in earlier centuries. As a result, temporal boundaries have weakened just as the experiential dimension of space has shrunk as a result of modern means of transportation and communication"¹⁴. He understands memory as "a mode of re-presentation and as a belonging ever more to the present"¹⁵. What is of paramount importance in his understanding of the memory is that, as he states, "[i]nvariably, every act of memory carries with it a dimension of betrayal, forgetting, and absence"¹⁶. Huyssen sheds light on the fact that memory is closely allied with forgetting, which is one of the most characteristic phenomena of today's world.

Barnes constantly plays with the concept of memory throughout his novel. As he writes in *England, England*, "Memories of childhood were the dreams that stayed with you after you woke"¹⁷ (6). Memory plays a key role, being the phenomenon which opens the novel and which guides the reader through it. Memory and the jigsaw puzzle run in parallel as two concepts representing the development of personality. The memory is a model which is constantly rewritten, altered by nostalgia, thus gradually losing all connection to the original.

Past events fall into an abyss, impossible to recollect. As Jonathan Culler notes, "one cannot track down and make present the event or cause because it exists nowhere"¹⁸. Consequently, memory becomes a trauma, impossible to reconcile. Martha's memories symbolized by her childhood jigsaw puzzle are the representatives of her constant search for her father and for her identity: "She did not know whether she was meant to remember or to forget the

14 i. m., 1.

15 i. m., 4.

16 i. m.

17 BARNES: *England, England*, i. m., 6.

18 CULLER, Jonathan: *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*, Cornell, Ithaca, 1985, 163.

past. At this rate she would never build her character"¹⁹. She feels that her life is unfulfilled, and the only way to retain some control and balance is through her memories of playing with her "Counties of England" puzzle.

Memory fails to recall the past faithfully and, what is more, it is able to distort past events for its own purposes. Martha notes that what is represented by memory is not "a solid, seizable thing"²⁰ in the past, but rather "a memory now of a memory a bit earlier of a memory before that of a memory way back when"²¹. This leads to an infinite chain (the signifying chain) in which each memory points to an earlier one, never reaching truth *per se*, but only figments of the consciousness which compose a story about the past of the individual. Memory is no more than "a sign that only ever points back to another sign"²². As Sarah Henstra remarks, "Martha compares personal memory with national history to explain how the means supercede the ends when reconstructing the past"²³:

"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."²⁴

Martha understands memory as built and molded by the technique of *mise en abyme*, through which her memory becomes "a story within the story of what is its own statement"²⁵ through "mirrors set in parallel"²⁶, in which memories are embedded into other memories, always pointing towards the next memory, never

19 BARNES: *England, England*, i. m., 87.

20 i. m., 3.

21 i. m.

22 HENSTRA, Sarah: "The McReal Thing: Personal/National Identity in Julian Barnes's *England, England*", in: *British Fiction of the 1990s* (ed. BENTLEY, Nick), Routledge, Oxon, 2005, 95–107., 97.

23 i. m.

24 BARNES: *England, England*, i. m., 6. qtd. in: HENSTRA: "The McReal Thing", i. m., 97.

25 DE MAN, Paul: *The Resistance to Theory*, Minnesota UP, Minnesota, 1986/2002, 86.

26 BARNES: *England, England*, i. m., 6.

reaching an end. The result is an infinite reproduction of one's memories, and through them, of oneself: of one's own image. The process of remembering works as the chain of signifiers, constantly referring to new ones, ultimately achieving a state in which each memory is rendered unstable. Memory is always coloured and altered by new mirrors, reflecting on the present, impossible to distance from the present.

In an interview, Barnes remarked that *England, England* was "about the creation of false truths about a country, and these coarse icons that are made to stand in for real things"²⁷. The (re)creation of England and its consecutive decay stand at the centre of the novel. The process through which this is achieved relies heavily on memory: on tourists' memory of England, on their perceptions, on myths surrounding the country. As it is revealed in the course of the novel, memory is replaced by nostalgia.

Two distinct kinds of nostalgia are presented in the novel. The general one is represented by the tourists who seek entertainment by visiting a world of simulacra, an island re-presenting something lost, the past of a country, guided by the laws of the consumer society, of the "society of the spectacle"²⁸. They, like Martha Cochrane herself, are in search of a world lost, but their attitude is one of passive gazing, of devouring the spectacular shows they are entertained with. Martha's nostalgia differs from the one represented by the tourists: she clings to her own past – tightly connected to that of a whole country –, and does not let her memories slip away from her consciousness. Her nostalgia might be "excused", as implied by Barnes since it is "knowingly constructed and aware of its idealizing take on the past"²⁹, as Sarah Henstra remarks. Her version of nostalgia is an active agent which serves to find a valid identity for the heroine, which acknowledges that the object of its affection is not and can never be real, but a simulacrum.

27 GUIGNERY, Vanessa – ROBERTS, Ryan (eds.): *Conversations with Julian Barnes*, UP of Mississippi, Jackson, 2009, 59.

28 DEBORD, Guy: *The Society of the Spectacle* (trans. SMITH, Donald Nicholson), Gallimard, New York, 1994, passim.

29 HENSTRA: "The McReal Thing", i. m., 103.

“As for Being C–onstructed (*sic!*)...”

Identity and its definition have become of central concern in the contemporary world: in politics, in sociological studies, at every level of enquiry, with fiction occupying an important position in exploring its politics. Numerous definitions of identity are being employed in the different fields of study. This section will analyze identity based on the definition by Erik H. Erikson which claims: “The conscious feeling of having a *personal identity* is based on two simultaneous observations: the immediate perception of one’s selfsameness and continuity in time; and the simultaneous perception of the fact that others recognize one’s sameness and continuity”³⁰. As is the case with Barnes’s *England, England*, personal identity today seems to be interconnected with national identity. The individual and the country remember their pasts through the same process, Martha identifies her first memory to consist of her assembling the counties of England jigsaw puzzle: “this, she thought, might be a true, unprocessed memory: she had progressed from the floor to the kitchen table, and her fingers were swifter with the counties now, neater and more honest – not trying to force Somerset to be Kent – and she would usually work her way round the coastline...”³¹, and thus her very first notion of her identity is directly related to her getting to know her own country. “English identity... attract[s] increasing attention..., fuelled by nostalgic reconstructions of the myths of Englishness”³², Bentley remarks. The heightened sense of national identity provides a basis for searching the personal and for creating the illusion of community, of a shared system of values which seem to guide each individual’s life in the society.

“Anxieties surrounding the deconstruction and pluralization of the self have resulted in an interest in models of hybridity and inbetweenness, of identities that reside on the borders between, and in between, traditional categories of identity. This has led the novel to investigate ques-

30 ERIKSON, Erik H: *Identity and the Life Cycle*, Norton, New York, 1980, 22.

31 BARNES: *England, England*, i. m., 5.

32 BENTLEY, Nick: “Introduction: Mapping the Millennium: Themes and Trends in Contemporary British Fiction”, in: *British Fiction of the 1990s* (ed. BENTLEY, Nick), Routledge, Oxon, 2005, 1-1-8., 11.

tions of ontology often expressed as an uncertainty about the relationship between the real and the unreal, between simulacra and simulations, about authenticity and fakery, as well as nostalgia for lost or displaced selves and organic communities."³³

Nick Bentley reveals the relationship between identity formation and the novel which today focuses on the person caught up in a web of simulacra, unable to find "truth", to rely on any reality. Memory plays a central role in constructing identity by distorting past events, by forming them, according to its own purpose. It leads to the illusion of acquiring a clear identity and, through this identity, a sense of certainty, of safety in a world full of signifiers which lead to other signifiers, but never to signifieds: to a graspable reality.

Martha Cochrane, the central character of *England, England*, provides the occasion for the text's enquiry into "the links between individual and collective identity, between personal loss and national decline"³⁴. There is a clear-cut process of formation detected in her case, showing how, in the project which builds entirely on simulacra, from "Appointed Cynic"³⁵ she becomes CEO and, in contrast to this, her sense that she loses her own identity is more and more heightened. From the very beginning, through the metaphor of her jigsaw puzzle, Martha's "individual identity is linked to that of her country"³⁶: she is overwhelmed by "a sense of desolation, failure, and disappointment in the imperfection of the world"³⁷ when she discovers a piece missing, and she feels complete only when the puzzle is completed: "Staffordshire had been found, and her jigsaw, her England, and her heart had been made whole again"³⁸.

Henstra notes that "[e]arly losses compounded by the inevitable failure of recall set the stage for Martha's struggle to reconcile national and personal selfhood, while the suggestion here of indeterminate betrayal and uneasiness directs the reader's atten-

33 i. m., 10.

34 HENSTRA: "The McReal Thing", i. m., 96.

35 BARNES: *England, England*, i. m., 44.

36 HENSTRA: "The McReal Thing", i. m., 96.

37 BARNES: *England, England*, i. m., 5.

38 i. m., 6.

tion to a narrative substratum of anxiety and grief³⁹. The entire process of her search for an identity is embedded in her country, which becomes even more powerful with her involvement in the Project. What haunts her throughout is the question of natural as against artificial identity, which leads to her anxiety, fearing that her nature “was no more natural”⁴⁰ than the constructed reality of the theme park. Mark states: “As for being c-constructed (sic!)... well, so are you, Miss Cochrane, and so am I, constructed. I, if I may say so, a little more artfully than you”⁴¹. This proves that every individual, Martha included, is artificially constructed; our identities are formed by the illusion of being part of a community, and possibly “for all a lifetime’s internal struggling, you were finally no more than what others saw you as. That was your nature, whether you liked it or not”⁴².

As it was stated earlier, personal and national identity seem to meet in the course of the novel. The actors’ changes transpire in parallel with the great changes both the Island and the “original” England undergo. England, now under the name Albion (or Anglia), falls into a primordial state, but this very state is consciously organized and created in a simulacrum. It constructs new identities, every inhabitant takes up a new personality, fooling outsiders, even themselves. This phenomenon, encountered in the Old England, is similar in many respects to that one experienced by tourists visiting the Island. The difference is, however, that while visitors to the Island have clearly delineated expectations, encounter characters from England’s historical past, the primordial England is entirely constructed by its inhabitants, and the visitors are deprived of the security of knowing beforehand what they might encounter. This simulacrum might be even more complex than Sir Jack’s since “reality” is more changeable than ever. Jez Harris enters a game with the tourists in which he is the one who sets up the rules: if he invents a new name for some trees, the tourists are compelled to accept it unconditionally. This section enhances the irony of the novel: in the second part, when designing the Island Project, the group provides the reader with a critique of the tourists, building the entire site on the stereotypical information for-

39 HENSTRA: “The McReal Thing”, i. m., 97.

40 BARNES: *England, England*, i. m., 259.

41 i. m., 136.

42 i. m., 259.

eigners have about England, and thus conforming to their "touristy" expectations. In Albion, those who have the opportunity of visiting it (since very few are permitted to), come with the same stereotypical expectations, with thirst for sensation, which, in this case, Jez Harris fulfills by inventing a name for a "clump of trees." This is again a different kind of simulacrum: something nonexistent gaining existence through giving it a name and inventing a catching story for it.

The entire nation has reverted to its roots: roots that are impossible to retrace, and so they invent new ones for themselves. The nation living in Albion closes its gates to the outside world, becomes secluded, creates an entirely different world for itself: an agrarian world with no media, no international relations, only village people living from one day to another. For this simulacrum to function every citizen has to conform to its new rules. Consequently, many choose exile with the prospects of a successful life not obliterated by the Island Project or, to the contrary: on the Island, as actors. Those who remain, consciously choose the simulation of living, a simulation even more difficult to achieve and retain than that of the Island, since the roles of the inhabitants are not delineated beforehand by famous personalities of the past, but they have to construct these identities.

When the perfect simulacrum is attained, it alters the identity of the country, of its nation at large, and of every individual connected to it. *England, England* presents in parallel the fate of the Isle of Wight now housing a "new England," and that of "Old England," the country affected by the simulation, and thus creating a simulated life for itself. While Baudrillard would identify decline and "doom" in these changes, the meticulous analysis of the characters inhabiting the novel points towards the possibility of accepting these hyperrealities, of conforming to a new world with a new self. The Island Project continues to function and prosper, the actors repeat their characters day by day; meanwhile, Old England constructs a life for itself, sheltered from the outside world, safe for its inhabitants, where even Martha can find herself.

In conclusion, *England, England* is a novel which approaches possibly the most aspects simulation entails for individuals, capturing the birth of the perfect simulacrum, adopting the Deleuzian understanding of the phenomenon. This process leads to a different

understanding of one's surroundings and one's own self, as was proven by the analysis of Martha Cochrane, the protagonist of the story. Since one of the most important motifs running throughout the novel is Martha's search for identity, the simulated world she inhabits will lead her to two realizations: identity is shifting, conforming to the simulated world, but one can find and identify with it inside this world: Martha ultimately settles down in "Old England," now also a simulacrum, but different from that of "England, England."