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Staged history: Concept of theatricality in the modern utopia (*England, England* by Julian Barnes)

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Abstract. The work explores the concept of theatre and the role of theatrical conventions in Julian Barnes's utopian novel *England, England*. This article discusses theatricality as the principal artistic strategy of the novel, heavily influencing its formal and thematic structure. It outlines the main characteristics of the theatrical chronotope, and considers the similarities between theatricality and the conventions of the utopian novel per se. It examines closely the way Barnes exploits the various semantic implications of the chronotope in his critique of contemporary society. Methodologically the article is based on the findings of theatre semiotics and employs them as its theoretical framework (Alter, Fischer-Lichte, Pavis), while also considering sociological (Debord), anthropological (Milton Singer, Geertz Clifford), and psychological (Erving Goffman) approaches to the phenomena of theatre. Tightly intertwined with actual cultural and social strategies, theatre has always been an essential integrative part of social life. The author uses theatricality to take a reflective attitude towards the contemporary culture, to examine and display the political and social strategies which are considered as immanently theatrical. Under the theory of theatrical semiotics, the decisive aspects of theatre as an aesthetic system are theatrical space and time. The main characteristics of the theater are conceptualized primarily in the theatrical chronotope. On this ground, it can be argued that the significant structural element through which theatricality is incorporated in novelistic discourse is that of the artistic chronotope. The specific enclosure of the theatre universe manifested within the typical utopian locus serves to arrange it as the space of utopian social experiment perfecting the latent tendencies of the culture and exposing them to critical observation. Theatrical "a-temporality" correlates with utopian "a-historicity" and unfolds the rupture with the historical continuum which gives free rein to its purposeful reconstructions. Theatrical images are subjected to regrouping in eclectic totality and re-combinations of disrupted elements of the historical continuum. The cyclicity of the performances representing historical and mythical figures and the re-enacting events essential for national identity involves the spectators in pseudo-communication. It actually deprives them of experiencing real time and space, replacing it with the comfortable pseudo-experience of consuming surrogate images. Thus, the main characteristics of theatrical chronotope are employed to develop the novel's essential concerns with such issues as reconstruction of individual and national identity and their subjection to distorting speculations. Theatricality reveals the nature of a forward-looking industrial society as a commercial spectacle turning national culture and history into a manipulated commodity.

Keywords: theatricality, concept of theatre, utopia, chronotope

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Introduction

French theatrical semioticians are credited with having first coined the term *theatricality* (*theatralité*), acknowledging the special position of theatre as an aesthetic system and as the specific organisation of a theatrical code. In modern culture, theatricality appears as a capacious multifaceted philosophical and aesthetic concept related to different areas of human thought and, though initially originating from the art of theatre, transcending its boundaries and manifesting itself in all kinds of cultural experience. “Theatre” and the related term “performance” have “acquired different metaphorical significations during its course of evolution” and shifted “into a master concept” of the modern culture [1. P. 67].

Barnes characterised *England, England* as a ‘political novel’, thus revealing his principal concern with the actual affairs of British society. The novel is the author’s commentary on the current cultural, political and economic situation; as Barnes himself states, “a letter to my own country at the turn of the millennia” [2. P. 70]. This article discusses theatricality as the principle artistic strategy of the novel, heavily influencing its formal and thematic structure. As an organising principle, theatricality shapes representation of reality and constitutes the novel’s text according to the principles of a theatrical performance.

Theatre is one of the most significant nationally marked concepts of English culture which largely determines “the peculiarities of the national behavior of the British and <...> the formation of the ethnospecific English linguaculture” [3. P. 2]. This is acknowledged by the studies concerned with a variety of aspects of English literature. The concept is also a fertile area for research in the field of literary imagology, analysis of ethnic stereotypes, national myths revealed in artistic texts.

Thus, in a similar aspect we consider the theatre in the article “Theatricality and the Chronotope in the *Magus* by J. Fowles and *England, England* by J. Barnes,” which considers, among other questions, the features of the cognitive incorporation of the “theatre” concept by the national English mentality [4].

This article focuses on theatre as a philosophical and semiotic system embodied in the artistic world of the modern utopian novel, where the utopian world picture is immanently shaped in the space-time characteristics of theatricality.

Purpose of the study

The article aims to investigate theatricality as one of the constitutive poetic principles of the novel by considering its historical contexts and theoretical applications. It examines the ways in which theatricality is embodied in novelistic discourse, i.e. how the structural features of theatre as a specific aesthetic system

are introduced in literary texts, and how theatricality, in turn, manifests the author's artistic conception and generates the meanings of the novel.

Research theoretical framework

Methodologically the article is based on the findings of theatre semiotics and employs them as its theoretical framework (Jean Alter, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Tracy Davis), while also considering sociological (Guy Debord), anthropological (Milton Singer, Geertz Clifford), and psychological (Erving Goffman) approaches to the phenomena of theatre. Under the theory of theatrical semiotics, the decisive aspects of theatre as an aesthetic system are theatrical space and time. On this ground, it can be argued that the significant structural element through which theatricality is incorporated in novelistic discourse is that of the theatrical chronotope, and hence it is the most expedient feature for applying theatricality to an analysis of the novel. Of special relevance is the typical division of theatrical space involving the duality of the stage-auditorium opposition; spatial and temporal isolation and distancing; and specific temporal dialectics depending on an ever recommencing present as its main temporal stratum, presupposing its cyclicity and atemporality.

The studies concerned with utopia as a literary genre (Richard Gerber, Jerzy Szacki, Frederick Polak) provide a basis for revealing similarities between the conventions of the genre and theatricality. Louis Marin in his article "The Utopic Stage" explains the analogy between utopia and the theatre and claims that utopia inevitably requires performative techniques for its realisation, it "dissimulates, within its metaphor, historical contradiction <...> *by projecting it onto a stage*. It stages it as a representation by articulating it in the form of a structure of harmonious and immobile equilibrium" [5. P. 115].

These similarities fall into three main areas. (1) First, there is the specific cultural function of providing a critical standpoint for scrutinising the present state of society, which presupposes the use of performative techniques. (2) Second, the above-mentioned duality of the stage/auditorium spatial opposition reflects a spatial demarcation which is also constitutive for utopia. Congruent with theatre, the reality of utopia is presented as a dual entity, the different segments of which are loaded with different types of significance. As Polak explains, reality is split into two: into the actually existent, and the other, speculatively projected. One who experiences utopian reality is, accordingly, to learn dual comprehension, to "behave purposefully as a 'citizen-of-two-worlds'" [6. P. 282] and this evokes the requirements of dual behaviour for a participant in theatrical performance. (3) Finally, there is the spatial and temporal isolation which is realised in a temporal present or "complete contemporaneity" (Fischer-Lichte) [7. P. 7] of theatre and a utopian "frozen present" (Szacki) [8. P. 99], presenting a perfect static state of reality structured in a temporal vacuum.

Thus, what is especially important for this article is that the chronotopes of theatre and utopia reveal their structural similarity, which makes them expedient for analysis as mutually complementary.

Furthermore, important elements of Bakhtin's genre theory reveal the nature of the novel as an incorporative self-reflective genre that engages in a continuous search for its own authenticity and has a great integrative capacity readily employing the principles of other literary (as well as non-literary) forms. That is all the more true for a postmodern novel that consciously employs the discourses of different artistic languages to explore its ultimate boundaries and authenticity, as well as the effects of their transgression. Theatricality, as well as play, is considered as a device used to realise the novel's self-reflexive and metafictional nature, "the definitive condition or attitude for postmodern art and thought" [9. P. 1].

In modern literary criticism, theatricality is viewed not only as a phenomenon related exclusively to drama, but also as a cultural concept and structural principle of a novelistic discourse. Relevant studies which analyse theatricality among specific characteristics of prosaic works include *Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity* by Lynn M. Voskuil, *The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels* by Robert Garis, and *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* by Joseph Litvak.

In this article, theatricality is used as a cultural concept, as well as a descriptive and interpretative term, one of the possible codes for reading and analysing multiply-coded postmodern novels. Following the conclusions of the semiotic theory of theatre, the typical theatrical chronotope organisation is considered an essential feature of theatricality.

Results and discussion

Theatricality and utopia as isomorphic phenomena

In *England, England*, theatricality is realised in its essential features primarily as a technique for scrutinising the nature of contemporary society as Barnes conceives it. By means of theatricality Barnes pointedly raises an important problem for English literature, that of national authenticity. As Margaret Sonmez remarks with regard to the Victorian novel, authenticity was recurrently the "part of a network of ideas related to truth, origins, stability, and hierarchy, and it could be associated with the moral qualities of truth and integrity" [10. P. 638].

As a socially and culturally determined phenomenon, theatre provides unique resources for such an observation. As a social institution, theatre contributes to the culture's self-comprehension which is possible due to the specific character of the theatrical signifying process.

Theatre <...> reflects the reality of the culture in which it originated in a double sense of the word: it depicts that reality and presents it in such a depiction for reflective thought <...> In this sense, theatre can be understood as an act of self-presentation and self-reflection on the part of the culture in question [7. P. 10].

In Barnes's novel, theatricality can be conceptualised mainly within the context of Debord's characterisation of modern society as a kind of totalising com-

mercial spectacle, as well as within Jean Baudrillard's conceptions of simulacrum. Both concepts are indicated in the novel as guiding theories of the spectacular reality of the perfected state of England, England.

This article argues that through the use of theatricality Barnes constructs in the novel specific features of the new utopia. As a literary genre utopia is traditionally loaded with both artistic and political commitments ensuring its main concern with providing a critical stance for observing the potential of current society. Thus, it appears to be linked to the cultural function of the theatre. As Marin states in his suggestive article "The Utopic Stage", the representation of an ideal society necessarily "conjures up, as a negative referent, real society; it thus encourages a critical consciousness of the society" [5. P. 131].

In line with the discussed artistic intentions, the author uses the generic conventions of utopia to create a specific utopian universe. A utopian ideal world is based on the practical manifestation of essential characteristics derived from the actual culture, which often are those most valued by this culture. In the utopia, they are presented as perfectly accomplished, having reached the desired maturity. This places Barnes in close quarters with utopian writers, who scrutinise the society to find out what its essential characteristics are.

Barnes states that *England, England* represents a universalising "idea of England novel", thus regarding it as the representation of what the ideal England would be like. The properly organised reality of the new state *England, England* is presented as a perfect commonwealth, a kind of possible future that is prospective, auspicious, and, even if only ironically, welcomed. "The new Island state' is enthusiastically claimed to 'prove a role model for more than just the leisure business'" [11. P. 178]. It actually manifests what Barnes's own society's significant elements are, portraying them as developed and properly organised: "The Island Experience, as the billboards have it, is everything you imagined England to be, but more convenient, cleaner, friendlier, and more efficient" [8. P. 184]. Quite in accord with the values of the commercial society, the new England, England represents "a locus of uncluttered supply and demand, somewhere to gladden the heart of Adam Smith. Wealth was created in a peaceable kingdom: what more could anyone want, be they philosopher or citizen?" [11. P. 202]. The newly created state of England, England, traced back to the conventions of classical utopias, represents the spectacular display of "[t]he best of all that England was, and is, can be safely and conveniently experienced on this spectacular and well-equipped diamond of an Island" (emphasis added) [11. P. 185].

Theatrical and utopian chronotope

As mentioned, the theatrical and utopian chronotopes share some essential structural features, enabling us to analyse them in the novel as mutually correlated. To begin with, the division of the artistic space continuum in the novel reflects that which is essential for utopia. Both are premised upon a similar mental assumption, as a result of which reality is conceived as a dualistic entity. For the theatre, it is realised as the opposition of stage and auditorium. In a utopia, a

speculatively projected ideal society is displayed against the actually available social reality.

The contexture of *England, England* structurally reflects the theatrical spatial “stage-auditorium” division. Over the course of the novel, the perspective of the narration successively proceeds from one spatial segment to another and then back again. The movement of the plot is pointedly presented in terms of space; thus the three parts of the novel are entitled by toponyms, which foregrounds the distinctness of the novel’s different spatial segments. The first part, “England”, presents Martha Cochrane’s childhood, which she recalls from the distance of time, retrospectively. The main themes of the novel, such as the quest for reliable reality, individual authenticity, and fallibility of human memory, are initially introduced as related to personal existence. The next part entitled “England, England” describes the organising and functioning of the “Project” – a technological tourist destination created on the Isle of Wight – which is presented as a model society in the state of England, England. The last part returns to the old deserted and decayed “Anglia”, which being reflected and self-reflected in the mirror of the flourishing state of England, England, is trying to find its own new ways. This correlates with the pragmatic position of spectators in the theatre, who are to leave their actual reality (the existent) to experience the other one (the performance), and then to return back, transformed in some way by having gone through the experience.

Thus, according to the principles of both theatrical and utopian chronotopes, the distinctive spatial segments in the novel are bonded in the specific interconnection. The Old Anglia serves as the authentic source of the Theme Park’s creative transforming activity. It is doomed to provide the crude raw material for the Project’s artistic cultivating inspiration. The new England, England, the mirroring replica of the Isle of Wight, establishes itself as the artificially accomplished version of the old one and provides the ground for its observing and self-reflecting. As such, Anglia and England, England constitute the two juxtaposed realities with different ontological statuses, in Debord’s phrasings, the space of the world directly lived and the space of the world of “re-presentation” [12. P. 12] in the Project’s artificial spectacles.

The spatial division in the theatre also arranges the corresponding cultural division, which Fischer-Lichte explains as the opposition of “a culture of those who depict it and a culture of those who watch it”. The role of this opposition with respect to the theatre is to create an observable “model of cultural reality in which the spectators confront the meanings of that reality” [7. P. 10]. Essential both for the artistic dialogue of theatre and for the social communication of utopia, these interrelations reflect the confrontation of the two cultural and social orders and aim at observing and juxtaposing their meanings. In *England, England*, such a confrontation reveals the practical affinity of the two worlds, in which the supposedly opposite theatrical world in fact magnifies the actual one. The main ideas on which the Project thrives are displayed as having originated in the old, non-artificial reality, only to be properly developed and accomplished by Sir Jack’s sagacious genius.

By this token, the theme of the perfidy and evanescence of human memory as an unreliable instrument for securing any authentic past, which the art of the Project is claiming to reconstruct, is initially raised precisely with regard to the ordinary experience of the old Anglia. As Martha reflects: “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 <...> she was never to come across a first memory which was not in her opinion a lie” [11. P. 3].

Furthermore, the main Project’s originating conception – the insecure borderline between the authentic and the artificial, the original and the replica – is firstly clearly revealed as related to the old England. The ultimate value of the former original is discredited in favour of the replica, a persuasive example of the new construction.

Similarly, role-play as a socially accepted communication strategy is also pervasively exercised and socially approved in the present culture. It is shown as being rooted in the general practices of social life. In this way, social interoperation in Pitco is contingent on role-like employee positions, which are accepted as an effective means of identifying individuals and forcing them into certain models of required stereotyped behavior: a Concept Developer, an Official Historian, an Appointed Cynic, an Ideas Catcher etc. The nonfailure functioning of the social system is secured only by individuals’ total adherence to the prescribed functions. No personal excess would be tolerated by the system, something which Martha cautions herself against in her function as an Appointed Cynic: “[D]on’t confuse professional cynicism with amateurish contempt” [11. P. 120]. Even Sir Jack, as powerful and almighty as he is, has to conform his behaviour to the laws of spectacle, under which he must enact as the role of “Sir Jack”. The scrupulous performance of his spectacular self in public has little to do with the real Sir Jack, quite in accordance with Alter’s claim: “All social life is theatre where everyone plays roles determined by rules of social behavior” [13. P. 46].

Personal identity is completely replaced and neutralised by a functional role which is radically displayed in the manner of corporative communication. Stereotypical professional names – Susie, the PA, – are assigned to every person newly employed in a particular business position, thus depriving people even of a basic indicator of unique personality – an individual name.

In theatrical reality, any object or even human being can be replaced by any other. Moreover, this interchangeability is encouraged in order to manifest the nature of theatricality and its secondary signs which can take on an almost unlimited number of meanings: “a chair can <...> be utilised to signify not only a chair, but also a mountain, a staircase, a sword, an umbrella, an automobile, an enemy soldier, a sleeping child, an angry superior, a tender lover, a raging lion, etc.” In England, England, this characteristic of theatrical signs has specific implications and manifests a general devaluation of human spiritual significance as an important feature of modern society resulting in the destruction of an individual self. As the narrator concludes: “it was not really her name he was unsure of, but her identity” [11. P. 34]. In this regard, the question of her “reality” is at is-

sue, as posed by the great social spectacle's main producer, Sir Jack: "You are real to yourselves, of course, but that is not how these things are judged at the highest level. My answer would be No" [11. P. 31].

According to the flexible character of the theatrical signifying mechanism, the new England implements a society that easily accepts a random replacement of one human being by another. As Sir Jack assures his employees, they can be easily "replaced with substitutes, with ... simulacra" [11. P. 31].

Thus, the nature of the society in question is revealed as that of a spectacle insisting on the nullification of personal existence by forcing individuals into external ready-made roles imposed by the dominant social ideology and making them personally undistinguished both for others and for themselves. Debord explains this effect as follows: "In a society where no one can any longer be *recognised* by others, every individual becomes unable to recognise his own reality" [12. P. 152].

This distinctly follows the postulates of theatre theory, similarly emphasising the insignificance of personal existence beyond the roles people play: "[T]heir material existence is of interest for theatre with regard neither to its uniqueness nor to its specific functionality <...>. What is crucial is not existence as such but rather the meanings to be created using existence as a sign" [7. P. 140]. Later, in the project of England, England, this reduction of individuals to external role-like functions and properly imposed requisites – that is, to empty signifiers – is efficiently accomplished in the staged social spectacles.

Martha shrewdly acknowledges that the Island's theatre-like reality is capable of exteriorising the internal properties of objects, isolating them from the objects themselves. Likewise, Sir Jack reduces the functioning of Parliament to puppet performances, lacking any actual significance but serving as a sign of a sign, in some sense brilliantly mocking the practices exercised in modern politics. The new Parliament functions perfectly with "non-speaking backbenchers able to master some simple choreography – rising to their feet at a signal <...> utter[ring] various nonverbal but interpretable noises – contemptuous baying, sycophantic groaning, rabid muttering and insincere laughter being the main categories" [11. P. 173–174].

Therein, the existent society itself is shown as being the direct source of the Project's modelling activities. Habitual social performances of the "old Anglia" are reincarnated in the staged shows of the new England, England according to the Project's utopian ambitions as formulated by Sir Jack: "We want our Visitors to feel that they have passed through a mirror, that they have left their own worlds and entered a new one, different yet strangely familiar" [11. P. 120]. The Island frames and magnifies the general intrinsic characteristics of the present society within the conventions of the stage, employing them as material, a part of the process of its own creation.

However, the performances of England, England profess not just to mirror and display, but rather to usurp and replace the basic reality which they plagiarise for their own constructions. Ultimately, there are two contending versions of reality in question – the objective original reality and its artificial, theatrically represented substitution.

Space of substituted reality

Theatrical and utopian chronotopes both seek to maintain the modelling potential of some framed, isolated space. They also need to ensure a specific distance to provide the perspective required for proper observation. “<Theatre> places the culture at the scrutiny of a distanced and distancing gaze” [7. P. 10]. Similarly, utopia as a genre engages the society in question in the process of self-reflection, hence employing features analogous to the theatrical chronotope. To fulfil its modelling and observing functions, the universe of utopia needs distancing from factual reality in terms of time and space. The typical utopian space, created under generic utopian conventions, must be simultaneously “something quite different from the ordinary world and yet part of this world” [11. P. 3].

The characteristic enclosure and distancing of stage space is utilised within England, England. By constituting “a different world” as a re-presentation of the present one, an act of spectating is arranged, which estranges the culture at issue from itself and thereby makes it expedient for observation and self-identification. According to this intention, in *England, England*, the representational image of the culture comprehending itself is re-located on an island. The Isle of Wight housing the doubled England is portrayed as a topographically ideal setting for performing and exercising the “conceptualisation and visualisation of change” required by utopia [8. P. 282]. “The island <...> is a diamond <...>. In short, perfect for our purposes. *A location dying for makeover and upgrade*” [11. P. 73, 76] (emphasis added). The pointed allusion to Shakespeare’s presentation of England once more highlights the Isle of Wight’s role as a model, factually embracing the whole of Britain.

Moreover, the stage space is especially conscious of marking and securing its boundaries in order to secure its own specificity and way of communicating with other types of reality, which normally affords correlation but not interpenetration. Since the stage intends to delimit itself from the other, it naturally accepts the spatial and temporal remoteness of utopia. As canonised by More’s prototypical *Utopia*, this distancing serves also to preclude the integrity of the ideal world from any outside invasions. In this manner, the Island is rather anxious to insure its boundaries; in view of this a new patriotism is enthusiastically conjured to foster “a proud new insularity”. It advisably ignores what is left outside, which is characteristically formulated in terms of space and time employing the traditional utopian motif of the journey: “Why become voyeurs of social strain? Why slum it where people were burdened by yesterday, and the day before, and the day before that?” [11. P. 203].

Further, any chronotope is strongly determined by the characteristics of the objects available within its boundaries and by the way they can function within it. In this respect, the specifics of the chronotope of spectacles are determined by objects functioning as theatrical signs of signs. Likewise, the objects of utopian space are not to be directly experienced but only speculatively comprehended, since by their nature they are presented as belonging to nonexistent time and

place (οὐ τόπος – no place). The lack of direct referential definiteness characteristic of utopias makes their ontological status rather ambiguous on the whole. On this ground, a comparison between utopia and theatrical performance can be further developed and argued: that the reality of spectacle, as well as that of the utopia, is “figured out as a simulacrum so that it can be contemplated” [5. P. 122].

In Barnes’s novel, the artificial reality of the theme park is initially intended and designed for performative purposes. This is claimed to provide the audience with a cultivated ideal version of England and in so doing to double it through artistic representation, which the name of the new state – England, England – produced by reduplication of the original toponym also proves. Thus, the Island as a whole functions as a stage space to be equipped with proper attributes of set design and decorations. According to theatre’s basic requirement, it is deliberately reconstructed to present things as different from what they really are, as Fischer-Lichte puts it, “donning a different appearance and acting in a different way in a different space” [7. P. 8].

The space of the Isle of Wight is constructed as a special place of performance which is able to renunciate its actual ontological status and authentic practical functions to signify any other spaces the performers may find themselves in. Designed to represent the space of England, it contains some spatial micro-images that fulfil such a substitute function. “[T]he White Cliffs of Dover [were] relocated without much linguistic wrenching to what had previously been Whitecliff Bay”, “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” [11. P. 147] etc.

Consequently, only the objects that homologate with such a space and are susceptible to its influence can be tolerated within the theatrical universe – objects that can bear high semantic mobility and function as theatrical signs, practically, standing for something different from what they actually are: “All, however, is not as it seems. [...] the guardsmen are actors, Buckingham Palace is a half-size replica, and the gun salute electronically produced. Gossip has it that the King and Queen themselves are not real” [11. P. 178].

These objects are designed to artificially double the culture underlying the performances and so to preserve the features of Englishness most recognisable to the mass audience. This evokes the mechanism of theatrical meaning-generating which “interprets the signs generated by the culture [...] as the theatrical signs of signs” [7. P. 140]. As signs, they correlate not to objects of actual reality, but to other signs which the culture produces and in which it manifests its main concepts. The theme park, reduplicating the old England in every significant and standard cultural object in miniature, operates as a collection of simulacra. As Baudrillard states,

[n]o more mirror of being and appearances, of the real and its concept <...> rather, genetic miniaturisation is the dimension of simulation. The real is produced from miniaturised units, from matrices, memory banks and command models - and with these it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times [14. P. 167].

Barnes highlights the predominance in contemporary society of the technologically produced “replica” over “the original”. As the French intellectual claims in a suggestive allusion while addressing the Project’s Committee:

[W]e are talking of something profoundly modern <...> nowadays we prefer the replica to the original. We prefer the reproduction of the work of art to the work of art itself, the perfect sound and solitude of the compact disc to the symphony concert in the company of a thousand victims of throat complaints [11. P. 53].

This reversed priority is caused by fear of the original, of its insecurity and the “existential indecision” that a modern human experiences as existential anguish, the atavistic fear that forces people to seek shelter in artificial simulative replica and hence to prefer the predictability of copies – governable and thus approachable for comfortable digestion.

To understand this, we must understand and confront our insecurity, our existential indecision, the profound atavistic fear we experience when we are face to face with the original. We have nowhere to hide when we are presented with an alternative reality to our own, a reality which appears more powerful and therefore threatens us [11. P. 54].

Occupying one level beyond the real, the meta-reality of simulacra not only challenges the distinction between the natural and the artificial, but also desires to totally usurp the realm of the real, to absorb it and, thus, to impose itself as the one and only reality available. The project of the reduplicated England, England appears as an annexationist endeavor to suggest not a mere copy but rather “*the thing itself*” [11. P. 59]. Sir Jack Pitman exemplifies this by reference to an initially artificial object that evolved into natural functions ultimately acknowledged as such:

That lake you discern on the horizon is a reservoir, but when it has been established a few years, when fish swim in it and migrating birds make it a port of call, when the treeline has adjusted itself and little boats ply their picturesque way up and down it, when these things happen it becomes, triumphantly, a lake, don’t you see? It becomes the thing itself [11. P. 60–61].

This importantly bespeaks the function of theatrical space in England, England. It is presented as the terminal stage of simulation, in which a copy, desiring to be the only thing available, no longer requires any relation to any actual reality whatsoever, becoming “its own pure simulacrum”.

The objects of such a simulative reality are available for any degree of transformation in order to generate their own domain of the “real” that will be beyond substantiated justification. The theatrical meaning-generating process sanctions the meanings to be re-interpreted and thus possibly and presumably distorts and falsifies them depending upon the current expectations and needs of the social and cultural context. Moreover, what is supposed to ensure and justify fidelity to the real – an authentic individual and cultural memory – in fact maintains the falsifications. As Martha’s insight reveals, “[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 then” [11. P. 3].

So the cultural as well as individual memory on which we rely to secure the past relates not to reality, but only to its own previous distorted version that in turn is based on references to previous ones. Consequently, memory itself functions as a sign of a sign, responsible for inevitable distortions and ultimate dissolving of any original facts. In this manner, in the spectacles of the new England, England, “all unflattering traits of Englishness are discarded, and all the major historical figures and episodes are caricatured and simplified” [3. P. 109]. Moreover, accepted as the general principle of England, England’s existence, the authorised replica is aggressively “seeking to abolish the reality of those old edifices” [11. P. 54]. Struggling to replace the original, the copies reveal “the murderous capacity of images: murderers of the real; murderers of their own model as the Byzantine icons could murder the divine identity” [14. P. 170]. Thus, the cultural and national identity that they are supposed to accumulate and secure, appear irreversibly destroyed, lost in some arbitrary re-presentations, and that is one of the most significant revelations of the novel.

Expectedly, the more the Island of replicas is flourishing, the deeper the competitive Island of the original is getting buried in decay and destruction. So the access to the original, likewise to the authentic memory or past, appears to be blocked by intrusive simulations: “Old England had lost its history, and therefore – since memory is identity – had lost all sense of itself” [11. P. 251]. The imposed false memory/images of England are regarded as the only true reality usurping and annulling the real England.

Thus, in the novel the relations of the two spaces and hence of the two realities are presented not as those of mere reflection, but of substituting and usurping, an attempt to “deter every real process by its operational double, a metastable, programmatic, perfect descriptive machine” [15. P. 2].

Time of immobilised pseudo-cyclicity

Theatrical art is persistently concerned with the concept of Time as an object of artistic and philosophical reflection. In *England, England*, time is presented as the main concept, the Project’s “keyword”. The Theme Park recognises time as a commercial value; it is engaged as an object for creative, even though manipulative, endeavors of the Project’s producers to fabricate “an accumulation of time. Time” [11. P. 39]. Time itself is turned into raw material for constructing the artefact of England. As such, it is exposed to volitional rearrangement and purposeful representation as theatrical time.

First of all, theatre’s important function is to provide the conditions in which phenomena can exist and be experienced as ultimately developed in their innate nature though, for in actual reality, ever continuous and ever unfolding, they are always vague and incomplete. To perform this function, theatre constructs the chronotope as completed. In this respect, the theatrical atemporal present, its “*complete contemporaneity*” [7. P. 7], which creates such wholeness of the stage time, matches a utopian “frozen present”, enabling the utopian reality to exist as having come to its “perfect and static states” [16. P. 10]. To present perfect con-

structs, the utopian reality must necessarily be out of time. “In the Earthly Paradise time comes to a stop” [16. P. 6].

According to these principles of utopian projecting, perfected reality is vigorously implanted on the Isle of Wight constituted in the immobilised static present. As Gerber explains, “[t]he utopian imagination cannot remain content with far-off bliss and perfection. It not only wants to effect a radical change here, it also wants it now” [16. P. 45]. Echoing this, the Project’s main concerns are enunciated in similar terms, preserving the ordinary within the scopes of the enclosed time and space, which makes it extraordinary: “We want *here*, we want *now*, we want the *Island*, but we also want *magic*” [11. P. 120].

Characteristically, when England, England is depicted in its final arrangement, the tense of the narrative shifts from the retrospective past to the synchronic present – the everlasting “now”:

It is a classic springtime day outside Buckingham Palace. The clouds are high and fleecy, William Wordsworth’s daffodils are blowin’ in the wind, and guardsmen in their traditional ‘busbies’ are standing to attention in front of their sentry boxes. Eager crowds press their noses to the railings for a glimpse of the British Royal Family [11. P. 178].

This is the utopian temporal stop, the situation of a perpetual bliss that demands no further development. Reality is immobilised in certain qualities, authoritatively selected, deliberately frozen, and so always available now and here:

And what about the traditional chilly weather? That’s still around. There is even a permanent winter zone, with robins hopping through the snow, and the chance to join the age-old local game of throwing snowballs at the bobby’s helmet, and then running away while he slips over on the ice. You can also don a wartime gas-mask and experience the famous London ‘pea-soup’ fog. And if it rains, it rains. But only outdoors. Still, what would England, ‘original’ or otherwise, be without rain? [11. P. 184.]

The utopian reality accommodates itself in an ontological and historical vacuum. The resulting rupture with the historical continuum is one of the main principles of the Project’s ontological conception. The performative England, England glorifies rejection of historical determination and the historical process, an important precondition for utopian thought: “In comparison with the absolute bliss awaiting man outside time, the existence in time must be considered miserable, and the way out of time is the only satisfactory solution” [16. P. 6–7].

In the same way, inclusion in history itself is regarded as an inefficient burden threatening the whole mechanism of England, England’s utopia. Quite logically, the idea of disapproving and dispensing with history in the new social order is eagerly propagated and directed at the residents’ social consciousness:

Here, on the Island, they had learnt how to deal with history, how to sling it carelessly on your back and stride out across the downland with the breeze in your face. Travel light: it was true for nations as well as for hikers [11. P. 203].

Furthermore, to display the essential break with history, *England, England* employs other important qualities of the theatrical chronotope, the cyclicity and

multi-dimensionality of theatrical time and space, its ability to embrace other temporal and spatial dimensions. However, these qualities are reactualised according to the novel's conception. Having been turned into an object of observation, history is incorporated into collections of aesthetic-technological hybrids designed to present stereotypical Englishness. This echoes Debord's postulation that "[t]he end of cultural history" becomes apparent from "organisation of its preservation as a dead object in spectacular contemplation" (emphasis added) [12. P. 131–132].

Historical images are represented as withdrawn from their original context and accumulated in some limited place. The required temporal discontinuity is manifested in the spatially concurrent coexistence of different segments of historical time. "It was also [Sir Jack's] original stroke of lateral thinking which brought together in a single hundred-and-fifty-five square mile zone everything the Visitor might want to see of what we used to think of as England" [11. P. 179].

The constructs of the theme park's reality depend on the nature of theatrical time and space that accept any combinations of their units since they are relatively independent from exacting referential bounds. As semiotics postulates, theatricality allows regrouping "the significative structure by undertaking in the stage space a quasi-factual restructuring of the material structure of signs in that culture and presenting this to the audience" [7. P. 141]. As in theatre, the materiality of signs generated by other cultural systems is used to rearrange these "primary signs" into some eclectic assemblage where all of them can visually co-exist. By this token,

[t]hey had a half-size Big Ben; they had Shakespeare's grave and Princess Di's; they had Robin Hood (and his Band of Merrie Men), the White Cliffs of Dover, and beetle-black taxis shuttling through the London fog to Cotswold villages full of thatched cottages serving Devonshire cream teas; they had the Battle of Britain, cricket, pub skittles, Alice in Wonderland, The Times newspaper, and the One Hundred and One Dalmatians. The Stacpoole Marital Memorial Pool had been excavated and planted with weeping willows <...> The National Gallery had been hung and varnished. They had Bronte country and Jane Austen's house, primeval forest and heritage animals; they had music-hall, marmalade, clog- and Morris-dancers, the Royal Shakespeare Company, Stonehenge, stiff upper lips, bowler hats, in-house TV classic serials, half-timbering, jolly red buses, eighty brands of warm beer, Sherlock Holmes and a Nell Gwynn [11. P. 142].

The geographical and temporal distinctions that keep all these clearly attributed objects distinct are obliterated inside the stage space of the theme park, which embraces all the items of an "all-time list of The Fifty Quintessences of Englishness". It is a kind of historical museum, in which every installation is well equipped with an appropriate attribute, furnished by stereotypical tokens, made easily identifiable by visitors. These material attributes are ascribed to the recognisable social, ethical, and cultural context of a certain historical period typified by mass consciousness.

Thus, the Isle of Wright is constructed as an eclectic totality of distinct typified fragments of historical time epitomising the situation as follows: if there is

no historical continuum in which the society recognises itself and which is able to subject the space of the spectacular twilight world to lived time, “the forces of *historical absence* begin to compose their own exclusive landscape” [12. P. 126]. This historical absence is manifested as the dense accumulation of time in some limited space.

Theatrical representation paves the way for the regrouping of culturally and socially determined meanings. The manipulations of time and space correlate with manipulations of the present matrixes of historical meanings. This ultimately leads to “the invention of tradition”, as Barnes puts it, to a “*way [to] forget our own history*” (emphasis added) [2. P. 27], which the author acknowledges as one of the main issues of the novel.

Extracted from their authentic environment and merged into the new unity of England, England’s performance, the fragments of historical continuum appear amenable to realignment according to some ideological code in agreement with that of the audience. The images are provided with features adjusted to the modern social and cultural reality, to contemporary public tastes. In this manner, “a primal English myth” of Robin Hood is made politically correct and adapted to the present visitors’ expectations: “Band personnel had been realigned with great sensitivity; offensive elements in the scenario – old-fashioned attitudes to wildlife, over-consumption of red meat – had been expunged or attenuated” [11. P. 222]. By the same retouching transformations some other key events and figures of English history have been providently polished.

Real historical events as well as identifying national myths are introduced not authentically, but in the form in which they can be utilised for contemporary exploitation, and as such they appear detached from connection to any reality whatsoever, being their own simulacra. Their elements, serving as empty theatrical signs of historical and cultural signs, are naturally relativised in their similar role *as commodities*. This chronotope allows a high degree of variability, being at the same time essentially undifferentiated.

This displays the totalitarian ambitions of the spectacle society that ultimately aims at total ‘homogenisation’ of all events and things. Individual distinctions are rendered irrelevant to their functioning as images to be consumed by a spectacular society. The whole culture is turned into an article for trade, properly reduced to some catalogue of “digestible” and marketable items of national identity. Thus, the spectacle serving as an ideological system strives to subdue and neutralise the complexity of real life and history, reducing them to cartoonish simplifications to make them function effectively in utopian ideal reality.

Also importantly, the fabricated events of England, England’s spectacle are arranged in recurrent successions. They represent temporal fragments that having been abstracted from the historical continuum function within the theatrical eternal present. Mythical and historical micro-events, representative of the popular view of Englishness at its most favourable, such as “[t]he Trial of Oscar Wilde”, “the Battle of Britain”, “the Execution of Charles I” [11. P. 185], and the matches of Manchester United [11. P. 142], are repeatedly re-enacted. Staged according to a spectacle time-table, at regular intervals, they are submitted to some sped-up circular time.

This non-stop reappearance of temporal cycles does not aim, however, to provide a transpersonal experience for the participants like traditional theatre which “induces a change of consciousness in which the subject and the object merge” [17. P. 64]. Reality, fabricated out of some disjointed fragments, can be indirectly observed only, not immediately experienced, and in this sense becomes a pseudo-reality. In such a spectacle, theatrical cyclicity misses its primary purpose, which theatre inherited from the primordial ancient forms of Mystery and Festivals. The purpose of theatre in most of developed cultures is to involve individuals in a personal re-enactment of transpersonal events, and by so doing, complete their self-realisation. In England, England, on the other hand, actually explored and comprehended historical time and space are extracted from personal experience as inefficient forms of living. They are replaced by the technologically produced, easily digestible and efficiently commercialised time and space of the spectacle, in which the spectator’s consciousness is immobilised by illusive dynamics, so that cyclic time fails to be experienced as a movement toward an individual’s self-realisation.

Moreover, incorporated into this pseudo-cyclicity and subjected to the rules of spectacle, individual time is transformed into an empty revolving image and thus inevitably death as the culminating unique event of human existence appears socially rejected. The inherent desire of utopias for human immortality is finally satisfied in the Island’s theatrical pseudo-cyclic time. The social absence of life available through the spectacle appears homologous to the social absence of death. This is illustrated by the case of Sir Jack himself whose life and death are submitted to the “logic of marketing <...>. Sir Jack must live again” [11. P. 258]. A human being totally deprived of his personal self and replaced by an empty image to be recurrently reproduced by spectacle and likewise consumed by spectators is deprived also of his unique personal death. By this token, Sir Jack is to persist forever through a re-enacted theatrical pseudo-existence, as a sign of a sign of Sir Jack.

Break with history

The single actual purpose of the spectacle’s pseudo-involvement of the audience naturally is to ensure the existence and continuity of the spectacle (along with the commercial benefits associated with its continuation). Pseudo-events, crowdedly collected in some fixed time and space and inflated in their accelerated cyclical representations, merely inform the audience about themselves. The performances have no real intent to communicate a message. They are not designed to include the audience in any interpersonal meaning-generating communication. The main epistemological function of theatre is degenerated to the benefit of the secondary functions – entertainment and commerce; as Sir Jack prudently remarks, “people won’t be shelling out to learn things <...>. We don’t insult their ignorance” [11. P. 71].

The performance and the audience are related in mere commercial communication, which is totally detached from any epistemological or aesthetical significance. The only requirement the spectacle imposes upon the audience is the passive acceptance of its unquestionable and satisfying goods, and hence of its totalising utopian conception. The utopia of England, England appears to be a

“spectacle whose function is to make history forgotten within culture” (emphasis added) [12. P. 137]. Therefore it can ensure its existence only through the ignorance, indifference, and cognitive passivity of the audience, qualities on which it thrives and due to which it successfully projects its own history as the only reality available and accepted as such.

In this regard *England, England* depicts not only the fear of the real but more importantly the fear of the past and historical knowledge inherent in any utopia, since history is by nature a hazard to utopian equipoise and indeed to the very existence of utopia. Real history is fraught not only with the forces that lead to utopia, but also with the disruptive and disintegrating attitudes that prevent it from ever being accomplished.

Conclusion

Tightly intertwined with actual cultural and social strategies, theatre has always been an essential integrative part of social life. The constitutive principles of the chronotope of the novel under consideration allow it to be considered as a theatrical one. The author uses theatricality to take a reflective attitude towards the contemporary culture, to examine and display the strategies of political and social behaviour which are considered as immanently theatrical.

The specific enclosure of the theatre universe manifested within the typical utopian locus serves to arrange it as the space of utopian social experiment perfecting the latent tendencies of the culture and exposing them to critical observation. Theatrical “a-temporality” correlates to utopian “a-historicity” and unfolds the rupture with the historical continuum which gives free rein to its purposeful reconstructions. Theatrical images are subjected to regrouping in eclectic totality and recombinations of disrupted elements of the historical continuum. The cyclicity of the performances representing historical and mythical figures and the re-enacting events essential for national identity involves the spectators in pseudo-communication. It actually deprives them of experiencing real time and space, replacing it with the comfortable pseudo-experience of consuming surrogate images.

The main characteristics of theatrical chronotope are employed to develop the novel’s essential concerns with such issues as reconstruction of individual and national identity and their subjection to distorting speculations. Theatricality reveals the nature of a forward-looking industrial society as a commercial spectacle turning national culture and history into a manipulated commodity.

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