

The Fall(ing) Made Gentler: Nostalgia and Christianity in Julian Barnes's *England, England*

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Abstract

The article focuses on ways Julian Barnes's England, England presents the complexity of postmodern nostalgia, and explores the role nostalgic evocations of Christianity play in the novel's problematisation of the relation between the present and the past. It is argued that contemporary nostalgia – also depicted in the Barnes's novel – is heterogeneous, i.e., (1) it shows features of both a retreat from the present as well as reflection on the impossibility of such escape; (2) it allows for the ironisation of its desire to restore the lost thing or condition; (3) it maintains the interplay between irony and yearning, preventing irony from dominating the structure of contemporary nostalgia. In the article, the heterogeneous nostalgia in Barnes's England, England is studied with the help of the concept of the Fall (and the related concepts of the pre- and postlapsarian) and of the metaphor of the arrested falling, crucial for one of Barnes's characters. The article makes the ironically Christian colouring of the dynamics of nostalgia the basis for its reading of the Barnes's novel.

Thematised in many recently published texts, nostalgia proves to be anything but an innocent, undivided concept. Theorists like David Lowenthal, for whom inconsequential and guiltless nostalgia is a symptom of the inability to take the past seriously (Lowenthal, 7), or Gayle Green, who sees nostalgia as reductive, backward-looking, and therefore harmful (Green, 295-296), are outnumbered by critics who treat nostalgia as a highly complex, multifaceted cultural phenomenon. Linda Hutcheon, Svetlana Boym, Susan Steward, Paul Grainge, Frank Ankersmit, Stuart Tannock, Michael Pickering, Keith Tester – to name only the most important writers – have theorised nostalgia's heterogeneity, its paradoxicality or ambivalence, and question in that way the often taken for granted sentimental naivety, or unknknowingness

of the nostalgic attitude. Coupled with irony, flanked with serious reflection, spiced with non-tragic disillusionment, and motivated by concerns about the future, nostalgia seems to have already eaten from the postmodern Tree of Knowledge and lost its simplicity.

I am evoking the biblical image of the Fall and prelapsarian simplicity in the context of my historicised account of nostalgia for two reasons. The first is that nostalgia itself depends on the idea of discontinuity, lack or deprivation, of which the Fall and the prior state of plenty are particularly good images. As Tannock explains, "In the rhetoric of nostalgia, one invariably finds three key ideas: first, that of a prelapsarian world [...]; second, that of a 'lapse' (a cut, a Catastrophe, a separation or sundering, the Fall); and third, that of the present, postlapsarian world [...]" (Tannock, 456) The Fall is built into the structure of the nostalgic feeling, and nostalgia reacts to the deficient condition, employing various mechanisms to cope with the loss. The second reason is that one of the contemporary objects of nostalgia (understood especially in the un-Lowenthal-like way, henceforth labelled as "heterogeneous nostalgia") is Christianity and its biblically-grounded narrative of the original sin, charity and redemption. Suffice it to say here, that a whole host of influential thinkers of various stripes (many of whom are Marxist) turn to Christianity not so much to restore the stability of the Christian cultural home (*nostos* – Greek for "return home" – inscribed in the term "nostalgia") as to reflect on the clash between such desire and the inconclusiveness of this longing (*algia* – longing – in the term "nostalgia"), to linger in the ruins and to search for the still retrievable fragments of Christianity. Thus, notwithstanding the numerous differences between them, many novelists (e.g., Jeanette Winterson, Margaret Drabble, David Lodge, Julian Barnes, Jim Crace), philosophers (e.g., Alain Badiou, Gianni Vattimo, Slavoj Žižek, John Caputo) and critical theorists (e.g., Terry Eagleton) can be seen as displaying something of the Wittgensteinian family resemblance, due to which they critically, but not disparagingly, revisit Christianity. One of the elements retrieved via heterogeneous nostalgia, and either literally or only implicitly present in their writings, is the idea of the Fall. Understood as the movement between the prelapsarian unity and the postlapsarian impoverishment, the Fall figures as the imaginative crux of the multidimensional rethinking of the relation between the present and the past. Irreducible neither to the tragic sign of human exile from Edenic

unity nor to the *felix culpa* (fortunate fall) opening the possibility of redemption, the heterogeneously nostalgic attitude to the Fall is symptomatic of the recent post-secular atmosphere dominating the humanities. In the present article, I will focus on the mode in which the Fall, Christian belief and heterogeneous nostalgia are brought into an interplay in Julian Barnes's *England, England*, a British novel published in 1998 and shortlisted for the Booker Prize the same year. I will precede my reading of Barnes's novel, however, with a summary of the most important aspects of what I have dubbed "heterogeneous nostalgia."

**Theorising nostalgia:
structural dualism, multiple reshaping, ironic constitution**

The first feature of heterogeneous nostalgia, one that recurs in most contemporary accounts of this phenomenon, is its duality. On the most basic level, this means that nostalgia resembles "a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life." (Boym, xiv) Nostalgia is structurally dualistic, doubling up two different times – the past and the present. (Hutcheon, 198) On another level, seeing nostalgia as a double phenomenon helps to come to terms with the coexistence of reactionary, conservative *and* liberating, subversive dimensions of nostalgia. For example, starting from the premise that nostalgia functions as the search for continuity, Tannock distinguishes two ways in which nostalgic texts react to the experienced – and posited (Tannock, 456) - discontinuity. The nostalgic vision may be either one of "retreat" or of "retrieval." The former is motivated by the desire for a stable source of identity, community or agency believed to be unavailable in the present but allegedly offered by the past. The latter, in turn, is fuelled by the belief that the past sources are "retrievable as resources" (Tannock, 457), i.e., that the past is to be combed for elements usable in building the future. Retreat cordons nostalgic subjects off both the present and the future, isolating them inside the monolithic, stable past, while retrieval grows out of the longing for openness, for "a little breathing space" (Tannock, 456) the nostalgic subject finds in the past. Svetlana Boym argues that the two main ways of giving shape to longing are "restorative" and "reflective" nostalgias. Restorative nostalgia tries to protect absolute truth it locates

in the past, and return to the uncorrupted, original stasis. In this type of nostalgia, ambivalences are erased, while the belief in the Manichean good-evil battle is foregrounded. Evil becomes associated with the nostalgic subject's enemies against whom the *nostos* is paranoically reconstructed. The nostalgic subject feels obliged to fight the enemies to restore the imagined homeland they seem to threaten. Restorative nostalgia results in the "blandness and homogeneity" (Boym, 47) of the restored object, whose new flatness effectively eliminates all traces or scars that might have been left by the passing years. Consequently, the object of restorative nostalgia looks "old and brand new at the same time," (Boym, 46) which makes it an ideal commodity, source of entertainment, a popular merchandise. Reflective nostalgia, whose fathers according to Boym are Nietzsche, Benjamin and Baudelaire, is described as calling any absolute truth into doubt, dwelling on ambivalences of longing, and as perpetually delaying the homecoming. Reflective nostalgia focuses on the meditation on history and passage of time and takes "sensual delight in the texture of time not measurable by clocks and calendars." (Boym, 49) This nostalgic tendency is often humorous, inconclusive and ironic. It meditates on the shattered fragments of memory, never pretending to be keen on rebuilding some mythical place; it loves distance rather than the referent itself. Another explanation of the dualistic character of nostalgia is proposed by Paul Grainge, who distinguishes between nostalgia as "mood" (or "sentiment") and nostalgia as "mode" (or "style"). Nostalgia as mood is a response to loss or absence; it expresses the longing for authenticity, for unmediated experience, origin or nature. Unlike the nostalgia mood, which is based on the concept of painful experience of lack and the felt yearning, the nostalgia mode is founded on the postmodern sense of amnesia, the inability to relate the past and the present, understood outside the concepts of loss or longing. "The nostalgia mode questions the ability to apprehend the past at all in a postmodern culture distinguished by the profound waning of history. [...] When authenticity and time have themselves become victims of the postmodern speed, [...] forms of stylised nostalgia have been framed in relation to an incumbent memory crisis." (Grainge, 21) Where nostalgic mood symbolises emotions and locates meaning in the glorified past, nostalgic mode is a "representational effect," (Grainge, 21) a kind of stylised, technology-

depended entertainment for which the past is an “image and stylistic connotation.” (Grainge, 31).

The second feature of heterogeneous nostalgia is the complex interaction occurring between the two major aspects of nostalgia discussed above. Theorists of heterogeneous nostalgia repeatedly emphasise that, far from being confined to “trivialised mass representations, or sentimentalised expressions of regret and yearning for times past,” nostalgia “covers a range of ways of orienting to and engaging with the past.” (Pickering and Keightley, 926) This “range of ways,” also described as “multiple and different nostalgias among individuals and communities of social groups throughout Western modernity,” (Tannock, 928) are the effects of the two main dimensions of contemporary nostalgia criss-crossing, reshaping and informing each other. Thus, Tannock points out that “retreat and retrieval are never entirely separate, there being an element of each in every nostalgic vision [...]” (Tannock, 459) Svetlana Boym emphasises that though reflective and restorative nostalgias “do not coincide in their narratives and plots of identity,” they nevertheless “overlap in their frames of reference,” using the same symbols or bits of cultural memory to tell different stories about them. (Boym, 49) For Paul Grainge,

[i]t is important not to exaggerate or schematise the difference between mood and mode; nostalgic sentiments in social life can, of course, be related to nostalgic styles in cultural production. Particular periods or eras that have been characterised as nostalgic have frequently witnessed a proliferation of cultural forms and genres that, at some level, reflect and embed a prevalent economic and/or politically determined mood. (Grainge, 21)

Thus, nostalgic mood and mode – as well as other manners of discussing the double character of nostalgia - keep intersecting, producing a characteristically ambivalent contemporary relation between the sense of the (more or less) poignant estrangement from the past, and the sense of our (variously imagined and executed) abilities to handle the past in the present.

The third feature of heterogeneous nostalgia is its ironic or paradoxical constitution. Irony has recently become nostalgia's strange

bedfellow. Admittedly, irony can be perceived as kind of an undercurrent in the other two features of heterogeneous nostalgia simply because, similarly to double-exposure-like nostalgia, it is based on the duality of the said and the unsaid (there is a "secret hermeneutic affinity" between irony and nostalgia." [Hutcheon, 198]) Like the ambiguous interplay between the differently theorised aspects of nostalgia (retreat/retrieval, restoration/reflection, mood/mode), irony does not congeal into an easy pattern with neatly delineated parts. Irony marks the core of Boym's reflective nostalgia, and remains an unacknowledged ally of Grainge's commercially-wise nostalgic mode, pouncing on any marketable element of the past. As Linda Hutcheon observes, postmodernism foregrounds the conjunction of irony and nostalgia, without allowing the two to function as simple alternatives or mutually exclusive components of culture. Hence, "[t]o call something ironic or nostalgic is, in fact, less a *description* of the ENTITY ITSELF than an *attribution* of a quality of RESPONSE." (Hutcheon, 199) The not-so-obvious affinity between irony and nostalgia indicated by Hutcheon means that neither of these belongs to the object, but both are aspects of our active participation or reaction to the object. Since any decision about ironic or nostalgic attribution depends on the subject, the same object may generate both responses in various subjects. Moreover, it may be impossible to decide today whether a cultural product is a nostalgic or ironic phenomenon, as the subject may perceive an object as simultaneously both.

In the postmodern, [...], nostalgia itself gets both called up, exploited, and ironised. This is a complicated (and postmodernly paradoxical) move that is both ironising of nostalgia itself, of the very urge to look backward for authenticity, and, and the same time, a sometimes shameless invoking of the visceral power that attends the fulfilment of that urge. (Hutcheon, 205)

Contemporary culture remains dedicated to the pursuit of the auratic, the original, and the unmediated, but at the same time distrusts and ironises its own urge to find authenticity. Taking into account the postmodern consciousness of the fact that the very search for the authentic makes authenticity unavailable (e.g., the tourist demand for the

virgin places depletes their number, substituting them for staged-authenticity places [Frow, 123-130]), nostalgia cannot but be seen as undercut by irony. Accordingly, as a deliberately employed style, the nostalgic mode may self-consciously evoke yearning (mood), complicating it with signals that indicate the longing's constructedness and cultural dependence. We can miss things we have never lost or actually experienced; we can allow ourselves the *fun* of being nostalgic. Yet, we can also treat nostalgia as a proof that beyond the concerns of the here and now, there is still something else that stirs us non-ironically, though we remain deeply sceptical about the truth of that "something else."

This complicated conflation of the ironic and the nostalgic is the point at which heterogeneous nostalgia opens onto the problem of the Fall. Heterogeneous nostalgia is dissatisfied with both the simple sense of absence as well as by the sense of the consolidated, stabilised, ironic knowingness. It is too ironic to search for some past or present firm ground (including the ground of full self-understanding and closure) and too desiring to forget its constitutive lack. If the Fall designates distortion and corruption, heterogeneous nostalgia partakes of its logic because both aspects of nostalgia are distorted or deprived of their self-contained integrity. Ironised nostalgia is (1) the sentiment falling from the appearance of the purity of *algia*, and (2) the stylised effort falling from the complicity of *nostos* it found in irony. Heterogeneous nostalgia taints ideals, questions disillusionment and brings their disfigured versions together. Thus, in nostalgia, both the desire and irony are corrupted and marked with something alien to them, while their potentially monolithic character is suspended. They are fallen, or rather falling, as it is in Julian Barnes's *England, England*, in which "a sense of falling, falling, falling, [...] and then an awareness that the fall was being made gentler, was being arrested," (Barnes, 238) is one of the crucial images.

**Ironising the postlapsarian:
heterogeneous nostalgia in Julian Barnes's *England, England***

Barnes's *England, England* tells a story of Martha Cochrane, a brilliant young woman employed by the tycoon Jack Pitman to cooperate on and

supervise the Project, i.e., the creation of the top-notch tourist attraction called "England, England," offering all quintessentially English cultural products and phenomena in one place. Located on the Isle of Wight, "England, England" is a kind of miniaturised replica of England, which first rivals and then eradicates its original. The rise of "England, England" and the fall of the Old England go hand in hand with the rise of Martha (who manages to oust Pitman from the leading position) and her fall (she is betrayed by Paul - her lover and anti-Pitman co-conspirator - and exiled from "England, England"). Significantly, the novel suggests a possibility of relating the two falls: the Project's logo is the image of Betsy's fall, which is a pictorial rendering of a legend about a woman swept off the cliff and miraculously saved by the gust of wind puffing up her crinolines and helping her land unscathed. Depending on who deals with the image, it elicits responses that either foreground or weaken the ironic dimension. On the one hand, the image cynically resuscitates the (mostly untrue) past and manipulates the reactions of those expecting the past to be both safely familiar and enthrallingly magic (Betsy's fall becomes a bungee jump); in that sense, Betsy's fall represents the ironic appropriation of restorative/retreat/mood nostalgia underlying the Project. On the other hand, the image becomes an emblem of Martha's broodings on Christianity and acts as a metaphorised version of the Christian Fall-and-Redemption narrative, mediating Martha's nostalgic respect for the myth that had the power to attract and inspire people; in that sense, the image of the falling Betsy represents the serious yearning for the past whose world order is seen through the prism of reflective nostalgia. The old Christian worldview may be demystified as based on the manipulated story, yet the understanding of its inauthenticity does not preclude Martha's authentic nostalgia. Without getting naively sentimental, Martha weakens her ironic predisposition and allows the wise heterogeneous nostalgia to overcome her.

In "England, England" the programmatic attitude to the past excludes anything resembling what Stuart Tannock discussed as the nostalgic "retreat". Pitman's Project is predicated on the idea that the original is superfluous and old-fashioned, so the dedication to it should be abandoned for the sake of the celebration of the copy, re-presentation and the replica now understood as "an enhancement and enrichment, an ironisation and summation of the world." (Barnes, 55) In an aptly

postmodern manifesto for “England, England,” delivered by a Frenchman (a person, admittedly, made by Barnes into a subtle parody of a poststructuralist theorist), it is announced that we need to “dismiss as sentimental and inherently fraudulent all yearnings for what is dubiously called 'the original'. We must demand the replica since the reality, the truth, the authenticity of replica is the one we can possess, colonise, reorder, [...] and finally, [...] confront and destroy.” (Barnes, 55) The Project relies on the deeply ingrained belief that what we take to be original is in fact a copy whose derived status was forgotten. The novel abounds in inlaid stories illustrating this belief: Sir Jack Pitman explains that the hill he stood on the other day, the one the Project Manager would take to be “an example of Nature,” is not natural since it used to be an Iron Age burial mound (Barnes, 60); Paul tells Martha a story of a Russian composer who, sent by Stalin to collect folk songs in the Caucasus but confronted with the absence of any such songs, decides to write some himself rather than be killed for negligence (Barnes, 65-66); history turns out to be a manipulatory narrative rather than a “lucid, polyocular transcript of reality.” (Barnes, 148) Gradually, the burial mound, the bogus folk songs and historical accounts acquire the status of the original, authentic picture of reality, as a consequence of which we start to be nostalgic for what we think they signify. “England, England,” however, does away with the embarrassingly naïve nostalgia and instead ironically proposes “*the thing itself*.” (Barnes, 61, italics in the original) In a masterly orchestrated and profit-oriented handling of England's past, “England, England” presents for tourist consumption the staged authenticity of Robin Hood and his band, the Battle of England, Dr Johnson and the Buckingham Palace (to name just a few attractions). The stylised nostalgia mode satisfies the top-dollar people's desire to plunge into “a guilt-free homecoming” (Boym, xiv) – curious Americans consciously choose “England, England” because they “still feel kinship with [...] the country from which the *Mayflower* set sail [...]” (Barnes, 184) Above all, the Project's boredom-proof, politically-correct version of the past relies on everyone's tacit knowledge of the ironic distance between the so-called original and the copy.

Such knowledge seems to be evoked even by those fragments of the novel which deal with characters' efforts to recover origins or disclose truth. When Dr Max, the Project's Official Historian, divulges to Jeff the secret of his “Petersburg” perfumes (they were produced

according to the instructions in an original, old blending-book discovered in the blocked chimney), his story is not met with enthusiasm. Dr Max's comparison of the reconstructed perfumes to the successfully cloned extinct animal ("It's like scientists cloning animals lost to the planet for millennia" [Barnes, 72]) is shrugged off by Jeff with the curt "It makes you *smell* like a cloned animal." (Barnes, 72) What fascinates Dr Max is the operation of the restorative nostalgia, or – to be more precise – its subclass called by Svetlana Boym "technonostalgia" and "a Jurassic Park syndrome." (Boym, 33) These forms of the restorative nostalgia employ technology to provide the audience with a total restoration of the past which is beyond anyone's recall. Like the cloned dinosaurs in the film Jurassic Park, enacting the fulfilment of the desire for eternal recreation and reversibility of time, the restoration of the perfumes seems to be an answer to the nostalgia for splendour and sophistication (Dr Max invokes Versailles) as well as power (he hints at the Tsar and his aristocrats). Yet the restoration concerns only the highly volatile smell that will not stay long and will evaporate together with the particular mode of the nostalgic fashion. As Jeff wryly indicates, Dr Max does not smell like the Tsar but like a cloned animal, i.e., he has around him the air of the contemporary high-tech laboratory rather than that of the eighteenth century Russian court. Thus, the restorative/retreat nostalgia becomes ironised, which is made even more palpable by the immediate context of Dr Max's conversation with Jeff. Jeff reminds Dr Max that "people won't be shelling out to *learn* things [in England, England]. [...] They'll come to us to enjoy what they already know." (Barnes, 71) In other words, the Project's cultivation of the past is not inspired by the desire to investigate or reflect on history but by an easy, commercialised nostalgia that ironically recognises its own limitations.

Another moment in the novel when not only the yearnings for the prelapsarian but also the truth itself become ironised is Martha and Paul's discovery of Jack Pitman's secret way of getting sexual satisfaction. Pretending to be a dedicated nephew of his elderly aunt, Pitman regularly visits a special type of brothel whose clients derive pleasure from being literally treated like babies. Martha and Paul learn that inside the auntie's house, Pitman is breast-fed, powdered, provided with a nappy, a cot and a gigantic pram, and that his climax is coordinated with his baby-style defecation. Pitman's dirty secret may be seen as a ridiculous way of pursuing something that is irrevocably lost, a pitiful

reenactment of the blissful childhood, a caricature of the return home – the *nostos* – from which all pain (the *algia*) has been eradicated and which manages to collapse baby innocence with adult sexual gratification. Pitman's nostalgic retreat into the Golden Age of childhood is presented as grotesque, and his recreated experience of the prelapsarian is shown as unmistakably fallen. Martha and Paul discover the truth about Jack Pitman; however, this is a truth of a staged fantasy, a truth made possible by an untruth, a lie authenticated by an expensive, life-like performance of the auntie's staff. Hence, the novel neither merely asserts nor rejects the authenticity of Jack Pitman's "original" sin, but plays one against the other.

There is one more point in Barnes's *England, England*, which foregrounds the problem of the unavailability of the original. In the opening chapter of the whole novel we learn of Martha's childhood and of the loss she will continue to cope with in her mature life. Martha's father decides to abandon his family, which apart from causing everyone's emotional disorientation has a more tangible effect on the little girl's life. Martha liked to play with the Counties of England jigsaw puzzle, whose pieces her father used to snatch away, offering them back on his return home. Father's return coincided with the completion of the puzzle, symbolically representing the state of wholeness and promising the fulfilment of the desire for the lost thing. When her father disappears, a part of the jigsaw puzzle is gone as well – the Fall occurs, marring the wholeness of the toy and, metaphorically, of her world. That one missing piece of the puzzle will remain "one tiny yet ineradicably painful thing for which she could never find a cure." (Barnes, 23) The desire for the father's *nostos*, accompanied by the acute pain (*algia*) caused the loss of the favourite toy's completeness, transform Martha into a nostalgic subject, who many years later will know very well "what she wanted: truth, simplicity, love, kindness, companionship [...]." (Barnes, 134) However nostalgic Martha became, she simultaneously persists in her ironic attitude towards the world, which will later grant her the position of the Appointed Cynic in the Pitman's group. She is ironic enough to realise that the pure origin – and probably the authenticity of the story of the jigsaw puzzle and the missing piece – is unattainable. The memory of her childhood play, like any other memory for that matter, "wasn't a solid sizeable thing, which time [...] might decorate down the years with fanciful detail [...] but could never expunge. 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 back then." (Barnes, 3) Since the story of Martha's childhood is preceded with the quoted above passage, an ironic distance from the "truths" offered by the ensuing narrative is maintained. The restoration of the missing piece "was a true memory, but Martha was suspicious; it was true but it wasn't unprocessed. She knew it had happened, because it had happened several times; but in a resulting amalgamation the distinguishing marks of each separate time [...] had been lost." (Barnes, 6) The authenticity of the remembered past is to be mistrusted because it is coloured and transformed by what happened afterwards. Yet, as Martha soon finds out, the coloured and the distorted may rival the original. She was "a clever girl, and therefore not a believer," who decided "she would pray differently" (Barnes, 12) and compose her own version of the Our Father prayer. The coloured prayer was:

Alfalfa, who farts in Devon,
Bellowed be thy name.
They wigwam come.
Thy will be scum
In Bath, which is near the Severn.
Give us this day our sandwich spread,
And give us our bus-passes,
As we give those who bus-pass against us,
And lead us not into Penn Station,
Butter the liver and the weevil.
For thine is the wigwam, the flowers and the story,
For ever and ever ARE MEN. (Barnes, 12-13)

The imaginative recreation of the Pater Noster is not merely an instance of childish blasphemy. Rather, it bears witness to the fact that "the past was never just the past, it was what made the present able to live with itself." (Barnes, 6) Christian narrative, perceived here as a resource enabling retrieval needed for "identity-building projects in the present" (Tannock, 457), is integrated into the structures of the heterogeneous nostalgia, within which it yields to ironic transformation.

**Attenuated irony, nostalgic maturity:
the *felix culpa* of Martha Cochrane**

At a certain point, however, the carefully managed irony of heterogeneous nostalgia, whose many examples I discussed above, begins to slip out of control. A couple of years after the Project became reality, the “smugglers” hired for the fake smuggling raids turn into real smugglers, carrying out their business against the law of “England, England.” The Robin Hood people start stealing and eating animals used as the necessary items in the *tableaux-vivants* of the island’s restored past. The actor impersonating Dr Johnson becomes Dr Johnson and refuses to act according to the script supplied by the Project’s authorities. He probably follows another – equally inauthentic – script, now specifying to him what it means to be Dr Johnson, but the point is that the required distance between the historical person and the contemporary identity is minimised. Uncannily reenacting the scenario of the artificial changing into the original (compare the burial mound becoming the natural hill), “England, England” adds one more ironic twist to its already established nostalgic mode. Now, the replica of Dr Johnson behaves as if he were the real Dr Johnson, while “in fact” he only loses touch with the “reality” as defined by the “England, England” code. When in one of the “non-synchronous episodes of the nation’s history” (Barnes, 228) the Iranian Embassy Siege group fails to neutralise the rebellious Robin Hood band, the buff battle between the two groups proves to be a commercial success with the tourists. The historical untruth is bracketed off by anyone watching, and the stylised nostalgic version of the past again proves the norm – “cross-epoch conflict clearly had strong Visitor Resonance.” (Barnes, 232) More importantly, it transpires that the battle was doubly staged since the scenario prepared by Martha was superimposed with another scenario prepared by Pitman. Martha wanted to teach the Robin Hood men a lesson plus have a nice show for the tourists, whereas Pitman planned to have a good show and discredit Martha, which all in all had the effect of out-ironising the ironic master.

Interestingly, in the Dr Johnson episode Barnes’s narrative downplays for a moment its usual irony and amplifies the characters’ focus on understanding the mechanism of loss. Though irony is not altogether abandoned, its grip is visibly lessened. After a failed attempt to bring “Dr Johnson” to his senses (“She’d heard of method acting, but

this was the worst case she'd ever come across" [Barnes, 211]), Martha changes from her voice-of-the-Project discourse ("We want you to be 'Dr Johnson', don't you understand?" [Barnes, 211]) to the discourse of somebody recounting her disappointment in love and her yearning for true feelings ("What about love, Sir?"). Strikingly, Dr Johnson's transformation, Martha's question and her blushing were "absurd, [...] yet [...] didn't *feel* absurd." (Barnes, 212, emphasis added) Martha does not stop being ironically self-conscious, but she allows herself to fall for the seriousness of behaviour and the gravity of ideas of her bizarre, melancholic interlocutor. She falls for it because "his pain was authentic because it came from authentic contact with the world." (Barnes, 218) When "Dr Johnson" became Dr Johnson, i.e., when he shook off "the protective quotation marks," (Barnes, 217) he changed into a vulnerable human being whose authenticity is not diminished even by his historically mistimed behaviour or by Martha's professional scepticism. To step out from the distancing power of quotation marks and irony is to fall victim to a fully fledged "hypochondria of the heart," (Boym, 7) to nostalgia as an incurable disease, a "modern malaise." (Lowenthal, 4)

Although Martha is deeply moved by what happened to Dr Johnson, she never totally renounces the ironic dimension of her heterogeneous nostalgia. The incident with Dr Johnson triggers in Martha the desire to visit "[t]he church of St Aldwyn [which] lay half-overgrown in one of the few parts of the Island still unclaimed by the Project." (Barnes, 218) The dilapidated, disused church, which has resisted the Project's spiralling ironisation of nostalgia, attracts Martha in the same manner "England, England" attracts American tourists: she is disappointed with her life and curious. (Barnes, 220) Significantly, her curiosity is bordering on envy insinuating itself as she skims the list of the former parishioners. "What did they know [...]? More than she knew, or less? Nothing? Something? Everything?" (Barnes, 220) When Martha remembers her refashioned Lord's Prayer and her youthful certainty of the Christian story's untruth, she realises she is no longer as sanguine about her judgements as she used to be. Previously, she claimed that "it isn't true, they made it up to make us feel better about death, they founded a system, they used the system as a means of social control, no doubt they believed it themselves, but they impose faith as something irrebuttable [...]." (Barnes, 220) Now, she asks, "was that the end of the argument, or was she just a wretched unidea'd girl?" (Barnes, 220) For

Martha, neither “getting religion” (Barnes, 220) nor rejecting Christianity will help her “cut the knot” of the incessant self-mockery (Barnes, 237-238). She is not in a church because of God. (Barnes, 237) “[H]er case did not replicate the old clergy-pleasing story. Yet was there a parallel? Dr Max did not believe in salvation, but perhaps she did, and felt she might find it among the remnants of a greater, discarded system of salvation.” (Barnes, 236) Here, Martha practises nostalgia as retrieval, i.e., she rummages among the debris of Christianity to find ideas on which she could build her future life. What she needs to carry on is the sense of seriousness which will make her future more bearable, and in the world gradually redefined by the “England, England” mentality, Christianity seems the only resource with such seriousness on offer.

Barnes filters those reflections through a kind of psychomachy - an internal battle in which one of Martha's voices stays thoroughly ironic, while the other argues for the wise pursuit of nostalgia. “Brittle cynicism is a truer response to the modern world than this ... sentimental yearning,” argues the first voice. (Barnes, 237) “No, it's not sentimental. On the contrary,” responds the second voice. (Barnes, 237) The internal conflict illustrates the tension between the two dimensions in the heterogeneous nostalgia and does not allow the nostalgic sentiment to stand unaccompanied by the distancing, ironising perspective. Its outcome, however, shows how irony may be maintained yet prevented from dominating the structure of nostalgia. Martha recalls Betsy's falling and perceives it as “a short, eternal moment that was absurd, improbable, unbelievable, true.” (Barnes, 238) In the jamming of the mutually exclusive adjectives, all of which are related to the jarring-but-combined images of the Christian Fall and the Project-related falling, Martha finds her inspiration. If initially Martha's heterogeneous nostalgia develops despite the observed inauthenticity of her memories, now her nostalgia feeds on the mildly ironic celebration of the potentially false, culturally mediated Christian-mythic image. Thus, in the first chapter we read that “even if you [...] grasped the impurity and corruption of the memory system, you still, part of you, believed in that innocent, authentic thing – yes, thing - you called a memory.” (Barnes, 6-7) Towards the end of the novel, it is said that “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.” (Barnes, 238) Even if Christian

stories focus on events that never happened or happened differently, they should be nostalgically (i.e., heterogeneously) celebrated for the sake of their potential support for a new community. Martha enters such community in her old age, when she decides to move and settle in Anglia – an impoverished, backward country which replaced the no longer existing Old England. People in Anglia “comb the past for every sense of possibility and destiny it might contain,” (Tannock, 458) and conclude that the old Christian faith suits well their needs and their “neither idyllic nor dystopic” life. (Barnes, 256) Together with other villagers, Martha goes to church and sits “through inoffensive sermons, with stomach calling out for the joint of lamb [...]. For thine is the wigwam, the flowers and the story: just another pretty verse.” (Barnes, 258) The villagers do live according to “an attenuated Christian code,” but what they need is not spiritual advice as much as “regular society.” (Barnes, 262) Christianity belongs to the strange conglomerate of various fragments of the past revived in Anglia, laying foundations for the Village Fete and the tall stories of Jez Harris - a “city-bred American with a joke accent [who] made one of the most convincing and devoted villagers.” (Barnes, 261) On the one hand, Christianity binds people – to each other and to the past; on the other hand, Christian faith is present only nostalgically, as the irredeemably distant thing, as something you realise “you could never have known.” (Barnes, 260)

Ironically Christian, heterogeneous nostalgia continues to inform the last pages of the Barnes's novel. Anglia is reduced to toll-bridges, scythes and wind-pumps, which seems to caricature the simplistic nostalgia for the good old days, and signals the need for the sustained ironic distance to any naïve nostalgic restoration. Simultaneously, however, the country's technological deterioration runs parallel to its ecological and social improvement. Wild life and seasons return; local food is appreciated; “without traffic, the village felt safer and closer; without television, the villagers talked more, even if there seemed less to talk about than before.” (Barnes, 256) The return of the past lifestyles – the nostalgic dream come true – has its bright sides as well. And it is the balance between the ironisation and affirmation of nostalgia that looms large at the end of the novel. Martha envies children the ability to believe and disbelieve simultaneously, to be stimulated by deception and to see the deception *as* deception. In a way, she is nostalgic about their Betsy-like state of the yet “arrested fall,” knowing that herself, she is only a

“copied and coarsened” version of “a woman swept and hanging, a woman half out of this world, terrified and awestruck, yet in the end safely delivered.” (Barnes, 238)

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