

A Memorial Address to a Passing Civilisation: Roger Scruton's Elegy for England

Tomáš Jajtner

ABSTRACT

The present article deals with the concept of England, its culture and tradition in the work of well-known contemporary British conservative philosopher, Roger Scruton (b. 1944). His idea of English culture develops from the notion of home and belonging: in that sense, the England he mourns over what was once an "enchanted" place radiating a more or less comforting view of the English way of life. The article starts with a discussion of the process of "enchanted" England, then moves onto the physiognomy of Englishness, in particular the unique nature of various English institutions, and finally deals with Scruton's defence of the nation state and the "situatedness" of English politics. The conclusion aims at evaluating Scruton's contribution to the current discussion about English identity as well as its future in the EU and in the globalised world.

KEYWORDS

Roger Scruton, modern English conservatism, English culture, decline of the British society since World War II

1. Introduction

*What follows is a memorial address: I speak of England as I knew it, not as the country might appear to the historian. My intention is not to add to the store of factual knowledge, but to pay a personal tribute to the civilisation that made me and which is now passing from the world. Since the Second World War the Owl of Minerva has hovered uninterruptedly above my subject [...]*¹

These words introduce Roger Scruton's book-length essay *England: an Elegy*, first published in 2000 to mark the legacy of English culture at the turn of the century.² However, his perceived decline of English culture and institutions since World War II (in particular the triumph of cheap pop culture, decline of public decency, internationalization of England, destruction of the countryside and traditional folk culture as well as the declining state of Anglicanism), had been a topic of his writing even earlier. Since the end of the 1990s, Roger Scruton has published a handful of texts focusing on various aspects of the supposedly vanishing English cultural and political consciousness.³ Scruton has

1 Roger Scruton, *England: an Elegy* (London: Pimlico, 2001), vii.

2 Originally published by Chatto & Windus (London, 2000).

3 Some of Scruton's book-length texts specifically dealing with "English" subjects include *On Hunting* (South Bend: St. Augustine Press, 1998), a defence of fox hunting, which also mentions other subjects like the slow decline of English society, the collapse of high culture and public decency as well as others that are further elaborated upon in *England: an Elegy*. His *News from Somewhere: on Settling* (London: Continuum, 2004), can be understood as a *cri-de-coeur* of a country dweller who is defending the values of English rural life. His autobiography *Gentle Regrets: Thoughts from a Life* (London: Continuum, 2006) explains the historical roots of

once been called an “intellectual dissident” in strongly liberal England,⁴ his views have, however, gained eminence beyond strictly conservative circles in the last couple of years and his authority has been strengthened by various prestigious appointments.⁵

This article will describe and analyse Scruton’s affirmative “anatomy of England” that can be found in the key books and articles he has published on the subject. Although his interpretation may represent a minority view in the United Kingdom, it presents an elegant and articulate form of contemporary British conservatism whose voice enriches not only the debate about the future of England, but presents an alternative view (and method) in the field of British cultural studies in general.

2. England re-enchanted and dis-enchanted: England as a home then and now

In defining England, Scruton tests the validity of several related concepts: *nation*, *country*, *political community*. These all seem to be relevant in varying degrees, but the key concept for Scruton is the idea of *home* and the type of “membership” that goes with it. *Home* is a reality that precedes reflection, even when it is faced with an apparent paradox:

Things at home don’t need explanation. They are there because they are there. It was one of the most remarkable features of the English that they required so little explanation of their customs and institutions. They bumbled on, without anyone asking the reason why or anyone being able, if asked to provide it. Continental observers often accused the English of a disrespect for reason, and an unwillingness to think things through. But if the result of thinking things through is paradox, why should reason require it?⁶

In this sense, even English institutions can be defined from the experience of *home*.⁷ Home, however, is not a static “place”; it is a space domesticated by customs, images and stories. It is therefore an *enchanted* place whose culture can be understood as a process of *re-enchanted* the land,⁸ i.e., of recreating and sanctifying the transient experience of being into a home. For Scruton, this is also the case with the crucial turning points in literature: they may be seen precisely as these attempts to re-enchant the land. Scruton thus equates history of literature (and high culture in general) with the history of “topographical imagination” filling the concept of home with a peculiar flavour. The English imagination has, thus, been “re-enchanted” in:

his conservative creed and the context that gave rise to his defence of England and its traditions. His recent book *Our Church: A Personal History of the Church of England* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012) explaining the “personal story” of his Anglicanism combines a long commentary on the roots Anglicanism with its peculiar blending of religion and the English way of life.

- 4 See the cover of his *Gentle Regrets*: “Roger Scruton is Britain’s best known intellectual dissident, who has defended English traditions and English identity against an official culture of denigration.”
- 5 Here his 2008 election to the Fellowship at the British Academy in recognition of his outstanding academic achievements should be stressed.
- 6 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 16. The theme of home is also greatly developed in *News from Somewhere* (Chapter 4 “Our Home”, 93-122) as well as in *Gentle Regrets* (Chapter 11 “Returning Home” 197-218). Scruton’s biographer Mark Dooley characterizes his philosophy as the “affirmation of home, soil and settlement”. Roger Scruton: *The Philosopher on the Dover Beach* (London: Continuum, 2009), 5.
- 7 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 19.
- 8 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 40.

[...] Shakespeare's Arden, in Milton's Eden, in Gray's *Elegy*, in the poetry of John Clare, in the novels of Fielding, in Blake's lyrics and mystical writings and – pre-eminently – in the *Prelude* of Wordsworth. [...] The real tradition of English literature continued in its ancient way – not grieving over a Merrie England that had never existed, but re-enchanting the landscape, as Hardy and Hopkins did, as Lawrence did and as Eliot did in *Four Quartets*. Those writers turned to the landscape not in order to sentimentalise it, but in order to discover another order, a hidden order, which had been overlayed by history but which was, nevertheless, the true meaning of that history and the deep-down explanation of our being here.⁹

The *sense of membership* related to the English sense of patriotism can thus be more reliably explained through tradition and example than by abstract argument.¹⁰ The commonly shared “enchantment” re-enacts the personal structure of the world inscribed into the country of “our” birth.¹¹ “England” for Scruton is a place imagined and inscribed by *language, religion and high culture* which protect it from sinking into the wasteland of the modern no-man's land.¹² Scruton's polemics against the *soixante-huitards* are driven precisely by this notion of a nation which is not based on outer signs of identification, such as power distribution, institutions or borders, but on the personal spirit of a given culture:

[...] a nation is defined not by institutions or borders but by language, religion and high culture; in times of turmoil and conquest it is those spiritual things that must be protected and reaffirmed.¹³

This hidden personality of the “country” calls for a culture of respect, a respect whose roots recall a religious basis. The culture of “repudiation”, which Scruton associates mainly with the New Left, is based on the idea that our world is a constructed world, a fragmentary world with no binding force and can, therefore, be freely de-constructed, debunked and repudiated.¹⁴ In fact, such a “forbidding of England” links all tradition with ideology and destroys a fundamental longing of the human soul, i.e., the longing for *homecoming* and for *personal safety*. This primeval experience of home is thus “dis-enchanted”:

9 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 41.

10 Cf. Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 49.

11 This is, indeed, a wider trait of Scruton's philosophical work: human subjectivity finds its reflection in the personal structure of its “lived world”. Scruton's position on this issue is summarized by Mark Dooley: “Man is, at one and at the same time, object *and* subject. To treat him merely as an object is, therefore, an act of *desacration* – a squandering of his personhood and a denial of his subjectivity. But that, suggests, Scruton, is what happens whenever we search for the so-called ‘really real’ in defiance of the ‘personality of the world’. To reach the really real would require us to scrape away all the marks of human subjectivity that lie across the surface of our world. Human beings express their subjectivity through creative acts that make the world intelligible and meaningful.” *Roger Scruton: The Philosopher on the Dover Beach*, 12-13.

12 Cf. Scruton, *The Philosopher on the Dover Beach: Essays* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990): “It is difficult, however, to retain the sense of the sacred without the collective ritual which compels us to listen to the voice of the species. For the modern intellectual, who stands outside the crowd, the memory of enchantment may be awakened more easily by art than by prayer... without the sacred, man lives in a depersonalised world.” Quoted in Dooley, *The Philosopher on the Dover Beach*, 7.

13 Scruton, *Gentle Regrets*, 33-34.

14 Cf. Roger Scruton, *Modern Culture* (London: Continuum, 2005), 130-134.

The land loses its history and its personal face; the institutions become administrative centres, operated by anonymous bureaucrats who are not us but them. The bureaucratic disenchantment of the earth has therefore been felt more keenly in England than elsewhere. For it has induced in the English the sense that they are really living nowhere. [...] It is the fact that England has been forbidden – and forbidden by the English.¹⁵

Scruton's "anatomy of contemporary England", however, does not seek to recreate a "dead" civilisation but to commemorate "its virtues, its achievements and its meaning."¹⁶ A disenchanted culture has died; nevertheless, the merit of commemorating it is to fertilise the grounds of an unstable modern civilisation. Such returns resemble the rebirth of the Antiquity at various crucial moments of Western intellectual history:

For dead civilisations can speak to living people, and the more conscious they are while dying, the more fertile is their influence thereafter. Roman civilisation, which understood itself so well in the Augustan poets and orators, endowed its successors with law, language, literature and an image of virtue, and in the moments when European civilisation has returned to these things for inspiration it has taken new heart.¹⁷

In that sense, the epilogue to his elegiac praise of England also opens up the relevance of its particular features: i.e., the limbs and organs that used to give it a personal stature. To these features we are now going to proceed in detail.

3. "At-oneness" of the English: the physiognomy of English character and society

If the idea of England is to be developed from the notion of home, then the key notion is the idea of "at-oneness" of the English with their environment.¹⁸ The peak of this "at-oneness" seems to be the concept of the community as a person, i.e., as an organic structure. This structure, indeed, defies any a priori intellectual conceptualisation.¹⁹ In fact, Scruton tends to observe the national phenomena from the logic of the "corporate person", rather than from the Cartesian ego. This approach, however, does not seek to erase individual consciousness or responsibility, because it has "no self of its own," i.e. individuality always more or less rests on the notion of a broader identity:

But although the corporate person has no self of its own, it may actively penetrate the self-identity of its members, so linking their consciousness to a larger tradition of thought and

15 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 246-247.

16 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 244.

17 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 244.

18 The term "at-oneness" is taken from Arthur's Bryan book *The National Character* (London: Longman's, Green and Co., 1934), 20.

19 This trait of the English character according to Scruton is to be associated with the empiricist tendency in English thought: "The English did not reject mystery; they rejected the desire to explain it, to rationalise it, to replace it with abstract principles. Reason seemed to them unreasonable – the imposition of a standard to which no human thinking could attain. The reasonable person does not solve the problems of morality, religion, politics or gardening by consulting a priori rules, but by consultation, negotiation and compromise with those who seem to disagree with him but who might nevertheless be right. Tradition and example are far more reliable than abstract argument; rituals and ceremonies, because they exist without an explanation, are far more likely to contain the truth of things than any intellectual doctrine." Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 49.

feeling, amplifying their projects and telling them who they are. In that sense it has a real mental history, and a mind of its own.²⁰

As is the case with an individual human being, the country must be defined from the “unalterable raw material which sets limits to what it can accomplish.”²¹ For Scruton, the key elements in shaping the character of the English people is the *insular nature of the country and the typical form of English countryside, the consciousness and culture* (including the genius of the English language), *the unique tradition of the English Common Law, the specific nature of the class society and the evolution of political consciousness of the English people.*

The *insular nature of the English* has helped to define the unique isolation resulting in a sense of sovereignty that does not and cannot exist on the continent. The English countryside, with its “gentle gradients, slow-moving rivers, long and well-drained valleys”, almost every part of which “can be crossed on foot or horseback, and to none of it is access barred by nature”, Scruton relates to the sense of gentle moderation and the humaneness of the English citizen.²² The countryside reflects the English character inasmuch as the English character is also the result of the specific qualities of the English landscape:

They remade the landscape as the outward sign of their inner unity, as a place that was fitting home for their collective act of dwelling. And all they most loved in their society – the permeable boundaries that kept them apart, the negotiations and compromises that healed the wounds of conflict, the overarching law-abidingness and the sense of belonging and ownership which redeemed the accidents of nature – the unconsciously imprinted on the face of England, to produce that inimitable patchwork which was one of the few things, besides clouds and the climate, that the painters knew how to furnish with a soul.²³

The relatively homogenous nature of England’s population is to be understood as the result of being “unconquered during the centuries that made them [i.e., the English].”²⁴ That created a sense of openness towards otherness. In fact, the genius of the English language lies according to Scruton precisely in its rather lax attitude to its “ethnic” purity.²⁵ The lexical richness of English allows for smooth transitions between the idea of home as a fortress and the respect for the others and their specific qualities:

[...] the move away from the Anglo-Saxon is a move towards abstraction, marked by the artificial sound of the language; conversely the Anglo-Saxon idiom acquires a concreteness and knobbliness which is framed and endorsed by then smoother and more other worldly idioms that surround it. The real and threatening foe (Anglo-Saxon) can be confronted as

20 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 71. Scruton’s defence of hunting is also very much based on the experience of the corporate person: “In those centaur hours, however, real life returns to you. For a brief ecstatic moment the blood of another species flows through your veins, stirring the old deposits of collective life, releasing pockets of energy that a million generations laboriously harvested from the crop of human suffering. And this intimate union between species transfers to our human mind not the excitement of the animals only, but also the innocent concreteness of their thoughts.” Scruton, *On Hunting*, 69.

21 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 73.

22 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 74.

23 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 85.

24 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 76.

25 Cf. Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 78.

an enemy (French) or an adversary (Latin), and so studied from perspectives which are progressively more scientific and disengaged.²⁶

In that sense, the English language stands as an epitome of a unique blend of different influences which, however, tend not to be abolished in some sort of higher synthesis, but are integrated into the “catholicity” of the English spirit. In the tendencies of the Puritans, marked by a “dislike of elegance and a preference for the high moral tone”, Scruton understands as a deviation from the “model of catholicity.”²⁷

The English love of liberty founded the tradition of sceptical thought, scientific achievements (often initiated by “ingenious amateurs”²⁸), but also the culture of social engagement, well represented by “the club, team or regiment that gave shape to their projects and meaning to their solitude”.²⁹ Scruton sees the spirit of England embodied especially in the work of Hobbes, but also in the work of the Irish thinkers Boyle and Burke, as well as the Scots Hume, Reid and Adam Smith.³⁰ The major message of Hobbes’ philosophy for Scruton is the balance between the rights and duties of the individual in an organized polity: “if we value the individual, we must value authority more.”³¹

From the tradition of English literature Scruton singles out certain themes and topics that have especially contributed to the formation of Englishness. The genius of Shakespeare managed to integrate the major four themes of English literature. The first is the *theme of “common people”* (as displayed in medieval authors such as Chaucer, Langland, Wycliffe and Tyndale and the anonymous *Everyman*), *the theme of the individual* (especially Shakespeare, but also Smollett, Fielding and Dickens), *the third theme is that of England* (famously in John of Gaunt’s speech in *Richard II*) with the idea of the Crown as the expression of the corporate personality of the nation³² and finally the key theme of his idea of Englishness, i.e., *the theme of enchantment* as it is illustrated in Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, Sidney’s *Arcadia* and Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, but also in the tradition of late Renaissance English poetry (Jonson, Milton, Marvell)³³ and in other works.

The theme of enchantment is also connected to the sense of *sanctity* as it is displayed in the majesty of English Gothic cathedrals, as well as in their later Victorian imitations.³⁴ Another important form of enchantment is English landscape painting (Crome and Constable³⁵) as well as the memorable images of the English landscape we can find in James Thomson and Wordsworth as well as in George Crabbe’s *The Borough*.

26 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 80.

27 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 210.

28 Among those, he names Dalton, Dave, Faraday and Rayleigh. Cf. Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 202.

29 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 204.

30 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*.

31 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 205.

32 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 208.

33 Cf. Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 210-212.

34 Scruton sees the Gothic as England’s vernacular style and he defends even the “hypocritical” Victorian Gothic as something essentially English, very much to be associated with the peculiar nature of Anglicanism. Cf. Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 215.

35 Scruton makes an interesting comparison with the work of Poussin and Lorrain in saying that while the two French authors essentially depict a mythological, inaccessible place, in Crome and Constable “we find the here and now of Arcadia – England as it is, but subtly remodelled in the light of its own ideal” Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 217.

In all these forms the English spirit re-tunes the idea of the countryside to the historical evolution of the country and becomes “at-one” with itself.

As for the tradition of English *Common Law*, Scruton emphasises its traditional association with “the law of the land” as opposed to various local customs and variations.³⁶ He also corrects its traditional definition as *judge made law*, since it is neither made by the judge, nor by anybody else: it is a law *yet to be discovered* based on the innate capacity of human beings to make judgements related to justice and morality.³⁷ Scruton spends a great deal of time explaining the development of the judicial system in England and stressing its most important traits, namely “the dispersed network of courts and the right, in the more serious cases, to trial by jury.”³⁸ The jury system has “ensured that questions of fact were clearly distinguished from questions of law, that the accused had a fair hearing, and that the assumption of innocence was maintained, with the onus on the prosecutor to establish beyond reasonable doubt that the accused was guilty of the crime.”³⁹ In that sense, the English love of liberty was enhanced by the Common Law system, since it “existed not to control the individual but to free him.” Scruton also refers to the “friendly presence of the law” embodied in the local constable and thus affirming Peter Hitchens’s view voiced in his *Abolition of Liberty*.⁴⁰ In short, the English Common Law system was concrete, just and ingenious, based on the balance between individual liberty and the common good.

The specific nature of the English class system is a recurring topic in Scruton’s work: his stand on this issue is movingly described in the autobiographical sections of *On Hunting*, *Gentle Regrets*, and *England: an Elegy*. Scruton came from a modest background,⁴¹ yet his notion of class is that of *coherence* and *evolution*. The “classes” drew their inner strength not from class struggle or antagonism, but from an inner solidarity, and from the existence of a “vast and mobile” middle class that presented a “fluid and resilient barrier – buffer zone – at the centre of social conflicts”.⁴² This middle class was the place of “perpetual movement”, of the rhythm of “rise and fall” and thus the idea of “social aspiration”.⁴³ The middle class also conformed “to three unspoken principles of English life: it was attached to the land; it possessed a corporate identity; and it had more authority than power.”⁴⁴ The resentment provoked by the English class system was “widespread”, yet helped define the notion of the reality as opposed to mere “appearance” and empty snobbishness that permeated English culture “from the Restoration theatre to Noël Coward”. The classic works of Wilde and Woodhouse, for instance, brought a new “kind of class ideal, not known elsewhere in the civilised world, in which the upper-class manners were also a comic disguise.” Even the snobbery frequently associated with the middle class and their petty efforts to emulate the customs of the nobility has essentially been affirmative for Scruton. It has proved “a determination

36 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 112.

37 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 113.

38 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 119.

39 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 120.

40 I expand on this topic in my article on Hitchens “Rage, Delusion and Abolitionism: Contemporary British Society in the Eyes of Peter Hitchens,” *American and British Studies Annual* 5 (2012): 69-82.

41 Cf. Scruton, *On Hunting*, 7ff, *England: an Elegy*, 114 or *Gentle Regrets*, 1-18.

42 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 150.

43 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 151.

44 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 151.

that hierarchies and rituals should remain in place. You cannot rise in society if there is no distinction between the bottom and the top of it."⁴⁵

This love of hierarchy which Scruton somewhat uncritically associates with the whole of England⁴⁶ found its final form in the ideal of an English gentleman: the honesty and disinterestedness based on a vigorous education and a stable code of manners.⁴⁷ Kathy Vaughan-Wilkes, who was involved with Scruton in an underground programme conducting philosophy seminars in communist Czechoslovakia, had originally come from an upper-class family, however, she was a socialist. Although the two differed fundamentally on political and philosophical issues, they, nevertheless, respected each other on the notion of gentlemanly values⁴⁸ and the sense of justice based on this old English concept.⁴⁹ In that sense, the idea of a gentleman is the ultimate good based on the English class system.

As far as the English idea of government is concerned, the key concept for Scruton is not democracy, but *representation*.⁵⁰ In fact, this model makes clear that voting is not the only possible way of insuring that all legitimate interests have a say in national politics. This also justifies the hereditary principle in the English tradition. In this sense, the major question is the nature of the representation.⁵¹ The representative accommodates all possible interests:

His concern is not to promote the interests of his constituents come what may, but to promote the interests which can be brokered and resolved by Parliament, in the way the Parliament requires. As in the case of the law courts and the sovereign power, the search is for a ruling, a decision in which all the relevant interests have been given a hearing, and which has the authority and the impartiality of law.⁵²

The gentlemanly respect that the notion of representation entails is historically bound with the view of Parliament "as a kind of court of law" in which "an enemy ceased to be an enemy and became an opponent". The formal and objective procedures of the English are thus the very opposite of Mediterranean life and politics, which are based on warm, quasi-familial relations with different kinds of pitfalls hidden therein.⁵³ This formal respect within English institutions is ultimately based on the notion of liberty that lies at its heart: the English idea of just government is unthinkable without free

45 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 156.

46 This can be explained by his understanding of England as a "corporate personality" which was alluded to earlier.

47 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 157-158.

48 The idea of a gentleman thus has "nothing to do with sex". Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 159.

49 Scruton associates this ideal with the evolution of the Chaucerian knight in *The Canterbury Tales*, a *princeps inter pares* travelling with the other personages who represents a "common and class-based ideal". Scruton emphasises the publication of Henry Peacham's extremely successful 1622 handbook *The Compleat Gentleman* and its relation of the idea that gentlemen are not born, but educated and recruited. See Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 157.

50 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 174.

51 Scruton here reiterates Burke's distinction between "representation" and "delegation": representation is of wider scope than delegation, since representation has to take into account the issue on its own merits. See Edmund Burke, "Appeal to the Bristol Electors 13th Oct. 1774", in *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, vol. 3, ed. Paul Langford (Oxford: OUP, 1996), 61.

52 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 176.

53 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 177.

market respecting the needs and demands of individual people, without the dispersal of power among many institutions and local authorities,⁵⁴ or without the notion of justice embodied in the very tissue of the *Common Law*. The goal of any good authority is “to mobilise consent”:⁵⁵ the historic success of the English form of government is related precisely to this important idea. The stability of the monarchy creates a vital space in which partisan interests dissolve and are resolved in the conception of the Crown as a corporate person. The Burkean respect for the dead, i.e., the representation of the dead, is a matter of respect and maintenance of time-tested notions of justice and legitimacy. The embellishments related to English institutions has reconfirmed Burke’s notion of representation, a concept more expansive than mere “delegation” or short-duration and short-sighted political positions.

The deep consensus Scruton sees at the heart of the English experience, i.e., the enchantment sanctifying the very notion of English existence, is very closely related to the genius of the Anglican Church and the Anglican religious settlement.

4. The merits of a settlement religion: the genius of Anglicanism

Scruton’s view of Anglicanism may sound surprisingly secular, yet he clearly distinguishes between the universal Christian message conveyed by the Church of England and “Anglicanism” in a narrower sense. “Anglicanism” for him is primarily a cultural stand uniting the love for the country as a homeland with the comfort of “spiritual homecoming” provided by religion. Large sections of *Our Church*,⁵⁶ a book devoted entirely to Anglicanism, deal with and provide comment on the history of the church; an interesting synthesis of a philosophical analysis (with theological excursions) and a truly “personal” story are presented. It is, therefore, no surprise that the second chapter is introduced with Larkin’s acclaimed poem *Church Going*, which echoes the sense of awe and respect in the middle of “a vanished piety”.⁵⁷ Indeed, even a simple Anglican church building represents much more than just an ordinary place of worship. It is a meeting place with the dead, with the tradition and with the divine *mysterium fascinosum*, whatever it might be. Indeed, “English churches tell of a people who for several centuries have preferred seriousness to doctrine, and routine to enthusiasm – people who hope for immortality but do not really expect it, except as a piece of English earth.” The traditional appeal of Anglicanism is related to its notion of God:

54 In fact the decline of English/British politics in the modern period is a slow shift from the representation of a particular place towards the primitive politicising and “delegating” various partisan interests: “During the course of the twentieth century local government became politicised, corrupted and prodigal of its tax-raising powers; the national political parties invaded and cancelled the local identity of the councils, and the parishes lost all say in their future. [...] Until those changes, however, the sense of locality was one of the most powerful forces in English politics, and was responsible for the unique system of representation in the Lower House of Parliament. According to this system, each Member of Parliament represented his constituency, which was defined as a portion of English (or Welsh or Scottish or Northern Irish) territory. He was the voice of a place, and he was therefore obliged by convention to reside there and hold weekly surgeries, so that his constituents could convey their grievances to him. His responsibility towards his constituents did not depend upon whether they had voted for him.” Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 177, 184.

55 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 177, 185.

56 Roger Scruton, *Our Church: A Personal History of the Church of England* (London: Atlantic Books, 2012).

57 Scruton, *Our Church*, 38.

God as represented in the traditional services of the Anglican Church, is an Englishman, uncomfortable in the presence of enthusiasm, reluctant to make a fuss, but trapped into making public speeches. Like his fellow countrymen, God hides his discomfiture behind a solemn screen of words, using old-fashioned idioms that somehow excuse the severity of what he is bound by his office to say. In his presence you use the same antique language, and, although both of you know that this is in some measure a pretense, it suits you to rehearse your relationship in words that distance it from the world outside. More than any country I have visited, the English country church of my youth was a home – God's house, the private space that is both here and elsewhere, a part of England, and an immortal projection of England in a realm beyond space and time.⁵⁸

The problem of Anglicanism, however, is not only its secular, doubting, shy Englishness, but also its very constitution, i.e., the idea of a religious settlement and of its status as a state religion.⁵⁹ One of the first fruits of the Anglican settlement is that English has become a sacred language. In fact, the feeling of the seriousness, solidity and sanctity of a good speech goes back to the key early texts of Anglicanism such as *The Book of Common Prayer* (1549) and later the *King James Bible* (1611). The standing that English as a language acquired by the sheer fact of becoming a language of worship was enormous.⁶⁰ The majesty of the hymns and the long row of great composers of the past – Tallis, Byrd, Purcell, Handel, Vaughan-Williams and Gustav Holst – have reproduced the aesthetic aspiration of Anglicanism, one that both uplifts the congregation, but also helps to define "a genuine popular culture".⁶¹ Public schools were meeting points where new generations of English gentlemen were bred in the midst of the Anglican tradition of piety, not much different from the Latin *pietas*, representing the notion of respect and awe towards the past and the responsibilities to the future.

Nevertheless, the neuralgic point for understanding Anglicanism as a cultural phenomenon is the balance between the secular and the sacred. Scruton – in line with his favourite countryman Hobbes – endorses the idea of civil government and believes it "to be superior in every way to the rule of priests":

Life has taught me that civil government cannot exist without the nation and that religion that conflicts with national sentiment will, like the Islam of the reactionary Salafists, destroy the hope of civil peace. Life has also taught me that a nation that strives to live without religion, in however muted and moderated form, will never be able to call upon the loyalty of its citizens, and is destined to disappear. For three centuries we have enjoyed a dispensation in which religious and national sentiments endorsed each other, the first flowing into the gaps left by the second, and the second tempering the natural excesses of the first.⁶²

58 Scruton, *Our Church*, 40.

59 "The English Church, like the English law, Parliament and Crown, was a *settlement* – a solution to long standing quarrels and discontents, in which rival beliefs, rival masters and rival liturgies finally congealed around an acceptable common practice. The eccentricity – indeed, the downright weirdness – of the Anglican Church and its Nonconformist offshoots were hardly noticed by the resulting community of half believers. What mattered to them was less the clarity and certainty of a religious faith, than the shared experience of sanctity, which blessed in familiar but elevated tomes the country and society that was theirs." Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 87.

60 Scruton, *Our Church*, 101-102.

61 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 106.

62 Scruton, *Our Church*, 129.

This point of focus has now disappeared: England is a “post-Christian” country where both religious and secular issues have become difficult. Furthermore, the bond between the nation and the church has been so strong that the decline of each threatens to endanger the existence of the other. Scruton presents the Anglican faith as the way to tackle the mysterious nature of being. His notion of Anglicanism is not abstract doctrine: it is a “quiet, gentle, unassuming faith that makes room beneath its mantle for every form of hesitation.”⁶³ It is the ultimate English experiment in *enchaining the country*: the Anglican dispensation means “that we can make in this place of exile a durable and consoling home, one example of which has been England.”⁶⁴

5. Patriotism and internationalism: England between “somewhere and nowhere”

Scruton – as almost every important English conservative public intellectual of the day⁶⁵ – is known for defending the “prejudice” of national life, i.e., its situatedness in a concrete and defined “somewhere” of the national existence. He defines himself as a “patriot” while simultaneously dismissing nationalism. Patriotism entails “a natural love of country, countrymen and the culture that unites them.”⁶⁶ In this view patriotism is a matter of the fundamental affirmation of a person’s origin that stems from the very localisation of basic loyalties. The danger of “internationalism” is thus not a matter of “fearing the Other”, but a form of weakening the very basis of loyalty, i.e., its observable locality based on the notion of home. In that sense “every attempt to replace national loyalty with some internationalist ideal threatens the historical balance of power and the local forms of equilibrium that depend on it.”⁶⁷ Scruton’s opposition to the EU agenda, which he views as another step towards abolishing the “somewhere” of England and of other countries, rests on the distinction between legitimacy and traditions based on local loyalties on the one hand and bureaucratic decisions of distanced institutions on the other. Those institutions no longer ask the question of pre-political loyalty that makes the very legitimacy possible.

In fact, one of his most moving apologies for his conservative view of England is entitled *News from Somewhere*. Its *raison d’être* is a polemic with William Morris’s *News From Nowhere*,⁶⁸ a 1890 socialist utopia “purged of real people, inoculated against religion, and sprinkled all over with a kind of medieval star-dust.”⁶⁹ When Scruton moved to his current residence in Sunday Hill Farm, he had to learn to transform the art of appearance, “the sweet especial rural scene” with the reality based in the countryside.⁷⁰ The “prejudice” related to the country life to Scruton must be respected because the basis of any sound

63 Scruton, *Our Church*, 185.

64 Scruton, *Our Church*, 176.

65 Here I would stress Peter Hitchens, Peter Obourne, Peregrine Worsthorne and Simon Heffer. I refer to the work of these writers in my previous article “Rage, Delusion and Abolitionism: Contemporary British Society in the Eyes of Peter Hitchens,” *American and British Studies Annual* 5 (2012): 72ff. See note 40.

66 Roger Scruton, *A Political Philosophy: Arguments for Conservatism* (London: Continuum, 2006), 3. Here I quote from Mark Dooley, *Roger Scruton*, 158.

67 Scruton, *The West and the Rest: Globalization and Terrorist Threat* (ISI Books: Delaware, 2002), 61.

68 William Morris, *News from Nowhere* (London: Penguin, 1994).

69 Scruton, *News from Somewhere*, ix.

70 Scruton, *News from Somewhere*, x.

society is a *sense of belonging*. This sense is often ruthlessly broken by distanced bureaucratic regulations.

Scruton's defence of fox hunting, to which he devoted an entire book,⁷¹ turns into a powerful defence not only of this peculiar "sport", but of a "settlement" and a "somewhere" as embodied in the ceremonial rituals and customs that give the country its inalienable charm. It ends up with a gloomy vision of the new "nowhere" of bureaucratic decisions taken and regulations instituted from far away. This state of affairs can be characterised by a shocking insensitivity to the people's needs to belong and to understand. What Scruton finds most alarming in this process is the lack of agency by locals in these regulations. This reminds him of a totalitarian disinterestedness regarding decisions that people neither understand nor approve of.⁷² The question "who is responsible for this wholesale destruction of the English notion of home" thus finds an "only one convincing answer: No-one".⁷³ The face-to-face culture of the national prejudice (me/us vs. you) has been turned into the alienation of the third-person *them*.⁷⁴

The destruction of other English peculiarities and oddities – weights and measures, the monetary system, the love of hierarchy, etc. – mark the decline or downright destruction of the situatedness of the English form of life. England tends to be more and more "forbidden."⁷⁵ The difficult settlement that lies at the centre of English life is endangered by constant reforms and "revolutions". These, however, prove a deep crisis in terms of the "at-oneness" of the English, where liberty no longer means practicing "a community of free beings, bound by the laws of sympathy and by the obligations of family love" and "everything is permitted so long as no one is harmed in the process. Liberty is thus confused with licence in the culture of rights."⁷⁶

Scruton presents a gloomy vision of a "dead civilisation." The question is exactly how should this "elegy" be understood in the context of contemporary considerations about the nature of English/British culture?

6. Conclusion: work of mourning

Scruton approaches English culture from an analysis of its *Lebenswelt*. As we have seen, his approach is that of *enchantment* and *affirmation*. His "methodology" presupposes the fundamental unity of the "spirit of England". As he points out, the affirmation of traditional institutions is a more difficult challenge than the culture of debunking and repudiation he associates with the New Left. In a lecture delivered in Brno in 2004 entitled *What I Believe and Why* he explained the struggle in the following words:

71 Roger Scruton, *On Hunting* (South Bend: St Augustine Press, 1998).

72 "I am reminded of the great mystery of communism: how could it have come about, at the moment in history when human beings were demanding space, freedom, property, and the free exchange of goods and labour? During my years of wandering behind the Wall, I would put the question to officials and dissidents, to head-down scavengers and upright martyrs for the truth. Nobody whatsoever, I discovered, believed in communism – not even those who didn't mouth them when they should. Nor was there anybody to blame for this. Blame had been chased from the system, and each person was equally involved himself in knots that were taught to him as a Young Pioneer. The cause of the catastrophe was nowhere to be discovered." Scruton, *On Hunting*, 156-157.

73 Scruton, *On Hunting*, 160.

74 Cf. Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 246.

75 Scruton, *England: an Elegy*, 245ff.

76 Dolley, *Roger Scruton*, 171.

The one who says 'yes' bears the onus of proof. He must show how the obvious faults are outweighed by the hidden virtues. He must lay bare the intricate workings of his favoured arrangement, to show that it tends in some benevolent direction. His attempts to praise are impeded at every point by protests, and when, finally, he rests his case, it is not because he has proved it but because he is too tired to go on. There is, as Cardinal Newman argued a century ago, a 'grammar' of assent. Only by treading carefully over a broken landscape, following rules that govern your every step, can you advance to the point where affirmation is possible.⁷⁷

The paradox of postmodern cultural studies based on the ideas of Foucault, Derrida, Eagleton and others is that its point is essentially cultural critique.⁷⁸ Scruton, nevertheless, understands cultural studies as an affirmative introduction into "common culture" understood as a kind of wisdom. He thus polemicizes against the idea of culture as a mere construction that can be de-constructed at will, seeing such methods as mere vivisection. Scruton's approach, on the other hand, is that of respecting and affirming the living tissue of England, i.e., its institutions, traditions and imagination. Such an understanding of culture, indeed, recalls the sense of the sacred that lies at the heart of any *cult* and, therefore, of *culture* as well.

His concept of culture and cultural studies may be considered a Freudian "work of mourning" for a dead civilisation. Nevertheless, his approach fundamentally questions the meaning of such studies in the first place. If culture is understood as a form of wisdom, than the point of cultural studies is also a sense of *belonging* and *membership*: i.e. to respect the living rhythm of the culture itself.

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⁷⁷ Masarykova univerzita Brno. 2004. Accessed on 15 May 2014, https://www.phil.muni.cz/estetika/files/Scruton_Brno_lecture_en.doc

⁷⁸ Scruton discusses this "debunking" concept of cultural studies in *Thinkers of the New Left* (London: Clardige Press), 2-7, and in *Modern Culture*, 1-5.

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Tomáš Jajtner is Assistant Professor of English literature at the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice. He studied English and Czech at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague as well as at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. He completed his Ph.D. at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague in 2006 (dissertation *Concepts of Harmony in Five Metaphysical Poets*). In 2008 he was Assistant Professor at New York University, Prague. In 2013 he completed his Th.D. at the Faculty of Catholic Theology, Charles University, Prague. He has published a monograph on the English metaphysical poets (*Concepts of Harmony in Five Metaphysical Poets*, 2012) as well as several book reviews and articles on English and Czech literature. Jajtner has also translated numerous historical and theological studies from English, German and French. His research interests include early modern English literature (drama and poetry), English religious thought as well as modern French spirituality (Charles de Foucauld and René Voillaume).