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Abstract

The thesis analyses how the play *Albion* offers a scene for debates regarding migration and British identities. The aim is to explain how migration and British identities interact in the play and how they are represented. To answer this question, the research builds on Marlena Tronicke’s analysis of the play and extends it by including various theories, such as imperial nationalism, British exceptionalism and representation of migration. The analysis demonstrates how migration and identity have been intertwined in British culture since the formation of the empire. This interaction has been present in Brexit theatre, showing that the consequences of the imperial past are displayed in the public discourse.

Keywords: postcolonial melancholia, British identity, British exceptionalism, representation of migration.

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Introduction

Richard T Ashcroft and Mark Bevir stated that “the central dilemma facing postwar Britain was how to understand its role in the world, and the idea of Britishness itself, in a nonimperial context.”¹ The British empire has had a major role in the formation of British identities and its dissolution in the second half of the twentieth century posed a question of what it means to be British when the empire is no longer the pillar of identity. British identity has as its vital component the empire. However, once the colonies were freed, the nation had to change its ways of governing its territories and deal with the aftermath. Ashcroft and Bevir argue that the dissolution of the empire forced Britain to undertake “a radical overhaul of its law relating to nationality and citizenship.”² The authors argue that the Commonwealth represented a way for Britain to have its former glory as the heart of the empire³ but in a less authoritarian manner. The UK no longer had governing power over its territories but it maintains its reputation by offering the inhabitants of the Commonwealth the status of British citizenship. This action suggests that after the transformation of the empire the ruling of Britain is not yet ready to renounce the power and the significance the empire provided. In other words, the nostalgia for an influential determinant of British identities, i.e. the empire, can be seen from the earlier days of the Commonwealth.

The expansion of the empire means that British culture is also expanding because the colonisers brought British customs and politics to the colonies. This expansion, simultaneously, allowed different ethnic groups to enter the Anglophone world. Ashcroft and Bevir explain that all the inhabitants of the empire were British subjects with citizenship during the height of the empire in the first half of the twentieth century. This status allowed all British subjects to travel freely within the borders of the empire. Simultaneously, they argue that the idea of British subjecthood was a symbolic way to “reassert Britain’s status as the ‘mother country’”⁴, which means that it still holds important aspects that would preserve its power and sense of self. People from across the empire, predominantly non-white subjects, started to migrate to Britain. Although all the subjects of the empire were invited, the government did not predict the masses

¹ Richard T. Ashcroft, and Mark Bevir, “British Multiculturalism after Empire: Immigration, Nationality, and Citizenship,” in *Multiculturalism in the British Commonwealth: Comparative Perspectives on Theory and Practice*, eds. Richard T. Ashcroft and Mark Bevir, (University of California Press, 2019), 25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvr7fcvv.5>.

² Ashcroft and Bevir, 26.

³ Ashcroft and Bevir, 26.

⁴ Ashcroft and Bevir, 27-28.

of non-white immigrants coming into the country and to restrain the great influx racially ambiguous migration policies started to be implemented. Ashcroft and Bevir argue that migration policies became more racist with the growing influx of non-white migrants.⁵

Various scholars have reflected on the racialisation of migration policies in British politics, such as Nadine El-Enany, who explores the intrinsic racism in the migration policies of the British Empire, stating that the government designed “legislation that did not discriminate explicitly on the basis of race but had this effect in practice.”⁶ According to El-Enany, the status of British citizenship functions differently if one is a colonial subject than if one was born in Great Britain.⁷ El-Enany is talking about the beginning of the twentieth century when such immigration laws started to be implemented. This special status of the colonised offered the government a loophole in the system to advance their migration policies: these policies were meant to restrict non-white migrants from coming to England. The resistance of the British home rule to receive immigrants into their country is touched upon by Kasia Lech, who states that the British government “created a politically motivated, demonized, and hyper-visible image of a foreigner as a threat to British society either through claiming benefits, stealing jobs, or terrorism”⁸. However, the irony is that the nation benefits financially from the foreign workforce. Lech is referring to the current situation of migrants in Britain and she does so through the perspective of theatre. Similarly, El-Enany claims that the state exploits the colonised for the welfare of the white British, but it simultaneously labels them as threatening and burdensome.⁹

The gradual dissolution of the British Empire at the end of the twentieth century made the nation to be more inward-looking and shield itself from other nations or groups of people. This xenophobic behaviour manifested itself in the relationship between Great Britain and continental Europe as well. However, the xenophobic attitude functions differently within the European context. Menno Spiering argues that the relationship between the UK and Europe is very specific: it would not make sense to draw the same comparison between France and

⁵ Ashcroft and Bevir, 33.

⁶ Nadine El-Enany, “Aliens: Immigration Law’s Racial Architecture,” in *Bordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire*, (Manchester University Press, 2020), 44. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvwh8fsgs.6>.

⁷ El-Enany, 43.

⁸ Kasia Lech, “Claiming Their Voice: Foreign Memories on the Post-Brexit Stage,” in *Migration and Stereotypes in Performance and Culture*, eds. Yana Meerzon, David Dean, and Daniel McNeil, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 216.

⁹ El-Enany, 71-72.

Germany, for instance.¹⁰ This comparison is relevant because it positions Britain outside of Europe, as the Brexit campaign has shown to a certain extent, and thus the status of the relationship between Britain and an EU state is different from that of the relationship between two EU states. Spiering starts in medieval times with the split of the Church of England from Catholicism. According to Spiering, this split was a way for the British to assert their identity. Spiering argues that in the English view, Catholicism is a European product and its rejection demonstrates the cultural exceptionalism of the English nation.¹¹

More recently, the political phenomenon of Brexit, is another instance of the scepticism of the UK towards other nations. When Britain joined what was then the European Economic Community, in 1975, a Referendum took place to determine Britain's European status. This referendum, argues Andrew Glencross "evokes a certain 'British superiority' that suggests the UK could walk away from a federalizing EU with no deleterious consequences."¹² Glencross argues that for the British nation the inclusion in the EU would simply represent a utilitarian action.¹³ Belonging to the EU was seen by the British, in Glencross's view, as a business partnership and not as a shared identity. Glencross's point might seem improbable that the British joined a union without thinking it would imply some aligned values and principles. However, Glencross does explain the distaste some British individuals have for EU policies, arguing that one aspect that was not favoured by the British, among many others, was the immigration policies. One of the principles of the EU is the free movement of people and goods, but the British state wanted to impose more restrictions on immigration which goes against a fundamental principle of the Union.¹⁴ Immigration has been mentioned multiple times in Brexit news. *The Irish Times* wrote that immigration was a key component of the Leave Campaign as people viewed it as harmful to the economy.¹⁵ On the other hand, the *BBC* wrote in an article

¹⁰ Menno Spiering, "I Don't Want to Be a European': The European Other in British Cultural Discourse," in *The Road to Brexit: A Cultural Perspective on British Attitudes to Europe*, ed. Ina Habermann, (Manchester University Press, 2020), 127. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv11g95n1.12>.

¹¹ Spiering, 130, 140.

¹² Andrew Glencross, "British Euroscepticism as British Exceptionalism: The Forty-Year 'Neverendum' on the Relationship with Europe." *Studia Diplomatica* 67, no. 4 (2014): 8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26541986>.

¹³ Glencross, 8.

¹⁴ Glencross, 14.

¹⁵ Matthew Goodwin, "Why Immigration Was Key to Brexit Vote," *The Irish Times*, May 15, 2017, <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/why-immigration-was-key-to-brexit-vote-1.3083608>.

that it is unlikely that the level of migrants might pose a problem to the British economy since the country has more job offers than applicants.¹⁶

The interaction between immigration and British identities has created a sense of cultural exceptionalism which resulted in Great Britain having all the political power over the subjects of the Commonwealth. Attitudes of some people in Britain depict such an exceptionalist attitude and simultaneously interweaves with different aspects of identity and nationhood. Wendy Webster illustrates how the British experienced the empire and its dissolution and explains the cultural implications of the process. Webster's analysis mostly focuses on films and she argues that in the second half of the twentieth century such films show the anxiety that the English home is in peril because of the immigrants coming into the country. Webster argues that in the cinematic cultural products of the time, domestic order started to become associated with Englishness.¹⁷ However, this order was perceived as being under threat because of the immigrants coming into the country and disrupting the English home. This space had to be protected but because the men were off fighting in the colonial wars, the woman became the protector of the English home. Webster states that the woman or the wife was depicted as a heroine in this way, showing as much courage as a man in protecting the nation.¹⁸ Webster's argument is relevant and intriguing because for the British nation to maintain its superiority the figure of the woman receives vital importance, as the idea of Englishness is becoming gendered. This female figure, states Webster, "was not only associated with strength and courage but also with vulnerability."¹⁹ This vulnerable image in films is to show that the feminine figure is still gentle and caring even though she has taken a more active role in protecting herself. The idea of the woman being not only the domestic figure but also the warrior becomes prevalent during the colonial war period.

Another relevant aspect discussed by Webster is the notion of the English home and garden. The woman has become an important figure in protecting these spaces but it is interesting to look at these spaces in comparison to the overseas territories of the empire. Webster indicates in her analysis that in the second half of the twentieth-century images of the English home and garden were contrasted with threatening images of immigrants coming into

¹⁶ Mark Easton, "The UK Migrant Dilemma - It's All about Brexit," *BBC News*, November 22, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-59369179>.

¹⁷ Wendy Webster, "'There'll Always Be an England': Representations of Colonial Wars and Immigration, 1948-1968." *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 561. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3070747>.

¹⁸ Webster, 568.

¹⁹ Webster, 568.

the country and destroying its idyllic sceneries.²⁰ This idea was developed against British expansionism as well. Webster argues that “in contrast to the expansive rhetoric of empire, the English were also imagined as inward-looking-decent, but quiet and private.”²¹ Thus, one can observe a shift in the rhetoric of the cultural products and how the idea of the English home became a key aspect of English identity.

The idea of the English home and garden as something to be protected and its “protectress” being the one chosen for the job is present in the post-Brexit theatre play *Albion* by Mike Bartlett, which premiered at Almeida Theatre, London in October 2017. The play was directed by Rupert Goold and it is set in the ruins of a rural English house with an imposing but ruined garden. This place is where a woman, Audrey Walters, tries to find hope for the return of the great past. *Albion* interweaves different themes of what the British, or English, identity means nowadays in a divided British society. The play offers a ground for debate regarding British identities and migration. These topics seem to point to the divisions in the UK. *The Guardian* wrote in a review about *Albion*, and specifically about Audrey, that “in her mixture of romanticism about the past and restless hunger for change, she seems to epitomise the nation’s neurotic divisions.”²² The complex nature of the play leads to the core of this thesis which is to explore how notions of British identity and migration interact in the play. This results in the research question: how do the representations of migration and British identity in the play symbolically show the cultural crisis present in today’s Britain? To answer this question, the thesis constructs a theoretical framework as the foundation for the analysis. This framework draws on concepts that relate to migration, identity and cultural exceptionalism. The next chapters will dive deep into the play and will explore its complexities and their meaning. The paper ends with a conclusion and a reflection on the play’s contribution to scholarship and suggestions for further research.

²⁰ Webster, 573.

²¹ Webster, 573.

²² Michael Billington, “Albion Review – Mike Bartlett Captures Nation's Neurotic Divisions,” *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, October 18, 2017), <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/oct/18/albion-review-mike-bartlett-almeida-london>.

Theoretical framework and methodology

The introduction established the cultural and historical background of this thesis. It pointed out how immigration impacted British identity and how migrants were perceived during the empire era. The attitudes towards migrants are quite hostile and in order to understand the imagery of the migrant threatening to steal the jobs of the natives I will be utilising different concepts from postcolonial theory and migration rhetoric, drawing upon scholarly work from academics such as Claire Gallien, Kasia Lech and J. David Cisneros. Alongside the theories from these scholars, the thesis analyses how empire and nation contribute to the debate on migration. To explain this, the articles by Krishan Kumar and Marlene Tronicke are added to the analysis.

Gallien argues that refugee literature and arts “have a lot to say with regard to the violence and unevenness of the current world order” and that “their uprootedness and extraterritoriality interrogate” mainstream literary representations.²³ Her argument places great emphasis on the societal importance of refugee narratives. These texts have the position of being outside the norm of white European or Anglophonic environments and have, thus, objectivity in their writing. They can show how privilege affects society and people who live in privilege fail to understand the struggles of those who seek refuge and have a troubled background. One might say that there is a clear misunderstanding between those who seek asylum and the states that could grant it, due to a lack of authentic representation of migrants. The misunderstandings mean that the natives of the country have a negative view of migrants, who have come into the country seeking help. These migrants are immediately marked as undesirable. Gallien’s line of argument is in tandem with Kasia Lech’ argument. Lech argues for “migrants’ agency over their representation, offering a platform for a new social imagination that can facilitate multicultural democratic spaces etc.”²⁴ This statement poses a new situation:

²³ Claire Gallien, “‘Refugee Literature’: What Postcolonial Theory Has to Say,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 54, no. 6 (February 2018): 722. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2018.1555206>.

²⁴ Lech, 217.

what Lech is suggesting is that there is no real representation of migrants by migrants in theatre. Therefore, migrants are not heard but they are certainly mentioned in debates about Brexit and migration policies which only leads to vilified images of these people.

The portrayal of migrants as surplus for a nation indicates the unwillingness of governments to help solve the conflicts they might have instigated and the lies to cover up the truth. Gallien states that the renowned “migrant crisis” is a deceiving term as “only a minuscule proportion making it to Western Europe.”²⁵ This statement challenges the arguments of many politicians that opted for the Leave Campaign. The question that arises now is how the false information overshadows the truth and why the stories of the migrants who are deeply affected by the policies made against them are ignored. The emphasis on migrant narratives, or the lack of, signals a potential answer. From Gallien’s argument, one may notice that language plays an important role in this situation. The author states that in refugee literature language could be used to “create admiration, pity, guilt even, for readers who would not have endured such atrocious conditions.”²⁶ Furthermore, she states that language in literature and art can have a “militant spirit” and help readers become aware of the politics of representation.²⁷ Thus, texts can be used to trigger a reaction in readers. This reaction is based on experiencing truthful stories of migrants. Secondly, texts could be used to bring together various communities and could potentially solve conflicts. Language, ultimately, reveals how representations have effects on people’s perception and on policies as well.

The importance of representation is one of the key points made by Cisneros in his article “Contaminated Communities: The Metaphor of ‘Immigrant as Pollutant’ in Media Representations of Immigration.” Cisneros argues that “as repositories of cultural understandings, metaphors are some of the principal tools with which dominant ideologies and prejudices are represented and reinforced.”²⁸ Looking at the term immigrant, one might then realise the prejudices behind the term and which ideologies reinforce those. His idea is developed and explained by putting together images from news media of migrants coming into

²⁵ Claire Gallien, “Forcing Displacement: The Postcolonial Interventions of Refugee Literature and Arts,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 54, no. 6 (2018): 736. <https://doi-org.ru.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/17449855.2018.1551268>.

²⁶ Gallien, “Forcing Displacement,” 740.

²⁷ Gallien, “Forcing Displacement,” 742.

²⁸ J. David Cisneros, “Contaminated Communities: The Metaphor of ‘Immigrant as Pollutant’ in Media Representations of Immigration.” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 11, no. 4 (2008): 571. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41940396>.

a country and images of toxic waste released into our environment. Cisneros points out that the way the images of immigration are constructed in the media is similar to that of toxic waste. The immigrants are shown to come toward the camera creating a sense of invasion of the private space for the people watching TV at home.²⁹ Cisneros states that immigrants, thus, are depicted as a mobile threatening mass. His argument is that by creating these images, the media only reinforces the representation of the migrant as a pollutant and that “the pollutant is on the move and will soon reach and contaminate the viewer.”³⁰

The negative portrayal of migrants is a key factor for the reluctance of a country to receive them. This can be further combined with other factors that will propagate xenophobic attitudes. One other factor is the feeling of superiority colonialism creates in a nation, which is the case for the British Empire. The imperial past of Britain has implications for the reluctance of the UK to receive foreigners into their country. The expansion of the empire created a sense of entitlement for Britain to its colonies and people. This sense has visible links to Krishan Kumar’s concept of imperial nationalism. Kumar’s definition of this concept is that empires “may be the carriers of a certain kind of national identity that gives to the dominant groups a special sense of themselves and their destiny.”³¹ These groups “will be careful not to stress their ethnic identity; rather they will stress the political, cultural, or religious mission to which they have been called.”³² For a long time, religion had been de facto the main scope for British exceptionalism and expansionism. The introduction of this thesis presented how religion is an essential part of British identity through Spiering’s argument and that the rejection of Catholicism also implied the rejection of Europe and its values.³³ The nineteenth century, however, saw new changes in British culture. Kumar argues that because of the secular mindset of the century, the “religious mission” could no longer be employed to justify the empire’s actions. Therefore, new ways for affirming their identity had to be developed.³⁴ Also during that century, a cultural, as well as economic, phenomenon took place: the Industrial Revolution. Kumar says that this revolution gave the British nation a new sense of purpose: to modernize society.³⁵

²⁹ Cisneros, 581.

³⁰ Cisneros, 581.

³¹ Krishan Kumar, “Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective.” *Theory and Society* 29, no. 5 (2000): 579. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3108547>.

³² Kumar, 580.

³³ Spiering, 130.

³⁴ Kumar, 590.

³⁵ Kumar, 591.

Long after the Industrial Revolution to the present-day Britain, another political and cultural event unfolds, namely Brexit. This phenomenon proves that, once again, there is a disruption in the assertion of British identity. Brexit may be the consequence of this, but not necessarily the cause and it has been incorporated into different cultural productions such as the study case for this thesis: *Albion*. Marlena Tronicke has analysed the play and the thesis shall follow her analysis, and even extending it to include the play in more general debates about migration. Tronicke employs a theoretical concept from Paul Gilroy: postcolonial melancholia. Tronicke states that this notion is the result of the loss of the empire and Britain's inability to mourn this loss and to reflect upon the changes in culture that followed.³⁶ This concept helps in understanding the political and cultural tensions that are symbolically represented in the play and what they mean for Britain as a nation. Moreover, Tronicke observes that though *Albion* is a Brexit play the word *Brexit* is never mentioned in the text. She states that this strategy is to not "subordinate these larger debates and processes to the 'eventness' of the Referendum."³⁷ The debates are those about migration and British identities, which are more fundamental than just Brexit as an event.

The image of Britishness in the play, as argued by Tronicke, is almost exclusively that of England through the pastoral scenery. England is seen as an idyllic place, but this view is highly romanticized. Similarly, Wendy Webster mentions that in the films of the 1950s the idea of Englishness has been associated with domestic order and home.³⁸ This idea, however, is perceived to be under threat by the influx of migrants. The combination of the personal, domestic life with war is something prevalent during the colonial wars. During this period, argues Wendy Webster, "British women occupied an important place in representations of colonial wars."³⁹ The association between the female protagonist and the domestic English setting is present in *Albion* as well. This, in turn, creates various tensions in the play since the active gender is the feminine one.

The concepts of representation of migration, imperial nationalism and the 'immigrant as pollutant' shall be employed in the analysis. However, some of them are adjusted to fit the scope of this thesis. For instance, Cisneros theory focuses mostly on the American context but

³⁶ Marlena Tronicke, "Imperial Pasts, Dystopian Futures, and the Theatre of Brexit," *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56, no. 5 (2020): 666. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2020.1818441>.

³⁷ Tronicke, 665.

³⁸ Webster, 573.

³⁹ Webster, 567.

it is nonetheless useful for the migration debates in the play. The other notions, postcolonial melancholia and imperial nationalism will be utilised. In the case of Kumar, the theory will be narrowed down to the situational context of the play. Kumar analyses different empires in parallel to explain his theory, however, this thesis would use the same tools on a smaller scale. The next chapter will focus on the different places in the play and their symbolic meaning. After that, chapter four will zoom in even more and will analyse the characters and their relationships with each other. The aim is to show what the relationships between the characters symbolise for the relationships between the people of Britain. Finally, the thesis will give a conclusion and also a brief reflection of this analysis in the broader context of academia and how the play contemplates the current events in Britain.

Locations and their Symbolic Meaning

Brexit and “Postcolonial Melancholia”

The post-Brexit play *Albion* by Mike Bartlett encompasses cultural debates into which aspects of British (and English) identity are unfolded and questioned through symbolic places and characters. The play follows the journey of the main character, Audrey, a white middle-class woman, who decides to move together with her family to Albion in the countryside. The other characters who are part of the family are Paul (Audrey's husband), Zara (her daughter) and Anna (Audrey's daughter-in-law). Katherine is Audrey's friend from university, but they are quite different people. Whilst Audrey is living in a world driven by dated principles of what it means to be a proper Englishwoman, Katherine is aware of the class differences and quite critical of that. Anna also has a tense relationship with Audrey. She was supposed to marry Audrey's son James but he went off to war and died. However, she remained part of the family as she could not part ways with James' ashes kept in an urn by Audrey. This chapter shall focus on the symbolism of places and the relationship the character have with these places. The locations play an important role in the play and help in understanding the tensions between the city and the countryside and also between the characters. The next chapter builds on this analysis to further illustrate the tensions between the characters and what they represent symbolically.

James, although dead and only mentioned a few times in the play, becomes a sort of symbol for his mother. At the end of act 1, Audrey's family finds out that she spread James' ashes in the Red Garden without anyone's consent because that garden is a “tribute to those soldiers who were devoted to their country but weren't so lucky to come back to it. And James is one of those soldiers.”⁴⁰ Audrey's actions reveal two important aspects of her judgement. Firstly, she is a strong patriot although she never used that term. She thinks it is best if her son's remains are laid on English soil and the Red Garden seems the best place for that. She explains

⁴⁰ Mike Bartlett, *Albion* (London, UK: Nick Hern, 2017), 44.

that the original owner built this garden as a homage to the fallen soldiers. Secondly, Audrey has a strong sense of entitlement. She did not ask whether the others thought spreading James' ashes in the garden was a sound idea but she did it anyway exclaiming "but he's my son, ultimately [...] He had me from the beginning. He has me at the end." ⁴¹

The feeling of ownership Audrey displays in relation to her son illustrates her sense of entitlement. This feeling is due to her strong admiration of the past, which is evocative of Brexit. Audrey's adoration for Albion as a grand example of the English country house and her nostalgia for the past echo a few of the statements voiced in the Brexit campaign. The propaganda has the ubiquitous messages of "Take Back control" and a form of nostalgia for mighty Britain, independent from Europe. According to Marlena Tronicke, it is because of this resemblance of Brexit within the play that *Albion* received the label of BrexLit. The label of BrexLit is often attributed to many works written during and after this political phenomenon. Tronicke argues that this labelling "brings to the fore what Paul Gilroy has identified as 'postcolonial melancholia.'"⁴² Tronicke continues by stating such a revival implies that "an awareness of colonial crimes and the resulting racist violence still lies dormant."⁴³ What Tronicke observed in *Albion* is that the name Brexit is left out completely, later explaining that this choice is to avoid thinking that the debates of identity and migration are a consequence of Brexit.⁴⁴ Indeed, such debates have been present in British culture for quite a long time. This thesis follows Tronicke's analysis of the play by looking at how the characters and the places are symbols of political debates surrounding Britain and Brexit. In addition, the thesis goes further than Tronicke's explanation by introducing the concept of "imperial nationalism" coined by Krishan Kumar. This addition helps in understanding the deeper meaning of debates surrounding empire, nation and how they influence British identity.

Instead of analysing the play in tandem with Brexit, Tronicke analyses it by comparing it to Paul Gilroy's notion of postcolonial melancholia. This shift suggests that Brexit is the consequence of such melancholia and not the cause of the plethora of literature written about Brexit. The "postcolonial melancholia" is visible through the main character, Audrey, and her plan to restore the garden of the countryside house to its former glory. Audrey is an Englishwoman who inherited a mansion with a large garden in the countryside of Southern

⁴¹ Bartlett, 44.

⁴² Tronicke, 663.

⁴³ Tronicke, 664.

⁴⁴ Tronicke, 665.

England. Her plan is to restore the property. She is the only character who is adamant to maintain the property to such an extent that it seems an obsession. When her daughter-in-law asks her why does she want to restore everything Audrey replies that “It’s important” to “Everyone. All of us.”⁴⁵ Although Audrey exclaims that everyone wants this plan to proceed, she never asked the opinion of the others. Zara, especially, seems to be very upset by the move to the countryside since she was used to the rapid lifestyle of living in London. Zara’s opinion is shared by Paul as well. He mentions with a resigned tone that the saying is “Once you leave London, you’ll never get back in.”⁴⁶ Audrey considers the restoration of the garden as something extremely important because of its historical legacy: Albion is “the quintessential English Country Garden” that has “the chaos of nature in a formal setting.”⁴⁷ However, it is ambiguous whether that is the real plan or just her personal agenda. When she talks about the garden with her neighbour, Edward, she states “My garden, Edward”⁴⁸ to which her husband, Paul, corrects her that it is *their* garden. Furthermore, Audrey is very reluctant to receive the villagers as guests for the annual party in the garden “There’s delicate work to do here, and certainly while we’re doing that work, the village may have to find another venue.”⁴⁹ The initial scenes reveal what kind of person Audrey is and the audience can notice that her decision to move the family to this house is selfish. The same could be said about the decision of doing a referendum to leave the EU. This political choice can also be viewed as selfish since not all parts of the UK agreed on this.

Audrey and The Red Garden

Audrey, both as a character and as a symbol, combines her personal life with national and political elements to justify her decisions. The figure of the woman, although still in a domestic setting, became more active and has a protective role, according to Webster. Audrey thinks it is her duty to restore the house with its huge garden, even though this mission might pose great financial challenges for her family. Her actions seem quite extreme to the outside viewer because Audrey considers this mission to be vital for her existence. When Paul says that one does not need a mission or a purpose to be happy Audrey counteracts by saying “You can be happy without purpose. But for the true English man or woman, that’s tantamount to a sin.”⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Bartlett, 19.

⁴⁶ Bartlett, 21.

⁴⁷ Bartlett, 16.

⁴⁸ Bartlett, 20.

⁴⁹ Bartlett, 20.

⁵⁰ Bartlett, 16.

As Tronicke observes, the protagonist goes to such an extent that she spreads the ashes of her dead son through the Red Garden “to emphasise the link between the personal and the political, between past and present.”⁵¹ Audrey’s mission for restoring the property symbolically represents the nostalgia of the British imperial past. Her mission is to bring back the past, but she does not realise that such an action could be harmful to her family and friends since they live in different times.

Audrey and the garden are symbols for the British Empire and they show how the empire impacts the lives of its people. Kumar’s notion of imperial nationalism helps in understanding Audrey’s mission and she convinced everyone (at least at the beginning of the play) that she can manage to bring back the garden and the house to their former glory. Imperial nationalism presupposes that the dominant group has to emphasise a purpose for the nation. Audrey does the same in emphasising that an English person should have a purpose to be happy. This purpose-driven nation also develops a sense of superiority. The obnoxious personality Audrey has shows exactly how this superiority unfolds: she treats the other characters according to their assumed position and does not care about them as persons. For instance, when Gabriel says he is a fan of Katherine, Audrey is surprised and exclaims “Yes but he cleans the windows”⁵² to which Gabriel replies that he writes as well. Audrey’s response has a very sarcastic tone that almost undermines Gabriel’s capability of being a writer. This scene illustrates how Audrey’s mentality is grounded in class differences. She grew up surrounded by people who could afford to hire staff to do the house chores: “My uncle had staff when he was here.”⁵³ Since Gabriel is on her staff, Audrey does not think of him as an equal but rather as an employed person.

Audrey’s attitude is proof of classism, which can be further illustrated by observing the type of parties she has and whom she decides to invite. Anna’s dislike for the private themed garden parties proves that the enthusiasm for the past is not shared by all. Audrey has a very distorted view of temporality, especially when she states that if they recreate the past “it won’t be the past, it’ll be now.”⁵⁴ Tronicke argues that this statement resembles that of Theresa May’s vision of Britain: “a ‘glorious’ future if Britain remembers its former muscle and thus wilfully rejects any critical interrogation of imperial legacies.”⁵⁵ However, Anna is questioning that past

⁵¹ Tronicke, 666.

⁵² Bartlett, 17.

⁵³ Bartlett, 33.

⁵⁴ Bartlett, 92.

⁵⁵ Tronicke, 667.

and she exclaims that “If we wanted a real 1920s-themed evening we should all come as corpses.”⁵⁶ Anna is criticising the classism present in Audrey’s envision of the past. It is intriguing that Anna uses “we,” which implies that anyone who is not Audrey does not fit into this event, i.e. everyone who is not the dominant group does not fit into the system of the empire. Anna voices the alienation that most characters feel with Audrey’s ideas, but they do not confront her or they do so in a very subtle manner but follow her words nonetheless.

City versus countryside

The tension between the characters could be further extended to tensions between places. As mentioned in the beginning, all these characters transitioned from living in the bustling metropolis to living in a quiet countryside environment. Places play an important role in the play and they may provide some points to better understand the text and its symbolic meaning. The characters have divided views on whether the change of location from the city to the countryside is detrimental. Webster argued that the focus on domestic detail and the countryside house in the 1950s films has been associated with Englishness.⁵⁷ Paul voices his opinion from the beginning that the choice of selling their house in London is an irreversible decision. He does not push his opinion any further as he does what Audrey says. Zara, Audrey’s daughter, shares Paul’s opinion and she is ready to challenge her mother’s idea of moving them all to Albion. Audrey affirms that she has lived in the country before but Zara frowns at hearing this which makes her mother state that she has always been passionate about gardening. Later, Audrey says to Zara “I should put you to work. Do half a day’s digging, make a woman out of you [...] Lived in the city all your life.”⁵⁸ These words reveal that Audrey has fantasies about living here in Albion. She reveres the place tremendously and she is quite impressed by it. She states that Albion is the “quintessential English Country Garden”⁵⁹ which fuels Audrey’s passion even more. The domestic English setting, as Webster has argued, plays a symbolic, but important role in the British, as well as English, identity.

The city represents a lucrative place for enterprises and building connections. Audrey has a business, a shop, in London which she founded to support her family after the death of her first husband. This business, Katherine explains to Zara, is “To provide for you and James.

⁵⁶ Bartlett, 61.

⁵⁷ Webster, 561.

⁵⁸ Bartlett, 20.

⁵⁹ Bartlett, 16.

It's all about you and James.”⁶⁰ Katherine states that Audrey “has hardly ever done anything for herself. This garden might be the first time.”⁶¹ What these quotes reveal is that the only aspect Audrey finds vital in the city is that she is able to have an income that can support the family. The city means business but not fulfilment. As Katherine mentioned, the business did not start from Audrey's entrepreneurial spirit but out of necessity. The garden, on the other hand, is a personal project which shows that Audrey has a romantic view of the countryside where she is “blooming.”⁶²

⁶⁰ Bartlett, 55.

⁶¹ Bartlett, 55.

⁶² Bartlett, 31.

Relationships and their Symbolic Meaning

Difficult Staff

This chapter shall observe the dynamics of the characters' relations with each other and shall analyse how they reflect the social struggles present in today's Britain. The relationship between Krystyna and Cheryl, and Krystyna and Audrey are two important ones for the analysis. Because Krystyna is a migrant from Poland, her position in the play is vital for understanding how migration within the play serves to reveal the attitudes to the constant migration that is happening in Britain for centuries. To begin the analysis, the chapter employs theories from Gallien and Lech. These two authors focus specifically on the representation of refugees and migrants in literature and, thus, it is appropriate to include their theories in this chapter. Another relation that is a key component of the play is that between Audrey and Katherine. These two characters have the same age and lived in the same environment when they were young. However, their development differs substantially. Whilst Audrey represents the more stereotypical version of Britain with fixed morals and a feeling of superiority of the British nation, Katherine is more reflective of these aspects and quite critical of them. Katherine is not part of Audrey's world, although they are close friends, and can tell the problematic aspects of the life Audrey is living. Finally, the last characters that shall be included in this chapter are Zara, Anna and Gabriel. They represent the younger generation of Britain which creates some tensions between them and the older generation. The tensions between Audrey and Zara, Anna, and to some extent Gabriel reveal that the younger generation has a different mentality but is not quite able to assert it due to the interventions of the old generation. Thus, the play also has a generational conflict that serves as a metaphor for how the younger generation in today's Britain deals with the political and cultural changes.

Cisneros analyses how the representation of migration is metaphorically compared to pollution, which affects migrants' position in society. As discussed in the theoretical

framework, the migrant is toxic and disturbs the social order of the country. One argument of Cisneros' paper is that the news portray migrants negatively and they are to blame for taking the jobs of the native population. However, Cisneros argues that those reports fail to cover that in many cases the migrants prove to be more competent and possess the right skills for the job. The play shows the same tensions between the house staff, namely Krystyna, a Polish worker, and Cheryl, the original house cleaner. Krystyna is the only character in the play who is not British and her presence creates some tensions in the house. She is employed by Audrey to take over Cheryl's position: Cheryl is old and Krystyna is younger and more efficient, doing the same amount of work as Cheryl but far quicker. Cheryl is dismayed that she has been replaced, but instead of going to Audrey she accuses Krystyna: "You did take my job."⁶³ Krystyna replies that "Mrs Walters gave the work to me. That's up to her."⁶⁴ Cheryl, however, cannot see or refuses to see that everything is up to Mrs Walters. It is far easier for Cheryl to blame Krystyna, who is not the one in charge.

Krystyna's situation is similar to that of many migrants who are vilified but not given a voice to express their experiences. Lech argues that to understand the situation of migrants they need to speak up and they need a medium to do so. Lech is referring to the theatre by migrants in this case, which also applies to the analysis of *Albion*. There are a few instances where the play demonstrates how giving a voice to migrants can help in enlightening the audience about the migrants' situations. Krystyna says to Gabriel that "I will never be British but there's been work for good money. That's all that matters."⁶⁵ Krystyna does not want to settle in Britain, and she admits she did not have any other expectations but she needed some financial support to fund her business in Poland that she has been working on with her boyfriend. Indeed, Krystyna seems to be a very relatable and tangible character for many people. She is aware that one has to work hard to achieve their goals and she is willing to do the work. She tells Zara that "It is sometimes about scrubbing other people's shit off toilet bowls. It is sometimes about being on your hands and knees and working hard."⁶⁶ These lines are vital for not only understanding Krystyna as a character but for understanding everyone who is in her position. She confesses that the work she is doing is not glamorous and it can be hard. That, however, does not stop her because she is driven by a goal to buy a house for her and her boyfriend. Therefore, one can

⁶³ Bartlett, 87.

⁶⁴ Bartlett, 87.

⁶⁵ Bartlett, 47.

⁶⁶ Bartlett, 107.

understand that the image of the migrant portrayed in the play is not negative: Krystyna wants to earn money to be able to go back to Poland.

Moreover, Krystyna does not appear to be involved in Britain's political crisis. In a discussion with Gabriel, she asserts in regards to the Brexit campaign in Britain "That's your problem."⁶⁷ Krystyna is not British and she does not see any reason why she should be concerned with the events in the UK. Krystyna is the only representation of a migrant in the play and although the migrant experience differs from individual to individual, her struggles could be extended to anyone who is trying to achieve their goals and the audience can, thus, relate to this experience. The migrants are represented as a threat to the economy, but when their stories are put forward, one can observe a different side of the same story.

The "Old" Britain versus the "Other" Britain

The focus of this section is the friendship between Audrey and Katherine. These two characters seem completely different but they could be interpreted as two sides of the same coin. Audrey, for instance, thinks of herself as being an accurate example of what an English person is: someone who is driven by morals and principles. Katherine is also someone who is English but who is an outsider to those principles. The interactions between the two show their personalities differ: Audrey tells Katherine "I'm head head head, sensible, responsible, wanting facts, practice, preparation. But you're completely heart."⁶⁸ However, Audrey's words seem to work against her here when the full argument between her and Katherine unravels. Katherine says that the point she is making in her book, which Audrey did not like, is that the action of sneering "is being driven by inequality and resentment. There should be tax policies which encourage distribution of wealth."⁶⁹ Audrey disliked the book because she felt it was sneering at people who did not have great ambitions but were pleased with their average lives. Katherine argues that this feeling of contempt could lead to a regime where nobody is even allowed to voice these worries. Thus, Katherine is very aware of the injustices present in society and that many people do not do much to stop them. Ironically, Audrey, who claimed that she is driven by facts, somehow forgets the fact that people live in poverty and inequality. She is surrounded by people who echo her ideas and who are part of the same class as she is.

⁶⁷ Bartlett, 47.

⁶⁸ Bartlett, 67.

⁶⁹ Bartlett, 67.

Audrey's bigotry and choice of ignoring the social injustices is a metaphor for the ignorance of nations when it comes to refugees and migrants. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, Gallien argues that there is a misunderstanding between the inhabitants of Western countries and migrants, emphasizing that this is due to a lack of representation of authentic migrants' voices. This opinion is shared by Lech, who states that there should be more narratives written by migrants. This chapter builds on those arguments to show that the problem lies in the ignorance of people who are not migrants or who do not have contact with migrants. Audrey is the perfect case study in this case. She is very reluctant to welcome anybody into her house. She refuses to hold the annual parties the village has in her garden for the reason that the villagers might stamp the flowers. Moreover, when Katherine observes that the weather is similar to that of the South of France, Audrey exclaims "Oh I hope so. Means we won't have to actually go there anymore."⁷⁰ This line has an underlying tone of xenophobia. Audrey does not enjoy the company of the French people, or any people who are not English-born. Her staggering bigotry is what brings the downfall of the family: she refuses to see that the world is changing and the new generation has a different mindset than hers.

Young England

The same tensions between Katherine and Audrey can be seen between Audrey and the younger characters of the play. These characters are equally important to analyse, namely Zara, Gabriel and Anna. They represent the younger generation of the play and, symbolically, of England. Zara, Audrey's daughter, is quite the opposite of her mother. She is queer and falls in love with Katherine; she enjoys life in the city because she feels free there, and the move to the countryside makes her uncomfortable. At one point she stated that "Even the birds seem to move faster in London."⁷¹ Zara, unlike her mother, seems to know more about the world around her, for instance, she knew about Katherine, she has read all her work and she knew how famous Katherine was. She also advises Gabriel about going to university "If you're going to get into all that debt, wouldn't you do better to take a degree which will be respected whatever you end up doing, for instance English Literature."⁷² This scene between the two young people shows that Zara thought about what degrees are lucrative, on the one hand. On the other hand, it shows her privileges. She grew up in a middle-class family, thus, she can afford to study English even

⁷⁰ Bartlett, 36.

⁷¹ Bartlett, 26.

⁷² Bartlett, 50.

though it might be expensive. Gabriel, however, cannot afford the luxury. The audience can observe all these aspects of Zara's character, but her mother seems to be unaware.

Audrey does not seem to know her daughter well and her behaviour towards Zara is contradictory. Audrey tells Katherine that "I want her to grow up. Make mistakes."⁷³ However, Audrey is hypocritical: she wants to be the one who decides which mistakes Zara can make. Zara has a chance of becoming an editor in the publishing industry but Audrey sold their house in London and relocated the family to Albion. Audrey also says that she wants Zara to make mistakes but would not allow the love affair between Katherine and her daughter to continue. Zara's life is being hindered by the beliefs of her mother and because of that, she makes terrible mistakes. The tragic end of the love affair was orchestrated by Audrey, who blackmailed Katherine that she shall write an accusatory article defaming Katherine's reputation. This action reveals the damage that Audrey had done to her daughter when Zara says "Cos if you did, if you did say something, then you took away my life. My future."⁷⁴ Indeed, this is exactly what happened: Audrey's intervention ruined Zara's chance of having her own story and development. The conflict between Zara and Audrey seems to echo the conflict between the younger generation in the UK that voted to remain in the EU, and the older, more conservative generation. *The Guardian* published an article that shows that "According to polling data from YouGov, 75% of 18- to 24-year-olds voted to remain in the European Union."⁷⁵ Zara's desires are important because her voice is symbolically that of all the British youth. The play shows exactly the same generational conflict that is present in Britain on a smaller scale.

Audrey also intervenes in Anna's life and to some extent Gabriel's. Anna only had a brief relationship with James, Audrey's son, but she claims that they were going to marry. However, he was killed in the Iraq war and what is left of him are his ashes. Anna assumed that she would have the ashes to spread in meaningful places for her and James. Audrey, on the other hand, has different ideas. She spread the ashes in the Red Garden, which is a tribute to all those who died fighting for their country. Audrey did not apprise the other family members. Anna highlighted Audrey's behaviour when she says "you wanted to claim him and put him in your house."⁷⁶ Anna could not even take comfort in having a few of the ashes with her because

⁷³ Bartlett, 72.

⁷⁴ Bartlett, 113.

⁷⁵ Elena Gresci, "Meet the 75%: The Young People Who Voted to Remain in the EU," *The Guardian* (Guardian News and Media, June 24, 2016), <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/meet-the-75-young-people-who-voted-to-remain-in-eu>.

⁷⁶ Bartlett, 73.

Audrey took that away. Furthermore, Anna implies that it is Audrey's fault that James died because she encouraged him to join the military: "Everyone in his life thought it was a crazy idea but you said you'd be proud of him."⁷⁷ Audrey's action of pushing people in the way she considers to be best is literally taking away their future. The possessive personality creates despair and destroys the development of the younger generation. This could be a metaphor for how Brexit took away a chance for the younger generation who voted to remain. Close to half of the British population in Britain chose to remain but no one listened to their voice. Even more striking is that around 75 percent of the youth voted to remain in the EU. The tensions between the characters reveal larger political tensions present in today's Britain.

Conclusion

The thesis has aimed to show how the tensions between places and characters in *Albion* reveal larger political tensions in today's Britain. The chapter on locations has demonstrated how the garden and Audrey's mission to restore it are metaphors for the British past and the nostalgia for the empire. The fourth chapter analyses the dynamics of the characters' relationships with each other. It shows that they are symbolically representing the relationships between the younger generation and the older generation in the UK, but also those between the ones who voted to remain and those who did not. The final point this thesis is making builds on Tronicke's analysis that the play acts as a metaphor for Brexit and the "postcolonial melancholia" present in the Leave Campaign. In this way, the play can be understood as a critique of society and its inability to move forward to include more voices. The migration policies seem to move backward again and the overall feeling of Britain being a place for white Protestant people is making a surge in public discourse. The play seems to offer a pessimistic view on the situation in Britain as it does not really provide a happy ending nor does it come to a resolution of conflicts.

The division between people is also highlighted in reviews of the play. One review from *The Guardian* states that the play shows "a deeply divided people torn between the urge to preserve the past and to radically reform it."⁷⁸ The review states how the play not only shows a great divide between people but a mix of identities too. This mix is shown through the selection of the characters: a middle-class family from London, the villagers and a Polish worker.

⁷⁷ Bartlett, 73.

⁷⁸ Billington, "Albion Review – Mike Bartlett Captures Nation's Neurotic Divisions."

Moreover, the impact theatre has on culture is mentioned in Tronicke's article, which has been used as a theoretical foundation for this thesis. Tronicke argues that "theatre plays a major role in the British state-of-the-nation debate"⁷⁹ which implies that theatre mirrors current political and cultural events. Furthermore, theatre also comments on such events and *Albion* is a great example. The play depicts the current situation in Britain by putting together different kinds of people and how they interact with each other. The interactions cause some conflicts between the characters that are helpful in understanding the play. The central character, Audrey, is the most interesting in the play because she is very attached to the past, to an obsessive degree, but she wants to bring it into the present, to restore it. Audrey offers relevant insights into the mentality of the Brexit campaign bringing the past into the debate and making it seem that that is the only solution to Britain's success. The title of the review of the play says it perfectly: Britain is marked by a "neurotic division." Thus, the political tensions in the UK are internal, as well as external.

There are many other aspects that this thesis could not cover. One important part of the thesis is migration and its representation. However, the thesis only showed how migration is dealt with in the play *Albion*. Thus, further analysis of how the latest political events affect migrants is required, and texts written by migrants are vital for larger perspectives. Another aspect which was covered in the analysis is the gender aspect of migration and imperialism. Audrey, the protagonist, is a woman and she is the one pulling the strings in the play. Her decisions directly influence the other characters, which often end up in a worse place. The thesis contributes to understanding the consequences of political events in theatre and, most importantly, shows that the nostalgia for the past is still present in British society. This fact, as one can observe, leads to stalling the progress of the younger generation and impedes them from developing a path that is different but perhaps more progressive. Further research could explore how the idea of the feminine gender being portrayed by a character that is controlling and negatively impacts the lives of the rest of the characters and what this might symbolically mean.

⁷⁹ Tronicke, 662.

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