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‘It is important to stress that the meanings associated with national iconography do not stand still. There are frequent struggles over meaning and demands to rethink the status acquired or transmitted by national icons.’ To what extent do your chosen plays and performances rework and rethink national iconographies and to what effect?

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It is arguable that the term ‘nation’ is one without a concrete definition, given Nadine Holdsworth’s assertion that ‘summoning the nation as a known, unchanging entity […] suggests harking back to some misplaced notion of national purity, when, in fact, the reality of the nation is reliant on its impurity’.[1] Roy Williams’ *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads* and Jez Butterworth’s *Jerusalem* dramatize this sentiment, exploring the ‘impurity’ of England’s urban and rural communities respectively. They look past what David Ian Rabey suggests one might think of ‘if pushed to suggest some positive images of Englishness’, such as London’s liberal modernity or Wiltshire’s peaceful countryside.[2] Rather, their dramas focus on the spaces – and people – these idealised perceptions of England eclipse, thereby reshaping the national iconographies of its bustling capital and idyllic countryside to better reflect the lived reality of this nation’s inhabitants. In this way, both *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads* and *Jerusalem* can be thought of as state of the nation plays. These are works which interrogate the notion of national identity, often products of what Holdsworth terms ‘moments of social breakdown and urban unrest that unsettle any idea of the homogenous nation’.[3] Williams and Butterworth suggest that, in such moments, traditional symbols of Englishness assume greater significance.

Indeed, Doreen Massey acknowledges that ‘a strong sense of place’ – such as that invested in national iconographies – can be a response to the ‘desire for fixity and for security of identity in the middle of […] movement and change’.[4] Thus, in the plays, symbols or practices such as the St George’s flag, football, morris dancing and myth-retelling act to anchor the white working-class characters in an idealised yet stable past, providing a clear national identity to those who feel forgotten by the nation’s evolution. First performed at the Royal Court Theatre in 2009, the very title of *Jerusalem* indicates a concern with nationhood; it refers to William Blake’s poem, which is widely interpreted as a homage to rural England. Today, its hymn adaptation has assumed the status of a pseudo national anthem – something which Simon White decries, stating that ‘[the hymn] has been used to represent a range of causes that seem to wilfully misread the poem’.[5] This appropriation of ‘Jerusalem’ constructs the rural as a national iconography in itself. Jo Robinson notes that theatre is often city-centric, and as such rarely depicts ‘the lived reality of those who live and work within rural localities’.[6] As such, Butterworth’s *Jerusalem* seeks to problematise the popular

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[1] Nadine Holdsworth, *Theatre & Nation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.22.
[2] David Ian Rabey, *The Theatre and Films of Jez Butterworth* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), p.1.
[3] Holdsworth, *Theatre & Nation*, p.42.
[4] Doreen Massey, ‘A Global Sense of Place’, *Marxism Today,* 35:6 (1991), 24-29 (p.26).
[5] Simon White, ‘The Blakean Imagination and the Land in Jez Butterworth’s *Jerusalem*’, *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 7:2 (2019), 259-280 (p.262).
[6] Jo Robinson, *Theatre and the Rural* (London: Palgrave, 2016), p.16.

and often urban-perpetuated stereotype of the rural as nothing more than 'Englands green & pleasant Land'.[7] At the play's centre, then, lies a series of contrasts: between urban and rural, perception and reality, national iconographies and local disillusionment. Rarely, however, are these binaries presented as entirely separate – they coexist, albeit uneasily, embodied by the places, institutions, and people of Flintock.

The opening scene of *Jerusalem* epitomises this struggle, introducing the dichotomies which permeate the play. Framed by a proscenium arch emblazoned with the words 'THE ENGLISH STAGE COMPANY' and 'adorned with cherubs and woodland scenes. Dragons. Maidens. Devils. Half-and-half creatures', the elfin Phaedra sings the eponymous hymn's opening verse before being aggressively drowned out by 'thumping music'.[8] It is arguable that, for the audience, the shift from these initial allusions to Shakespeare and Blake to the uncivilized setting of Johnny 'Rooster' Byron's caravan constitutes a sort of cultural or class voyeurism, whereby the audience's entertainment is facilitated by the promise of depravity and hedonism – safely contained within the onstage world. While Robinson suggests that opening *Jerusalem* with the hymn implies 'that there just might be a green and pleasant – and powerful – land, embodied by Rooster', this reading does not consider the rough interruption of Phaedra's song.[9] The audience's first encounter with Byron is sound-tracked not by Blake's poem but by twenty-first century 'deafening bass' and accessorised by the detritus surrounding his home – 'the old Wessex flag', 'an old hand-cranked air-raid siren', and, seemingly incongruously, 'four red Coca-Cola plastic chairs'.[10] Battered symbols of traditional English regional pride, British military triumph, and modern globalization respectively, they imply a complex and multi-faceted relationship with both the land and its history. The very presence of Byron's caravan in Rooster Wood therefore colours his localist resistance to the encroaching New Estate with a certain irony, for it itself represents an intersection of the local with the national, and indeed the global. As a place, Rooster Wood is invested with its meaning and wild potential through the interactions and experiences of the children who congregate at Byron's caravan – what Massey terms 'articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings'.[11] Seen in this context, it can be argued that the audience's impression of Byron is not so much as an embodiment of the 'green and pleasant' pastoral ideal, but of the land's mythic past and untamed possibility. Meanwhile, it is Phaedra the May Queen – significantly not present for much of the play – who personifies this Blakean view of rural England. Interpreted this way, her peripheral appearance only at the beginning and end of each act perhaps implies a rejection of this idealised perception; instead, Butterworth suggests a rural which is far more complex than merely 'green and pleasant' lands – one which, like the music at *Jerusalem*'s opening, is increasingly a hybridisation of traditional legends and urban modernity.

The play occurs over twenty-four hours on 23rd April, significant both nationally – as St George's Day and Shakespeare's birthday – and locally, as the day of the highly-anticipated Flintock Fair. In this way, Butterworth frames Flintock as a microcosm of England, using this narrowed focus on the town to, in Anna Harpin's words, 'refract broader questions of culture, of identity, of place'.[12] Flintock, but more specifically Rooster Wood and Byron's caravan, are archetypal of what Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts term 'edgelands':

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[7] William Blake, 'Milton a Poem, Copy A' (1811), electronic edition from *The William Blake Archive*, http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/milton.a?descId=milton.a.illbk.02 [accessed 26/03/2020], plate 2, line 44.

[8] Jez Butterworth, *Jerusalem* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p.5.

[9] Robinson, *Theatre and the Rural*, p.7.

[10] Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, p.6.

[11] Massey, 'A Global Sense of Place', p.28.

[12] Anna Harpin, 'Land of hope and glory: Jez Butterworth's tragic landscapes', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31:1 (2011), 61-73 (p.66).

'complicated, unexamined places that thrive on disregard' which exist 'in the hollows and spaces between our carefully managed wilderness areas and the creeping, flattening effects of global capitalism'.[13] These liminal spaces exist all over England, overlooked and lacking in aesthetic appeal but which, like Rooster Wood, possess a certain allure; they are on the boundary of urban civilization, but somehow are still 'places for hiding […] places beyond the codes and authority of the day'.[14] Hence, *Jerusalem* depicts a setting simultaneously specific to a small corner of Wiltshire and nationally recognisable, suggesting a need to re-evaluate the national iconography of the rural to accommodate these marginalised yet omnipresent spaces. Similarly, *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads* is characterised by Williams' sustained focus on the interior of the 'King George public house, south-west London'.[15] Literally, but also economically and culturally on the fringes of the city centre's affluence, the play's setting can be considered an urban edgeland – one which even its inhabitants admit is 'going nowhere', but to which they nevertheless retain 'a strong imaginative attachment'.[16] This link between place and identity is epitomised by Alan's impassioned reaction to Barry supporting Manchester United, despite being from Shepherds Bush: 'You are born in the town of your team. They are your family as well, your blood. […] And no matter where you go, where you move. You take them with you, in your heart'.[17] Alan is thereby characterised as a proponent of community insularity, and this theme is also conveyed through the play's proxemics. Although events external to the pub – such as Bad T stealing Glen's phone, Sharon's arrest, and of course the England vs Germany match at Wembley – are intrinsic to its internal dynamic, they are never depicted onstage, much like the Flintock Fair in *Jerusalem*. Hence, both plays' unwavering focus on their respective edgelands foregrounds the human impact of what Paul Kingsnorth terms 'the bleaching out of character, community, place and meaning in the name of growth, investment and global competitiveness'.[18] Byron's caravan and the King George pub are thus framed as sites of resistance to their respectively bureaucratic and increasingly globalised surroundings.

Significant, then, are the ways in which this resistance is enacted, and by whom. Keith Peacock defines the term 'multicultural' as '[referring] to immigrants and the indigenous population preserving their cultures and interacting peacefully within one nation', distinct from 'multiracial' in that the latter 'suggests a mixture of races who may or may not accept each other's values'.[19] Act One of *Sing*, initially, implies a relatively multicultural onstage world; Glen is shown to hang around with Duane and Bad T, while Barry – having not yet appeared onstage himself – is hailed by Becks as a 'wicked player' who 'won the game' for the pub football team.[20] However, as the on-screen game kicks off and England concede a goal, race relations become increasingly strained. This is further accentuated by Williams' use of smaller scale competitions, triumphs, and losses to explore tensions between the characters on an individual level. Mark quickly and easily beats Lawrie at table football in Act One, but by Act Two, Alan conversationally dominates Barry during their game of pool, which culminates in the latter angrily walking away from the game. In this way, the play uses sport to expose the underlying divide between its black and white characters – something which is further emphasised spatially. The pub's interior is represented as a predominantly white-centric space; not only are the majority of characters within white but, aside from Glen,

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[13] Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness* (London: Random House, 2011), p.10.
[14] Farley and Roberts, *Edgelands*, p.162.
[15] Roy Williams, *Sing Yer Heart Out for the Lads*, in *Williams Plays: 2* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2004), p.132 [accessed 10/04/20 via Drama Online, hereafter referred to as *Sing*].
[16] Williams, *Sing*, p.138; Farley and Roberts, *Edgelands*, p.162.
[17] Williams, *Sing*, pp.203-4.
[18] Paul Kingsnorth, *Real England: The Battle Against the Bland* (London: Portobello, 2009), p.15.
[19] Keith D. Peacock, 'The Question of Multiculturalism: The Plays of Roy Williams', in *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880–2005*, ed. by Mary Luckhurst (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), p.531.
[20] Williams, *Sing*, p.153.

Lee, and Lawrie, they also remain within for the play’s duration. In contrast, the black characters repeatedly cross the pub’s threshold, entering and exiting the stage space according to whether they are inside or outside. Significantly, Barry is the only black character who, having entered, remains inside and onstage throughout, attempting to conform to the white characters’ narrow-minded notion of Englishness through his physical positioning as well as his emulation of their xenophobic football fanaticism. Alan is presented as an ethnic nationalist – someone who, Holdsworth explains, ‘define[s] nationality on the basis of genealogy’.[21] Therefore, it is arguable that to him, the black characters’ literal boundary crossing represents a figurative transgression too: the encroachment of non-white races, who allegedly only have ‘squatter’s rights’, on England and English identity.[22] In this way, the pub setting can be interpreted as a heterotopia – what Joanne Tompkins defines as an ‘alternative space’ that is ‘*distinguished from* [the] actual world, but that *resonate[s] with* it’.[23] Indeed, Lynette Goddard asserts that, in *Sing*, ‘the off-stage space becomes symbolic of those excluded from full participation in old-fashioned constructs of an ‘English nation’’.[24] Thus, the audience-familiar space of the pub invests the play with what Tompkins terms ‘the capacity to influence an audience’s understanding of the relationship between the theatre and the world outside its walls’.[25] Through this heterotopic space, Williams suggests the enduring existence of an uncomfortably multiracial, rather than multicultural, contemporary London – a distinct alternative to the urban stereotype of liberal, integrated communities.

In *Jerusalem*, the distinction between onstage and off – and which characters occupy these spaces – is similarly significant. Butterworth’s play imaginatively constructs both Flintock and Kennet and Avon council offstage – who, while not excluded as such, refuse to participate in Byron’s hedonistic performance of mythic England, verbally maintained by his fantastic stories. Those who do participate, however, are a collection of youths Paul Mason identifies as representative of ‘real life in low-skill, low-pay, low-horizon England’.[26] During their visits to Byron’s caravan, their view of the world is altered – literally through the use of psychedelic drugs, but also figuratively as they are enchanted by his tales of ‘all the lost gods of England’ and ‘a giant that built Stonehenge’, connecting them to these legends and the landscape that inspired them.[27] In this way, Rooster Wood can also be considered a heterotopia; placed in stark contrast against the New Estate and the bureaucracy of Kennett and Avon council, it creates what Kevin Hetherington terms ‘spaces of alternate ordering’, in which the disillusioned youth are able to resist the homogeneity of small town life.[28] This desire for escapism is manifested most ambitiously in Lee’s plans to leave for Australia, but is equally present in the group’s propensity for drugs. Indeed, to them, the Flintock Fair represents an annual opportunity for intoxication, a lack of sobriety seemingly incongruous with traditional

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[21] Holdsworth, *Theatre & Nation*, p.16.
[22] Williams, *Sing*, p.219.
[23] Joanne Tompkins, *Theatre’s Heterotopias: Performance and the Cultural Politics of Space* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p.1 [emphasis in original].
[24] Lynette Goddard, *Contemporary Black British Playwrights: Margins to Mainstream* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.106.
[25] Tompkins, *Theatre’s Heterotopias*, p.27.
[26] Paul Mason, ‘Butterworth’s *Jerusalem*: the full English’, *BBC News: Idle Scrawl - Paul Mason’s blog* (18th December 2009) https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/newsnight/paulmason/2009/12/butterworths_jerusalem_the_ful.html [accessed 12/03/20].
[27] Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, p.18; p.57.
[28] Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (Abingdon, Oxford: Routledge, 1997), p.viii.

English celebrations such as morris dancing or crowning a May Queen. This juxtaposition is realised most prominently in Act Two when Byron asks Wesley to pay for 'a cheeky gram' by morris dancing in front of the collective.[29] The latter complies, explaining the dance's cultural significance ('each dance you do, each one connotes a different thing'), only to be met with derisive and mocking replies: 'I'm no expert, but to me it says, 'I have completely lost my self-respect'.[30] Equal parts comic and tragic, this scene conflates recognisable national iconography with the desperate reality of the white working class who hold onto these symbols of Englishness. The characters can or will only attend the fair when intoxicated, suggesting that its significance within the community has little to do with patriotism and more to do with their various desires for escapism (Ginger et al.), profit (Wesley) or self-mythologizing (Byron). Thus, the prominence of intoxication in the play exposes the national iconographies associated with the Flintock Fair as hollow and suggests the need for what Tompkins terms 'the rethinking and reordering of space, power, and knowledge' regarding common conceptualisations of the rural.[31] The Fair becomes a performance of reflective nostalgia for an England that never existed, but it is nevertheless one which the residents indulge in an attempt to deny the increasingly evident fault lines in their community.

Equally, the obsessive, alcohol-fuelled support of the English football team depicted in *Sing* can also be read as such a performance. Svetlana Boym defines reflective nostalgia as a concept which 'thrives in *álgos*, the longing itself' for some 'phantom homeland' – a process with which Alan and Lawrie engage as much as the characters of Butterworth's play.[32] In *Sing*, this yearning for the past is primarily fuelled by Alan's weaponization of history; although his blatantly unfounded assertion that '[black people] have given nothing to Britain' and 'have never served any purpose in British history' is vilified by Mark, statements such as this nevertheless stoke Lawrie's xenophobia and 'flavour [his] thought', inciting in him some foolish notion of lost national purity.[33] This reflective nostalgia is realised most prominently in Act Two, when Lee outlines his brother's glorified perception of the 1960s as the decade 'when England ruled the world again for four glorious years, when Enoch, best prime minister we never had, spoke the truth'.[34] By having the characters allude to England's 1966 World Cup win and Enoch Powell's infamous 'Rivers of Blood' speech (1968), Williams dramatizes the comparative discontent with the state of the nation felt by white nationalists in the early 2000s. *Sing* was first performed in 2002 at the Loft Theatre as part of the National Theatre's 'Transformation' season, but is set two years earlier in 2000, on the day of the 2002 World Cup qualifying match between England and Germany. Both contexts must be considered in light of the seminal Macpherson report, which concluded that the investigation into the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1999 was hindered by the Metropolitan Police's institutional racism: 'the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin'.[35] The report epitomised what was, in Harry Derbyshire's terms, 'the United Kingdom's uneasily heterogenous society' at the turn of the century; a society in which racism existed at all levels, but perhaps most vehemently amongst the white working class – some of whom perceived themselves to have been, as Goddard notes, 'sidelined in politically correct

[29] Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, p.55.
[30] Butterworth, *Jerusalem*, p.56.
[31] Tompkins, *Theatre's Heterotopias*, p.6.
[32] Svetlana Boym, 'Nostalgia', *Atlas of Transformation* http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/n/nostalgia/nostalgia-svetlana-boym.html [accessed 27/03/2020].
[33] Williams, *Sing*, pp.219-20; p.221.
[34] Williams, *Sing*, p.201.
[35] William Macpherson, 'The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny', *Gov.uk* (February 1999), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stephen-lawrence-inquiry [accessed 14/05/2020], p.49, chapter 6.34.

endeavours for multicultural equality' under the New Labour government.[36] Indeed, Alan's assertion that 'people like Lawrie' blame their 'shit jobs […] shit life, shit education' on the non-white people of Britain somewhat pre-empts MP Ruth Kelly's warning that, 'detached from the benefits of those changes, [white Britons] begin to believe the stories about ethnic minorities getting special treatment, and to develop a resentment, a sense of grievance'.[37] As such, the play's context frames Alan and Lawrie's reflective nostalgia for what Ben Carrington terms the 'myth of 1966' as to some extent a product of the early 2000s' political and social change; through the gateway concept of 'football coming home', they '[argue] for a particular view of Britain in the 1960s, and British economic and political confidence, returning home too'.[38] Thus, as their community evolves around and seemingly without them, traditional national iconographies such as football, the St George's flag, and the physical space of the pub become increasingly significant to the white characters' identities because, as Aleks Sierz notes, these 'olde images of Britishness, or Englishness […] provide a stable fiction against which to define [them]selves'.[39]

Hence, both Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* and Roy Williams' *Sing* explore the concept of national identity primarily through their foregrounding of often overlooked communities. These edgelands can be considered overarching national iconographies; while at odds with the idealised perceptions of England's pastoral rural and London's liberal metropolis, they are representations of the nation which perhaps better reflect reality. Within these edgelands, Butterworth and Williams both suggest the existence of divisions, shown literally through their use of stage space. In *Jerusalem*, this heterotopic reordering of space suggests that Byron's influence somewhat redefines tradition, presenting an alternative, hybrid conceptualisation of the rural. His caravan in Rooster Wood conflates the local and the global, myth and modernity, and although he is served an eviction notice by the council, the play ultimately concludes with Byron's relentless drum beat and impassioned summoning of old Albion's folkloric figures – an act of defiance that Robinson terms 'an invocation of the still talismanic power of England's green spaces'.[40] In *Sing*, however, Alan and Lawrie's performance of reflective nostalgia serves not to imagine how past and present can combine to create revised national iconographies, but rather to reassert traditional symbols of Englishness which Williams suggests are outdated at best; at worst, when weaponised, they are shown to be profoundly dangerous.

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[36] Harry Derbyshire, 'Roy Williams: Representing Multicultural Britain in *Fallout*', *Modern Drama*, 50:3 (2007), 414-434 (p.415); Goddard, *Margins to Mainstream*, p.105.

[37] Williams, *Sing*, p.216; Ruth Kelly, 'Ruth Kelly's speech on integration and cohesion', *The Guardian* (24th August 2006) https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/aug/24/uksecurity.terrorism [accessed 12/03/2020].

[38] Ben Carrington, ''Football's coming home' but whose home? And do we want it?: nation, football and the politics of exclusion', in *Fanatics!: Power, Identity and Fandom in Football*, ed. by Adam Brown (London: Routledge, 1998), p.114; p.115.

[39] Aleks Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation: British Theatre Today* (London: Methuen Drama, 2011), p.226.

[40] Robinson, *Theatre and the Rural*, p.1.

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