

### Simulacra, Memory, and Self-Fashioning in Julian Barnes' England

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#### Abstract:

Julian Barnes' 1998 *England, England* is a novel that explores the working of Baudrillardian Simulacra in the production and dissemination of national identity by mediating the ways into which a nation can imagine its history. The current study argues that this view is exclusionist since it overlooks the working of Simulacra on the personal level in this novel. Simulacra is essential to England's image of itself as to the central character Martha Cochrane's image of self and imaginary. The study further argues for the centrality of memory to the working of Simulacra in *England, England*. Memory, whether personal or national, is a par excellence textual space for the negotiation and interrogation of the issues of Simulacra and self-fashioning. Barnes' narrative, as such, is less about identity than self-fashioning construction. Memory, notably in the first part of the novel, is mediated and reconstructed by Simulacra to initiate the process of the construction of self-fashioning parallel for Martha and fin de millénaire Britain. The novelty of this research lies in the way it seeks to re-conceptualize Baudrillard's Simulacra critique from cultural simulation to the subversive play of cultural memory. The research shall limit its scope to this novel as it masterly invokes the psychology of the memory, particularly through the psychological model of the Adaptive Constructive Process.

**Keywords:** Julian Barnes, Simulacra, memory, self-fashioning, trauma, adaptive constructive process.

### 朱利安·巴恩斯(朱利安·巴恩斯)的英格兰中的拟像、记忆和自我塑造

#### 摘要:

朱利安·巴恩斯(朱利安·巴恩斯)于1998年出版的《英格兰, 英格兰》(英格兰, 英国)是一部小说, 探讨了鲍德里亚拟像在民族认同的产生和传播中的作用, 它通过调节一个民族可以想象其历史的方式。目前的研究认为, 这种观点是排外主义的, 因为它忽视了拟像在这部小说中个人层面的工作。拟像对于英格兰自身的形象至关重要, 就像中心人物玛莎·科克伦(玛莎·科克伦)的自我形象和虚构形象一样。该研究

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进一步论证了记忆在拟像在英国英格兰工作中的中心地位。记忆，无论是个人的还是国家的，都是对拟像和自我塑造问题进行谈判和审问的绝佳文本空间。因此，巴恩斯的叙述与其说是关于身份，不如说是关于自我塑造的结构。记忆，尤其是在小说的第一部分，由拟像调解和重建，以启动为玛莎和英国千禧一代建立自我塑造平行线的过程。这项研究的新颖之处在于它试图将鲍德里亚的模拟批评从文化模拟重新概念化为文化记忆的颠覆性游戏。研究将其范围限制在这部小说中，因为它巧妙地调用了记忆的心理學，特别是通过适应性建构过程的心理學模型。

**关键词：** 朱利安巴恩斯，拟像，记忆，自我塑造，创伤，适应性建设过程。

## 1. Introduction

Julian Barnes' 1998 novel *England, England* is an ingenuous work of speculative fiction, in which Barnes explores the nature and working of simulacra and memory on the personal and cultural levels through the intertwined narratives of Martha Cochrane and Jack Pitman. The novel falls into three parts. The first part carries the title "England." It introduces Martha's childhood and subsequent growth into a stern, but disillusioned, young lady. The second and lengthiest part carries the title "England, England." It follows Martha's involvement in the theme park project of the entrepreneur Jack Pitman, which eventually leads to the collapse of the United Kingdom. In the third part, which carries the title "Anglia Martha quits the theme park project and moves to live in a primitive and rural England of the Anglo-Saxon times.

Barnes' thesis in this novel is that memory, whether a personality of national, is essentially simulacry in nature, and therefore, a par excellence site where issues of authenticity and the real are contested. Barnes employs the theory of Simulacra by the poststructuralist thinker Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) to explore the dynamics of memory. Baudrillard regards the phenomenon of simulacra as the most significant symptom of the postmodern condition. In the postmodern culture, reality is being contested and replaced by hyperreality because of the over-proliferation of images, representations, and signs under the impact of technology, media, and consumer-style of life.

Simulacrum, according to Baudrillard, is the "generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, the map precedes the territory – procession of simulacra – the map engenders the territory" (Baudrillard 2010:1). Simulacrum is discursively disseminated from the process of Simulation. In this process, the real is being problematized and gradually contested by its representations. The result is a decentered world made up of contesting signs, images, and models. Such a world is being generated via a simulation. The referential, like the real, is no longer accessible in such a simulated world. The relationship between representation and simulation is a sort of deconstructive deferral. Representation, on the one hand, interprets simulation as a false representation as it lacks concrete referentiality, a kind of misrepresentation of the real.

Simulation, on the other hand, seeks to encompass the representation itself as a kind of simulation. The deferral is irreversible and ends with the utter rule of simulacra.

Baudrillard schematized this process into four orders. Representation originates as "a reflection of a basic reality" (Baudrillard, 2010:6). Gradually, this representation starts to mask and pervert "a basic reality" (Baudrillard, 2010:6). It is with the third order that simulacra start operating in a manifest way as representation at this stage "masks the absence of a basic reality" (Baudrillard, 2010:6). In the fourth order, the original is utterly lost as representation "bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum (Baudrillard, 2010:6). Thus, the first order is the representation of the real in its classic referential sense, whereas the fourth order is the simulacrum at its full sway. The second and third orders are the processes of simulation. The transition from signs that disseminate something to signs that disseminate nothing is the turning point in the fashioning of simulacra.

Barnes incorporates Baudrillard's insights into his exploration of the simulacry nature of personal and national memory. Memory, it should be remembered, in the context of *England, England* is less an act of remembering than conceptualizing the way an individual or a nation imagines his\its past\history and how this act of personal\national imagining is mediated and, therefore, of a constructed nature.

This aspect of *England, England* is well documented in the critical literature written on this novel. However, attention was almost exclusively directed to the national memory because Sir Jack's theme park project, so central to the novel, is self-consciously constructed along the lines of Baudrillardian simulacra. Barnes makes explicit references to Baudrillard and his theory of simulacra in the text of the novel in the speech of the French intellectual that Sir Jack hires to address the Project Co-ordinating Committee. The theme park seeks to simulate England for tourist purposes by copying its cultural icons in one place. The resulting copy of England on the Isle of Wight becomes so real in the popular imagination that it surpasses the real England and contests its authenticity. Thus, critics, such as James J. Miracky, Vanessa Guignery, Christine Berberich, and others, focused exclusively on the simulation of national memory in the theme park. Miracky, for instance, observes that the theme park project "belongs on the third order of simulation, as a "hyperreal" in which the model precedes (or at least

overtakes) the real” (Miracky, 2004:165). Guignery also notes that “by foregrounding the construction of national history, *England, England* problematizes issues relating to the art of representation, the simulacrum, and the relationship between the replica and the original” (Guignery, 2006:110). Christine Berberich highlights that the hyperreality of the simulated park surpasses the original England as tourists turn from actual England to *England, England* of the theme park where they can find all the icons of the actual historical England conveniently placed in one place with many added attractions. But Berberich thinks that this novel “sends a warning signal” because “a world where reality is merely being simulated and eventually implodes, where people’s sense of identity is being manipulated is, first, a dangerous and dystopian world” (Berberich, 2008:176).

## 2. Simulacra, Memory, and Self-Fashioning in *England, England*

Thus, national memory, vis-à-vis the way Britain imagines its historical past, has become so central to any discussion of simulacra in *England, England*, whereas the simulation of personal memory, vis-à-vis the way Martha imagines her childhood, is overlooked or, at best, mentioned but linked to national memory. Nick Bentley is a typical instance of this tendency. Commenting on Martha’s childhood memory of doing a jigsaw puzzle made up of the counties of England, Bentley states that “the process of constructing and re-constructing the nation is central to this image” (Bentley, 2007: 181). He reads this ‘process’ in the context of identity formation, both personal and national. The help Martha gets from her father to provide the missing county of the puzzle “is thus presented in terms of both completing the nation, but also of completing and fulfilling Martha’s identity” (Bentley, 2007: 181). Personal memory in *England, England* loses its materiality as a sign as it solely exists as part of the simulacra of national memory in the sense that the act of remembering on the personal level cannot materialize unless it finds its imaginary in national memory.

However, note that almost all critics who acknowledge the simulacry nature of Martha’s childhood memories seem to take their lead from the reflection on the nature of memories that opens the first part of the novel: “A memory was by definition not a thing, it was ... a memory. A memory now of a memory a bit earlier of a memory before that of a memory way back when” (Barnes, 1999:10). This is an unmistakable invocation of the Baudrillardian conception of simulacra as copies without an original. The unnamed narrator, which most critics quite mistakenly identify to be Martha, further substantiates this simulacry nature of personal memory:

If a memory was not a thing but a memory of a memory of a memory, mirrors set in parallel, then what the brain told you now about what it claimed had

happened then would be colored by what had happened in between. It was like a country remembering its history: the past was never just the past; it was what made the present able to live with itself. The same went for individuals [...] an element of propaganda, of sales and marketing, always intervened between the inner and the outer person (Barnes, 1999:12-13).

Although hypothetical, what happens here to memory is not the ‘procession of simulacra’ per se but merely the second order of the simulacra in which a separation is occurring between reality and its imaginary. The process of replication here is not identical as the actual past experience being remembered is in a constant deferral. The signification is gradually getting groundless as the real is surpassed by the welter of its numerous copies. Sara Henstra highlights this Baudrillardian aspect of ‘groundless signification’ when she notices that the recursive structure of this reflection on the simulacry nature of memory “thwarts any attempt to reach unmediated ‘truth’ about memory is a sign that only ever points back to another sign” (Barnes 1999: 97). However, Henstra, unfortunately, stops short of substantiating the full simulacra potential of this reflection on memory and regresses instead back to the first order of simulacra. She claims that the memory involved in most recollections of childhood is “performative rather than strictly commemorative” because such memories are “calculated” to solicit an emotional appeal. Such memories are rhetorical re-visits of childhood times for emotional aggrandizement or discharge. “The rhetorical function of memory,” concludes Henstra, “outranks any bid for accuracy” (Barnes, 1999: 97).

It is this confusion of simulacra for a lack of accuracy that Baudrillard warned in his discussion of simulacra and simulation: “Although representation attempts to absorb simulation by interpreting it as a false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation itself as a simulacrum” (Baudrillard 2010:6). Such a state of textual tension and its attending interpretive ambivalence is strongly effectual in shaping the reader’s cognitive processing of Martha’s childhood jigsaw puzzle memory. While this memory is a simulation with no origin, the text offers a strong counter argument that this memory is ‘a false representation’ fantasized by a traumatized child. The novel makes this explicit right on its very first page when the nameless narrator reflects on a person’s first memory. The narrator highlights that “Martha Cochrane was to live a long time, and in all years, she was never to come across a first memory, which was not in her opinion lie. *Thus, she lied too* (italics added)” (Barnes, 1999: 10). When relating to the details of her very first memory, the narrator, or was it Martha herself?, asserts that “Yes, that was it, her first memory, her first artfully, innocently arranged lie” (Barnes, 1999:11). The evocation of such memories as lies is meant to highlight their constructed nature as false or fabricated memories. The term false memory “refers to a conscious “recollection” of an event that never

happened" (Schacter & Curran, 2000: 829). The point here is that the experience being remembered here has never occurred or, at least, experienced in a radically different way. Three forms of false memories are identified in the psychological literature in terms of their causes: Confabulation, Intrusion, and False Recognition (Schacter et al. 1998:293-294). Confabulations are forms of false memories that assume the form of a narrative story of an event or incident that was never experienced in reality. Intrusions are false memories that create a new or an imagined part of a really experienced event. In false recognitions, new experiences or events are claimed as old or belated ones. Martha's jigsaw memory is clearly a confabulated false memory as this type of false memories is most often associated with patients with psychic or neurotic disorders. Seda Arikan and Yesim Ipekci (2020:170) mention this effect when they theorize that Martha's "inability to grasp the unconscious reality that is each subject's buried 'the Thing,' in Lacanian terms, leads the characters of the novel to an infinite search for fictional realities, which is the main trope in the novel". They are right in reading Martha's first memory as a case of "Lacan's *manqua an etre* subject – the subject that is identified with a permanent lack" (Arikan & Ipekci, 2020: 171). They, however, attribute the source of this Lacanian 'lacking' to her anger at losing the Nottingham piece of her jigsaw puzzle. Such attribution is inaccurate since the Lacanian 'lacking' can only materialize through either the loss of a family member or an organ of the body. Arikan and Ipekci overlook the psychological impact of her father's abandonment of her at an early age. This qualifies as a traumatizing situation that can promote a Lacanian 'lacking' in her.

One significant consequence of this traumatic experience and the Lacanian 'lacking' it promoted in Martha is the acute problematizing of the relationship between memory and reality for Martha. Her willing lie is subsequently related to the trauma she experiences as a child of six in the wake of her father's abandonment of his wife and daughter. She seems to construct this first memory to rationalize the long absence of the father:

To Martha, it was perfectly simple. Daddy had gone off to find Nottinghamshire. He thought he had it in his pocket, but when he looked it wasn't there. That was why he was not smiling down at her and blaming the cat. He knew he could not disappoint her, so he'd gone off to hunt for the piece and it was just taking longer than he'd imagined. Then, he'd be back and all would be well again (Barnes, 1999: 20).

A substantial psychological literature is available on false and fabricated childhood memories, and most of this literature tends to relate such memories to traumatic or stressful experiences (Porter et al., 1999: 518-520). Martha's childish rationalization of the prolonged absence of the father betrays a traumatized self. Her report shows one factual detail, which is "why he wasn't smiling down at her and blaming the cat." This painful experience is the actual core around which a

narrative is confabulated. Therefore, she was not rationalizing the absence of her father as much as palpating the pain of a hurting father. The coldness of her father toward her has traumatized her so, deep in her subconscious mind, she projected the jigsaw game as the imaginary for the cold father. It should be remembered that Martha is intimately connected to her father, and her early childhood is shaped by the sole presence of the father, as the first part of the novel suggests. Therefore, the impact on her proves to be traumatic. Martha, as such, shows posttraumatic stress disorder (usually appreciated in psychological literature as PTSD) as in her school blasphemy. Her blasphemous play on prayer words is symptomatic of a posttraumatic refusal of the authority (and the very existence) of the Father (divine and human): "She did not think it was blasphemous, except perhaps for the bit about farting. Some of it she thought was rather beautiful: the bit about the wigwam and flowers always made her think of Nine Climbing Beans Round, which God, had He existed, would presumably have approved of" (Barnes, 1999: 18). This refusal is also nostalgic as it harks back to the happy memory of the visit to the agricultural show with her parents. The 'Nine Climbing Beans Rounds' are the beans that won the annual completion of the show. She was fascinated by them and tried years later to emulate them in her participation in the same show. These 'Nine Climbing Beans Rounds' symbolize her link to her father and one of the happiest moments of her childhood. This memory, in particular, seems true and genuine. The narrative voice presents this memory as factual: "When she looked back, then, she saw lucid and significant memories that she mistrusted. What could be clearer and more remembered than that day at the Agricultural Show?" (Barnes, 1999: 13) That was a real memory, not confabulate and not even simulated: "But nothing had gone wrong, not that day, not in her memory of that day. And she had kept the book of lists for many decades, knowing most of its strange poetry by heart" (Barnes 1999:14). Unlike the jigsaw memory, this one is rich with sensory details, and there is concrete evidence that she visited the show. Her father bought her "The District Agricultural and Horticultural Society's Schedule of Prizes." This is a picture book of some dozen pages in red. This book, which later figures prominently in the third part of the novel, is described here aptly by the narrator as "a prompt-book of memory" (Barnes, 1999: 14). Once more, this memory is symptomatic of the painful experience of the absent father. Deep in her subconscious, this memory is a nostalgic escape into a happy past prior to the traumatizing situation of the father's abandoning her and her mother. This neurotic recoil into a prelapsarian past as an escape from a painful memory would necessarily cast doubt on the authenticity of the memory she chooses to recoil into for that memory or, at least, some of its details are either readjusted or fabricated to meet her psychic needs for recoil away from the pain of memory.

However, such psychological rationalizations of

Martha's childhood memories as false memories are but part of what Baudrillard calls 'false representations.' Such representations vie to efface the presence of simulacra in fashioning Martha's memories, her perception of them, and, ultimately, the way she imagines her own childhood. Martha, for sure, is aware of the constructed nature of her childhood memories but not in the sense that she confabulated or falsified them. She admits that her first memory is an 'innocently arranged lie' in the sense that such a memory is montaged and re-montaged repeatedly to serve in her retrospective self-fashioning. This in essence is the working of the simulacra were her memories, and childhood, become copies without origin. Her first memory is only officially first as far as it is the end product of the simulacra of former life experience that occurred far before the simulacra officialization of what was actually experienced but duly effaced. This is why she confessed earlier that she cannot 'remember' her first memory because "there's always a memory just behind your first memory, and you can not quite get at it" (Barnes, 1999: 1). This, in short, is a clear acknowledgment of the working of the simulacra.

Recent research in the field of memory studies corporate such a claim. In his pioneering study of memory, *Mental Time Travel: Episodic Memory and Our Knowledge of the Personal Past* (2016), Kourken Michaelian (2016: 100) observes that the memory of past events has "a flexible, simulational character" because the memory system responsible for remembering past events is simultaneously responsible for imagining future events. This system, in other words, is "dedicated to retrieving stored representations of past experiences unaltered" and "dedicated to flexibly modifying such information to produce representations of possible future events" (Michaelian, 2016: 101). Michaelian traces this simulational aspect of the episodic memory back to "adaptive constructive processes" (Michaelian, 2016: 101). Due to their constructive character, these processes "inevitably cause distortions, errors, and illusions" (Michaelian, 2016: 101). Remembering, concludes Michaelian, "is itself a matter of Simulating". These 'adaptive constructive processes' correspond to the order of the Baudrillardian simulacra as they happen each time an episodic memory is remembered. Thus, remembering repeatedly a specific episodic memory over time accumulates 'distortions, errors, and illusions' of the actual past experience. This entails the production of highly variable copies of the same episodic memory, where the original actual past experience gradually, but inevitably, is lost beyond recovery.

Seen from this perspective, Martha's childhood memories can be said to be the product of the workings of simulacra. Her memories are episodic in the sense that they give us "knowledge of specific episodes experienced in the past and depends on a dedicated memory system" (Michaelian, 2016: 35). The jigsaw memory and the visit to the annual agricultural show are episodic as they retrieve and represent in a narrative

mode specific past experience. In both of these two memories, we are presented with a complex sequence of events. However, in both of these memories, there is a noticeable sense of fragmentation as if each memory is montaged out of the snaps of other memories. These snaps are delivered from a strong visual perspective in the form of cinematic close-ups. For instance, in the jigsaw memory, the close-ups go in the following sequence:

(1) The mother cooking and singing beautifully in the kitchen.

(2) Vivid details of the rug mat on which her jigsaw puzzle pieces are displayed.

(3) The way she arranges the pieces of the puzzle.

(4) Help from the father in finding the missing piece in a theatrical way.

These scenic close-ups lack sequential cohesion, but behave like a simulated scenario. We know that close-ups (3) and (4) did happen in Martha's childhood as her father himself did not acknowledge the very possibility of their existence. In the closing scene of part one in the novel, Martha tries desperately make her father acknowledge her memory: "You used to take a piece and hide it, then find it in the end. You took Nottinghamshire with you when you left. Don't you remember?" (Barnes, 1999: 29). While the answer of her father is devastatingly ironic, it exposes the constructed nature of her memory: "He shook his head. 'You did jigsaw? It is supposed that all the kids love them. Richard did. For a while, anyway. He had an incredibly complicated one, I remember, all clouds or something – you never knew which way up it was until you were half finished ...'" (Barnes, 1999: 29). This unexpected reply cannot be rationalized on the ground of the father growing old and, as such, being prone to forgetfulness. Her father sounds sure of himself and affirms that such role-playing did not happen. With this gesture, Martha's episodic jigsaw memory starts to acquire the status of simulacra. Here, the third and fourth orders of the simulacra manifest themselves clearly. This memory 'masks the absence of a basic reality' and 'bears no relation to any reality whatever.' It becomes 'its own pure simulacrum' as Martha goes on maintaining a firm belief in the authenticity of this simulated memory as the 'real': "She would always blame him for that. She was over twenty-five, and she would go on getting older than twenty-five, older and older and older than twenty-five, and she would be on her own; but she would always blame him for that" (Barnes, 1999: 29). While this gives an insight into the way reality is being supplanted by simulacra, it, fundamentally, problematizes the boundary between memory and reality for Martha. These last authorial words that conclude part one of *England, England* loop the reader back to the very opening of this part. Martha cannot remember her very first memory as she is by now aware that her memory is just simulacra of whatever real experience. The origin is lost irrevocably, and memories are just confabulated copies. Hence, her earlier evocation of the simulacra nature of memory as

'a memory now of a memory a bit earlier of a memory before that of a memory way back then.' This also justifies why she describes her memories as 'lies' because they, at the fourth order of the simulacra, 'bears no relation to any reality whatever.'

The critic Peter Childs relates this simulacrum aspect of Martha's first memory to her sense of identity construction when he states that *England, England* is "a novel around rather than about the simulacra of memory, identity, and self-construction" (Childs 2011:109). The simulation of memory in this novel is less related to the question of identity than to the question of self-fashioning in the sense that it is less about assuming identity than with the process of the construction of identity. Seen in the context of the simulation of memory, this conception of self-fashioning invoked in *England, England* is roughly equivalent to the way or ways an individual or a nation imagines his\its past history to re-invent and rationalize his\its present moment of existence. Childs is, therefore, right to see a link between the simulacra operating on the level of personal history and the rewriting of the national past. Childs notes that Barnes's narrative dwells on the "reinvention of language and authentic experience through a rewriting of the national past" (Childs, 2011: 108). He finds that this is comparable to "an individual recasting of memories over time, where the inaccurately remembered rather than actual past shapes the subject's conscious sense of identity" (Childs, 2011: 108).

Imagining national history might be comparable to remembering the personal past but with a qualitative difference. In Lacanian terms, the personal past operates on the level of the imaginary, whereas national history operates on the symbolic level. However, in both cases, the real is mediated by the working of language and memory in which its representations are open to the play of simulacra.

### 3. Conclusion

It should be noticed here that the personal and national past engage with episodic memories to self-fashion a narrative. The construction of such a narrative is done on a parallel course. Martha's self-fashioning a narrative of her childhood echoes, and evokes the simulacrum grounds of the wider national project of creating an historical narrative of its past. Martha exists and focalizes the two stages of Britain's construction of a national memory in the next two parts of the novel. She is central to Pitman's theme park, which seeks to simulate British cultural memory. She is also agentive to capture England's willing regression into Anglo-Saxon history as she is employed at the narratological level as a center of consciousness to focalize the events of this section.

Therefore, it is logical to assume that in the three parts of the novel, simulacra operate on the level of memory as a means of self-fashioning of the individual and the nation alike. Simultaneously, memory, whether personal or national, becomes a space where simulacra

and self-fashioning are negotiated. This is radically different from the current readings of *England, England* as fashioning simulacra to interrogate the authenticity of personal and national history. Such readings overlook the significance of memory as a textual site for the play of the simulacra in fashioning narratives of how an individual and a nation imagine their pasts.

Compared to other studies that sought to analyze this novel through the model of Baudrillardian Simulacra, this study focusses more on the concept of memory, whether personal or national, as the actual focus of the Baudrillardian Simulacra. Simulation as a cultural practice of the postmodernist era is viewed here as a process of cultural and interpersonal process of self-fashioning in which Millennial England seeks to re-invent itself cultural in search of a defaced identity. Thus, this study does not seek to apply systematically a cultural theory, as in the case of most of the related literature on this novel. It rather seeks to re-interpret Baudrillard's Simulacra by showing that its exclusion of personal and interpersonal memory limits its efficacy as an effective tool of cultural analysis. Baudrillard's over emphasis on national memory makes his theory a rigid abstraction by overlooking the power of the individual. The modification this paper advances restores focus to the level of characterization, which would add a lot to our understanding of the way Simulacra operates on the cultural level.

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