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## PJ Harvey and Remembering England

### Introduction

PJ Harvey is an English musician who has, to date, enjoyed a career spanning nearly a quarter of a century. She comes from Dorset, a rural county in the South West of England, where she still lives. This fact is important because it locates her in a particular rural and potentially ‘pastoral’ place, one that is far away from the metropolitan, from Thomas Hardy’s ‘madding crowd’. This chapter focuses on *White Chalk* (2007) and *Let England Shake* (2011) to argue that they are her ‘English’ albums, a claim that rests not only on their musical temperament, lyrical concerns or audio-visual representation, but also on the nature of how they remember England, especially when this collides with narratives of war and home. Remembering is often selective and selection is part of the archiving process. What we leave in and what we leave out of the archive dictates in turn, what is and is not remembered. In these two albums, Harvey presents a version of Englishness that adds to contemporary discourses on (memories of) national identity by foregrounding the forgotten, the rural, the disappointed; by narrating tales of love and war that are not those of victory or triumph but of longing and loss.

For clarity of navigation, throughout the chapter a music video or short film will be written in small capitals (WHITE CHALK), the album titles will be in italics, *White Chalk* and a song track from an album will be within quotation marks, ‘White Chalk’.

Harvey has been recording since the early 1990s, has won the UK Mercury prize twice and might be considered to be one of the country’s most longstanding and important musicians. Her 2011 work, *Let England Shake*, on land and nation cemented her musical and intellectual reputation. She has been awarded the MBE, an honorary degree from Goldsmiths, University of London, has conducted poetry readings at the British Museum and guest edited

Radio 4; she has been taken into the folds of the intellectual elite. It is even tempting to start thinking about her as a ‘national treasure’, whereby she is rehabilitated from the wilds of the independent music shores to take part in a shared cultural life.

This chapter interrogates how and why this has happened and argues that it is, in part, due to her narration of Englishness and what aspects of it are remembered. To map this out, the discussion entails an analysis of the development over Harvey’s recent career (2007-2011) of audio-visual aspects of her work that might be construed as ‘English’ particularly in relation to locality and land (Aughey, 2007). One of the questions posed here is to ask whether these aspects might be seen to culminate in her more recent work at a time when nation and identity may be considered to be pertinent political and cultural themes. In this sense, the chapter asks whether her albums are part of an archiving process that contributes to a reframing of Englishness.

### **Harvey the archivist**

In other work (Gardner, 2015), I have argued that Harvey is an archivist, in that she collects, curates and presents alternative versions and visions of the past, predominantly those of past femininities. Sifting through what is presented to her from the past, she has re-inhabited them and reconfigured them, questioning their legacies with irony and camp humour. In a similar fashion she does the same in *White Chalk* and *Let England Shake*, the first of which is concerned with matrilineal histories and rural place, the second where she presents a tapestry of Englishness that has as its metanarrative, an idea of nation as configured through loss, war and remembrance. Harvey’s lyrical concerns in these two albums centre not only on land and belonging but also on how that land and allegiance to it are archived and remembered. In *Let England Shake* in particular, Englishness is defined in relation to land and war and, crucially

what is recorded (literally, through the audio archiving that is the record) becomes Harvey's archive of Englishness. It is a radical re-imagining of England at a time when its mythology and status were under debate. What she does on this album, the process of setting down on record, the audio inscription, is in line with Derrida's (1996) view in *Archive Fever* that the archive is not always about the past but can be about the future. It records what we are agreeing to remember of the past, specifically that of a mythologised pastoral England.

Harvey's stories people the land with voices that have been marginalised or under explored. We hear laments from wounded soldiers (2011), young women abandoned by their lovers (2007), we see, in Seamus Murphy's films, young gamekeepers, elderly men and women. Harvey rescues these ordinary accounts and pastes them onto the received trope of Englishness that are the stock imagery of an old and pastoral England, across meadows, beaches, fields, oak trees and milestones. These two albums fit into a wider compulsion across contemporary British popular culture to retrieve from history the voices of those previously unheard and to focus on the emotional weight they have. The BBC's 2016-2017 year of popular music memories ('My Generation') is one example of the mediation of musical memories and emotional attachment. Emotion has featured in academic work on media in general (Doveling, von Scheve and Kojin, 2010; Gorton, 2009; Garde-Hansen and Gorton, 2013) and is visible in recent additions to the popular music canon (Juslin and Slobodan, 2010; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). Harvey's albums expresses a narrative of Englishness that articulates the emotional ties to family and land that are themselves emergent from older archives of Englishness; musical expressions, melodic structures, military archives, all of which Harvey has consulted and reinterpreted, producing in turn her own archive of Englishness.

Harvey emerged onto the UK 'independent' or 'indie' music scene in the early 1990s, and has, to date produced nine solo studio albums. 'Indie' is a term whose 'exact definition

and boundaries are open to dispute' (Leonard, 2007a: 4). It has been, and continues to be, a topic of debate across popular music, both in academia and within industry discourses and Moore's (2003) oft-cited paper positions it as a construct characterised by 'rawness' (Frith and Horne, 1988:88) and unmediated communication (Grossberg, 1992,1993). It has become allied to a white masculinity (Bannister, 2006b, Leach, 2001) despite its historical link to 'difference' (Bannister, 2006a:58) and counter-cultural possibilities, particularly with providing space for women to perform and produce (Kruse, 2003; Reddington, 2007; Schilt, 2004; Leonard, 2007a). A seam through all of these conversations is the notion of 'authenticity' (Shuker, 2013: 18). This term, itself much debated, arguably determines how punk and folk music have been discursively situated within a polarity, at the opposite end of which sits 'pop' (Dale, 2012: 43; Hesmondhalgh, 1999:56). Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Harvey mined a seam of Gothic Blues and garage punk so that both her early output and later albums might be corralled into such generic parameters. However, keen to cross musical genres, Her Mercury Prize winning 2001 album *Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea* experimented with a fuller sound. Six years later, she released, *White Chalk* (2007), which was pared down, piano-led and arguably, more versed within a folk tradition. *Let England Shake* (2011) continued this line of creative direction.

These two albums herald a shift towards a consideration of country (side) and belonging that work as audio-visual renditions of a radical pastoralism. That is, Harvey uses musical and visual tropes of rural and imagined England as material upon which to stage narratives that foreground the place of land and countryside within personal stories of gendered (2007) and national (2011) identity. In their work on popular music and place, Connell and Gibson articulate how the term 'nation' is a contested concept 'that provides the basis for debates in society about cultural difference, uniqueness and attachments to territory'

(Connell and Gibson, 2003: 123). Their last assertion that national identity is tied up with relationships to land plays the biggest role in Harvey's two 'English' albums.

## **Finding England**

The idea of 'Englishness' and England has become ripe for reconsideration within the academy as writers on popular culture trace out emerging imaginations of Englishness with respect to identity and place (Bunting, 2009), politics (Kenny, 2014) and popular culture (Featherstone, 2009). But England as a geographical place and as a national or regional identity has figured less in popular music accounts, partly because, as Moy suggests, it remains 'problematic' (Moy, 2007:56). These problems are to do with definitions, absences and appropriations. Aughey (2007) has argued that 'Englishness' as a term has been fraught with political tensions because concerns with the soil (often conflated with continuity) lie at odds with a progressive politics and this is very clearly marked in folk music, which as Winters and Keegan-Phipps note, is enjoying a 'resurgence' (2013). Their ethnographic and musicological study notes that whilst the 1980s saw the start of a body of work on Englishness as a 'scholarly ... political and a cultural, concern' (2013: 3), there has been little investigation into Englishness and folk music, which they address. *White Chalk* and *Let England Shake* are not folk albums, but they borrow some of the genre's idioms, instrumentation and melodic structures. Arguably, this is because folk music has a stronger bond with English national identity than the blues-rock of Harvey's earlier work; she is 'coming home' in a sense. It is possible to read these albums and particularly *Let England Shake* as part of the 'resurgent' Englishness that Winters and Keegan-Phipps claim for English folk music, so that the albums are read as indicative of 'an English cultural sensibility or sense of English national identity rather than nationalism' (Winters and Keegan-Phipps, 2013: 132). However, delineating such boundaries is difficult, and Winters and Keegan-

Phipps note that there have been cases where folk music has been appropriated by the Far Right, which in turn has been countered by movements such as Folk Against Fascism.

*Let England Shake* utilises English folk idiom to present an album that mixes such traditions with diverse interjections of reggae and Bulgarian choirs to offer a sound palette that suggests the fluidity and diversity of nation. In a review for the *Guardian*, Alexis Petridis noted how its ‘guitars [were] wreathed in echo’, how it used ‘muzzy electric piano’ and ‘smears of brass’, all leading to an album whose take on Englishness was, he argued, ‘muted, misty and ambiguous’ (Petridis, 2011). Throughout the album there is an ambiguity of narratorial position that makes it difficult to identify a sympathetic identificatory standpoint, although it offers the listener an insight into what belonging and partisanship might feel like as Harvey sings disparagingly about Europeans and claims allegiance to England in the rhetoric of the patriot. This ambiguity did not stop the album being conflated with a Far Right agenda. The short film for *Let England Shake* was posted up for around eight months from April 2012 on a Nationalist website. Below an image of the Cross of St George, seemingly rendered in blood against snow, under the title ‘Let England Shake’, Harvey’s film sat amongst anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim and white supremacist posts and adverts. With links to Far Right parties and organizations across Europe, the presence of Harvey’s name on the site is illustrative of the tensions that folk music, in particular, has had as a consequence of its embrace by the Far Right. There is much therefore at stake in the term, ‘Englishness’. It is perhaps not surprising that it was the image of ‘Punch’ from the film that took pride of place on the Birmingham Nationalist blog spot. Perhaps what connected Punch to this site was that this eponymous bruiser was a cipher for a specific British masculinity, pugilistic and peculiar to England, and for nationalist rhetoric it indicated how this past might be fighting back. The blog is now removed and its presence and subsequent absence indicate the tussle of what, and what isn’t ‘English’.

## **Harvey: English Rural**

If there is a problem with defining Englishness in general, and how it might be situated within popular music more specifically, then there is a real problem when we get to trying to attach the label to Harvey. Harvey has always made a play in her lyrics and music video performances of not 'fitting' in (see MANSIZE, 1993, 50ft QUEENIE, 1993) and this is apparent when we start to consider her as an English artist in relation to other musicians whose national identity has been marked in their work or representation.

Throughout her career up to 2011, her national identity has been incidental, neither key to her representation nor to her lyrical concerns or musical influences. She has been positioned within a Transatlantic canon, alongside other Anglo-American female musicians such as Courtney Love or Tori Amos (Whiteley, 2001; Burns and Lafrance, 2000) indicating that her work has been considered as part of a broader, international genre of 'indie' than an alliance to any specific national musical or aesthetic heritage.

Harvey is not an 'English artist' in the way, for example that Kate Bush is (Moy, 2007) and I want to use Bush as a benchmark to frame this section on Harvey as English rural. Moy argues that Bush's accent, delivery, lyrics and instrumentation are specifically and uniquely 'English' (2007:61). Harvey's back catalogue certainly does not match this, and it is only in recent work (2007, 2011) where she has turned to instruments that might be coded as potentially, but not exclusively, English (the autoharp, the Melotron). This she does to evoke versions of Englishness and to refer back to musical traditions that she adds to. Neither can she allied to Bush's version of English 'eccentricity'. This derives, in Bush's case, from working within musical and aesthetic tradition that derives partly from a middle-class progressive rock or psychedelic lineage whose discourse has been typified by a reification of theatricality and whimsy (Hegarty and Halliwell, 2011; Reynolds and Press, 2005; Whiteley,



2003:57) and partly from Romanticism, a discourse deployed within popular music to foreground creativity and genius (Negus and Pickering, 2002).

She is not an 'English' artist in the way that The Kinks or Ian Dury, The Jam, Paul Weller or The Libertines are, she is not part of a 'long lineage of mythically English bands and performers' (Moy, 2007:57). She is not concerned with the minutiae of suburbia, concentrating on the travails of suburban love and frustration and so cannot be conflated with that constructed sense of 'Englishness' that was subsumed under the 'Britishness' that was Britpop, where 'nostalgic images of small-town suburban working-class and life grounded the music in specific locales' (Connell and Gibson, 2003: 125). Her work does not 'fit' with a retro Britpop that was largely underpinned by a constructed English masculinity, premised in turn on nostalgia for the 1960s (Harris, 2004 Bennett and Stratton, 2010). Being neither Northern, nor Southern, nor male, she sat outside the narratives of Englishness that have appeared across British popular music culture in the mid-1990s. Within the available constructs of national identity that had appeared within British popular music industry, there was nowhere where she fitted, nothing about her music, influences, lyrical concerns, or instrumentation that could be identified as particularly 'English'.

Harvey therefore is an English artist by default, not an artist whose work has carried with it specific markers of Englishness that have surfaced in popular music discourses. Her identity, as such as it has been referred to in reviews and interviews with her, has placed her as a regional artist, located within a specific rural place. Any reference to identity in terms of location or provenance has been not on 'country' but on 'county', specifically on Dorset, her home. This largely agricultural country in the South West of England has figured more, particularly in press representation. Kitty Empire (2011a) positions *Let England Shake* as 'an agrarian polemic' and Harvey is arguably positioned as being rooted in a 'Deep England', a 'Southern Metaphor' of England' (Winters and Keegan-Phipps, 2013: 116) signified by

‘Dorset’ and ‘farm’. There is again an implied eccentricity in this affiliation to a rural place, (that chimes with how Kate Bush has recently been mediated in sections of the UK press, e.g.: Harmsworth, 2014; McNulty, 2014), which is associated with her refusal to conform to norms or rock stardom (Moy, 2007) and remain located in the rural.

Authenticity is bound up in the idea of this rural space (Moy, 2007:37; Connell and Gibson, 2003). It is allied to the pastoral and coded as idyllic (see Winters and Keegan-Phipps, 2013), lying, as it does, as opposite to the urban and its troubles, and most often associated with a conservatism that sees it as unchanging and to be preserved as such (Aughey, 2007). In this respect, the rural that has been referred to within academic debates on the folk resurgence across England and on Englishness within the broader cultural sphere, is reliant upon the notion of the Pastoral. This is a long-standing literary conceit, which has its echoes within classical and popular music and which appears too in contemporaneous media reviews of the videos for the album (Newman, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 2011). Literary theorist Gifford (1999) identifies three interwoven strands of the pastoral within literature whereby it, and ‘it’ refers to an idealised rural space (forest, wood, meadow for example), has one of three dominant functions.

The first function of the pastoral, seen in Renaissance drama and poetry particularly, is where it acts as an imaginative space outside of the ordinary, beyond the boundaries of the urban, the real and the possible and thereby offers a retreat from the urban. Upon return from it, the protagonist is afforded a sense of renewal. Gifford’s second framing of the term is to note it as a conventional rural setting and the third is a pejorative that critiques the second; where nature as benign and rural idyll comes under scrutiny. The pastoral has surfaced within the English creative arts and English Classical and Folk Music, from William Morris’ Arts and Crafts Movement and Cecil Sharpe’s English Folk Song and Dance Society, which might be corralled into what Moy terms the ‘English pastoral project’ (2007:61), some of which

was defined by a desire to collect and protect a national culture against a European (most notably a German) one. What characterizes the English pastoral in classical music is the use of a sonic palette that is the opposite of the mathematical baroque and classical German. Moy argues that the English Pastoral, as illustrated by Vaughn Williams, is ‘a more impressionistic terrain often expressed through ‘washes’ of sound’ (2007:61) with the use of strings and wind rather than brass. Across Europe, composers such as Bela Bartok were also looking to folk music for inspiration, and utilising folk melodies in their work. Recourse to the ‘folk’ has therefore been a form of a retreat to the pastoral, done to regain and renew and Moy argues that this is apparent in Kate Bush’s work and in progressive and psychedelic English Rock (2007:61).

Harvey’s work on *White Chalk* and *Let England Shake* is not pastoral in the sense of using the English countryside as an idyllic place of retreat and return, despite the urban commentators reading of it (Newman, 2011); rather she, and Murphy, utilize rural landscapes pejoratively. In both albums, the natural (English) world is used as a setting for disappointment, death and war. It rots bones (‘White Chalk’), its tree branches are home to body parts (‘These Are the Words that Maketh Murder’), and its milestones are the stage for doomed love affairs (‘The Devil’). This is not a picturesque pastoral in any way. The farm workers that we see in Murphy’s films (THE WORDS THAT MAKETH MURDER) may stride across a field swathed in the mists of dawn but as they do, Harvey sings about how (she) has seen and done things that she regrets. Bell ringers may be filmed in their belfry but as they ring out their bells, they are accompanied by Harvey singing about soldiers burying their dead (‘In the Dark Places’). Writing from a rural perspective, Harvey is reinvesting the pastoral with the reality of the repercussions of war upon those who live there.

It is in the representing and re-peopling of this rural English space that what is key to understanding Harvey’s work as related to Englishness emerges. Most crucially, what is

important is not how Harvey might be conceived of as 'English', rather it is what she has to say about how we might remember Englishness that positions her work as a contribution to articulations of Englishness, since it is in the remembering that the construction of both the present and the future notions of such an identity are formed. Harvey uses this space as somewhere to review and consider the past, and in *White Chalk* she focuses on women's relationships to men, to each other, to children in an audio-visual language and instrumentation that is arguably, more influenced by English folk song writing traditions than previous work. It is what she does with this format that marks her out as important and as a commentator on Englishness as presented in folk narrative and myth. *White Chalk* sees her upsetting the English rural idyll by ushering in narratives of death and violence.

### ***White Chalk*: Harvey's Return of the Native**

England's Jurassic Coast is known for harboring dinosaur bones. Stretching across its southern counties Dorset and Devon, it has been famous since Victorian times for its fossils, its prehistoric possibilities. The cliffs of the Jurassic coast are white and sheer, and they crumble regularly down onto the pebble beaches into the sea. The white chalk within these cliffs appears across the hills of Dorset and it is within these hills that Harvey in *White Chalk* sings that her bones will rot. The track is from an album of the same name, released in 2007, and it heralded the start of Harvey's mining of Englishness.

*White Chalk* acts as a transitional piece, whereby she moves from the concerns of previous work where desire, sexuality and home are apparent, towards a more explicit concern with home and connection to the land and nation. In the 90s and up to *Stories From the City*, Harvey was interrogating different modes of femininity, working out how to fit into its templates and picking through archives of its imagery to try on and reformulate what

gendered identity might be (Burns and Lafrance, 2002; Gardner, 2015). In *White Chalk* she is still concerned with love and loss but importantly the land upon which these narratives play out becomes more predominant. Her lyrics begin to use language from the rural English past, 'milestone' is referred to in 'The Devil' and 'Dorset' is named in the title track. This marks a contrast with the references to San Diego, New York, Mexico, Brooklyn and The Empire State Building that appeared across *Stories from the City*, *Stories from the Sea*, particularly in the track 'Beautiful Feeling'. The album cover for *Stories* had Harvey looking out at the viewer from behind dark sunglasses on a neon lit city street.

In stark contrast to this *White Chalk*'s album cover sees her dressed in a full length, white, Victorian-era dress. It has puffed sleeves, a bustle, is tight across the torso and Harvey is sat on a chair, with her hands neatly folded on her lap, her hair a mass of black curls, looking straight at the camera. She is staring out from the past as she replays it. Harvey, like Cindy Sherman, has used photography and music video performances (Gardner, 2015) to perform stereotypes of the feminine. Like Sherman, she 'draws on a familiar archive of culture and 'stag[es] stereotypic figures from the image repertoire of femininity, fairy tales, or horror films' (Bronfen 1998:418, 416), doing so to make her 'her representations of femininity were not a return but a re-representation, a making strange' (1991:139). Harvey mines this history of the silent Victorian feminine to foreground the allure of the archive and one's performance within it. She looks back at this particular archive of feminine imagery and re-represents it in a way that forces a rethinking, that may, as Butler (1993) argues, challenge our conventional reading of what gendered identity might be. Here she is presenting a version of femininity that is both familiar and strange; we can understand that this is an old photograph of a young woman taken possibly around a century ago, Harvey's image as this photographed Victorian bears the imprint of the real, or as Hirsch describes it,

in a work on family photography and loss, 'the photograph gives the illusion of being a simple transcription of the real' (2002:7).

But we know that this is a fake, that Harvey is playing around with what the past might be and who might have inhabited it. By investing herself in this past, she manages to bring it back 'in the form of a ghostly revenant, emphasising, at the same time, its immutable and irreversible pastness and irretrievability' (2002:20). This version of femininity is long gone but its existence in the form of a recognisable photograph of somebody's ancestor renders it somehow readable within the parameters of the conventions of the family photograph. Without the context of stories, narratives that knit the family story together through the photographic album, this photo, de-serialised and de-contextualised, becomes at the same time a young woman who is both known and unknown to us. Harvey has put herself into a family photograph album and then emptied it of content and context, foregrounding how heritage, lineage and our pasts are too, at once strange and familiar.

Videos for the album also mined this seam of upright Victorian femininity, repressed and corseted, with an image of Harvey in a black version of the album cover dress sitting at an upright piano that accompanied the video for 'When under Ether'. Live performances of the album saw her dressed similarly, with Victorian lamps and decorations adorning the piano she played. Harvey is not an accomplished pianist and learnt the instrument for the album in order to refresh her approach and come up with new sounds. In contrast to the electric guitar, which had been her instrument of choice up until then, the piano is strongly coded as feminine ( Bayton, 2007). The Victorian lady was expected to be accomplished on it. But the gap between her and the piano in the video *THE DEVIL* is telling; it is the gap between her artistry and the presentation of herself as feminine. This particular version of the feminine, one from the nineteenth century, is 'strange' to her, and, as she sings of insanity, pining and the Devil, she performs stereotypes of the literary nineteenth- century female: the mad

woman in the attic, the pining Gothic heroine. She adds herself into an English Victorian archive, and we might consider that this is a reflection on where she sits in relation to ‘rooted’ musical practices and regional memory. It is part of her heritage and yet she is temporally removed from it. She becomes the ghost, the governess, the Victorian upright, uptight. Revisiting Victoriana in lyrics and visual aesthetics, she travels back in time, making herself present where she was absent. Harvey’s performances are conversations with the past, specifically with visualised memories of archetypes of femininity and have to be understood in relation to what they say of the past, about the weight of history and the ways in which she controls and commands her own archive.

A ghostly Englishness is implied through these visuals and the vocal technique that characterised the album, which was a departure from the guitar led ‘indie rock’ that she had arguably worked within prior to this. Her image evokes a lost femininity, and the lyrics circulate around loss; of grandmothers (‘To Talk to You’), unborn children (‘When under Ether’), of childhood (‘White Chalk’) and of love (‘The Devil’). The instrumentation underpins this sense of loss; all of the tracks on the album are piano led bar one, the title track, and the piano is treated with reverb and echo to make it sound old. She uses a Melotron, which is a synthesised keyboard that had been used in Progressive Rock in the 1970s by bands like King Crimson and The Moody Blues. This ties her back to a previous English genre that in turn, was fascinated by earlier English myths and legends. The zither (or autoharp) appears too, and figures more predominantly in *Let England Shake*, as does the banjo. These two instruments are rare in Anglo-American popular music, and are more commonly featured in folk music on both sides of The Atlantic and foreground the sense that Harvey is returning to some form of musical roots. These roots are further emphasised by references to inanimate objects and landmarks such as oak trees (in ‘Grow, Grow, Grow’), white cliffs (‘White Chalk’) and milestones (‘The Devil’), all three of which prioritise a sense

of rural and a historical landscape, one within which Harvey locates her *White Chalk* protagonists. These white chalk cliffs of Dorset act as a backdrop not just to her own life, from childhood to death, but evoke a sense of the ancient; they have paths cut through them that are 1500 years old. They are markers of both place and nation representing the specific (Dorset) and England (the oak tree).

Set against these backdrops, the stories that Harvey tells remain focused on the women's experiences of love and violence. They are connected by a strong sense of female lineage; the protagonist in 'To Talk to You' yearns for her grandmother, women grieve for their lost children, their own lost childhood and others' childhoods before them. The album therefore treads similar ground to Harvey's previous work around gender, desire and loss, but what marks it out as different is its focus on place and the past. Harvey is starting to consider how home and history act not merely as stages for her narratives, but drive them. This concern is manifest throughout the album that came after *White Chalk*, whose very title is an exhortation to radicalise, to review, to literally 'shake' things up. Harvey uses the past, its archives and myths, its language, as the pastoral. She uses it in an anti-nostalgic way that also manages to comment on nostalgia: Harvey's pasts are not a place to retreat to in opposition to an anxiety fuelled present; they were just as troubled.

### **Remembering England: Shaking England beyond nostalgia**

The nostalgic mind-set conceives of a time somewhere in the past that was comprehensible, unlike the incoherence that plagues the present (Lowenthal 1985: 40), and so it operates in a similar fashion to the pastoral but in time, not space. However, Harvey's pasts are fraught with loss and suffering too and so she upsets the past as nostalgic pastoral. It is worth considering how she treats the past through Borges' concept of 'once upon a time' since it offers a creative reading of the phrase that maps well onto what she does. Aughey details how



Borges reads the phrase as a mask of the present and not as a mirror of the past, in that it obstructs and veils rather than narrates; it is 'not even the remotest of historical moments but [is] a current state of mind' (2007:83). *Let England Shake*'s tales from Gallipoli and the Anzac trenches ('The Colour of the Earth') and from other wars where young men encountered hells from which some of them did not return, offer both specific and ambiguous 'once upon a times' and, in so doing, seek to question what England and Englishness is. *Let England Shake* was emblematic of a broader political/cultural race to claim such an identity and is partly responsible for that album's success; it won the prestigious UK music industry's Mercury Prize. But Harvey's rendition of nation is far from jingoistic. On the contrary, her stories of England, the place and its people are those of the forgotten, the ordinary and the universal, of national identity as felt and in particular, of how it is remembered. We see images of letters possibly written home from the First World War trenches (THE GLORIOUS LAND) and Harvey herself conducted a great deal of archival research for the album. This is her attempt to overwrite the 'arche', to commence and command with different voices, to offer up alternative archives and untold stories.

It is important to note that *Let England Shake* was released in 2011, a year that saw summer riots scarring England's urban centres and dead soldiers arriving back from Afghanistan in body bags. It was a year when England fought its enemies abroad and itself at home. Harvey's album was well timed to fit into a moment when the nation was asking questions of itself; what its role was, what its limits were, who felt 'at home' in it and who did not. It resonated at a time when England was being shaken, upset by internal and external conflict. Harvey's album that referred to war and home, nation and loss, was afforded a high level of publicity and promotion. She had appeared the year before on a current affairs television programme, *The Andrew Marr Show* (18 April 2010), where she discussed the war in Iraq and her research for the album. She sang 'The Words that Maketh Murder' in the

studio to Marr and the incumbent UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, also a guest on the show. Harvey was appearing alongside the political elite, her work seemed to matter.

In a year in which London and other major cities erupted into riots, music journalist Kitty Empire saw in this album a serendipitous resonance, a ‘once upon a now’ that accords with Smith’s view on remembering the past which ‘does not necessarily indicate a desire to return there. Remembering the past should instead be seen as a way to express valid desires and concerns about the present’ (Smith, 2000, in Wilson, 2005: 26). Seen thus, Harvey’s work is similar in spirit to Bikhu Parekh’s (2000) political view of national identity in relation to history, in which its history should be acknowledged not for the purpose of nostalgia but for the purpose of imagination; ‘not [to] inspire collective loyalty alone but also [to] inspire critical reflection on that loyalty ...’ (Aughey, 2007: 115). *Let England Shake* is an imaginative and critical reflection on war and homeland. The spaces that we see and imagine in *Let England Shake* are an England of fogs, graveyards, the Thames, the white cliffs of Dover, ploughed fields and dead sea-captains. This is arguably an ‘old’ England, a collage of historical and politically important landscapes and literary characters that have peopled prose, poetry and song over many centuries. However, Harvey uses this heritage as a background on which she maps tales of war and brutality and sutures into that map songs of soldiers reminiscing about ‘home’.

The lyrics are first-person narratives of soldiers returning and wanting to return; it is apparent that although England is the home for many of the narrators of the songs on the album, it is the concept of ‘home’ that Harvey is playing with. Home is a place of sensory belonging (Featherstone, 2009: 73) as well as of a cultural and mythical allegiance; the lyrics conjure up a history that can be smelt and felt, and Harvey’s depictions of wartime are visceral and evocative. *Let England Shake* sits a long way from the city; her lyrics and the majority of Murphy’s images are of the land. She details its beauty and how it comes to define home, while

indicating how the enormity of consequences for those men involved in battle are inconsequential to the locations on which those battles are played out. In Harvey's world, land, the countryside, is both beauty, home, identity and indifferent.

The album was recorded in a nineteenth-century church, in Eype, a small village on the Dorset coast (adding further to the authenticity of place and intent), and includes many descriptions of land in the album; of birds, insects, fields and forests, rivers, oceans, and descriptions of how that land smells. There are 'lingering panoramic shots of the countryside' (Winters and Keegan-Phipps, 2013: 116) interspersed with those that inhabit them; huntsmen, gamekeepers, ramblers, Punch and Judy shows, campanologists (IN THE DARK PLACES). Churches appear; we see spires in one film (BATTLESHIP HILL), and Harvey stands inside a church, wearing a black headscarf, autoharp in hand, against the hymn numbers on the hymn rack. Interwoven through these 'icons of timeless English rurality' (Winters and Keegan-Phipps, 2013: 116) are images, too, of the urban and the abandoned; there are shots of bingo players, young men in hoodies, derelict fairgrounds and Punch and Judy Shows, adding up to a heterogeneous snapshot of contemporary England seen through Murphy's photographic lens and adding to the sense of the 'land' as diverse and belonging to all. His shots of old, young, black and white, assert that Englishness, and England, is open to all. They add to the sense of radicalism that one might see Harvey as promoting by adding images of the urban and multicultural England to which Aughey was referring as the England of progressive politics and the future.

This might be reflected, too, in the use of samples that Harvey deploys on the album as they come from 1950s America, reggae and Eastern Europe. She weaves in Eddie Cochran's famous refrain from 'Summer Time Blues' about taking problems to the UN, uses The Four Lads 'Istanbul', samples Niney The Observer's 1971 reggae track 'Blood and Fire' as well as fragments of Bulgarian and Kurdish choral pieces, and uses the autoharp, an

instrument more commonly associated with American folk music, especially the Carter Family. Harvey's work has been an amalgam of influences benefitting from networks of cultural flow (Connell and Gibson, 2003:18). In this way, she maps out the differences within Englishness that are a mirror of a contemporary national identity, a patchwork of diasporic and transatlantic conversations, journeys and relationships.

Empire (2011b) also uses the phrase 'haunted psychogeography' and, without going into a discussion on how this might be linked to nostalgia or its repression, it is apparent that rural England as a place is crucial to a sense of self driving the narratives throughout the album either as point of physical return or as place of perceived continuity. It might be somewhat of a leap, then, to argue that Harvey's use of the rural, an England of fog and fields, might in any way be radical when the rural and its championing have been owned by such conservative agendas. But Harvey reignites the rural with a common claim, that its presence and past, her version of English heritage, is for all, so that this album and its films become part of a radical folk tradition which has at its core distrust for capital, monopoly, homogeneity along with a pride of place (see Winters and Keegan-Phipps, 2013).

## **Conclusion**

These are Harvey's 'English' albums. They 'facilitate a reframing and re-imagining' (Adams, 2008:469) of Englishness through acts of remembrance that foreground loss, yearning and violence. In both albums, Harvey deconstructs the fabric of constructed pasts drawn from shared cultural archives of Englishness as pastoral, of Englishness as triumphant, and plays with ubiquitous imagery to rework that fabric (Huyssen, 1995, 255). *White Chalk* is Harvey's musical 'return of the native'. It signalled a lyrical embrace of home and, in its simplicity and musical sparseness, reconfigured narratives of the lives led in that home to question rural

idyll and the myth of the pastoral. It remembered England as a place of rural violence and misery, of disappointment and death, of thwarted female passion. This remembering was fully realised in *Let England Shake*, which is characterised by a radical pastoralism. Harvey remembers England as a place of emotional belonging, and we hear the voices of those who have sat on the margins of official histories of war and nation. In particular, the album encapsulated contemporaneous anxieties about ‘England’ that tapped into a broader cultural and political unease about Englishness; what it might be and who might have claim to it. Both albums celebrate land. They sing of soil, chalk and earth. They are grounded. They are Harvey’s readings of the importance of place to memory, and these places are, by default, an England whose pastoral myths she reframes.

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