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"Life Would Never Feel This Good Again": The Use of Pastiche in Edgar Wright's *The World's End* (2013)

Abstract: This article explores the ways in which pastiche, the past, and national identity are portrayed and navigated in the concluding film of Edgar Wright's *The Cornetto Trilogy*: *The World's End* (2013). By focusing on the relationship between the use of the past and pastiche, it will be considered how they are employed to negotiate the notion of national identity. Through its comedic strategies and tropes, the film rebels against a homogenised version of Englishness based on mythical assumptions of the past and striving toward perfection. The dissection of the cinematic structure of pastiche will reveal a temporal framework questioning contemporary narratives of national identity. Moreover, the exploration of nostalgia and the past as places of retreat, as well as pastiche as a device of comedic criticism, enable Wright to offer a portrait of Englishness as struggling to recover its identity amidst a turbulent and apocalyptic time.

Keywords: film studies, comedy, national identity, Englishness, nostalgia, pastiche

1. Introduction

British Cinema possesses a longstanding tradition of expressing national anxieties and fears through humour. From *Ealing Comedies* to *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, Peter Sellers to Catherine Tate, and Charles Chaplin to *The League* of *Gentlemen*, comedy has been able to encapsulate the nation's most ardent concerns, as well as to display a "structure of feeling" prevailing in a given society: "Comedy reflects what is accepted as a given within the larger discourses of a society at a particular time" (Heath 189). Heath also comments on British comedy's ability to deal with societal taboos and to reflect topics that generated a wide discussion in society. The 1990s and early 2000s cannot be understood without Richard Curtis's comedies,

whose middle-class version of what Englishness connoted interacted with political discourses about Cool Britannia and was commodified and exported around the globe. Comedy's potential to sketch a specific version of national identity poses some ideological dangers; telling audiences who is to be laughed at also delineates the boundaries of the community, establishing the distinction between the members and the outsiders. Andy Medhurst, building on Stuart Hall's conception of identity, equates nationalists' processes of delineating boundaries of belonging to those of comedy: "Nation construction is also involved in the business of identifying internal others, who are seen by those subscribing to an imagination of national community wedded to closed, fixed, impermeable versions of belonging" (28). Delineating boundaries of belonging can be used for purposes of national identity, oftentimes targeting minorities as the enemy within, but also, using the comedic potential to question the boundaries of the most hegemonic groups. Moreover, for humour to work and resonate with the audience, comedy films usually operate through reproducing culturally recognisable tropes and strategies: "Most comedy was domestically oriented, a factor which gave it a clear sense of Britishness and range of regional representation which did not predominate in other genres. More than any other genre, comedy put working-class characters on screen" (Street 71). It provides means for both questioning national identity and promoting social inclusion. While discussing *Little Britain*, one of Britain's most famous contemporary comedy hits, Sharon Lockyer discusses the tension between satire and representation, but she highlights the genre's ability to deal with challenging topics: "It is clear from the above discussion that television comedy has been, and continues to be, a significant discourse through which concerns, anxieties, and questions about class and class identities in Britain are discursively constructed and contested" (134). In the same manner, comedy has shown and articulated the UK's national concerns over the main identity clash between the British and the English.

One of the strategies through which comedy operates is pastiche. Commonly linked to the postmodern era, the use of pastiche has provoked deep-rooted scholarly discussion about its nature. Frederic Jameson famously defined pastiche as "blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs," highlighting its differences from modernist parody: "It is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter" (23). Linda Hutcheon saw, withal, pastiche as a postmodern parodical practice not dissimilar from parody: "repetition with critical distance that allows ironic signalling of difference at the very heart of similarity. In historiographic metafiction, in film, in painting, in music, and architecture, this parody paradoxically enacts both change and cultural continuity" (11). The use of pastiche provides, then, a space of cultural reflection for the analysis of the inner contradictions of concepts like national identity in negotiation with (global) capitalism. Richard Dyer has also explored how cinematic pastiches recycle cultural tropes that enable a critique but also a deeper understanding of both national identity and capitalism and their representation.

Dyer characterises pastiche as a "knowing form of the practice of imitation, which itself always holds us inexorably within the cultural perception of the real and also, and thereby, enables us to make a sense of the real" (2). Pastiche is, therefore, self-aware and completely intentional. In her analysis of Richard Linklater's filmography, Mary Harrod distinguishes between pastiche and nostalgia while also highlighting their interconnectedness: "Just as pastiche is not the same as nostalgia, and nostalgic art is in any case not always defined by a sense of loss, only under certain conditions does pastiche become melancholic" (36). This article intends to analyse the use of pastiche in Edgar Wright's *The World's End* (2013). The aim is to explore the features and use of pastiche as a parodical practice in the film, dissecting the cinematic pastiche structure and its significance, as well as its relationship to the film's depiction of the past and its reflections on the contemporary problems of national identity. Ultimately, it will be explored how Wright's use of pastiche enacts an affective satire that warns about the dangers of closed national identities while reclaiming the common cultural heritage. *The World's End* creates a structure of pastiche that articulates a criticism of the dominant narratives surrounding national identity while arguing to embrace a vision of a more culturally diverse nation.

Edgar Wright can be considered one of the most prolific English filmmakers of contemporary cinema. Known for his usual partnership with friends and protagonists Simon Pegg and Nick Frost, the director often uses pastiche as a resource for cracking the hegemonic codes and tropes of film genres, giving Hollywood conventions an English twist, and turning the heritage film tropes into comedic chaos. His *Cornetto Trilogy* typically depicts problems such as globalisation or the individual versus society. His films are filled with intertextual references and a characteristic sense of humour. While some scholarly work has dealt with Wright's oeuvre, the treatment of national identity has rarely been addressed. Samuel Amago describes Edgar Wright's cinematic juxtapositions and pastiche as used in *Hot Fuzz* (2007, the second film of the trilogy) in the following terms: "Surely there could be no serial murderer in Sandford! The film's originality lies in its highly self-conscious staging of Hollywood blockbuster movie tropes – the Western and the police action movie – within the context of small-town heritage England" (45). Thus, pastiche and ironic contrast are two characteristic filmic traits of Wright as an auteur. Wright's use of pastiche parallels Ingeborg Hoesterey's definition of cinematic pastiche: "Pastiche structuration in many contemporary films goes beyond mere quotation to comprise a complex medley and layering of different styles and motifs," it is a "practice of quotation and appropriation as well as filmic reflexivity as critique" (46). The *World's End* depicts a group of male protagonists in their forties, whose leader lives longing for the past, meeting up to relive a past achievement. The concern with identity as well as the use of Hollywood tropes such as the zombie invasion allow the film to reflect on the future of national identity, currently in a state between dissolution due to the pressures of globalisation and the permanent twisting claims by some nationalistic sectors of society.

2. The Old Familiar

Both Jameson and Hutcheon argued that pastiche and parody operate through mimicry for the purposes of questioning or depicting (depending on the reactionary or revolutionary potential of a particular piece) an established or traditional norm or principle (Hutcheon 11). In Edgar Wright's film, the principle under revision is the way myths related to Englishness have been narrated and, in this case, their contingency and unreliability. It is not unusual for national identities to rely upon myths as the core foundational narratives sustaining such identities. National myths sketch a portrait of the features and habits to which the nation aspires. The case of the UK does, however, involve more difficulties due to its geopolitical specificities. In containing the ontological duality between Englishness and Britishness, the UK has endured struggles over identity and national myths. As Krishan Kumar notes (118), Englishness could never be rooted in a reactive nationalism; a nationalism built on dialectical opposition to imperial power because it was the imperial power. Conversely, Englishness became the hegemonic identity of the British nation, and thus, it was able to reorientate its ontological core by dissolving it into Britishness and concealing its identity gaps with the subaltern implications that Britishness embodied: "English myths, I have argued, are rarely free-standing expressions of the national culture and the national history. They have an elaborate scaffolding of non-English structures, myths, and memories that have come from elsewhere, especially from the wider context in Britain" (Kumar 210–211). Therefore, the attribution and interpretation of Englishness (its myth, features, and national past) has been narrated, mainly, through the culture industry.

The *World's End* (2013) is structured through temporality. There is a clear framework behind the film's depiction of the past (paramount for the understanding of the film's aura), the present (in which the film develops), and the dystopian future that enthrones the ending. The criticism and portrayal of national identity is based on a combination of satire and affection and a juxtaposition of elements of Arthurian mythology with those of Cool Britannia. While the beginning represents past nostalgia in a sort of Cool Britannia manner, there is a mythical narrative paid tribute to and debunked throughout the whole film: the representation of the nation in medieval stories and Arthurian romance. Arthur Lindley discusses how some medieval films use temporalization and foundational myths to reflect on the present problems of a nation:

> Medieval films are rarely set in or primarily concerned with the Middle Ages. More usually, the medieval material is lifted out of its historical sequence to serve, in Barbara Tuchman's famous phrase, 'as a distant mirror of the present,' an analog or distancing device that enables us to see ourselves from a position of estrangement. (20)

The distancing device Lindley mentions is constructed in this film, I argue, through the combination of the comedic overtones and the elements of pastiche as a critical

device. Many elements in Wright's film are reminiscent of Arthurian or medieval films. First, the names of the protagonists are all resemblant to a feudal society and connote their function in that micro-community of their group in Newton Haven. Gary King wants to still be called 'The King,' as he remains the unofficial leader of the gang. We also have Andrew Knightley, the loyal and chivalrous best friend; Steven Prince, the alternative candidate to the throne; Peter Page, the meek and innocent friend. Not only are the protagonists' names conceptualised around the idea of medieval narratives, but the names of the pubs are, in the usual pub manner, also resemblant of medieval motifs (The Trusty Servant, The Good Companions, The Crossed Hands). Moreover, pub names are also indicative of the narrative stage that the characters are in, foreseeing the events. As such, Sam, Oliver's sister, appears at The Old Familiar; or Steve makes a hole in the wall with the car at The Hole in the Wall. Gary also mentions King Arthur when shaming Andy for not drinking, as he links manliness with alcohol intake and the mythical figure.

The very premise of the film is gestated around the idea of conquering the Golden Mile of pubs as if it were the Holy Grail while Gary, the king, was reuniting his Knights of the Round Table. Gary himself alludes to the mythical undertones of the event: "That night it was the site of a heroic quest. The aim? To conquer the Golden Mile. Twelve pubs along a legendary path of alcoholic indulgence" (Wright 00:02:11). The return to a supposedly mythical place after a while also contains echoes of Arthurian Romance, as Neil Archer points out:

> the film's interest in linking (the) King's literal and spiritual 'return' with the reformation both of a chivalric band and with a form of national recovery – as they unite to confront the deadening forces of the Network – distills the climactic narrative themes of Malory's Morte d'Arthur, which sees King Arthur returning to an England darkened by Mordred's rule. (Archer 210)

The heroes' attempt to relive their past quest can be better contextualised as the attempt to return to the mythical place Archer mentions. Notwithstanding, the depiction of the past is filtered through Gary's overly nostalgic and idealised perspective, evident from the outset of the film. The opening scenes' soundtrack dates back to a 1990s melody sampled from a children's TV show followed by a montage displaying the different characters at high school. This montage, uncoincidentally, looks similar to that of a high school John Hughes movie; and it is precisely this mixture between homage and fear of assimilation that Wright displays in *The World's End*. Moreover, it is also uncoincidental because the decade that Gary sets the audience in at the beginning (the 1990s) was also the decade when American investment in British film bloomed. Therefore, Hollywood tropes and genres that had been always found in British cinema multiplied: "Throughout the 1990s much of the indigenous production and distribution remained largely fragmented, made up of a large number of small independent production companies,

ill-equipped to compete with the US studios with their large capital base and their international marketing network" (Watson 82). Nevertheless, the American echoes are combined with the avowedly English aesthetic of such elements as The Primal Scream Soundtrack and the Sisters of Mercy t-shirt. Gary's narrative voiceover early on sets the idealistic, nostalgic tone: "Ever had one of those nights that starts out like any other but ends up being the best night of your life?" (Wright 0:00:43).

The mythical booze quest is uncompleted, ending the night in a moment of male comradeship bonded by a communal rite of passage. Gary, nonetheless, allows the memory to outline his life, nourishing his nostalgic and glorified identity, turning away from his adrift state in the present: "I remember sitting up there, blood on my knuckles, beer down my shirt, sick on my shoes, seeing the orange glow of a new dawn break and knowing in my heart, life would never feel this good again. And you know what? It never did" (Wright 00:03:51). There is a stark contrast between Gary's idealistically nostalgic words and his present situation, for when he is triumphant speech finishes, he is shown to be telling the story at an AA meeting. In the same manner, all the protagonists seem to have traded rebellious teenage alcoholism for middle-class ennui, an irrefutable sign that time has indeed passed, even if Gary refuses to admit so. Gary, as the main protagonist, seems to be immersed in a similar dynamic to that of his nation. Whereas Britain idealises past medieval glories and has integrated them into its identity through mythical narratives, Gary King idealises his past glories and has made them the core of his identity narrative through self-mythologisation. Thus, macro and micro-political scenarios are juxtaposed with different genres so as to elicit an emotional response from the audience, as Gary tries to elicit an emotional response from his mates. The elements that generate emotional patriotism are those widely recognised by the audiences as elements of national identity: pub crawls, bands, even the Arthurian mythology, or common knowledge about small towns.

The dull nature of the gang's daily routines allows Gary to convince them to reunite and spice up their blank existence. When they get to Newton Haven, they are surprised to acknowledge the lack of change in their hometown. Newton Haven remains just as the members of the gang remembered it: "It is not that the town's changed, we've changed" (Wright 00:35:09). It is this fact the one that initially articulates a feeling of distance from their former community. Adulthood is portrayed as a surrender to the hardships of capitalist society, but Gary's attitude of irrational evasion is not depicted in a flattering light either. However, when they start their mythical quest there comes the realisation that the town's apparent continuity merely hides mimicry and standardisation of what they considered the English way of life.

3. Remaking, Remodelling, Refurnishing

As mentioned before, the depiction of the past and its articulation through pastiche are built on the idea of the unreliability of English myths such as the Matter of

Britain, replicating Arthurian tropes but reterritorializing them into the story of a 40-year-old alcoholic who cannot seem to forget his 1990s teenage glory in his provincial hometown. The golden mythical Englishness based on Arthurian tropes and folk pub crawls seems outdated and unattainable, a distrustful memory tinted by idealisation and nostalgia. The outline of the present also deals with a myth affecting national identity: the Myth of Global Britain. Robert Saunders discusses the erasure of the imperial past through the myth of Global Britain: "a set of timeless national characteristics that required only liberation from 'Brussels' in order to flourish. As such, it rejected the importance of decolonization as a rupture, that might require a recasting of Britain's geopolitical ambitions or a more bounded, regional identity" (1160). Saunders argues that the use of the narrative of Britain's ruling market power as a trading giant, rather than an imperial nation, erases the more problematic past and absorbs all the subaltern traits of its richness into a hegemonic entity: "It cast the empire as an expression of British power, rather than as its source; as something Britain did, not as something Britain was (and is no longer)" (1160). This entity is, usually, Englishness, whose ontological foundation (namely the distinctive beliefs and values that constitute its identity and way of existence) gets altered.

Although Saunders alludes to the use of such a narrative for ideological purposes during Brexit, its employment begins in the 1990s. When he was appointed PM and during his campaign, Tony Blair set up a discourse about the diversity and challenges of a younger and more open nation. The neoliberal era was at its height, and Blair was able to configure an attractive narrative that commodified diversity as an inspiring trait for a generation of young, aspiring, middle-class professionals. The myth was based upon a conception of the nation as superficially diverse and full of advanced, working professionals, who found in the economic regime their passion and would see their aspirations fulfilled. However, *The World's End* debunks all these conceptions. The foundations of the 1990s New Labour did not align with what was delivered by the time Tory Britain came to power in the 2010s. All protagonists, except for Simon, have supposedly middle-class jobs and live in suburban areas. All protagonists appear to be stagnant and immersed in a state of semi-bourgeois slumber. The parodical elements reside in the portrait of the members of the gang as archetypical of midlife masculinity: the ruthless capitalist, the exhausted father, the one dating a woman half his age, etc. The options to solve the masculine midlife crisis are either to embrace passive obedience to capitalist inertia or go for an irrational retreat into a nostalgic past. However, both options are proven ineffective throughout the film. There is an implicit parallelism between the Matter of Britain and Global Britain as two marketed narratives whose defenders idealise so as to keep a mythologised image of the nation. These two moments in time offered the promise of a better future, subsequently attempting to refurnish the nation while concealing the disappointment about its drift. The questioning of the myth of Global Britain brings about more implications once the gang returns

to their hometown, Newton Haven. It also enables the reproduction of another cinematic pastiche structure with a critical aim. If the opening scenes presented tropes and motifs of Arthurian romance and medieval films to demystify nostalgic idealisations of the English past, once the pub crawl starts the firm reproduces motifs and tropes from another genre: horror.

Ever since they return to their hometown, the protagonists detect something eerie, experiencing an uncanny feeling that is attributed to the fact that the town has barely changed, and yet, there is something strange in it. All the pubs seem carefully curated to appear just as the gang remembered them and yet, it feels like a replica, untrue. The display of the aura-less scenery is remindful of Jean Baudrillard's conception of *simulation*: "Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it" (1). As it will be certified later, the territory does not survive, or, at least, does not survive in the terms that it was conceived. Baudrillard alludes to the fact that the models of the real are not harboured in the reality; the artificial reproduction has dissolved the aura, and a sense of uniqueness can no longer be found or traced to a distinctive origin. It is this quality that defines the English pubs; they have been based upon what is already fictive, an untrustworthy memory that the grown-up version of the protagonists confronts. It raises a critique of the standardisation of pubs in the country, which have been turned into franchises with no distinctive traits. Similarly, they soon discover that most of the inhabitants of the town have also been turned into robotic, blue-blooded aliens whose purpose is to convert more adepts. These robotic aliens are called "blanks." It is at this point when the tropes and motifs of the different variations of the horror genre are reproduced. The film pays homage to horror films, especially *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (dir. Don Siegel, 1956). McDonald and Johnson dwell on the specificities of Don Siegel's film: "it relies on the concept of *infiltration* rather than invasion per se, and this coupling of a threat to the social and corporeal taps into the vulnerability of the social order" (130, original emphasis). Likewise, the citizens of Newton Haven have been invaded by a group of aliens that infiltrate society and attest to the vulnerability of the nation's current state, as well as the precarity of Englishness as a coherent, homogenising national narrative. The narrative choices of characterisation of the villain display echoes of fears and anxiety over globalisation. The alien group is called "the Network" and their purpose is "peaceful indoctrination and connectivity" (Wright 01:28:38). The film raises concerns about how such connectivity erases the individual and unique traits characteristic of national identity. Moreover, it also emphasises the potential dangers both of the Global Britain myth and the homogenising neoliberal discourse of Tory Britain. Uncoincidentally, the colour of the beheaded robots' blood is blue, the Conservative Party's emblematic colour. In one of the opening scenes, Peter Page is shown reading the Daily Express where the headline says: "New Survey suggests happier Britain" (Wright 00:05:23). Not only

does it deconstruct that vision of the anesthetised happiness supposedly produced by capitalistic prosperity, but it also reveals the inner kinetics that sustains such a system: the annihilation of individualistic or non-hegemonic traits.

Furthermore, when the protagonists finally face the Network's representative (played by legendary British actor Bill Nighy) the speech employed seems very resemblant to the neoliberal rhetoric present in the country since the beginning of the Thatcher years. Confronted by Gary, Andy, and Steve, the Network replies that their aim to perform in Newton Haven is: "to enable your full potential" (Wright 01:28:12). Leaving no room for imperfection, the aliens intend to replace all the inhabitants with perfect replicas. Thomas Curran and Andrew P. Hill discuss the neoliberal discourse that highlights perfection as an exchange value. "Neoliberalism and its doctrine of meritocracy have combined to shape a culture in which everybody is expected to perfect themselves and their lifestyles by striving to meet unrealistic achievement standards" (413). The striving for perfection, homogenisation, and invasion are elements of the neoliberal credo problematised in the film. As it usually occurs with invasion or infiltration motifs, there is usually a reductive group of rebellious fighters that refuse to comply with the outsider's power, out of morally aspirational and brave reasons. In this case, however, the parodical element of pastiche once again twists the motif. Gary King does not comply with the Network because he disagrees with them or questions their effectiveness but because of what Archer calls "constructive irresponsibility": "their objections are not the stuff of reasoned debate but rather an outpouring of energized anti-rationality" (204). Archer links such irrationality with that exhibited by Brexit enablers: "the people of England – are just too stubborn and idiotic to follow programmes for social organization. 'We just don't like being told what to do,' whines King, three years before the Conservative MP Michael Gove, on the referendum campaign trail for Leave, made a similar statement" (204). Archer is quick to categorise the claim as: "tuned in, uncertainly, to populist ideas of anti-global nationalism" (204). However irrational the claim might be, Gary King's rebelliousness is against a unifying idea of civic Englishness based upon perfection.

The aim revealed by the Network's may be linked with Michel Foucault's ideas about technology, power, and the neoliberal regime. Foucault distinguished between the technologies of power, through which domination would be achieved, and technologies of the self, less coercive and more persuasive: "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, to transform I themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection" (18). Therefore, Gary King is not rebelling against democracy but against Tory Britain and a unifying, reductive, and perfected version of national identity. The film presents Tory Britain as the logical evolution following what Cool Britannia and New Labour so eagerly promoted. The nation's self-image is examined, just like Gary's, as they both live in an idealised narrative of the past.

However, Gary's mates are initially depicted as dead as the blue-blooded robots that replace the inhabitants of New Haven, also trapped in their dull existences. While the film's tone may appear contradictory, it is precisely the articulation of such contradiction through contrasts that provides it with substance and significance. Gary's version of the past and his identity seem unreliable, idealised, and overly nostalgic. In the same manner, the present version of a single, unified national identity is depicted as threatening and problematic, censoring the subaltern details and various specificities that compose national identity. The film employs constant juxtapositions of intertextual references and genres-based pastiche to articulate a defense of the heterogeneity and diversity that compose English national identity.

4. Back to the Dark Ages

As it has been analysed so far, *The World's End* problematises both the populist patriotic and the neoliberal narratives of Englishness, proving them disturbing and inefficient. If the depiction of the past and the Arthurian motifs that conceived the folk version of Englishness appear unreliable, the homogeneous, neoliberal present is represented as an alienating threat. The last scenes of the film make use of the elements from the apocalyptic genre to once more exploit its parodical potential.

The cinematic pastiche structure is articulated through the juxtaposition of different genres and tropes that constitute a temporal structure. The opening scenes depict the past through Gary's eyes, and everything related to it imitates Arthurian romance. Gary is shown to be a careless, irresponsible, and unreliable individual, and so is his vision. The national identity concocted through Gary's vision is one clinging to the idealised past, attached to an unreliable memory that has faded away. The present acquires tropes and motifs of both invasion and action movies, depicting a town taken by robotic aliens with the purpose of homogenising the population through technology and interconnectivity. This part of the film problematises and questions the neoliberal narratives of the nation, invading all areas and trying to colonise all aspects of society. Although some scholars may suggest that the film endorses populists' narratives, both the overly nostalgic and folkloric vision of the past and the dull, alienating present are identified as incomplete and dangerous. In the face of a divisive situation, the film conjures an alternative vision for the future. The challenges faced and undergone by the United Kingdom in terms of identity are no novelty, for the nation has been adrift since the loss of its hegemonic power. As Ismail Adam Patel notes: "Since the collapse of the empire, Britishness has struggled to anchor significance and is in freefall" (109). Already in 2002, Tom Nairn spoke of national collapse and advocated for a reinvention of England "not belatedly, but in a sense *posthumously* […], it may indeed be essential, to save Britain" (38, original emphasis). Nairn, alongside Anderson, had attributed the nation's stagnant advances to a firm class-structured society where

the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie clang to hegemonic narratives and dogmas and implemented gradual social changes that prevented a workers' revolution. In view of the freefall Patel mentions, the film reproduces Nairn's arguments of the need for a collapse to reinvent national identity, where all the non-hegemonic components can be fitted into. Gary's refusal to comply with the technological demands of the Net provokes a massive explosion and a subsequent blackout, where everything fades into black.

No longer is the narration voiced by Gary, but this time Andy is the one in charge of revealing the protagonists' endings to the audience. The final traveling shots depict Andy by the fire telling the story to a diegetic audience. The aesthetics of the scene are resemblant to those of apocalyptic fiction: scarcity, coldness, and an overall crisis. The reluctant heroes have defeated the Net and the blanks, but they all are suffering the consequences of the collapse: "When the network went down, it triggered a pulse that wiped out all our technology and sent us here, back to the Dark Ages" (Wright 01:39:32). Andy's mention of the Dark Ages is no coincidence. The term is both charged with pejorative meaning connoting a time of struggle and it is also a symbol for the nation; since the flourishing of the Anglo-Saxons started with their victories over the Vikings and the several alliances that unified the kingdoms. Janet L. Nelson, while criticising the incompleteness of the term, references the two perspectives on it mentioned above: "The Dark Ages became the sign of Anglo-Saxon exceptionalism […]. The term has always tended either to be mythicised into an ideal 'heroic age,' or, more often, imagined as archaic, primitive" (195–197). In the same manner, the final scenes of *The World's End* reflect an analogous contrast. On the one hand, the collapse is deemed necessary for an identity narrative that was no longer sustainable, and a return to its roots has brought peace and advantages: "Some people say it was better when they were here. I can see that. It isn't easy now, but it is simpler" (Wright 01:39:55). The ironic significance is that the gang and the community have returned to a reimagination of medieval times without, however, a nation glorified or mythical quests. On the other hand, the blackout and the deprivation from technology have impoverished the country and left it isolated from the rest of the world: "Nobody could be sure how many we lost, because we never heard from the rest of the world again. Things aren't connected like they used to be. Everyone got cut off" (Wright 01:39:53). Moreover, the use of post-apocalyptic tropes allows the film to dwell on national division. If during the film there was a clear war between those converted by the Network and the protagonists, it is no longer the case.

Steve Crawford notes an affinity between some tropes of apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic fiction and the right-wing narratives: "potential comparisons between post-apocalyptic narratives and contemporary right-wing rhetoric. When considering borders in these works, the distinction is a familiar one to us: between the human and the other" (16). Once again, the tropes are reversed and allow the film to debunk such similarities. Initially, the blanks are shown to be vilified by the

rest of the population with graffiti saying, "Blanks go home" (Wright 01:40:43). The blanks are represented as the immigrants, the other vilified. These scenes alert the audience to the effects that national divisions and fractures may cause. In contrast, inclusion is emphasised by showing Gary traveling alongside young blanks in perfect harmony. In addition, Gary King exemplifies the inner contradiction at the heart of the nation, unable to move forward without some identity narratives but incapable of demystifying them. This time, however, Gary has been able to include diverse components in his new narrative and he is ready to move forward.

5. Conclusion

Edgar Wright's *The World's End* articulates a cinematic structure of pastiche by juxtaposing characteristics of different genres and different tropes. Such structure is turned into a device of parodic and critical reflection that examines and debunks some of the current narratives concerning national identity and problematises its use. The combination of elements from different genres may appear random at first, but it is masterfully structured to reappropriate British cinema and to elicit laughter while also eliciting a critique. Hence, the mimicry of recognisable elements, such as quests, action fights, or conquering aliens, seeks to generate identification within the audiences, for these elements are mostly transcribed from Hollywood but translated into a national context. However, British horror film has a solid tradition, in which tropes like invaders or zombies are also notorious and used to denounce the sociopolitical situation; from Wolf Rilla's *Village of the Damned* (1960) to Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002). The reinterpretation of such elements within a national context is both parodic of the Hollywood cliches and of English habits. Nevertheless, it also provides the film with a space for reflection through laughter, vindicating the diversity of national identity. The cinematic structure of pastiche is put together by confronting two main mythical narratives about national identity: the nostalgic return to a supposedly glorious past and the neoliberal narrative of homogenisation and manufactured Englishness. The structure of the film is designed with the purpose of embracing contradictions. Moreover, the contrast within the temporal framework contributes to enhancing the pastiche-related qualities since it allows for the contrasting of the different eras as well as the juxtaposition of the elements from different styles and genres.

The past is often seen as an unreliable narrative that shapes the identity of the present. It is depicted through a mixture of Arthurian and medieval romance and Hollywood tropes of teenage flicks. The combination of these elements, Hollywood, and Englishness, achieves what Hutcheon saw as signalling difference at the very heart of similarity. It advocates both for a change in identity narratives and for the cultural continuity of the elements distinctive of national identity. Gary King, the nostalgic protagonist, represents a part of the nation that believes that the grass was always greener in the past. The character epitomises why a return

to the past is always going to be both callous and impossible, for the past consists of unreliable memories and denies the nation the ability to change. Likewise, the portrayal of the present is demystified. The vision of a happy, middle-class Britain is shown to be dull and alienating. Globalisation has brought improvements in connectivity that have not been translated into actual closeness but have meant the erasure of all the subaltern or transgressive aspects of national identity, including the faulty, rebellious, anarchic ones – aspects that Gary King embodies. Faced with the dilemma of two controversial national narratives that have been hegemonic in the last decades, the film both warns against and embraces collapse, offering a new re-imagination. By borrowing the aesthetic from post-apocalyptic narratives, the future is portrayed as both regressive to simpler times and as an opportunity to articulate a more inclusive and heterogenous vision of national identity. Far from being depicted as ideal, the future furthers the contrasts and contradictions that are emphasised throughout the film. The *World's End* employs a comedic tone and a pastiche structure whose layering is designed to reproduce and question the ruling narratives concerning national identity. Through the juxtaposition and combination of different elements, the film meditates on the country's relation to its past and future, contraposing the problems and struggles over the conception of the nation. The cinematic pastiche highlights that same contradiction, for it sets forth how a unifying vision can be built from difference and diversity. Pastiche here is not a unidimensional sign of postmodern decadence but a critical device to cogitate on the future of the nation. Wright offers no definitive solution, but his film surely considers the dangers of clinging to a single, uniform vision of national identity.

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