Introduction

The outbreak of war with Germany in August 1914 sparked an effusion of patriotic poetry throughout the United Kingdom. Much of it consisted of sentimental declarations of attachment, not to the United Kingdom or Britain, but to England. Among the collections of verse published at that time was a slim volume, now forgotten, by the Anglican clergyman William H. Draper, entitled *Poems of the Love of England*. It included "In a Strange Land," which depicted the homesickness of an English colonial emigrant:

> Oh to lie awake at night and think of England,
> Out of reach and far away
> Oh to see her in the distance as a picture
> And to let your fancy play.[1]

The narrator remembers with nostalgia the people of England, evincing joy at the possibility of hearing in the night "an English voice." In the end, however, the exile must sadly accept a place "where no English memory stirs" and the landscape is not coloured "with English green."

Whether Draper's maudlin poem gave rise to the well-known catch phrase "close your eyes and think of England," referring to sex rather than nostalgia, is impossible to determine, but its highly sentimental tone seems to invite parody. The phrase in its bawdier connotation was attributed to Alice, Lady Hillingdon, a breeder of roses and wife of a Conservative politician, who in 1912 supposedly wrote in her diary that when her husband approached her bedchamber, "I lie down on my bed, close my eyes, open my legs and think of England."[2] Alas, no diary by the long-suffering Lady Hillingdon is known to exist, and her coining of the phrase was seriously doubted by the lexicographer Eric Partridge. Himself a New Zealander, Partridge proposed that "close your eyes and think of England" was instead "employed by Britons living in distant countries . . . when life has become particularly hard or distressing."[3] Although he did not know Draper's poem, Partridge was almost certainly right. The great historian of words remained misguided about one thing, however: the Scots and Welsh were not likely to "think of England" when they longed for home.

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It was an English, not a British, habit, as Draper was acutely aware. His poems are paeans to a specifically English identity.

What was that identity, and how did it change over time? This book seeks to answer those questions by examining the ways in which being English was imagined, from early medieval times to the present: as belonging to a nation, a people, or a race. All were categories of identity that sprang from human invention, not from nature or genetics. They tended to get mixed up with one another in scholarly as well as popular discourse and cannot always be clearly separated. "Nation" originally meant a people but came to designate a state defined by language and culture; "people" began as a generic term for the populace but later attached itself to a group united by history as well as lineage; "race," the most recent term, became a way of categorizing humanity according to features that supposedly ran in the blood. Nation, people, and race were never fixed categories, and they varied considerably – by gender, by class, by political persuasion.[4] Yet they were seen by those who believed in them as rooted in an immutable past, in the consequences of a particular history, and in traits that were inbred or perhaps even carried in bloodlines. Consequently, this book deals not with one conception of England but with many overlapping ones, with the memory of a succession of nations and empires whose inhabitants thought they belonged to one or another distinct nation, people, or race. These many identities – ancient British, Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, medieval English, Protestant English, modern British, and modern English – often existed alongside one another in the minds of those who wrote about them. Yet they related to an identity that was always perceived as lasting immutably through time.

This book is a cultural study of the uses of language in written and printed sources as well as in graphic ones. It seeks to read the language of English identity in relation to a changing series of contexts, built largely on other written and printed sources. Ultimately, references to national characteristics do not tend to relate to real things, but to other concepts, often half-formed notions or prejudices. Yet linguistic linkages arise from real historical situations, and they can have a strong impact on events like wars and the making of empires. Language has causes and consequences that can far exceed what may seem to be its limited rhetorical significance.[5]

The theme of this book was inspired by an apparent gap in the growing mountain of historical research that has appeared in the past forty years on English and British identities.[6] The publication in 1992 of Linda Colley's influential work *Britons*, dealing with national identity during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, sparked a lively debate about use of the term "British" in Scotland, but did not stimulate much analysis of how it was employed within England.[7] Over the past decades, historians have become aware that "British empire" and "Britons" were used in the Tudor and Stuart

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periods, to convey both English union with and dominance over its neighbours, but none has extended that interpretation beyond 1707.[8] Surprisingly little academic interest has centred on when modern sources used "English" in referring to identity. It has often been assumed that usage was random and accidental; people thoughtlessly referred to English when they meant British, and vice-versa. When examined closely, however, it becomes clear that most examples of each term cannot be written off as accidental; they follow discernible patterns that changed over time and relate to various understandings of identity. Long before the 1603 Union of Crowns, "British" was the preferred adjective in describing England's relationship to other parts of the British Isles. Under the Union of 1707, however, "British" came to refer to the state and its works. In describing culture, customs, character, traditions, laws, religion, and social stratification, as well as national history, "English" usually claimed a verbal precedence. This became entrenched after the Union with Ireland in 1801, when English character, culture, society, and government appeared to be challenged from within by a hostile people.

As a linguistic phenomenon, synecdoche, or taking the part for the whole, is much rarer than might be supposed among modern European nations. French intellectuals may think of "Paris" as "France," but they are careful not to say so. If a contemporary Spaniard used "Castilian" instead of "Spanish" to describe the nation, it would be considered a provocation to a Basque, a Valencian, or a Catalan. Even non-Germans can understand the belligerent implications of equating Germany with Prussia. England, however, was frequently equated with Britain in normal discourse, from the twelfth century until after 1945. Few English listeners took exception to it. Only after the British Broadcasting Corporation began to monitor usage of the terms "English" and "British" during the Second World War did identity epithets become a subject for public debate. A similar situation may be found in the Netherlands, where Holland, the name associated with two provinces, is often confused – and not just by outsiders – with the whole country.[9] A second, more disturbing parallel to England is Russia, where the assimilation of other nations and peoples was achieved by force before 1917. Under the Soviet Union, "Russian" was regularly used to identify the peoples of all the republics, as well as their common language, although many of them lived in ethnically diverse, supposedly autonomous regions. The current Federation, despite being composed of different languages and peoples, keeps the term Russian in its name.[10] However, neither parallel is very precise. The Dutch Republic was a far less centralized government than England or Britain, and Russia has had a considerably more violent recent history of relations with its neighbours than has England.

The synecdoche by which England represents Britain seems to be unique; it may reflect a legacy of empire-building within and outside the British Isles

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as well as the loose provisions of the 1707 Union. That hypothesis, of course, must be tested within a very large chronological framework. English empire-building in Wales, Scotland, and Ireland dates from the Middle Ages and continued into the modern period. The English overseas empire began in the late 1500s and reached its height in the first half of the twentieth century. To deal with the terms "English" and "British" as they were used in England as well as by people living within the empire therefore demands a big scope.[11] As a result, the temporal and geographical contours for this book have been pushed out, back to the early Middle Ages, forward to the twenty-first century.

Another factor in determining the book's wide chronological boundaries has been the problem of relating nationality to "modernity." Earlier historical studies regarded nation-building as an example of what was called "modernization," the process of becoming "modern" in the period after 1750. More recent work has cast doubt on this linkage, emphasizing instead the early connections of national identity with religion and ethnicity, and moving the development of nations back into the Middle Ages. England has even been held up as the prototype of "pre-modern" national identity.[12] The "modernity" of nations may mean little today, but perhaps it can be salvaged as a way of conceptualizing historical change, rather than reified as the empirical reality of adopting a modern life, whatever that signifies. Since the Enlightenment, nations within Europe have promoted "modernity" as a goal, but publicists have defined it in dramatically conflicting ways: as capitalism or socialism, as freedom from constraints on religion or the imposition of secularism, as the promotion of equality or the elevation of meritocracy. From the eighteenth century onwards, English identity was closely associated with a version of "modernity" that was regarded as an English invention, signifying commerce, manufacturing, and urbanization. Whether this "modernity" could ever be shared with other nations or peoples was always a debatable issue.

At the same time, English history was frequently invoked as a means of reviving a distant and imagined past, one in which English ethnicity seemed more uniform and straightforward. From the mid Tudor period onwards, this vision of English cultural purity was often connected with the new idea of race. English racism was seldom clearly articulated because it was not well supported by historical evidence, but those who held it were determined to look backward rather than forward, because in many cases, they feared the future. For some observers, English racial identity was a reaction to what they perceived as the equalizing, soul-destroying perils of "modernity," although they were careful not to reject those aspects of the modern age on which their nation's material prosperity depended.

To explain the emergence of complex identities and their relationship to the past as well as to the "modern," this book has grown into a study of the *longue*

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durée or long-term development of English national, ethnic, and racial ideas. Still, it is not intended to be a general history of England from early times down to the present, a type of scholarship that has become uncommon in the past half-century, superseded by histories of Great Britain. Robert Tombs, a skilled professional scholar, has recently published a far-ranging, well-written, amply researched and frequently controversial study that revives the English historical genre.[13] While I do not accept his contention that the English have been denied a modern history by researchers who concentrate on Great Britain or the UK, Tombs is correct to argue that too little attention has been given to the separateness of England within the post-1707 Unions. This book does not assume, however, that English history over the past two millennia possessed an inherent coherence that rested on the continuity of a nation, community, or people. Rather, it will argue that different versions of England appeared over time. The vision of nation, people, and race changed fundamentally, despite repeated insistence that they must have remained the same, simply because there had always been an England. The successive iterations of "eternal" England were connected in many ways, as might be expected, but they also differed substantially from one another.

The expression "Englishness" appears frequently in the following chapters. It must be treated with care, because it can suggest a misleading degree of stability or even a perpetuation of ethnic characteristics. Many popular studies of the past fifty years have taken Englishness as their theme; they include thoughtful discussions of English habits and ways of thinking at various historical moments, down to the present.[14] Englishness is usually understood in these works as the quality of being English. Such a definition sounds straightforward enough, but in fact it requires explanation. For a start, it is not an unchanging or "eternal" quality. Secondly, the term "English" is ambiguous. It refers to the inhabitants of the island of Great Britain who live within the current boundaries of England, but up to the seventh century, most of those people were called Britons. In addition, there have been many people within England whose origins lay in other parts of the world. Their treatment by the majority population deserves attention. English also denotes the common language of people living within England, which is shared with many millions of people outside the country, most of whom have no trace of English ancestry and little sense of identification with England.

This book will include accounts by those who lived in England, whether they were of English origin or not, but it will avoid discussing "typical" attributes, although English sources frequently highlighted them. Like every people in the world, the English perceived themselves as having common moral traits or characteristics, which were overwhelmingly positive: tolerance, generosity, bravery, loyalty, fairness, ethical rectitude, kindness to animals. Those who judged the English from an external perspective have

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frequently seen them in opposite terms, as fanatical, avaricious, cold, cowardly, treacherous, self-interested, and cruel to foxes, badgers, and children. Evidence can be found to support every one of these characterizations, both positive and negative, but they relate to specific individuals or groups within society, and when considered as a whole, they are distorted stereotypes. At the same time, what the members of a group say about themselves is important to an understanding of their culture, even if it is utterly implausible that most of them ever conformed to it. What neighbours, visitors, recent immigrants, and imperial subjects think about the English is also important, although it may be exaggerated, sometimes grotesquely. While caricatures are not accurate depictions, they nonetheless convey an imagined reality whose implications remain significant.

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Englishness was often a highly opinionated attitude. Consider the fulminations of the schoolmaster and grammarian H. W. Fowler in his influential 1926 work, *Modern English Usage*. Under an entry for "English, English(man)," Fowler included this blistering condemnation of the terms "British" and "Britons":

> It must be remembered that no Englishman, & perhaps no Scot even, calls himself a Briton without a sneaking sense of the ludicrous. How should an Englishman utter the words *Great Britain* with the glow of emotion that for him goes with *England*? he talks the *English* language; he has been taught *English* history as one tale from Alfred to George V; he has known in his youth how many Frenchmen are a match for one *Englishman*; he has heard of the word of an *Englishman* & of *English* fair play, scorns certain things as *unEnglish*, & aspires to be an *English* gentleman ... in the word *England*, not in *Britain*, all these things are implicit.[15]

Fowler recommended that "when Scots & others are likely to be within earshot *Britain* & *British* should be inserted as tokens, but no more, of what is really meant." His annoyance was extreme, but his work was on every scholar's desk in the 1920s and has remained in print since then. It suggests that, for many in England, Britishness may have been little more than a polite façade.

Despite his indignation, Fowler never explained whether he understood Englishness as a learned habit or as an inheritance – in other words, as based on education or bloodlines. In the diatribe quoted above, it seems to be both. This was typical of the bewildering attitudes of most modern English observers, who saw their identity in both cultural *and* ethnic or even racial terms, rarely distinguishing between them. To make matters more confusing, in many minds, Englishness simply sprang up spontaneously from the landscape of England. Yet it always related differently to urban and rural populations, to the "*English* gentleman" whom Fowler valued so highly and to the working classes, to men and women, to rich and poor.

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Where did English identity originate? During the Middle Ages, being English meant allegiance to a monarch, the use of a language, and a sense of belonging to a nation defined in contrast to other surrounding nations. These were cultivated attitudes but were not necessarily without ethnic connotations, because kingdoms, languages and nations could be seen as corresponding to peoples, broadly defined by lineage. They depended on place of birth, which was why subjects of the English king born outside England were not considered English. Describing identity in terms of race, based on the sharing of inherited characteristics among those of a distinct ancestral type, arose only after 1550. The impact of race in England eventually became substantial, as later chapters will show. That conclusion, however, was disputed by many early twentieth-century scholars, who claimed that the category was not relevant because the English were a "mixed race." They often cited as evidence Daniel Defoe's 1701 poem "The True-Born Englishman," which poked fun at "That Het'rogeneous Thing, *An Englishman*," and famously lampooned the English as "a Mongrel half-bred race."[16] The English-born historian Sir Ernest Scott, who had migrated to Australia, thought Defoe's satire had undermined Germanic ideas of "racial purity" and "laughed the nonsense" of racism out of English readers.[17] As he wrote this in the heyday of the "White Australia" immigration policy, it seems hard to believe that Scott took his own statement seriously, but in fact he did, because he imagined race as a category of "pure" or unmixed ethnic heritage.

Defoe's "True-Born Englishman" was not written to debunk racial myths; on the contrary, the poem revels in them. Defoe argued that the devil "matches proper Sins for ev'ry Nation," bestowing pride on the Spaniards, lust on the Italians, drunkenness on the Germans, ungoverned passion on the French, zeal on the Irish, fury on the Danes, fraud on the Scots.[18] This was about as complete a list of racial slurs as could be devised in 1701. Because they were a mixture of all ethnicities, in Defoe's view, the English were a mixture of all vices. Above all, they were ungrateful to the Dutchman William of Orange, who had delivered them from the tyranny of the Catholic king, James II: "*English* Gratitude is always such, / To hate the Hand which does oblige too much."[19] The poem concludes with a message aimed at those who questioned King William III's right to the crown: ancestors are irrelevant, because "'*Tis Personal Virtue only makes us great*."[20] This final valourization of individual moral character was what greatly impressed later readers, who generally ignored the poem's previous emphasis on inherited national traits. Of course, Defoe was not trying to write a coherent ethical treatise. He set out to demonstrate the legitimacy of a monarch who did not owe his title strictly to inheritance.

"The True-Born Englishman" was hugely popular; it appeared in fifty different editions by the middle of the eighteenth century. As Paula

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Backscheider has pointed out, it provided "a moving, nationalistic statement" in which "William becomes the archetypal Englishman," despite being half-Dutch.[21] As a satire on racial characteristics, however, the poem's original message was unclear and contradictory. In 1703, Defoe added an "Explanatory preface" in which he argued "That those Nations which are most mix'd, are the best, and have least of Barbarism and Brutality among them," which further complicated his message by suggesting that England's mixture of ethnicities made it *superior* to other nations.[22] Overall, Defoe's views on ethnicity were not at all consistent with Sir Ernest Scott's optimistic comments about "laughing away" racism; at best, Defoe was "laughing away" the assertion that the English were an "unmixed race," but he went on to assert that "mix'd" races were the most culturally advanced.

In the century after Defoe, English racial consciousness came to rest on a more coherent concept of "purity of blood," in particular, Anglo-Saxon blood. By the early 1800s, a reaction to union with the Irish, building on a long-standing fixation with the antiquated foundations of English law and government, had given rise to a powerful racial myth that elevated the Anglo-Saxons as the dominant element in English bloodlines. Critics of this myth restated Defoe's "mixed race" theory, combining an abhorrence of "pure" Anglo-Saxonism with concepts of racial dominance through heterogeneity. As Reverend James Long, an Anglican missionary in India, put it in 1883, "Englishmen justly boast that the foundation of their imperial greatness lay in their being a mixed race."[23] The blending of racial types in what Long called a "wondrous amalgam" was precisely what made for English power and greatness. In his view, Englishmen could justly defend their own racial superiority but not their racial homogeneity. Of course, the difficulty of imposing racial "purity" on peoples of diverse backgrounds was not unique to England; it can be seen in almost all European as well as non-European nations. Frenchmen could not claim to be direct descendants of the Gauls, or Germans unalloyed heirs of the Teutons. As a result, racial distinctions have often been constructed on cultural factors, like religion and language, that have more to do with historical circumstances than with ancestry. Religion and language have no genetic basis at all but can still be interpreted as "running in the blood," and have caused violent conflict between ethnic groups.

While race was an important element in modern English identity, it was often linked to the concept of a distinct culture that had to be learned anew by every generation, usually in schools. As the journalist Harold Begbie put it in 1917, every schoolmaster should be aware that "[t]he children who come under his care are the stuff of the English race, and it is his business to work up that stubborn and magnificent stuff into the highest types of English character."[24] To be English, in Begbie's view, denoted an awareness of historical, religious, and social belonging, in other words, a body of moral knowledge that was as

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much inherited as taught. He did not address whether Englishness could be learned by everyone – immigrants, the poor, women – or whether some might be disqualified from it by their own innate characteristics. In every age, the process of learning the connotations of English identity through schooling has been open only to those who have been granted access to it, which until 1870 meant English-born boys of the upper and middle classes. The education of women before then was haphazard, while that of the working classes was usually limited to charity schools, teaching writing and arithmetic.

The preservation of English identity has always benefited from the autonomy of national schooling. The Union of 1707 left the two fledgling educational systems of England and Scotland intact, and they have remained separate ever since. The appointment of school inspectors in England after 1838 gradually generated a standardized English curriculum, including literature and history.[25] The Elementary Education Act of 1870, establishing universal provision for primary education to boys and girls, applied only to England and Wales; it was supplemented by a Scottish Act two years later, which resulted in the creation of a separate "Scotch" Education Department, based in London until 1918, when it was finally renamed "Scottish."[26] Since then, Scotland has rarely participated in "national" educational reform. Despite its title, the National Curriculum of 1988 was not applied in Scottish schools, which today follow their own 2010 Curriculum for Excellence.[27] While many similarities between the two systems can be pointed to, English schoolchildren have not been not educated in the same way as Scottish ones, and in the teaching of their nation's literature and history, English education has arguably been far more thorough.

A recent example of mass-circulation children's literature gives a sense of how the process of learning history worked for many British children. The Ladybird series of children's books was designed after the Second World War to shape the thinking of young readers regarding the fundamental values that defined a modern way of life. Many of the books drew on recognizably English settings, characters, and references, as well as on an almost exclusively English understanding of history. By 1980, they included twenty-six titles on the English past, including the kings and queens of England, from King Alfred to Queen Victoria, and biographies of English worthies from Warwick the Kingmaker to James Cook, Admiral Nelson, Charles Darwin, Elizabeth Gaskell, and Florence Nightingale.[28] Only three titles dealt with individuals born in Scotland: Robert Bruce, David Livingston, and Robert Louis Stevenson, the last two of whom were as celebrated in England as they were in Scotland.[29] Apparently, the education of modern British children was still firmly anchored in an overwhelmingly Anglocentric past.

The Ladybird editors knew what their audience wanted. They included a two-volume study of *Our Land in the Making*, dedicated to the development of

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the landscape. This was a particularly well-chosen subject, because for many educated English people over the past six centuries, the land has provided a natural basis for national culture, one that was seen as divinely created. Englishness was often depicted as growing organically out of a specific type of landscape, usually described as fertile, well-ordered, benign, and without extremes. At the height of empire, the popular Victorian writer Tom Taylor underlined the importance to English travellers of remembering the landscape of home, in a poem that accompanied a series of nostalgic engravings of idealized English country scenes: "Under skies of tropic heat / . . . How many an Englishman may be / Wrapped even now in pleasant dreams / Of English coolth and greenery!"[30] The moderate, albeit rainy, climate of England made its well-tended scenery of green fields and woods more welcoming to English eyes than arid deserts and tangled jungles – which demanded to be overcome, not to be loved.

The topographical approach to Englishness has a long history. Attachment to the English landscape began in the Middle Ages with the creation of sacred places, such as holy wells and sites of pilgrimage. Medieval England was depicted in literature as an "island garden," even amid the unsettling changes brought about by the enclosure of land.[31] The secularization of monastic property and the destruction of saintly shrines during the Reformation undermined the sacred meanings of place, although the land itself continued to be seen by English Protestants as a work of divine providence.[32] Proud landowners of the post-Reformation period commissioned surveys and paintings of their improved property to show off its orderliness, fruitfulness, and prosperity, qualities that were both worldly and blessed by God. Poets like Sir Philip Sidney imagined England as "Arcadia," a garden land of beautiful pastures and meadows inhabited by happy rural folk. Sidney extolled his homeland "partly for the sweetness of the air and other natural benefits, but principally for the moderate and well tempered minds of the people."[33] Evidently, the English landscape and climate produced a particular type of inhabitant – as Shakespeare put it, from "[t]his other Eden, demi-paradise" sprang a "happy breed of men."[34]

In the late eighteenth century, less domesticated English landscapes – mountains, forests, and desolate areas – attracted interest as places that inspired awe and appreciation for the sublime. Yet untamed nature was always kept in check by firm boundaries that prevented it from spilling over into workable agricultural land, improved by human effort. England provided few examples of wilderness except in remote areas like the Lake District, although writers of the period aspired to find milder aspects of natural sublimity in all types of English scenery.[35] The assumed connection between a specifically English culture and the land from which it arose continued to be powerful, and as always, it was infused with religious notions of a nation and people chosen

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by God. In 1814, William Wordsworth almost burst with patriotic emotion as he considered the "majesty" of the English church and state, inscribed on the contours of "[t]his favoured Land:"

> And O, ye swelling hills, and spacious plains!
> Besprent [sprinkled] from shore to shore with steeple-towers,
> . . . may ne'er
> That true succession fail of English hearts,
> Who, with ancestral feeling, can perceive
> What in those holy structures ye possess."[36]

Nature, religion, and inherited Englishness, all divinely blessed, strolled together among the romantic poet's hills and plains.

How the ordinary people who lived and worked there felt about the poetic idealization of the countryside is far from clear. While they doubtless valued the common fields, woods, and streams on which their survival depended, for them these tended to carry local rather than national significance. Rural folk might move around in search of employment, but they lived out the bulk of their lives within parish and county boundaries. Their attachment to locality was reinforced by the farms where they worked, the villages and market towns in which they lived, the churches or chapels in which they worshipped, the parish officers who provided them with poor relief, the sessions courts where they were judged or sought justice. If they voted in parliamentary elections, which very few did before 1884, they chose between local landed men who were known to them. Unless they were hauled before an Assize court or served as soldiers or sailors, they were unlikely to have felt the full weight of national administration. Certainly, country people knew about Britain's rulers and wars, sang patriotic songs, and commemorated days of historical importance like the anniversary of the Gunpowder Plot, but their primary lasting attachments were to the places in which they lived rather than to the state or an idealized vision of England.[37] As one historian of the period has put it, "[t]he relations between society, the state, and politics were reconceived" only after 1884, "as localism gradually gave way to central authority."[38]

The writings of Thomas Hardy suggest that localism, or more precisely a regional outlook, persisted among country folk until late in the nineteenth century. What Hardy usually left out, at least before the First World War, was the national dimension. In his prose and poetry about southwest England, few connections are drawn or implied between English national aspirations and local life. "Charity favours home," thinks a volunteer militiaman in a Hardy poem, who considers desertion in the face of a French invasion.[39] Apart from references to military service, which he refused to glamourize and often presented as a grim fate, and to national celebrations, the British state might as well not exist in Hardy's works. For him, village traditions, often slightly

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sinister, testified to local beliefs and prejudices, rather than representing living pageants of lost English culture, as they did for many other writers who had less connection to them.

At the same time, Hardy was convinced that rural life was changing rapidly due to broader influences – that "the global is in the local, and vice versa."[40] What he perceived – the disappearance of smallholders, the consolidation of farms, the mechanization of agricultural labour – constituted a series of localized whirlwinds that swept away a considerable part of the existing English landscape, replacing it with the more open and uncluttered views of the countryside that can be seen today. By the twentieth century, while rural England was still idolized by the educated elite as the heartland of national character, it was also perceived to be fading away in the face of industrialization and agricultural change. Rural populations were different too, because of emigration to the settler colonies, relocation to the cities as servants and casual labourers, or displacement into the crowded alleyways of small towns. Still, throughout the twentieth century, English landscapes and villages remained the pride of the nation, or at least of those observers who did not regard them as sites of exploitation and pain. Carefully controlled and preserved after 1920, they seemed to poets and novelists to sum up "the real England," in contrast to the "unreal England" of the disorderly, class-divided cities.[41]

Yet Englishness always thrived most heartily in that "unreal" environment of towns and cities. Pamphlets, graphic works, periodicals, and, after 1880, mass-circulation newspapers could be found on almost every urban street corner, unlike in the villages where access to print was not usually a feature of daily life. Wordsworth's poetry was read by far more people in London, Manchester, or Leeds than in places like rural Grasmere. The most significant public commemorations, not to mention political and religious riots, took place in larger towns and cities.[42] National voluntary organizations and associations of all types, from trade unions to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, abounded in those places. Throughout England, in the nineteenth century urban areas were transformed by new buildings, bridges, museums, public spaces, monuments, and statues that reflected the values of national culture.[43] No village was ever altered in such profound ways. No village headquartered a major national institution, either. Within England, the most important of those institutions – the monarchy, Parliament, the legal system – were housed close together, in the urban borough of Westminster. Before 1815, the Church of England was arguably the only organized national body whose reach extended into every rural area, although the nineteenth century added workhouses, schools, and branches of the two major political parties. English cultural identity was largely promulgated in civic environments, although it constantly drew on idealized images of the countryside, along with rose-tinted assumptions about rural people, to justify itself.

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This does not mean that city dwellers unanimously embraced a single conception of Englishness. Like the inhabitants of urban areas in every other nation, they were divided, far more than country folk, by experiences, habits, and attitudes that might make them hostile to the acceptance of ideas and institutions that were guided by elites. While cities and towns may have made Englishness, they also created alternative versions of it, some of them rebellious, anti-establishment, or violently aimed at foreigners. Women in urban areas were often compelled to forge their own relationships to a national or ethnic identity that tended to exclude them or granted them only a passive role. What generally did not happen in cities and towns was an outright rejection of national culture. Even among the industrial working classes who proliferated in manufacturing centres during the nineteenth century and were harshly exploited by their employers, Englishness retained its influence. The radical Chartist associations that spread among English workers in the 1830s claimed "our native rights," including the right to vote, and asserted the membership of working men in "that great society which is called, the Nation." Echoing an old trope of radical history, they even maintained, wrongly, that "the government of our Saxon ancestors, was conducted on the principle of universal suffrage."[44]

Although he lived for decades in England, where he predicted the inevitable rise of the industrial working classes, Karl Marx never recognized the importance to them of national culture. While his views on nationality were not always negative, Marx conceived the working class in surprisingly idealized terms, as entirely shaped by economic conditions and having no ethnic or national boundaries.[45] The experience of the Second World War, however, altered the reluctance of Marxist scholars to consider national distinctions. In 1963, the prominent Marxist historian Edward Thompson published an influential study on *The Making of the English Working Class*, based on an analysis of political consciousness among English labourers that went back to the radicals of the seventeenth century. How differently the *English* working classes were "made" during industrialization, as opposed to the *British* working classes, was not fully explained, but Thompson's use of a national identifier suggested that culture played as important a role as economic conditions.[46]

Like all historical topics worth studying, English identity is protean and hard to grasp. When almost seized, it changes form and may either expand into airy vastness or evaporate into nothing. Yet it also has certain features that have existed with some consistency over long periods of time. For example, the conviction that Englishness is a precarious inheritance, under constant threat of extinction, goes back several centuries. It reached an early peak in seventeenth-century fears of the destruction of the "ancient constitution," proliferated after 1660 within the ranks of anxious Anglican clergymen, and

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was adopted by various opposition parties in the 1700s. It took on new urgency in the late eighteenth century when Romantic poets began to lament the decay of traditional village life.[47] Decline has haunted English cultural discourse ever since. A growing fear of its imminence motivated what the sociologist Krishan Kumar has called "the moment of Englishness" in the early twentieth century, when English identity was broadly reasserted in the face of threats from rivals to Britain's industrial and imperial dominance.[48] In the late twentieth century, the diminishing role of the Church of England, the loss of empire, multiculturalism, and membership in the European Union made these fears appear to come true. They were perceived as causes of the decline of Englishness, although they may be better understood as weakening a particular formulation of English identity.

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Because the manifestations of Englishness have been legion, no approach to it can be comprehensive. This book leaves out many aspects of the English past that have influenced identity, from music hall culture to the development of consumer products (Pears Soap, Lyle's Golden Syrup, fish and chips) for an English public. Perhaps the most serious lacuna has to do with international sports, a primary focus of English identity for many people, especially young men. The creation of separate "England" teams in cricket, football, and rugby dates to the 1860s, when ethnic consciousness was at a high point among the English public. They were formed to compete against rivals from White settler colonies as well as from other parts of the British Isles.[49] Cricket, a game that emerged in England, was a particularly useful way of displaying an assumed ethnic superiority – at least, until other nations became good at it.[50] Sport remained a remarkably divisive factor in British life throughout the twentieth century. From 1930, for example, the four nations of the United Kingdom have sent separate teams to the British Empire Games (renamed the British Commonwealth Games in 1970 and the Commonwealth Games in 1974).[51] With a far greater proportion of both the population and wealth of the United Kingdom, England had advantages in sport over the other parts. Athletic success, however, was interpreted as a sign of innate ability and hard work or perseverance, which meant any sporting victory could be associated with greater national resilience and stamina. Ethnic assumptions often underlay team distinctions, a connection that became rather too blatant in the case of the England A rugby team between 2006 and 2021, when it bore the name "England Saxons."[52] The increased ethnic diversity of England teams helps to explain why the name "Saxons" soon had to be reburied without ceremony.

What the following chapters chiefly focus on is the formation of English historical identities through the experience and recollection of violent conflict. The first two chapters examine the appropriation by medieval and modern

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English writers of two groups of peoples who fought over the terrain that became England: the Britons and the Anglo-Saxons. For centuries, the ancient Britons provided legitimation for empire-building by the English, both within Britain and further afield. Reconstructions of Anglo-Saxon history, on the other hand, envisaged the English as a distinct people who had entirely displaced the preceding inhabitants of their part of the island. During the Reformation, the assumption of Anglo-Saxon origins was manipulated into a vindication of a separate English form of Protestantism. After 1780, it was interpreted as denoting a distinct race, a theme that sprang into prominence after the unhappy union with Ireland.

The third chapter turns to relations with other peoples in Great Britain and Ireland. It traces the emergence of an ethnic English identity through sporadic violence against minority groups within England as well as a series of conflicts against the Welsh, Scots, and Irish that culminated in the Wars of the Three Kingdoms (including the English Civil Wars) from 1638 to 1653. Confrontation with Scotland was supposed to be put aside after the 1707 Treaty of Union, although mutual resentments lingered for decades. The survival of English identity under the Union is assessed in Chapter 4, which also discusses the disruptive impact of the 1801 Act of Union with Ireland. Constitutionally, these settlements merged different nations within a United Kingdom, but in practice they did very little to change the English perception of themselves as separate and, in many respects, dominant – in numbers, economic clout, military might, and cultural development – over neighbouring peoples.

The bellicose interactions of the English with other nations in Europe like France, Spain, the Dutch Republic, and Germany, are examined in Chapters 5 to 7. What tied these wars together was the self-image of England as an underdog in its struggle against greater powers. The first round of wars against France served to rally the fractious, French-speaking Anglo-Norman ruling class around the idea of being English, which in turn helped to open the purses of English merchants, to support the wars financially. During the war against Spain under Elizabeth I, the religious promotion of Protestant England as the new Israel was accompanied by the first attempt to isolate a treacherous "anti-English" population at home, namely Roman Catholics. The Dutch, against whom three wars were fought in the second half of the seventeenth century, were accused of infringing on England's dominion over the sea and equated with the Spaniards in war publicity. By contrast, the first stages of the wars against France from 1689 to 1815 brought out highly inconsistent responses from parts of the English public, who were not fully convinced the conflict was necessary. Only in the later stages of these wars did a new rhetoric of Britishness emerge in government publicity as a rallying point for patriotism, although it continued to share the stage with an abiding Englishness.

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Before the twentieth century, the British relationship to rival European nations was always open to ambivalence and permitted a degree of dissent. This changed with the brutal wars against Germany in the twentieth century. Englishness and empire marched shoulder to shoulder into battle in 1914, but by the end of that war, Anglocentric idealism seemed inadequate. A major consequence of the First World War was the rise of an interventionist state that was self-consciously British, rather than English. Its first task was to isolate and imprison foreigners; but it also took charge of wartime production and brought about a widened conception of citizenship for women. After the Second World War, the British state committed itself to spreading equal social benefits throughout the United Kingdom. Britishness became less associated with war and more linked to the provision of national services.

Chapter 8 deals with connections between the pre-1707 English empire and the post-1707 British one. Surprisingly enough for those who think of it as British, the modern empire was often described as English, down to the late nineteenth century. Many aspects of the empire – education, law, religion – retained a distinct English flavour, although Scots were active in building and maintaining them. While Scotland benefited enormously from participation in imperial commerce, the empire was dominated by English money. Meanwhile, nationalist leaders within the empire continued to regard England as the enforcer of their subjection and appealed to the English public for support in their struggle for independence.

The empire also generated new ideas of English racial identity, as described in the final chapter. Racial consciousness emerged from the belief in inherited moral qualities and often pointed to the poor as negative examples. The enslavement of African people added to this racial language the significance of skin colour and the possibility of polygenesis, or multiple origins for humanity. Emancipation did not end racial discourse; on the contrary, the demise of slavery led to the rise of "scientific" racism, culminating in the eugenics movement of the late nineteenth century. Whiteness as a distinct theme in racial thinking became more entrenched as fears of imperial decline set in after 1880. Britain became an unintended haven for immigrants in the post-war world, but by the twenty-first century, the cultural values of Englishness were increasingly associated with anti-immigrant sentiment and ethnic separation. This became the latest twist in the long story of shaping and reshaping English identity.

No single-volume study of English identity can cover everything, and no doubt this one has far more gaps in it than I have cared to notice. If the following chapters manage to tie together some diverse strands of history and inspire others to work out the issues involved more carefully, then they will have met the expectations of their author. A final point should be mentioned: this study was conceived before the Brexit referendum and was not written in

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reaction to it, but it has inevitably been affected by events since 2016. A brief discussion of the last decade of political developments in Britain, which some commentators have described as witnessing "the rise of Englishness," is provided in the Conclusion. As the following chapters argue, there have been many rises and falls of Englishness in the past, which have tended to result in a rethinking of identity. Whether that will be the case in post-Brexit England, and what its consequences will be for the United Kingdom, are beyond this historian's power to predict.

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