

**IRELAND AND ENGLAND: A NEW HISTORICIST REFLECTION ON
CONFLICTING DISCOURSE IN JONATHAN COE'S *THE ROTTERS' CLUB*.**

SILUE Ténéna Mamadou

Senior Lecturer

British Literature and Civilisation

English Department

Université Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire)

Email: silue_tenena@yahoo.com

Abstract: This paper explores how the Irish people's anti-English colonial discourses have exacerbated the animosity between Ireland and England in Jonathan Coe's *The Rotters' Club*. The legacy of English colonialism is negatively deemed in Ireland. The Irish nationalists most often have recourse to hateful discourses and anti-English sentiment to recollect their historical memories with England. The aim of this paper is to examine and consider how the Irish nationalists' anti-English discourses have hampered the union (reconciliation or inclusion) between England and Northern Ireland and affected their sense of belonging to Britishness. Building on Louis Montrose's (1989: 24) postulation of New Historicism that considers a literary text as another form of social and historical significance, the paper first evaluates Coe's fiction anti-English discourses as a social and cultural constructed practice of the English and Irish people's relations throughout history. Then it shows how hateful speeches between the two nations have caused divergent views on the sense of British nationality.

Keywords: Anti-Englishness, Animosity, Britishness, New historicism, Irish Republican Army

Résumé: Cet article explore la manière dont les discours coloniaux anti-anglais du peuple irlandais ont exacerbé l'animosité entre l'Irlande et l'Angleterre dans *The Rotters' Club* de Jonathan Coe. L'héritage du colonialisme anglais est jugé négativement en Irlande. Les nationalistes irlandais ont le plus souvent recours à des discours haineux et à un sentiment anti-anglais pour se remémorer leurs souvenirs historiques avec l'Angleterre. L'article examine comment les discours anti-anglais des nationalistes irlandais ont entravé l'union (réconciliation) entre l'Angleterre et l'Irlande du Nord et affecté leur sentiment d'appartenance à une identité britannique. S'appuyant sur le postulat du nouvel historicisme de Louis Montrose (1989 : 24), qui considère un texte littéraire comme une autre forme de signification sociale et historique, l'article évalue tout d'abord les discours anti-anglais de la fiction de Coe comme une pratique sociale et culturelle construite des relations entre les Anglais et les Irlandais tout au long de l'histoire. Il montre ensuite comment les discours haineux entre les deux nations ont provoqué des divergences de vues sur le sens de la nationalité britannique.

Mots-clés: Anti-anglais, britannicité, langage haineux, L'armée Républicaine Irlandaise, New Historicism.

Introduction

England colonial power was oppressive, and deadly in Ireland¹. In 1916, Ireland's attempts to rise against the colonial power of England in the Easter Rising² resulted in a lot of bloodshed (Margaret Hawkins, 1962, p. 12). Following this dreadful colonial event, the discourse of mutual resentment has been common in the two nations' relationships. Reflecting on both nations' complicated colonial histories, John Murphy, the Irish historian argues that: "English attitudes towards the Irish and vice versa were still conditioned by their past relationship twenty-five years" (2022, p. 11).

John Murphy's above statement encapsulates the ongoing historical antagonism between England and Northern Ireland or Ireland. Likewise John Murphy, Una Mullally, a *Guardian* journalist writes that: "Brexit has brought the anti-English sentiment flooding back in Ireland"(the guardian.com,2019: online). A scrutiny of Mullally's statement may suggest that the conflicting discourse between England and Northern Ireland is still strained over their colonial past. The anti-Englishness born of the English colonial rule is resurfacing in England and Ireland's relationship in this post-Brexit era. To substantiate this discourse of mutual resentment David McWilliams, a British scholar reckons English-Irish relations in these terms:

Our mutual animosity is the ethnographic pantomime of These Islands; we all ham it up when we need to. It's easier to play to the crowd than to delve more deeply into our complexities. When talking to a Frenchman, it is demanded that the true Irishman should dislike the Englishman (2006, p.18).

The Anglo-Irish conflict, as defined broadly here, paradoxically oscillates between animosity and reconciliation. According to David, the contempt of Englishman exacerbates the tensions and renders Irish-English relations multifaceted. And this language of animosity is not abating in both nations.

Jonathan Coe's *The Rotters' Club* delves into the issue of the Anglo-Irish animosity. The leading event of the plot focuses on the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) nationalistic attacks against the English people. Several English characters are killed by IRA because of past

¹ In this work, my use of the term "Ireland" often refers to Ireland as a single place that has been parted in 1912 due to centuries of conflict and division as a result of England's colonialism. But, I mostly use the term "Ireland" to indicate Northern Ireland, an integrated nation in the United Kingdom. The union or reconciliation between Northern Ireland and England is compromised by the Irish Republican Army's nationalistic actions.

² The Easter Rising is the Easter Rebellion launched by the Irish republicans against English rule in Ireland during Easter week in April 1916.

historical anger. Besides, the Irish character, Glyn vehemently hates the English people since he deploys a language of animosity to recollect Ireland or Northern Ireland and England's socio-cultural past. Owing to his anti-Englishness, Glyn opposes the love affair between his niece, Cicely Boyd and Benjamin Trotter, the Englishman. As for Doug and the other English characters, they use coarse language to describe the Irish Republican Army's (IRA) atrocity in England. These different events complicate the Irish and English characters' collaboration in *The Rotters' Club*.

Coe's rendition of the Anglo- Irish relations puts emphasis on the hegemonic power of characters' language or discourse to either foment historical animosity between Ireland and England or impinge the idea of a transnational or transcultural Britishness. Thus, the aim of this paper is to examine and consider how the Irish nationalists' anti-English discourses have hampered the union³ or reconciliation process between England and Northern Ireland and affected their sense of belonging to Britishness as a common shared identity of the British Irish isles.

The Rotters' Club is a revisited narration of the historical relationship between England, Northern Ireland and Ireland. Enduring hurts and political conflict have not been healed between the three nations. And since the partition of Ireland into two nations: Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, the union or reconciliation between Northern Ireland and England is still at crossroad owing to the Irish Republican Army's escalating anti-Englishness discourse. Coe's fiction echoes Northern Ireland and England's inability to deploy peaceful discourse in order to achieve reconciliation, union and tolerance. What is at stakes is individual's recourse to flammable language to foment past socio-political tensions.

Montrose's New Historicism paradigm is of a relevant importance. According to Montrose, New historicism sees "literary text as a social and cultural construct discourse" (1989, p. 24). In the light of this consideration of literature as a social construct, the paper will examine the ways in which the socio- political and cultural aspects of England, Northern Ireland and Ireland's relations shape individual's discourses of animosity or resentment in *The Rotters' Club*. And it will also show how these discourses of animosity affect individual's cultural and political sense of belonging to a transnational Britishness.

³ Our use of the term "union" refers to inclusion and reconciliation in England and Northern Ireland or Ireland's relationship. That is healing from past historical hurts and divisions. And we seek to demonstrate how this reconciliation process or union is compromised by the Irish Republican Army's nationalistic anti- Englishness discourse in *The Rotters' Club*.

1- Textuality of History and Anti- Englishness Discourse

In his “Professing the Renaissance,” Louis Montrose lays out that texts are “inscriptions of history (..). And literature is another form of social construct, which is produced by the society and in return is active in reshaping the culture of that society” (1989, p. 24-27). From Montrose’s observation, it may be noted that the social, political and economic aspect of a given society is embedded in its literature as textuality of history. Thus, in this section, we seek to demonstrate how the Anglo- Irish socio-political and cultural history is active in the shaping of anti-English narrative that exacerbates tensions between characters in Jonathan’s Coe’s *The Rotters’ Club*.

Discourse or language in *The Rotters’ Club* is presented as an artistic production of the Anglo-Irish history. This collective Anglo-Irish account is full of anti-English sentiment. In fact, the discourse of anti- Englishness refers to any opposition, dislike, fear, hatred, persecution and discrimination of the English people or England. This Anglophobia discourse is first observable throughout the Irish Republican Army’s (IRA) opposition to the English people and their land. When Coe presents the textual traces of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), he makes his media protagonist; Doug Andertone sums up the content of a printed leaflet in the following capital language: “IRA BASTARDS KILLED 12 PEOPLE ON MANCHESTER BUS YESTERDAY. REFUSE TO WORK WITH IRISH BASTARD MURDERERS” (Coe, 2002, p.37)

This above statement emerges from the historical context of the English colonial rule in Ireland. The Irish Republican Army’s claim to defend the interest of Ireland is posited in the narrative as an opposition against England and its people, hence anti-Englishness. The term IRA is evocatory of a historical force which the new historicists, Montrose and Greenblatt coined as the “historical contingency in a text” (1988, p. viii). For them any form of text is “performed in a cultural environment or historical contingency and literature is not a private matter, but a social act with its contests and negotiations” (Greenblatt, Montrose, 1988, p. viii). This consideration of literary text as a social act is fundamental to evaluate the IRA’s mass killing of the English people in term of a “historical contingency” resonating the political contest and ideological opposition between the Republic of Ireland and England. What is at



stake in the above statement is the English people's frustration over the Irish Republican Army's cruel opposition to them.

The phrase "IRA BASTARD KILLED 12 PEOPLE ON BUS" (Coe, 2002, p.37) also encapsulates individual's exasperation with a great toll of the English people's causalities. This heavy causality is related with a sense of what Montrose called a "social construction"⁴ in order to alert on the IRA's continuing anti- English sentiment. And the narrator's use of capital language or letters is meant to draw public attention on the Irish people's anti Englishness discourse. As a matter of fact, the two English adult characters, Sam Chase and Collin Trotter interrelate this social construction of anti-English sentiment to history in the following language: "the men fell to discussing the Irish question, their contempt (..) the bloody Catholic killers who had caused all the trouble in the first place."(Coe, 2003, p.55)

In these lines, Sam and Collin run into the cultural aspect of the anti-English sentiment throughout the expressions: "the Irish question, their contempt, the Bloody Catholics killers"(Coe, 2002, p. 55). These expressions are constituents of historical discourses that are both inside and outside the text. This constituent of historical discourse is noted in Montrose as "the historicity of texts". Following Montrose the historicity of texts is "the cultural specificity, the social embedment, of all modes of writing" (1988, p. 12). In this regard, the phrases: "the Irish question, their contempt, the Bloody Catholics killers"(Coe, 2002, p. 55) embody the religious and historical divergences that exacerbate the anti- English sentiment in Ireland.

Indeed, the contentious language: "The bloody Catholic killers" (Coe, 2002, p.55) encompasses the historical religious opposition between the Irish Catholicism and the English Protestantism. During the English colonial rule in Ireland, Catholicism was under threat. Given that the English revolted against ultramontanism, this increased the Irish Republican Army's animosity towards the English people. On this account, Benjamin and his sister Lois' conversation: "Why do the IRA go round killing everybody? Because they are Catholics" (2003, p.59) not only translates the Irish cultural opposition to the English, but also foreshadows their attempt to restore the papal authority over the English Church.

⁴For Montrose and Greenblatt social construction is twofold: Social structures create public imagination and at the same time, art, which is a social construct itself, helps alter and shape the social pattern



Besides, the anti- English stance is also expressed throughout avenging terror attack on innocent English people. The Anglo-Irish history is dominated by the IRA's nationalistic attacks against the English imperial rule of Ireland. Since many Irish people were killed or injured in the struggle against the English imperialism, the IRA has got recourse to retaliatory violent attack on innocent English people to avenge its colonial past. The death of Malcolm, a young English man, in the IRA's bomb blast embodies a significant pattern of socio-political imagery in the fiction, which works to reinforce the anti-English sentiment. Here is the narrator's effect of language as we read:

A victim of pub bombing (..) Lois Trotter, Ben's older sister(...) it was amazing that Lois had emerged almost unscathed, physically, given that her boyfriend Malcolm had been sitting right next to her and had been killed in the blast. There was no explanation here of how that might have happened. Lois is currently in the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, being treated for severe shock. So severe, she thought, that she still hasn't recovered more than two years later. (..) Poor Malcolm. Blown to oblivion, one ordinary Thursday evening; sentenced to death for waiting his girlfriend out for a drink in a city-centre pub (Coe, 2002, p. 224- 226)

Throughout this passage, the Anglo-Irish conflict looks like a tragedy. As a young English man, Malcolm is killed by the IRA's bomb blast and this murder psychologically affects Lois Trotter, his girlfriend. Although the narrator seems to see no explanation for this tragic death, the reader can arrive at an explanation through Montrose's postulation of a dialogue between a "poetics" and a "politics" of culture (1989, p. 24). Following Montrose (1989, p. 24) to interpret the poetics or texts, we are bound to reconstruct the socio-political histories of a given society through the filter of our consciousness. From this Montrosean perspective of text, it may be noted that there are several socio-political reasons why English civilians prove so vulnerable to the reader. For one thing, as despised figures, they have to make their way in an unsafe fictional space, which evokes both the Irish nationalists' threat and hatred.

We feel for Lois' anxiety, while contemptuous of the IRA's animosity towards the innocent English young people and children. Lois is treated as an orphan made by the Irish nationalist. She is psychologically disturbed and serves as a symbolic comment on the Anglo-Irish society as a whole. In Coe's fiction, it is as though several English people have all been traumatised and orphaned by the IRA's vengeful attack which indicates the failure of both the Irish and the English societies to bury their historical past and make peace. As Montrose and Greenblatt put forward that historical forces play a great role on generic codes" (1988, p. 12),



Lois' lamentation over her boyfriend's death is therefore indicative of the British young people's affliction over the ongoing historical stalemate between Ireland and England.

Furthermore, the anti-Englishness discourse is characterised through anger against England and its people. Many Irish people are grieved, for the English people have a benefit or socio-political advantage that the Irish people do not have. And the Irish people often see this social disadvantage as the result of their unfairly treatment by the English during colonial era. This anger about their drab social condition pushes the Irish to resort to hatred and derogatory discourse against the English. *The Rotters' Club*, is full of this hatred and derogatory discourse against the English, as Glyn, an Irish nationalist speaks to the Englishman, Benjamin Trotter in the following derogatory language:

You are English, aren't you? Glyn said, glancing at him. Of course. Well then, that's what I'll call you. You are not ashamed to be called an Englishman, I suppose? Should I be? Personally , I don't like the English. And(...) neither do the friends I was talking to just now. Do you know why? (...) we're bought and sold for English gold(...) to finance the imperial ventures of the English abroad. And so it remains to this day, with the North Sea oil revenues! And yet neither the Welsh nor the Scots have suffered so terribly from English rapacity and intransigence and ruthlessness as the Irish. (Coe, 2002, p.350-351)

In this conversation, Glyn, the Irish nationalist is miffed by the English people's past with Ireland. He expresses this resentment through phrases: "I don't like the English, English rapacity and intransigence and ruthlessness" (Coe, 2002, p. 350-351). These derogatory words: "English rapacity and intransigence and ruthlessness" (Coe, 2002, p.350-351) highlight the intense hatred and resentment the Irish nationalists nourish vis à vis the English people on account of their historical legacy. From Montrose New historicist perspective, we may say that Glyn's hatred of the English people is grounded in what Montrose called "the historicity of text" (1988, p. 2).

Thus understood, the foundation of Glyn's poetic logic is rooted in the Irish nationalist's representative historiography of Anglo-Irish significant historical events which Montrose ascribes as the "poetics culture". To grasp the full significance of Glyn's poetic logic: "we're bought and sold for English gold(...) to finance the imperial ventures of the English abroad. And so it remains to this day, with the North Sea oil revenues" (Coe, 2002, p. 350), one must say it fits into the Irish nationalist's representative historiography of the Anglo-Irish colonial past. Glyn's account of history is meant to establish the English people's guilt and justify the

Irish people's anti-Englishness. As a matter of fact, he continues elaborating on the Anglo-Irish historical events to Benjamin in the following indictment discourse:

Do you have any notion, have they taught you anything at all in that school of yours, about the horrors inflicted by the English upon the Irish during the reign of Elizabeth the First and the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell? When Elizabeth undertook the plantation of Ireland in 1565, the country rose in rebellion, and her generals competed with each other for the savagery with which they could butcher, hang, pillage, loot and massacre the innocent families of the native population (Coe, 2002, p.351)

Here, with a genocidal tone, the above discourse not only suggests Glyn's hatred towards English, but it also raises concern about the reliability of the Anglo-Irish historical past or narratives. As Glyn recounts the Irish massacre by English Kings, a reader can not only sympathize with Glyn in his hatred of the English people, but also be skeptical of the English version of the story. When Glyn asks Benjamin in this interrogative statement "Do you have any notion, have they taught you anything at all in that school of yours, about the horrors inflicted by the English upon the Irish during the reign of Elizabeth the First and the Protectorate of Oliver Cromwell? (Coe, 2002, p.351)", he is probably evoking Montrose's new historicist perspective that is the impossibility to get an unfailing past narrative. In fact, Montrose suggests that we cannot have "access to a full and authentic past" and we cannot have access to "a lived material existence, unmediated by the surviving textual traces of the society in question" (1989, p.20). From this perspective, Glyn's question to Benjamin is meant to depict the English account of the Anglo-Irish "lived material existence" (Montrose, 1989, p.20) in the English school institution as biased. In his opinion, the English educational institution does not provide students with what Montrose termed as the "full and authentic past" (1989, p. 20). The unreliability of historical discourse or narrative may explain Glyn's anti-English sentiment.

Indeed, *The Rotters' Club* is a Billingsgate novel that has an anti-Englishness setting. The plot or story line, on the one hand, works to direct consciousness towards an anti-English sentiment and on the other hand, it furnishes the reader with moral grounds for the Irish Republican Army's nationalistic attack on English. The Irish nationalists deploy an anti-Englishness discourse as retribution to the English colonial disaster in Ireland. In fact, the Irish Republican's physical violence, vulgar and abusive discourses resonate as a historical punishment of the English people. This constant anti-English sentiment has resulted into the shaping of a racialised Britishness discourse.



2- Britishness: A Racialised and Dialectical Discourse of Identity

In this part we seek to demonstrate how history, culture and race are deployed to articulate a racialised discourse on Britishness. Given the historical dominance of Englishness in Britishness, the discourse of a racialised separated British identity is common with Britons. This racialised discourse of British identity (or nationality) operates in terms of the negation of English colonial hegemonic history or culture and through the aloofness of Black British as a marginalised racial entity. Within Montrose's New historicist framework that considers literature as a subject of socio-cultural preoccupation, this section evokes a racialized Britishness discourse in the context of history, culture and race.

In *The Rotters' Club*, Britishness is an identity in constant flux within the English colonial heritage. The Irish historical experience of English colonial rule is threatening Britishness into what Montrose suggests as a "reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history" (1989, p. 24). In fact, the textuality of Britishness in Coe's fiction raises reciprocal concern because of the negation of the English historical prevalence. Since Englishness remains a dominant hegemonic entity of Britishness, the Irish people starting framing a regionalised discourse on Britishness as we read:

Our very identity was taken away from us in 1536. (..)Do you think the native Indians ask any free- thinking Welshman or Scotsman or Irishman what he thinks of the English and you will get the same answer. You are a cruel and bloody and greedy and acquisitive people. A nation of butchers and vagabonds. Butchers and vagabonds, I tell you, at which point Glyn (Coe, 2003: 351-352)

The opening statement of this passage may have stemmed from a historical problem between Ireland and England. The belief that the above quotation held is that Britain is not a homogenous country with a clear sense of a unique identity. The Irish character, Glyn's statement: "our identity was taken away from us in 1536"(Coe, 2002, p.351) is tantamount to Montrose and Greenblatt's thought of "social energy" or the socio-cultural reality within the textuality. In fact, the year fifteen thirty six marked the historical prevalence of Englishness as the core of Britishness. As England defeated the Spanish armada in fifteen thirty six, Britishness was characterised as purely the product of Englishness. On this account, the Irish character's claim for his local identity can be related to his repugnance of the English aristocratic core that sets its marks on Britishness.

From Glyn's perspective, we may note that the British people need to redefine themselves in the light of their local identities. Arguing about this self-identification crisis, the British political analysts Andrew Gamble and Tony Wright write that: "The British have long been distinguished by having no clear idea about who they are, where they are, or what they are. Most of them have routinely described England as Britain" (2001: 1). Actually, this statement echoes the lack of a homogenous identity of Britishness.

Indeed, Glyn's saying: "our identity was taken away from us" (2002, p.351), is reminiscent of the Irish Catholic austerity to the dominant English protestant entity of Britishness. Glyn's unflagging quest for an Irish local identity epitomises the dialectics of a racialised Britishness discourse grounded in the Irish nationalism as the narrator puts it forward: "there was a lot of (..) Irish feeling (...) Oh, yes, nationalism's a terrible scourge, in my view. That's the real enemy. Get rid of nationalism and you've solved ninety per cent of the problems" (Coe, 2002, p. 243)

Here, this above statement discloses the issue of the Irish nationalism and its threat to a transnational British patriotism. As the Irish people stands against the contamination of their culture, they assert their negation of the English patriotism in a transnational Britishness identity. The sentence: "Get rid of nationalism and you've solved ninety per cent of the problems" (Coe, 2002, p. 243) expresses a dialectical dimension to British identity. There is an unspoken question here concerning the relations between Irish nationalism and Britishness. The narrator's entreaty for the rejection of Irish nationalism is evocatory of the dialectical approach to Britishness. At this point the Irish nationalists consider themselves as separate entity from the English British.

In other terms, the narrator's appeal for the abandonment of nationalism is related to what Montrose calls "the textual constructs of us, our own historically, socially and institutionally shaped vantage points; that the histories we reconstruct (1989, p. 23). From Montrose's perspective the sentence: "Get rid of nationalism and you've solved ninety per cent of the problems" (Coe, 2002, p. 243) is connotative of a textual construct of national identity that is meant to obliterate the racialised Britishness discourse.

What can be seen to feed racialised cultural Britishness is to allow nationalism, which might suggest exclusiveness. In this sense, the Irish nationalism is purely equated to racialised

Britishness. This is why the narrator invites individual to help elites oppose the Irish racialised Britishness discourse in these terms:

Does Mr Anderton not realize that we are fighting a war in Ireland – a war designed to protect legitimate British interests? In these circumstances, it is surely incumbent on every right-thinking British citizen to do everything in his (or her) power to support the government in its campaign against those forces of sedition that are massed against it on the other side of the Irish sea (Coe, 2002, p. 235)

What is at stake here is to counter the Irish nationalism for the sake of a transnational Britishness. When the narrator reminds Doug Anderton, the English journalist, of the government's commitment to fight the Irish for the union, he is probably alluding to a re-problematisation or wholesale rejection of some prevalent cultural conceptions of Britishness in Ireland. In the light of Montrose's reflection on literary text as "another form of social significance" (1989, p. 24), we may read the sentence: "to fight against forces of sedition (...) of the Irish" (2002, p. 235) as a cultural reproduction of the Anglo-Irish racialised Britishness discourse. Through the narrator's statement: "to fight against forces of sedition (...) of the Irish" (2002, p. 235), there might be a cultural construction of the Anglo-Irish dialectical approach to Britishness. Given that the narrator deems it necessary to wage war against forces of sedition, it indicates that versions of Britishness are instantiated, deployed, contested and reproduced in a dialectical opposition between Ireland and England.

The relationship between the antagonistic imagined Britishness social groups of 'them (the English)' and 'us (the Irish)' denies any possibility of reconstructing a unique historical and cultural past. In this wise, Louis Montrose, in his "Professing the Renaissance," lays out that "we are historically bound and we may only reconstruct the histories through the filter of our consciousness" (1989, p. 23). Actually, through the filter of the Irish nationalists' consciousness the reader is introduced to a racialised Britishness discourse. *The Rotters' Club* provides us with these rival histories between England and Ireland. These rival reconstructed histories are affecting individual's sense of belonging to a unique Britishness. In fact, the Irish Republican Army's remodeled histories turn individual Irish into a marginal posture within the union as follows:

And I bet you think the IRA are a bunch of murdering Micks, don't you? And our boys in Belfast are the salt of the fucking earth. You've got to what's happening in this country. You mean with the unions? No, I don't mean with the unions. The unions are the good guys, you see. I mean the people who are getting together against the unions. (Coe, 2002, p.99)



This passage lays out an anti-Irish prejudice discourse which is impinging the individual Irish sense of belonging to Britishness. In fact, the character, Sean Harding of Irish origin is victim of inconsideration because of the IRA's remodeled terror history. Sean Harding is often deemed to share the IRA's ideology. Coe describes this marginal status of the Irish people in Britain through Sean Harding's filter of consciousness as the narrator says:

Benjamin's conversation with Harding may have revealed that they shared some musical enthusiasms, but otherwise, the consequences were disappointing. It didn't lead to any significant renewal of their friendship. (...) by the time of the new term, with rumours circulating that his father had left home and returned to Ireland, Harding seemed to have become even more solitary and difficult" (Coe, 2002, p. 258)

Indeed, the complicated friendship relation between Benjamin and Harding is illustrative of this divergence about Britishness as common identity. And the return of Sean's father to Ireland sorts out this unhappy collaboration among Britons. Sean's father return to home is related to a past history, as well as Britishness. By returning home, the character explores the ways in which he negotiates his identities, that is, the ways in which he works out his attachment to his place of origin (or his parents' places of origin) and to an Irish racialised Britishness discourse. Sean's unhappy collaboration with Benjamin and his father's return to Ireland are then an exploration of the idea of an anti- Britishness discourse or Irishness.

Furthermore, the political and territorial idiosyncratic of Britishness is undermined by race and ethnicity. The discourse of a transcultural Britishness identity is affected by colonial or historical considerations of race. In fact, the racialised Britishness discourse is occurring through the aloofness of Black British as a marginalizing racial and ethnic group. In *The Rotters' Club* Britishness has a racial connotation in the sense that it is largely determined by whiteness which suggests the detachment of Black British. The coloured people's sense of Britishness is dented by the historical discourse of racial exclusion as the textuality unfolds:

The black man is not as intelligent as the white man. His brain is genetically not so well developed. Therefore, how can he do the same job of work? The black man is lazier than the white man. Ask yourselves, why the British Empire conquered the Africans and Indians and the other way around? Because the white race are superior in industry and intelligence. Historical fact (Coe, 2002, p.38)

Here, the narrator's interpretation of this Black British aloofness as a truly reconstructed history is connotative of Montrose and Greenblatt's assumptions that: " literature functions within this system in three interlocking ways: as a manifestation of these concrete behaviors



of its particular author, as itself the expression of the codes by which behavior is shaped, and as a reflection upon those codes" (1980, p.4). From this perspective, the aloofness of individual Black British is embedded in the colonial history of British society. The colonial history is reconstructed to substantiate the aloofness of Black as an exclusive British group. This amounts to the endorsement of a racialised Britishness system within textuality.

Another noteworthy aspect of *The Rotters Club* is its ambivalent use of language to either spread hatred or abate racial tension. Given the relevance of language in constructing a transhistorical and transcultural Britishness, Coe's texture often delves into catalysing discourse through the filter of Sam Chase's consciousness, as he says:

Language is very important, said Sam. The English statesman, John Selden, said three centuries ago that "syllables govern the world(..) even in a democracy words are magic instruments. He who governs, or wants to govern, must be skilled in the science of employing words. Man is more influenced by language than the facts of surrounding reality (..) in truth a word can cut deeper than a sword" (2002, p. 264)

Actually, in Sam Chase's imagination, language cautious use can help preserve Britishness as a unique identity for the Irish, Scots and English. By emphasising on the proper use of language for human history, Sam explicitly implies that the historically oriented narrative of identity is likely to exacerbate tension. On this account, he says that "word can cut deeper than a sword" (2002, p. 264) to highlight the need for the British society to move toward a transhistorical and transcultural narrative of Britishness. This invitation to a transnational identity or unique Britishness parallels with Benjamin's consciousness of unity. Here is the narrator's illustration as he says: "Benjamin had a fleeting vision: it came to him that he was only one person (..) and he felt an incredible sense of ...oneness, that was the only word he could think of, a sense that the entire nation was being briefly, fugitively drawn together in the divine act of laughter" (2003, p.274)

From this point, Benjamin and Sam's consciousness enables us to reconcile the different cultural opposed narratives of Britishness. Coe makes use of Benjamin and Sam to give an insight into a transnational and transcultural Britishness that should emerge from a racialised narratives of identity.

Conclusion

This article tried to highlight and scrutinise the anti-Englishness discourse in Jonathan Coe's *The Rotters' Club*. It attempted to chart the Irish nationalists' anti-Englishness discourse through the use of hateful language. In this sense, the paper has had recourse to Montrose's new historicism paradigm, for it sees the literary text as a collective creation that contains the needs and desires of a given society. From this new historicist standpoint, we postulate that the Irish nationalists' discourse of hatred, anger and resentment is embedded in the histories of the English colonialism. Many Irish people are grieved because they often see modern Ireland's socio-political hardships as the result of the country's unfairly treatment by the English colonial power.

Indeed, *The Rotters' Club* refers to the Anglo-Irish historical past without any nostalgia. Both nations' shared past is related as a dismal and stagnant reality wherein the reconciliation between England and Northern Ireland is at stalemate owing to the Irish nationalists' continuous resentment discourse. In many passages of *The Rotters' Club*, the language of hostility towards the English people is haunting the idea of a transcultural Britishness identity. For instance, the whole novel portrays the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and Glyn's obsession to sever ties with the English constructed discourse of Britishness. In the Irish characters' exertion to reconstruct the memory of their local Irish identity, there is a formation of a dialectical discourse on Britishness.

Due to England's historical dominance on the British Irish Isles, the term Britishness has come to be understood through a pejorative reading in Ireland. From the Irish people's perspective Britishness often denotes Englishness or England's cultural domination. And this prevalence of Englishness in Britishness is an affront to Coe's Irish characters that divest from it with a dialectical discourse, known as racialised Britishness narrative. This racialised Britishness discourse is also couched within a colonial narrative and is presented as something entrenched in racial history, since Black people are depicted as marginalised British group.

In short, *The Rotters' Club* provides us with a revisionist account of the Anglo-Irish historical conflicting discourse. Although this Irish nationalists' revisionist historical output is derogatory towards English people, there is an attempt to relocate the legacy of England's colonial rule in a national context. This is why, Coe's Irish characters lay out nationalism as an essentialist understanding of ethnicity and regionalism in securing an inclusive Britishness in contemporary Britain.

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