



Europe's Problem with England

By Edmond Grace SJ

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On 1 January 1973, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland - better known as Britain - became a Member State of what was then called the European Communities. The contention of this paper is that Britain was constitutionally incapable of fulfilling the commitment entailed by membership of the European Union and that Brexit is the inevitable outcome of this situation. Britain is a vehicle for the pre-eminence of England - a pre-eminence which is inimical to that sharing of sovereignty, on which the European project depends.

Generosity and self-esteem

There is much to admire in the British heritage. The willingness of the English to share the democratic traditions of Westminster with neighbouring nations gave rise to a new political loyalty. This loyalty was universal in Scotland and, even in Ireland, constitutional nationalism was happy to work within British constitutional structures. There is a spirit of generosity and fairness in the English at their best.

One contemporary figure who sees his British identity in this light is Chris Patten. Toward the end of his recently published book¹ he acknowledges his Christian and Catholic faith and 'British patriotism' as crucial influences in his life. These motivations enabled him to play a pivotal role in resolving the most critical issue of the Northern Ireland peace process – policing. He was also the last Governor of a British colony – Hong Kong – bringing to an end the largely peaceful dismantling of the most extensive empire in history. As EU External Affairs Commissioner he facilitated peace agreements in both Kosovo and Serbia, thus helping to bring Europe's most serious conflict since the Second World War to an end.

This generosity is part of British self-esteem but it can also reinforce that sense of moral superiority, which is a hallmark of the British at their worst. Underlying it all is a virulent English nationalism which made its present felt in a vigorous and powerful manner in the Brexit referendum. The sad reality is that the disdain of foreigners which typifies many middle class supporters of Brexit – whom Patten calls 'the blazers'² – is more in tune with the underlying reality of Britain than the more generous values of Patten and those like him. The generosity of Britain is ultimately a means, not an end.

¹ Chris Patten, *First Confession* – a sort of memoir, Penguin, p. 296

² Patten, 243,245, 258.

The underlying attitude

The original union of England and Scotland – the United Kingdom of Great Britain – was designed to facilitate the emerging imperial ambitions of England. Since then the empire has come and gone but, in the absence of military defeat and the resulting humiliation, the underlying attitude of superiority and opportunism persists. This explains why Britain has consistently obstructed the project of political union expressed in the Schuman Declaration. This obstruction is not just a matter of policy and, as such, open to debate. It is a constitutional imperative. If Britain does not champion the pre-eminence of England, what purpose does it serve?

In the Brexit referendum England voted to leave, Scotland and Northern Ireland voted by clear margins to stay and this has given rise to unfinished business both within Britain and throughout Europe. A struggle for supremacy has begun between two futures - one in which each state seeks security in its own separateness and one which is founded on the peaceful interdependence of nations. Britain and Europe can no longer simply coexist, because each poses too deep a challenge to the other. For those who love Europe a major struggle and a major transformation lies ahead.

If Ireland features prominently in the analysis which follows, this should not distract from the wider European relevance. Ireland has unrivalled experience both of referendums on European issues and, more importantly, in dealing with the existential realities of the British constitution. The latest Irish experience in this regard is Britain's unilateral overturning of one of the underlying assumptions of the Good Friday Agreement – joint membership of the European Union.

An unwritten constitution

Britain is unique as a democratic state in not having a written constitution. The legal texts which are usually referred to as constitutions tend to be linked to other more inspirational documents such as the 1581 Dutch Act of Abjuration, the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man or the 1930 Purna Swaraj of the Indian National Congress.³ These constitutions and proclamations put written form on the underlying narrative and values of the state. They also capture that critical moment of revolutionary pathos in which the state is formed. The Schuman Declaration reflects such a revolutionary moment; it is the foundation and inspiration of a new kind of political identity – of peoples, former enemies, united in solidarity and peace.

In Britain there is no written constitution but, perhaps even more significant as we shall see, the second type of inspirational document is unknown. It is not that there is no inspirational element in the make-up of Britain, but in order to understand British structures and values we must look to history itself – the story of the Kingdom.

Absorbing Scotland

It begins with what is called the 'union of crowns.' In 1603 James, King of Scotland, became King of England and moved south to govern the entire island from London. He continued to govern his former homeland without any viceroy, making use of the extensive spy network established by his predecessor on the English throne - Elizabeth. Scotland still had a king, an absentee king, and the absence was a shock both to the economy of Edinburgh and to society as a whole.⁴ During the coming century England began to develop its colonies in India and America, while Scotland languished. By the end of the century the population of Scotland was one sixth (and its income one fortieth) that of England. One in five Scots lived as beggars.⁵

The final union of parliaments in 1707 has its origin in the Glorious Revolution of England in 1688. In addition to being an inspiring moment in the advance of democratic liberty it also marked the establishment of the Protestant succession to the English throne. When

³ The Magna Carta and the 1690 Bill of Rights are milestones in the history of liberty but they are legal enactments, guaranteeing specific rights rather than a statements of political vision.

⁴ David Ross, *Scotland, History of a Nation*, (Lomond Books, 2014), 174.

⁵ Ross, 208.

in 1707 the English Parliament chose George of Hanover as successor to Queen Anne, the Scots Parliament dragged its feet in agreeing to the choice - contrary to its usual practise of prompt acquiescence. This was largely intended as a gesture of independence, but the Scots were not in a strong position. The English out-manoeuvred a divided opposition and with the help of 'English gold' succeeded in getting the Scottish Parliament to vote itself out of existence. With the establishment of the Kingdom of Great Britain, with one parliament based at Westminster, any possibility of future rivalry between the two kingdoms was eliminated.⁶

The Irish experience

Ireland joined what became the United Kingdom Great Britain and Ireland in 1801 and, again, the prime movers were the English. After the 1798 rebellion London wanted a firmer grip on Ireland and it would maintain that grip in the face of popular resistance – mainly, but not always, constitutional – for over a century. In 1912, when Ireland was finally granted some measure of home rule, Ulster Protestants armed themselves with a view to resisting it. In 1914 the British government finally decided to face them down by deploying troops throughout Ulster and this led to what the Oxford Companion to Irish History calls the “Curragh incident.”⁷

Irish nationalists insist on referring to this incident as the Curragh mutiny, though the crucial act of insubordination took place elsewhere – in London. When a group of army officers based in the Curragh submitted their resignations rather than fight Ulster unionists, the War Office refused to accept the resignations and assured the officers concerned that there would be no offensive action against Ulster. The Secretary for War and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, who gave this assurance, acted without cabinet authority – effectively countermanding a government decision. They both had to resign but their decision was not reversed and, according to the Oxford Companion to Irish History, ‘the effect of the affair meant that the army could not be used to quell Ulster opposition to home rule.’⁸

Another ‘effect of the affair’ is that decades of political struggle by constitutional nationalists in Ireland – and a statute of the British parliament – was arbitrarily overturned. Irish nationalists have contended that this incident was in some way a violation of the British constitution, but when a constitution is not written down who is to say? The British constitution cannot be read, but it can be encountered in the behaviour of those who hold constitutionally significant positions under the Crown. The supremacy of parliament is one of the most significant conventions of the British constitution, but who is to say that there are not other deeper realities at work? Whatever happened and, whether or not it was ‘constitutional,’ the Curragh incident marked the beginning of the end for Irish constitutional nationalism and for British rule in most of Ireland.

Nelson, Wellington and “England”

Britain has always been an initiative of the English. It has included Wales (united to England for almost a thousand years), Scotland (British for three centuries) and Ireland (whose relationship with Britain remains fraught). The Union Jack reflects this relationship of the three nations by displaying the three crosses of St. George, St. Andrew and St. Patrick. Britain is a sovereign state with its own distinct military tradition and the regiments of the British army include the likes of the Irish Guards, the Royal Welch Fusiliers and the Royal Regiment of Scotland. There are other regiments whose names honour these three countries but there are no ‘English’ regiments. There is no clear explanation for this apparent oversight, but it does make sense as an act of shrewd condescension on the part of the pre-eminent nation.

The last war in Europe in which Britain was the undisputed primary victor ended two centuries ago. It was waged against Napoleon Bonaparte and it is of immense significance in the emergence of a distinct British identity. The battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo will forever be associated with two heroic leaders - Nelson and Wellington. Their stories contain powerful moments of pathos – one at sea and one on land – when the future of Britain hung in the balance. Not only did these two men provide intelligent strategic leadership, but

⁶ Ross, 217-220

⁷ S.J. Connelly (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Irish History*, (Oxford University Press, 1997), 131.

⁸ Connelly, 131.

their own personal bravery was noted by those who were present and the memories were handed on and celebrated with justifiable pride. They are truly British heroes.

By the time Nelson's great victory had been achieved he himself lay dead of his wounds, but one memory of his last day would be treasured. It was the norm for naval commanders to send instructions to the fleet by way of flag signals. On the morning of the battle of Trafalgar, Nelson added a quite superfluous signal as a gesture of nonchalance and good humour in the face of the approaching danger. It read: *'England expects that every man will do his duty.'*⁹

Wellington's initial response to his most famous victory was one of grief: *'I don't know what it is to lose a battle but certainly nothing can be more painful than to gain one with the loss of so many of one's friends.'*¹⁰ Accounts by those who were there spoke of how he seemed oblivious to danger as he made his way to the thick of the action issuing brief orders: *'Stand fast to the last man, my lads. We must not be beat. What will they say in England?'*¹¹ Wellington survived to become British Prime Minister and mentor to the young Queen Victoria. When he died she wrote in a letter to her cousin, the Duke of Cambridge: *'One cannot realise at all the possibility of his being no longer among us or think of England without him.'*¹² The fact that this great man was from an Anglo-Irish family, spent his childhood in Ireland and had served as Chief Secretary for Ireland (of which more later) was lost on the young English queen.

Fifteen years after Wellington's death, in 1867, Walter Bagehot published his magisterial work in which the term 'British Constitution' is used emphatically, if sparingly. Much more frequent use is made of the term which gives the book its title – 'The English Constitution.'¹³

Some corner of a foreign field

This emphasis on England was by no means confined to admirals and dukes. What is known to history as the Indian Mutiny was by far the bloodiest uprising against British rule anywhere¹⁴ and, when it was over, landowners who had refused to take sides in the uprising were brought to trial, convicted and hanged. A British resident in Mumbai was married to one of the Prize Agents, whose task it was to search for booty. She would later publish an account of those times, in which she singled out one particular Indian prince, the Nawab of Jhajjar. In her view he had conducted his own defence with *'startling justice'*. She added:

*It was England who had armed and trained the ruffians who had brought the calamity on the land; and it was not fair to expect him to compel that obedience in his followers which the rulers of the country had failed in compelling their own.*¹⁵

Those 'ruffians' were the mutinous soldiers of the British Raj and 'England' trained them.

Another telling example of the centrality of England is to be found in Anthony Trollop's Palliser novels. In *Phineas Finn*, one of his characters, Mr. Monk, has just been made a minister in Her Majesty's government and is welcoming Mr. Finn, an affable Irish Catholic MP, to his house. In an elaborately playful conversation Mr. Monk wonders if he might have too simple a lifestyle for 'an English minister' and he fears that he might injure 'the British Constitution.' Finn points out that, if Monk resigns soon, grave evil may be avoided. Mr Monks replies:

9 Tom Pockock, Horatio Nelson, (Cassell Publishers, London, 1987.) 325. At moments of glory, Nelson was decidedly an Englishman; see his reaction to the surrender of French troops in Bastia, Corsica. Pockock, 116.

10 Christopher Hibbert, Wellington, a Personal History, (Harper Collins, 1997), 182

11 Hibbert. 179.

12 Hibbert.404.

13 Walter Bagehot, The English Constitution, 1867, www.gutenberg.org. The phrase 'British Constitution' appears seven times in the text whereas 'English Constitution' is used thirty seven times

14 In the region of 150,000 in a two year period, compared with 28,000 during the 8 years of American War of Independence.

15 William Dalrymple, The Last Mughal, the Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857 (Bloomsbury, 2006), 427.

*I sincerely hope so, for I do love the British constitution; and I love also the respect in which members of the English cabinet are held.*¹⁶

This Anglo-centric view finds a particularly poignant expression in one of the best loved poems in English literature – ‘The Soldier’ by Rupert Brooke. In June 1915, on the Greek island of Skyros, Brooke was buried in the uniform of a British naval officer:

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field

That is forever England. There shall be

In that rich earth a richer dust concealed;

A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware...

On a more recent and much lighter note, the 1977 James Bond film ‘The Spy Who Loved Me’ (starring Roger Moore) has the following piece of dialogue in one of its opening scenes:

She: But James, I need you!

He: So does England!

An evolving constitution

Britain is the mask – the persona – through which England encounters the wider world and the British crown still commands allegiance in far flung parts of the world such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The English succeeded in creating that kind of wider political identity which Europe is still struggling to establish. Irish nationalists eventually rejected the Crown but, after one century of independent statehood, they have yet to meet the challenge of winning the allegiance of Ulster Protestants to an Irish Republic.

The English pioneered democratic government as we know it, with an independent judiciary and with parliament as a viable way of including all the people. The granting of Catholic Emancipation illustrates how the role of parliament developed. Daniel O’Connell is rightfully credited with the leadership of the first mass peaceful political organisation in history, but the response of the British establishment played a crucial part in this story. The Duke of Wellington, when he was Chief Secretary of Ireland more than twenty years previously, wrote in a dispatch: *‘The great object of our polity in Ireland should be to endeavour to obliterate, as far the law will allow us, the distinction between Protestants and Catholics, and that we ought to avoid anything which can induce either sect to recollect or believe that its interests are separate or distinct from one another.’*¹⁷ This did not prevent him, however, from being opposed to votes for Catholics, though by 1828 he had come around to the view that something had to be done, if civil war was to be avoided in Ireland.¹⁸

This change of view brought him into serious conflict with King George IV – and his bigoted brother - who felt that giving votes to Catholics would be in breach of the Coronation Oath. Things came to a head when the King demanded – and got – Wellington’s resignation.¹⁹ Then the King had to face reality. No one else had enough parliamentary support to form a government, so Wellington was reappointed and brought in the Catholic Relief Bill, 1829. This kind of moment is typical of how Britain’s constitution has evolved, though not all such moments have had such a happy outcome.

Montesquieu, the French political philosopher, was a great admirer of what he described as the ‘republican’ constitution of Britain and,

¹⁶ Anthony Trollope, *Phineas Finn, the Irish Member* (Penguin), 195.

¹⁷ Hibbert 67

¹⁸ Hibbert, 269.

¹⁹ Hibbert, 271-272.

in particular, the way in which political liberty facilitated 'doux commerce.'²⁰ Not only did liberty suit the development of trade, it also encouraged scientific enquiry and its practical application to people's lives. It is no accident that the industrial revolution began with Britain and, in particular, with England.

This island

Any country which can boast this kind of achievement, has every reason to be proud of itself and, by the end of the nineteenth century, England had long been accustomed to having little or nothing to learn from the rest of the world. Much would change in the next half century but certain underlying realities, both at home and abroad, remained in place. Abroad was the empire (though its days were numbered) and, at home, the ambivalent but inclusive identity of Britain. In his famous 'we shall fight' speech Churchill refers to 'our island home,' but he never names 'Britain.' It is hard to imagine an American or a French president under similar circumstances not mentioning by name the country he leads.²¹ Perhaps he was avoiding any comparison with one of the great popular hits of the day:

There'll always be an England

And England shall be free

If England means as much to you

As England means to me.

There is another - and highly unlikely - figure who spoke at this moment with true pathos of England. George Orwell, a veteran of the Spanish civil war now facing the even greater menace of the Third Reich, still spoke of England as '*the most class-ridden country under the sun*' but he had no doubt about where his fundamental loyalty lay. His words have an almost Churchillian ring:

*I believe in England and I believe that we shall go forward.*²²

Hugo Young, writing fifty years later, summed up this period: *It occurred to hardly anyone, whether in 1935 or 1945, to doubt the value of being British (for which 'English' was then a synonym the Scots and the Welsh tamely put up with.)*²³ Britain/England would survive. Unlike her continental neighbours she did not succumb to fascism. She had stood alone against the forces of the Third Reich and she still had her empire. (And unlike France in Algeria and Indo-China, the British would not end up waging war against former colonies.) Britain/England could also claim her part in the victory of democracy, along her English-speaking ally, the United States. The centrality of this alliance was prefigured in Churchill's 'we shall fight' speech and, in particular, in its seldom-heard concluding words:

*... and if... this island... were subjugated and starving, then our Empire beyond the seas... would carry on the struggle, until, in God's good time, the New World, with all its power and might, steps forth to the rescue and the liberation of the old.*²⁴

Interested... but not absorbed

The Americans were close allies though they had their own plans once the war was over. This included the re-integration of newly established republic of West Germany into a north Atlantic alliance. In September 1949, the American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson,

²⁰ Iseult Honohan, *Civic Republicanism* (Routledge, London and New York, 2002), 81-83.

²¹ <https://www.winstonchurchill.org/> accessed 13 June, 2017. He uses the term 'British' twenty eight times mostly in relation to British forces or equipment. He refers to the peril facing 'the British nation' once at the very start, once to 'the British Isles,' once to 'British subjects,' once to 'the British Empire.' He never speaks of 'Britain.'

²² Hugo Young, *This Blessed Plot, Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair*, (Macmillan 1999), . George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 1941.

²³ Hugo Young, *This Blessed Plot, Britain and Europe from Churchill to Blair*, (Macmillan 1999), 7

²⁴ <https://www.winstonchurchill.org/> accessed 13 June, 2017. Interestingly, these final words do feature in the recent film 'Dunkirk'

asked the French Foreign Minister, Robert Schuman 'to formulate a project on the future of Germany.'²⁵ Schuman was taken aback – shocked – by this request, but he did oblige and Acheson was one of the few people to know in advance of the contents of the Schuman Declaration of 9 May 1950.²⁶ No one was eager to include Britain in these developments.

Schuman, however, was keen to include the British in the final outcome and visited London soon afterwards with this in mind. He was accompanied by Jean Monnet, who had drafted the Declaration and who became founding President of what is now the European Commission. Monnet's family were in the Cognac business and he was taken out of school at the age of sixteen to begin his working career in the city of London. During World War I, while still in his twenties, he was responsible for the establishment of the 'Allied Maritime Transport Council.' This body was an exercise in joint-sovereignty between France and Britain, the first of its kind and a precursor of the European Coal and Steel Community. Its purpose was to enable both governments to purchase commodities jointly on the world market, thereby enhancing their bargaining power, bringing down prices and freeing up funds for the more direct demands of the war effort. This project gave Monnet unrivalled experience as an international figure and, in particular, in dealing with the British.

In his memoirs, published in 1976 (three years after Britain's entry to the European Communities) Monnet described his visit with Schuman, along with the reluctant response to their proposals by the British. He recalled making the following remark to Schuman:

*The British will not find their future role by themselves. Only outside pressure will induce them to accept change.*²⁷

When Schuman spoke of the possibility of associate membership for Britain 'compatible with her structure and her economic ideas,' Monnet recalled thinking that this was unwise:

*Experience has taught me that it is not a good thing for the British to obtain special conditions and an exceptional position in their relationship with others, or even for them to cherish such hopes. On the other hand, they are at their best if you firmly offer to work with them on an equal footing.*²⁸

In the light of what has happened since, these words can only be described as prophetic.

The initial reaction of Britain's Labour government to the Schuman Declaration came from Deputy Prime Minister Herbert Morrison: 'It's no good we cannot do it. The Durham miners won't wear it.'²⁹ Another aspect of the early British response was an unapologetic prejudice against the Catholicism of people such as Schuman and Adenauer.³⁰ The underlying view, shared by an entire generation of British politicians, was first expressed by Churchill as early as 1930: 'We are with Europe but not of it... interested and associated but not absorbed.'³¹

These two tendencies - internal preoccupation with sectoral interest and external stereotyping – has marked Britain's relationship with Europe ever since.

“Au revoir and bonne chance”

The Labour government, with its Foreign Secretary who believed that Catholic priests brought bad luck,³² would soon be replaced, but the incoming Tory administration was no less dismissive. Foreign Secretary, Harold Macmillan, speculated on 'a Common Market which

²⁵ 'un projet sur l'avenir de l'Allemagne' – Francois Roth, Robert Schuman, Du Lorrain des frontières au père de l'Europe, (Librairie Artheme Fayard, 2008), 370

²⁶ Young, 390.

²⁷ Jean Monnet, Memoirs, (Doubleday, New York, 1978), 307.

²⁸ Monnet, 308.

²⁹ O'Ceallaigh and Gillespie, 42.

³⁰ Young, 50; also David Gowland; Arthur Turner et al. Britain and European Integration since 1945: on the sidelines. (Routledge, London and New York, 2010), 31.

³¹ O'Ceallaigh and Gillespie ed., Britain and Europe: the Endgame, an Irish Perspective., IIEA 2015, 42.

³² Young, 50.

*either never came to anything or if it did proved harmful to the worldwide movement towards freer trade.*³³ Five years later, when the foreign ministers of the European Coal and Steel Community gathered in Messina, Italy, they invited the British to participate. This time they were represented by Russel Bretherton, Under-Secretary at the Board of Trade,³⁴ and there are various accounts of how it all ended. One of them credits Bretherton with making a speech worthy of John Cleese:

*The future treaty which you are discussing has no chance of being agreed; if it was agreed it would have no chance of being ratified; and if it were ratified it would have no chance of being applied. And if it was applied it would be totally unacceptable to Britain... Monsieur le President, au revoir and bonne chance.*³⁵

Bretherton never delivered that speech though one thing is beyond dispute: somebody composed it and somebody (likely the same person) had the standing to ensure that it was credibly placed in the record of that famous meeting. Hugo Young refers to sources which suggest that the author was none less than the Prime Minister himself, Anthony Eden.³⁶ Fiction or not, this passage has earned its place in the history of British-European relations.

Bretherton's account of that meeting is more prosaic but it does have its element of drama. His attitude had changed as a result of his participation in the Messina process and by this stage he was convinced that Britain could have taken a leading role, provided she was willing to participate. He wrote home to this effect, but no one was interested in his views. Instead he was instructed to deliver a message which poured cold water on the process by saying that the matters being considered were all within the competence of other institutions. According to Bretherton, Paul-Henri Spaak, the Dutch Foreign Minister, *'just blew up:*

England has not moved at all and I am not going to move either!

Unlike in the fictional account, where Bretherton was meant to walk out after his dramatic contribution, Bretherton did not leave till the end of the session, but Britain played no further part. The great virtue of the fictional version, is that it gave Britain the upper hand. Instead of a servant of Her Majesty's government being dressed down by a continental, Sir Russell does both the dressing down and the walking out.

The decision to join

Six years after the Messina debacle 'the future treaty' had been agreed, and ratified, and applied and had become quite acceptable to Britain – enough for Macmillan, now Prime Minister, to decide that it was now in Britain's interest to join. The motivation, however, had nothing to do with Europe. The first reason was *'to retain the level of influence in Washington which exclusion from the common market threatened to reduce.'* The second reason was that membership would strengthen the British economy *'so that Commonwealth leadership would remain possible.'*³⁷ Two years later, when General de Gaulle finally vetoed Britain's application he spoke of her *'being linked... to the most diverse and often most distant countries.'*³⁸ Britain had an interest in joining Europe but only as a means of promoting her interests elsewhere.

In 1964, a Labour government under Harold Wilson came to power. Wilson belonged to that section of the Labour Party which saw Europe as a capitalist monopoly and took great pride in a Commonwealth in which Britain was no longer an imperial power but now stood for multi-racial solidarity across the globe. Their dream was shattered, however, in 1965 when a white supremacist regime in Rhodesia declared unilateral independence. This coincided with a major financial crisis in Britain, which was compelled to cut its overseas

33 Charles Williams, Harold Macmillan (Phoenix Press 2010), 234-235.

34 A full account of this bemusing episode is to be found in Young, 86-98.

35 Roy Denman, Missed Chances: Britain and Europe in the Twentieth Century, (London; Cassell, 1996; .198; for a slightly different version see Margaret Gowing, Independence and Deterrence, Britain and Atomic Energy, 1945-52, vol. I, (Macmillan., 1974); 230.

36 Young, 93

37 Alan Milward, The Rise and Fall of a National Strategy 1945-1963. The official History of Britain and the European Community: Volume I, (London, Routledge, 2002), p.310

38 O'Cealaigh and Gillespie, 44

military commitments. This ruled out any effective challenge to the Rhodesian regime, with the result that Britain's standing with Commonwealth countries was seriously damaged. Wilson soon came to the view that there was no alternative to Europe.³⁹

Britain made a second application and once again it was vetoed by de Gaulle but, after his abrupt resignation in 1969, negotiations recommenced. They came to a successful conclusion under a Conservative government led by Ted Heath, and Britain became a member of the European Communities. Ireland joined at the same time, but there was a significant difference in how the decision was made in each country. The Irish electorate voted on an amendment to the Constitution, which explicitly stated that *'No provision of this Constitution invalidates' any law enacted by the European Communities, 'or institutions thereof.'* There is no equivalent statement in the European Communities Act 1972 passed by the Westminster Parliament. According to Hugo Young, writing twenty-five years later, Ministers did not lie *'but they avoided telling the full truth. They refrained from stating categorically that the law of the European Community would have supremacy over British law. This was a conscious much deliberated choice.'*⁴⁰ Geoffrey Howe, the chief architect of the Act, would later write to an old colleague in tortured tones:

*I ... remain at least plausibly exposed to the charge that less of [our] thinking than was appropriate was explicitly exposed to the House of Commons at the time the bill was being passed.*⁴¹

This reticence was strange enough but there was another void at work. Heath's private secretary, Robert Armstrong summed it up as follows:

*It always seemed to me that getting in was an end in itself. I did not have the impression that he had at the time a coherent vision about what to do with it when we were in, how it would evolve and therefore how we would try and make it develop.*⁴²

There seems to be no doubt about the sincerity of Heath's commitment to Europe which dated from his witnessing, with many of his generation, the destruction of the Second World War, but this does not negate Armstrong's criticism. Heath clearly did not work out the effects of joining on the unwritten constitution of Britain. His lack of coherence is clearly reflected in his lack of candour about the European project in his dealings with parliament.

Britain's first referendum

A year later, Labour was back in power but divided three ways on the issue of Europe. One group led by Roy Jenkins was firmly pro-European. Another, led by Tony Benn, was for leaving Europe altogether. Benn, who first broached the idea of a referendum on European Communities membership, wrote to his constituents before the 1975 referendum warning them that they should be in no doubt *'as to the effect British membership has had, and will increasingly continue to have, in removing the power the British people once enjoyed to govern themselves.'*⁴³

The third group was led by Wilson. After losing to Heath in the 1970 election he reverted to his earlier anti-Europe stance. Now, back in power, he instead favoured renegotiation of Britain's terms of membership. The party resolved its internal difficulties by deciding to hold a referendum on Britain's future in Europe. This was without precedent under a constitution in which the doctrine of the sovereignty of parliament had been in place for almost three centuries. The momentous decision to take such a novel step was taken with virtually no debate and largely revolved around the internal divisions of the Labour party.

This referendum was won, decisively, by the pro-European side though both Wilson and his successor, James Callaghan, were notably absent from the campaign trail. When the final result – 2:1 in favour of remaining in Europe – was announced, Wilson dutifully came

³⁹ Young, 187.

⁴⁰ Young, 247.

⁴¹ Young, 250.

⁴² Young, 255

⁴³ Young, 275. <https://blogs.spectator.co.uk/2016/05/a-lesson-from-the-1975-referendum/> accessed 25 May 2017.

out onto the steps of 10 Downing Street. He noted that the size of the majority was bigger than any government ever got at any general election. This result, he said, mapped the way forward for Britain to join wholeheartedly with the rest of Europe in working together. He also said that fourteen years of argument were over, but when asked by Bernard Donoghue, one of his entourage, to say that he personally welcomed the result, he pointedly declined.⁴⁴ Wilson was the supreme pragmatist, but no amount of pragmatism can account for this behaviour. It can be explained in terms of grief, perhaps, at losing so many of his old Labour party friends because of the stance he had taken, and an accompanying resentment and distaste for the direction in which Britain was now heading. It is hardly surprising, under these strained and strange conditions, that the case against Europe would endure and eventually thrive.

“Some abstract intellectual concept”

In 1980, soon after Margaret Thatcher came to power, she began to campaign for a rebate on Britain's contribution to Europe; in fairness to Thatcher this matter had not been fully settled in the earlier negotiations. It took four years to get what she was looking for, but her abrasive style would leave her isolated and weakened in the long run. She had little understanding of how the EU worked. She believed that the 1983 Solemn Declaration of Stuttgart, which she signed, *'was irrelevant and carried no legal status.'*⁴⁵ She failed to grasp that the Declaration was a statement of intent by Europe's heads of state and government, *'to transform the whole complex of relations between their States into a European Union.'*⁴⁶ There was no legal obligation, but the political intent on the part of the other leaders was in earnest and out in the open. The document was entitled *'the Solemn Declaration on European Union'* and, in the Preamble, the signatories resolved *'to create a united Europe.'* Thatcher, in her way, was no less open:

*I wish they would talk less about European and political union. The terms are not understood in this country.*⁴⁷

Thatcher was also a signatory to the Single European Act, which established the Single Market and explicitly called for the approximation of *'provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States.'*⁴⁸ A year later in her famous Bruges Speech she made the point that the Community belonged to all its members and was not to be *'constantly modified according to the dictates of some abstract intellectual concept [or] ossified by endless regulation.'* The *'endless regulation'* was a necessary part of the single market, if consumers were to enjoy the levels of protection that they had come to expect in the different Member States including Britain. As for *'the dictates of some abstract intellectual concept,'* this phrase was itself rather abstract, except as an indication of general distaste in the lead up to her most memorable comment about Europe:

*We have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels.*⁴⁹

By signing the Single European Act Thatcher had played her own part in giving Brussels its new dominance, though she was certainly not unique among European leaders in talking about European law-making as if her government played no part in it. In raising the issue of over-regulation, however, she touched on a reality which has become a source of grief between government and people everywhere in recent years. In the Bruges speech, however, she turned this issue into a source of grief between Britain and Brussels.

Meanwhile, back in Britain, something else was happening of which Thatcher seemed to have little understanding and had even less control. As Britain's greatest champion in post-empire times, she may have restored the confidence of England – and of Britain/England – but she came to be viewed as a figure of hate in Scotland. Whatever her own personal intentions towards that country, her period in office marked a precipitous collapse in support for the Conservatives in Scotland and the equally dramatic rise of the Scottish National Party. By 1997, seven years after Thatcher's departure, there was not one single Scottish Conservative MP left in Westminster. The Scottish National

⁴⁴ Young, 298.

⁴⁵ John Turner, *The Tories and Europe*, Manchester, (Manchester University Press, 2000), 97.

⁴⁶ Solemn Declaration of Stuttgart, 19 June, 1983.

⁴⁷ Young, 337.

⁴⁸ Single European Act, Article 18.1.

⁴⁹ <http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332> accessed 6 May, 2017.

Party, which had taken the Conservative seats, would soon take those of Scottish Labour and was decidedly pro-Europe.

Major and Maastricht

Thatcher eventually lost the confidence of the Conservative party because of the growing stridency of her attitude to Europe. Her successor, John Major, would go on to negotiate and sign the Maastricht Treaty, with a British opt-out for the Social Charter. Back home this was hailed as a victory. Even Major himself, normally a modest man, declared *'Game set and match'* to the British and the Telegraph's man in Brussels, Boris Johnson, described the achievement as *'the stuff of Foreign Office dreams.'* The Times agreed – *'emphatic success'* – only to be outdone by the Daily Mail's evocation of Caesar: *'He went. He stood firm and he prevailed.'* The Mail went on to speak of an effective defence *'of our country's interests in shaping an ever closer European union.'* It also speculated on a new currency, which would one day be worth having.⁵⁰

Major went on to win a fourth term for the Conservatives in April 1992, but then things began to go wrong. In June the Danish rejection of the Maastricht Treaty by referendum re-opened the divide on Europe within the Conservative party. Black Wednesday, 13 September, was the day on which Britain was compelled to leave the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM). The Tory press and Eurosceptic MPs, in their fury at this national humiliation, overlooked the fact that Britain joined the ERM under a Thatcher government. They directed their contempt at Major and turned Thatcher into a patron of the rapidly rising Eurosceptic creed. Even Major began to revise his views of the Maastricht Treaty, maintaining that it *'strained the limits of acceptability to Europe's electors.'*⁵¹

Blair's submission, Scotland referendum

Tony Blair came to power in 1997 and for the first time since the founding of the EU Britain had a truly 'European' government with a long life ahead of it. Yet only a few months later Blair decided that Britain would not be among those countries who would launch the euro on 1 January, 1999. His government would also refuse to join the Schengen Agreement and, in the Lisbon Treaty, the British were given the right to opt out of 130 police and criminal justice measures. If ever Britain had a leader who might instil in her people a positive vision of Europe it was Tony Blair, but his electoral victory owed much to the support of Rupert Murdoch, the Australian press baron, who was deeply hostile to the EU. He feared that if he moved too fast Murdoch would undermine his chances of a second term and so, according to Hugo Young, *'he submitted to a tendency that was hallowed not only in the politics but, one might say in the culture and psychology of his country.'*⁵² Blair might have been an enthusiast for Europe, but his enthusiasm was no match for deeper passions lurking among the forces ranged against him.

He did make a decisive difference in relation to another political union. Great Britain was born of England's determination to eliminate a possible rival in empire building through the establishment of a new political identity, which was focused on personal liberty and loyalty to the crown at home and, abroad, the enthusiastic collaboration of both Scots and Irish subjects in what, at root, would be an English triumph. The Scots and the English, with their shared and longstanding devotion to the crown, and distrust of Catholicism, gave themselves to this project more wholeheartedly, but even some Irish Catholics played their part in the imperial adventure.

The Scots, like the Irish, did want a greater say in their own affairs and two home rule bills were passed in 1912 – one for Scotland and one for Ireland. Both met the same fate but, while the First World War brought about the final breach between most of Ireland and Britain, the solidarity of war-time sacrifice had the opposite effect in Scotland; it strengthened the union. It would be another sixty years before the issue of devolution re-emerged in Scotland. In 1973, a Royal Commission on the Constitution recommended devolution for Scotland and five years later a Labour government passed the Scotland Act, which provided for a Scottish Assembly, provided the Scots voted for it by referendum with more than 40% of the entire electorate voting in favour. In 1979, the Scots voted yes by a slim majority, but with

⁵⁰ Young, 433-434.

⁵¹ Young, 457.

⁵² Young, 493-494.

an insufficient turn out. There would be no devolution, yet.

Then came the Thatcher years when Britain/England walked tall and Scotland grew in discontent. This found an outlet when Tony Blair's newly elected government held what was termed a 'pre-legislative' referendum on two proposals: whether there should be a Scottish Parliament and whether it should have 'tax-varying powers.' The only party in Scotland to oppose these proposals was the Conservatives and they were passed with majorities of well over 2:1. The first Scottish Parliament in almost three centuries had a Labour government and yet, within twenty years, Labour in Scotland would be all but eliminated. Tom Devine, author of *'Independence or Union: Scotland's Past and Scotland's Present'* puts this collapse down to the perception that the Labour party in Scotland was perceived as a 'branch office' of the British Labour party.⁵³ Even if both Labour and Tory have regained some seats in the recent election, they are both a long way from the dominance which each at different times once enjoyed.

The slide towards Brexit

When David Cameron came to power in 2010, there had not been a single Scottish Conservative MP in Westminster in thirteen years. One year later, the Scottish National Party won an overall majority for the first time in the Scottish Parliament and called for a referendum on independence which took place three years later. With only two days to go before voting, the three leaders of the major UK (and English) parties published 'The Vow' which promised 'extensive new powers' for the Scottish Parliament.

The Vow was a holding operation by English political leaders at a moment when the end of Britain was a real possibility. The fact that it was made a mere two days before the referendum indicates a state of panic, but it was effective in helping to bring about a clear result in favour of staying within the United Kingdom. The Smith Commission, set up by Cameron's government, duly made its recommendations and the Scotland Act 2016 implemented some but not all of them. The Vow is certainly not the end of the matter; in November 2016 one poll found that only 9% of Scots believed that the Vow had been kept.⁵⁴ As for the Vow itself, it contains no vision of a shared future, no attempt to inspire solidarity between Scotland and England, and no appeal to a shared British identity. The union remained in place but as a matter of economic self-interest rather than British loyalty.

Soon, the Scots would be called on to vote in another referendum. Like Harold Wilson, David Cameron became Prime Minister at the head of a party deeply divided on the issue of Europe. He had to strike a deal with his Eurosceptics to renegotiate, again, Britain's terms of membership and, like Wilson, to submit the outcome to a referendum. A critical moment on the road, which would eventually lead to Brexit, was his Bloomberg speech in which he began by referring to *'a war which saw the streets of Europe filled with rubble.'*⁵⁵ This was a strangely squeamish way of referring to the destruction of entire cities and, as an attempt to find common ground with listeners in such countries as Germany and Poland, it was lacklustre. He went on to talk of *'the skies of London lit by flames night after night,'* failing to acknowledge that, on the scale of human suffering, the London blitz pales before what happened in Dresden or Warsaw or Berlin.

He spoke of the many achievements of Europe since the war and how the challenge of peace had been replaced by that of securing prosperity. He then set out *'the spirit in which I approach these issues,'* acknowledging that the UK is sometimes seen as *'argumentative and rather strong minded'* and how, as an island nation the British are *'independent, forthright, passionate in defence of our sovereignty.'* They could no more change this sensibility, he said, *'than we can drain the English Channel.'* It followed, according to Cameron (whose logic at this point is unclear), that the British approach to Europe was *'more practical than emotional.'* He seemed to have little awareness that his European listeners were already well acquainted with British sensibility and that self-praise, be it of persons or nations, is seldom a profitable exercise.

He then spoke of Britain's contribution to Europe – keeping the flame of liberty alight and leading the charge for global trade and against protectionism – and added: *'I never want us to pull up the drawbridge and retreat from the world. I am not a British isolationist. I just want*

⁵³ 'The Strange Death of Labour Scotland,' *New Statesman*, 3 March 2016.

⁵⁴ <http://www.thenational.scot/> 16 September, 2015, accessed 13 June, 2017.

⁵⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/eu-speech-at-bloomberg> accessed 25 May, 2017

a better deal for Britain. I want a better deal for Europe.' This was the first sound of the note of threat.

He began the more substantial part of his speech by pointing out three challenges – the euro and its impact on EU structures, European competitiveness, and the growing gap between the EU and its citizens. These challenges were undeniable and they remain significant. He then enunciated five principles on which he based his vision for a new European Union – competitiveness, flexibility, more power to the Member States (and not just away from them), democratic accountability, and fairness (especially for non-Euro members). These principles provided a reasonable basis for the negotiations which were about to begin.

Finally, he spoke of *'what it all means for Britain.'* Disillusionment with the EU was at an all-time high and democratic consent for the EU was *'now wafer thin.'* He added that, if by saying all this, he was placing a question mark over Britain's place in the European Union, *'the question mark is already there.'* He was resorting to the language of the gangster who says *'I'm a reasonable man, but my friends are easily upset.'*

The rest of his speech is primarily a warning to Eurosceptics that leaving the EU would be damaging to Britain *'because with courage and conviction I believe we can deliver a more flexible, adaptable and open European Union.'* Cameron's warning was strangely hypothetical, because he had yet to negotiate that more flexible and open union and, perhaps more significantly, he had already given a favourable shove to the Brexit bandwagon.

A question of pathos

One of the more noteworthy comments in the Bloomberg speech is when Cameron speaks of the British approach to Europe being *'more practical than emotional.'* This is an enduring feature of Britain's understanding of her own approach to Europe. In the very early days the primary British objection was that it would not work. Thatcher's attitude to the Stuttgart Declaration reflects this theme of impracticality and at the time her Home Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, spoke of how Britain *'wanted achievements rather than proclamations masquerading as achievements.'*⁵⁶

The full import of this 'practical' view can only be understood – and countered – if it is set in contrast with the more inspirational tone set by European leaders down the years:

- *The pooling of coal and steel production... will change the destinies of those regions which have long been devoted to the manufacture of munitions of war, of which they have been the most constant victims. (Schuman Declaration, 1950.)*
- *By attaining unity, by renewing Europe's vitality, by creating a new and lasting situation, the people of Europe are making a decisive contribution to peace. (Jean Monnet)*
- *A good German cannot be a nationalist. A good German knows that he cannot refuse a European calling. Through Europe, Germany returns to itself and to the constructive forces of its history. Our Europe, born of the experience of suffering and failure, is the imperative mission of reason. (Willy Brandt, Nobel Lecture, 1971)*
- *We have to defeat our history and, if we fail, we will come face to face with another imperative. Nationalism is war! War is not just a thing of the past, it can be our future, and you, ladies and gentlemen deputies, are the guardians of our peace, our security and our future. (François Mitterand, addressing the European Parliament, January 1995.)*
- *There is no reasonable alternative to an ever closer bond between the peoples of Europe. We need to build the House of Europe. We all need a united Europe. (Helmut Kohl, address to the Catholic University of Louvain, 1996.)*
- *Europe has a patrimony of ideals and spiritual values unique in the world, one that deserves to be proposed once more with passion and renewed vigour for it is the best antidote against the vacuum of values of our time, which provides a fertile terrain for every*

⁵⁶ O'Ceallaigh and Gillespie, op.cit., P.45

form of extremism. (Pope Francis address to EU Heads of State and Government, Rome 24 March 2017)

These statements are typical of a particular kind of discourse. It consists in an appeal to solidarity and speaks from a place of vulnerability and pathos. It points, with longing, to a hoped-for future. It also makes use of metaphor as a means of persuading people to look beyond the limits of the present moment. The really crucial feature of such discourse, however, is that it is situated in the context of a shared story. In this case the story is of Europe; it is a story of how the reconciliation of old enemies has brought to birth a new political identity, which does not replace nationhood, but which sets nations free from the curse of mutual misunderstanding and conflict. That identity is certainly fragile. The adherence of European citizens to Europe remains tentative, because Europe is a strange new creature. While it does inspire genuine passion, this is only to be found among a privileged, if idealistic, group.

This story of Europe is at a moment of crisis and, even twenty years ago, this was noted by Helmut Kohl in his Louvain speech:

Have Europeans once again become weary of European integration? I don't think this is really the case. I believe, however, that there are too few people who are capable of sensibly presenting this decisive idea of our time with the requisite passion or the required talent.

An English kind of passion

One thing which Margaret Thatcher never lacked was passion and, when she outlined her vision of Europe as a *'willing and active co-operation between independent sovereign states'*, that passion was at work – a passion for Britain/England. Thatcher's vision is plausible in appealing to what is familiar and well tried, but she left something significant unsaid. Independent sovereign states differ widely in resources and the Europe of which she spoke would be a Europe of unequal partners in which the powerful states – including Britain – would inevitably dominate. The 'big guys' would have their interests, their clashes of interest, their conflicts and their compromises, while the rest would look on waiting for the occasional concession.

It is absurd for the British to claim they are more 'practical' than 'emotional.' They may not be emotional about Europe, but who could deny that Margaret Thatcher was deeply emotional about Britain/England and that her passion still enjoys a wide popular appeal in England? The British constitution, which is represented by the Crown, inspires in them a sense of pathos and solidarity. It is as if Britain has been there forever and will always be great. They boast of having no invasion for a thousand years, which is not quite true⁵⁷ and, besides, Great Britain has only existed for three centuries.

They can make sense of legally binding documents but those other inspirational documents, which are designed to appeal to both head and heart, are outside of their experience. They can hear talk of Europe and a European identity and *'building the House of Europe'* but this, in the eyes of too many in England, has no reality. When these *'irrelevant'* proclamations begin to take on concrete shape, Britain's political leaders profess to be taken aback, as Cameron was in his Bloomberg speech, when he said that the EU was now heading for a level of political integration that is *'far outside Britain's comfort zone'* – i.e. England's comfort zone. The English show little awareness that the Scottish view of Europe is very different from their own.

Two years after the launching of the Schuman Declaration, the British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, gave a speech at Columbia University in which he responded to suggestions that Britain might join *'a federation on the continent of Europe.'* This was something which *'we know in our bones we cannot do.'*⁵⁸ It violated *'the unalterable marrow'* of the British nation. (If Britain is a nation, what does this make Scotland, Ireland and Wales, not to mention the England beloved of Nelson, Victoria, Brooke and Orwell?) This instinctive rejection of any participation in Europe was widely held in the British political and diplomatic circles at that time. Con O'Neill, a young diplomat in those years and later a committed European, looked back with regret:

*I am ashamed to say that I did not realise its enormous importance. The idea that there should be a body with real authority over the decisions of national governments was something we felt was grotesque and absurd.*⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Young, 74.

⁵⁸ William of Orange invaded; he wasn't invited; see Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic, its Rise Greatness and Fall, 1477-1806* (Oxford University Press), 847-853

⁵⁹ Young, 69.

A constant and virulent antagonism

The attitude of contempt may have changed, in some circles, but an underlying visceral resistance to the European vision has always exercised a mesmerising grip on British political leaders. Harold Evans, Macmillan's press secretary during the 1962 Conservative party conference was taken aback with the way in which his boss was preoccupied with a tiny minority – 40 out of 4000! – who were opposed to entry into the 'Common Market' without special terms for the Commonwealth.⁶⁰ Edward Heath's reluctance to spell out the supremacy of European law marks a similar wariness of such opposition. Harold Wilson, though he had to take a clear and emphatic stance in favour of Europe, could not bring himself to claim an enviable political victory in the 1975 referendum. He started out being anti-European and it seems he never really shook off his antipathy; there was no conversion. With Thatcher this antipathy to things European became more explicit and it had a particular focus on Germany. She had no time for those who thought that what she called the German problem was *'too delicate for well brought up politicians to discuss'* and added *'The true origin of German angst is the agony of self-knowledge.'*⁶¹ In 1990, when Jacques Delors predicted – accurately as it turned out – that there would be a European currency within ten years, her reaction was clearly designed for a particular audience: *'We shall stop things which are not in British interests, of course we shall.'* The Sun newspaper backed her up with a memorable headline – UP YOURS DELORS!⁶²

Major started out with a positive attitude to Europe, at least compared with his predecessor, but before long he too was professing dislike for the continental way of doing things. Further integration, in his view, was all very well for Helmut Kohl, who was *'driving the motor,'* and for the likes of Spain and Portugal who *'not that many years ago were run by men in epaulets and dark glasses.'*

*It's a different prospect for a nation traditionally used to doing things in its own way, suddenly finding that it may not be able to do so.*⁶³

Perhaps Tony Blair missed an historic opportunity by failing to confront the lion of Euroscepticism or perhaps he was being a realistic politician. By the time David Cameron took over, however, it was too late. The lion was about to leap. This powerful and destructive force of British Euroscepticism is well described by Former EU Commissioner, Peter Sutherland:

*The essential antagonism of much of the political establishment and print media in Britain towards the European project has remained constant and virulent. Scarcely ever has there been a concerted good word uttered about European integration and there has been constant opposition to virtually all proposed advances (except to the internal market and enlargement).'*⁶⁴

The power of isolationism

Sutherland's view is reflected in Tim Shipman's recently published book about the Brexit referendum. At the beginning of the concluding chapter Shipman quotes four prominent figures on the Remain side explaining why they lost:

- i. *Looking back the truth is this was lost a long time ago because of the relentless drip, drip of anti-European propaganda. [Alastair Burt, Conservative MP].*
- ii. *With some honourable exceptions... the left have been reluctant to make the case for Europe. [James McRory, Open Britain]*
- iii. *If no Tory leader in twenty years had said anything positive about Europe, which broadly speaking was the case, then trying to turn that around in six months was impossible. [Damien Green, Conservative MP].*⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Young, 141.

⁶¹ Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, (Harper Collins, 1995.0)

⁶² Young, 368.

⁶³ Young, 456, 466.

⁶⁴ <http://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/peter-sutherland-little-reason-to-delay-talks-on-britain-s-eu-exit-1.2701875> accessed 30 April, 2017.

⁶⁵ Tim Shipman, *All Out War*, the full story of how Brexit sank Britain's political class (William Collins Books, London, 2016), 580.

- iv. *We launched in October for a June referendum. In those eight months we weren't able to turn around twenty years of Euroscepticism. David Cameron was actually one of the most Eurosceptic Conservative Prime Ministers we've had until he turned on a sixpence in February. [Will Straw, Remain].*
- v. *In focus groups, unprompted, people would tell you Leave's top arguments: "We spend lots of money on Europe," "They're making all the laws out there" and "Too many immigrants." On our side there was a vague sense that it was good for the economy but nothing tangible. [James McRory, Open Britain].*

These comments point to a listlessness in the pro-European movement in England. They were clearly no match for the stridently Anglo-centric world-view, which has propelled Britain out of Europe. The concluding words of Shipman's book are an intriguing example of this self-absorbed isolationism:

It seems to me when we look at the U.S. where Donald Trump... and much of the EU itself, where parties mine more extreme reaches of the political spectrum than we do in Britain, that we are still lucky to have the politics we do. If we are getting furious about the niceties of an overcooked £350 million a week to Brussels...⁶⁶ rather than rioting in the streets or real coups, political executions or racial apartheid, we are not doing so badly as a country.⁶⁷

There is something admirable about his unruffled sense of being 'British', but he overlooks certain realities. For instance, he suggests that there is no rioting in the home of football hooliganism, and that extremist politics was absent in a referendum campaign which witnessed the assassination of an English MP by an English right-wing extremist. He is eager to tell us that Britain has no coups, executions and apartheid, but not that the European Union has been a pathway from fascism and communism to liberty for hundreds of millions of people.

The land of Brexit

When faced towards the rest of the world Britain is not so much a place as an attitude. Imagine if Rupert Brooke had written his poem with one slight difference:

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field

That is forever Britain.

Britain connotes Empire, the raising of the flag, conquest. It is outward-facing and confident and would demand all of that foreign field and not just a corner. England, by contrast, suggests something much simpler. England is home. For Brooke and his contemporaries England was a place of rolling fields, hedges, pleasant villages and country graveyards. Today something has happened to Britain and England. According to Shipman, in the Brexit referendum campaign 80% of people who defined themselves as English voted Leave and 80% of those who called themselves British voted Remain.⁶⁸ (No one, it seems described themselves as Scottish, but then, in this referendum Scotland was a different place - one which voted 60:40 to remain in Europe.)

For the English who voted for Brexit, England is far removed from the hedges and rolling fields of Rupert Brooke. It is a place of football, pubs and busy streets, but still very definitely home. Brexit voters also have a sense of what it means to be British – one which the Edwardians would recognise. In Britain England comes first and no one cares about the rest of the world or what it thinks. The Edwardians could smile confidently at that world, but today's Brexit voters resent foreigners and they resent bitterly being governed by 'continentals'

⁶⁶ This sum was presented by the Brexit side as the cost to Britain of being in the EU. The actual cost is £250 million a week. Shipman, 582. Had they been more scrupulous they could have presented the latter figure with similar conviction and probably to similar effect. Either £250 million or £350 million is a vast sum for anyone disposed to be outraged by it.

⁶⁷ Shipman, 607.

⁶⁸ Shipman, 586.

and by all kinds of rules and regulations turning everyday life into an obstacle course. They are angry, they are passionate and, in voting for Brexit, they voted to take back control of England – and of their lives.

The 'Britishness' of those who voted Remain is echoed in the outlook of so many naive 'Europeans.' The broader horizon made possible by European union has a decreasing appeal as people become more removed from that well-travelled, well-educated, well-resourced (and English speaking) privileged group for whom the joys of Europe are second nature. The less access people have to the 'cleverness' of Europe, the greater the appeal of national and local loyalties.

To describe oneself as exclusively 'European' is to send a message of indifference to those whose lives are constrained and who are angry at those constraints. To describe oneself as 'British' and 'European' is to throw fire on that virulent antagonism towards Europe, which reflects Britain's true identity as champion of English pre-eminence. During the Brexit debate those who saw themselves as European and British failed to address this darker reality of Britain and England. They were too 'civilised' and too well-bred to face down the sneering English and British identity of the Brexiteers.

“English by birth”

Chris Patten's reflections on his own British – and English – identity is telling in this context. He refers to *'our own union in the British Isles whose largest member (England) is a nation but not a state.'*⁶⁹ For him, Edinburgh and Glasgow feel like *'slightly foreign cities'* and yet if Scotland were to vote for independence *"I would feel that the national community of which I am a citizen had suffered serious amputation."*⁷⁰ (He makes no reference to Belfast, in this context, or to whether the departure of Northern Ireland would also be an amputation.)

There is much ambivalence in this talk of England as a “nation,” of Scotland and *"the national community."* Most ambivalent of all, however, is his account of his own national identity: *"Maybe the fact that, while English by birth, I am in part Irish by descent makes me warm most to the sense of being British."* This is a fragile position for one who fears for Britain as *'a possible long-term casualty of the vote to leave the EU.'* It almost certainly will be, if people like Chris Patten continue to distance themselves from their English identity, while the Brexiteers continue to be energised by an incomplete, uncouth and unchallenged version of what it means to be English.

A dramatic and undebated change

The Brexit referendum not only marks a sea-change in Britain's relationship with the European Union, it has launched the British constitution into uncharted waters. Unlike the Scottish referenda where the parameters are defined by the higher authority of a British parliament, the Brexit referendum has become a self-defining political reality. There has been a cutting loose from long established practise in a manner dictated by the event itself. Not only does the referendum mark a departure from the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty but the manner in which this happened has no pre-defined external reference point. The elected leaders of Britain, most of whom personally disagreed with the outcome, declared themselves to be bound by the Brexit vote in spite of the fact that nothing in the European Union Referendum Act 2015 specified that the referendum would be binding. This conclusion is all the more surprising, given that the 52:48 result was far from being an overwhelming victory for the Brexit side.

A comparison with Ireland's experience of European referendums is instructive. On two occasions the elected leaders of Ireland have challenged the outcome of a national referendum which had rejected a European treaty. This opened up a period further debate and, in each case, the electorate revised its earlier decision. Some saw this process as 'the politicians' taking an unfair advantage of their (elected) position, but there was nothing in the Constitution of Ireland to prevent them exercising this kind of political leadership and, in the long run, the electorate had the final say. No one could seriously argue that democracy was in any way undermined. The Irish experience accords with a long-established view in the western world that parliamentary representatives are elected to exercise their judgement and

⁶⁹ Patten 215.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

not simply to act as delegates. Since the time of Edmund Burke this has been, emphatically, the British view. It goes without saying that conditions are different in different countries, but in the Irish situation the ground rules were clear, whereas with the Brexit referendum ground rules were decided on in the heat of an electoral moment with no debate.

England's greatest political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, associates Leviathan with the capacity of the Sovereign to inspire terror. He is mistaken. The book of Isaiah tells of the day when the Lord *'will punish Leviathan the disappearing serpent, Leviathan the coiling serpent, and he will kill the dragon that is in the sea.'* The dragon lurks unseen beneath what the American Jesuit theologian, John Courtney Murray, calls 'civility'.⁷¹ Murray speaks of a continuous war being waged 'beneath a fragile surface of more or less forced urbanity.' When that veneer of civility is torn away we can see Leviathan as the ultimate symbol of lawlessness - what Hobbes himself most dreaded and had witnessed in his own country. He wrote of 'Warre' as a time when *'every man is Enemy to every man... And the life of man, solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short.'*⁷²

Elections and referenda are moments when the veneer of civilisation is temporarily peeled away. There is a heightened intensity to public life, an unpredictability which, when given unlimited scope, leads to the insanity of the French Terror or Mao's Cultural Revolution. Yet democratic government requires that the roar of opposition be heard with its grief, its anger, its resentment and its hatred. The role of pathos in political life is to contain that roar in a story, which commands the attention of those who are in danger of being seduced by the destructive roar of the dragon in the deep. Pathos speaks to people's woundedness in a manner which seeks to calm the roar of rage. Only then is it possible to begin a conversation in which the underlying grievance can be addressed in a respectful and determined manner. The outcome might be far from perfect but, if it is seen to be conscientious, then the monster will return to where it belongs and civilisation can survive for another day.

Political impotence

When English pro-Europeans describe themselves as British, they deny themselves – and Europe – the capacity to strike the note of pathos, because they are placing themselves at a distance from the story of England, which was there long before Britain and will survive its demise. The words of William Blake, written at the outset of the industrial revolution, speak of an England which seeks no empire or dominance:

I will not cease from Mental Fight,

Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:

Till we have built Jerusalem,

In England's green & pleasant Land.

When pro-European British/English bemoan what has happened to their country, they need to ask themselves: 'What is my country?' Why in that hour of great peril could Churchill not bring himself to say – 'we British'? Why was that supremely anti-establishment figure, George Orwell, drawn to speak of 'England' when all of Britain was at war with a tyrant? By preferring their 'Britishness' and, with it, their international profile the 'Remainers' have abandoned England and they have left themselves with nothing to offer Britain or Europe at this moment of shifting identities. If all they can do is fret and wring their hands and look to their fellow 'Europeans' – across the sea – they are a privileged clique incapable of leadership. The cruel truth for the pro-European British is that Britain is a mask which protects its wearers from the bewilderment of having to deal with others on any other basis than that of superiority lined with the comforting illusion that they themselves are fair and reasonable.

⁷¹ John Courtney Murray SJ, *We Hold These Truths*, Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition, (Sheed and Ward, London, 1960), 18-19.

⁷² Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, (Penguin, 1985), 186.

A critical and fragile moment

The initial agreement of France and Germany to establish the European Coal and Steel Community came at a moment of deep bewilderment. Both countries were emerging from the horrors of military conflict and the humiliation of defeat. When they met for the first time, both Schuman and Adenauer were facing formidable opposition back home. Schuman may have been Minister for Foreign Affairs but only recently he had been ousted from office as Prime Minister. When the American Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, asked Schuman to 'do something' about Germany one of his entourage later spoke of 'un grand silence' and of Schuman going 'red as a poenie.'⁷³ Schuman had only recently agreed to the re-establishment of a German state a mere five years after German troops had been expelled from French soil. Many in France had bitterly opposed this decision.

As for Adenauer, he had to deal with Kurt Schumacher, an early and heroic opponent of Nazism and leader of the German Social Democrats. He was a man of great moral authority and he was calling for a neutral Germany, with no alliance with France or the U.S.⁷⁴ His call had great appeal in a country traumatised by war. Adenauer was keenly aware of this powerful opponent as he prepared for his first meeting with Schuman. The latter, having made some significant concessions, was expecting a friendly reception but instead, according to one source, Schuman ranted and raved – *tempeta*⁷⁵ – about French imperialism in the occupied Saar district.

Both men were in a very vulnerable situation and yet, within a mere four months they had agreed to a project which would lead to the European Union as we know it today. When the Schuman Declaration was first read out at the Quay d'Orsay one of the journalists who was present commented: *It is a leap into the unknown!*⁷⁶ It was a leap of trust. Many other political leaders in Europe have made that leap but none under such unsettled conditions. Political leaders in Scotland have made that leap but no one in England has done so.

As the exit negotiations are conducted in the coming months and years, European political leaders and public servants will come face to face with that visceral self-righteousness at which the English, in their British persona, excel. Europe's problem with the English is that their story – the British story – is one of pre-eminence. As long as they hold onto it, they will never see themselves as one people among many. We are at the early stages of a fundamental conflict which is by no means confined to Britain and which threatens the stability of Europe and the world. On the one hand there are those who believe that individuals and nations have the right to turn their backs on their neighbours and, on the other, those who believe that all persons and nations are interdependent. Europe has a key role to play in this struggle and, in playing this part, we cannot overlook the words of Jean Monnet:

The British will not find their future role by themselves. Only outside pressure will induce them to accept change.

Like all great powers, Britain celebrated her own ability to defeat her enemies and, in doing so, she cultivated an imperial tribal arrogance. Other European powers had their variation on this vice, but they have learnt, through bitter and bloody experience, that nations thrive more effectively through interdependence than through rivalry. The dominant political culture of Britain/England is blind to this idea and the English political leader who succeeds in remedying this blindness, will have to find a new purpose for Britain or a future for England without Britain.

David Cameron's determination to remove any reference to 'ever closer union' in Britain's dealings with Europe is a classic example of the blindness of England. If humanity is to survive, all the peoples of the earth – and not just of Europe – will have to learn how to live in ever closer union. The nations of Europe have a role to play in modeling this new reality – a role which includes the English, should they so wish. The alternative is to drift towards disaster in state of bigoted bravado.

⁷³ Roth, 370.

⁷⁴ Tony Judt, *Postwar, A History Of Europe Since 1945*, (Vintage Books, London, 2010), 268.

⁷⁵ Roth, 377.

⁷⁶ Roth, 396.

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