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A CATHOLIC ENGLAND: NATIONAL CONTINUITIES AND DISRUPTIONS IN ROBERT HUGH BENSON'S *THE DAWN OF ALL*

Introduction

Robert Hugh Benson (1871–1914) belongs to the tradition in English literature known as the ‘Catholic Revival’.¹ Son of Edward White Benson, the Archbishop of Canterbury, R. H. Benson converted to Catholicism, and this had a discernible bearing upon his imaginative concerns. As Benson described in his *Confessions of a Convert* (1913), his initial ordination into the Anglican Communion always required ‘qualifying clauses’ and thereby distanced him from Catholic universalism.² The theme of Catholic faith and the Catholic Church traverses much of Benson’s fiction, surfacing in *The Queen’s Tragedy* (1906), *Lord of the World* (1907), *The Necromancers* (1909), *The Dawn of All* (1911), *Come Rack! Come Rope!* (1912), *Initiation* (1913), *Oddfish* (1914), and *Loneliness* (1915). In Benson’s prolific literary output, *The Dawn of All* particularly stands out and merits attention for a number of reasons.

Like most of Benson’s writings, *The Dawn of All* remains almost completely unexplored or largely misunderstood. In his bibliography of utopian literature Lyman Tower Sargent catalogues the novel as a ‘eutopia of the Roman Catholic Church completely dominant in sixty years’.³ On a similar note, Janet Grayson interprets *The Dawn of All* in the light of Benson’s practices as a devout Catholic. However, this contextualization leads to a misreading of the novel when Grayson concludes that the protagonist ‘is made Cardinal Archbishop of England and with the king at his side goes into the skies on an aerial barge to welcome an airship carrying the Pope and world leaders making a world tour’.⁴ A similarly flawed reading can be found in Ian Ker’s book, which erroneously assumes that *The Dawn of All* ‘is unabashedly triumphalistic’.⁵ Not only do Grayson and Ker seemingly ignore the last few pages of the novel after the alleged triumph of Catholicism, but they also offer

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¹ Ian Ker, *The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845–1961: Newman, Hopkins, Belloc, Chesterton, Greene, Waugh* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), p. 9.

² Robert Hugh Benson, *Confessions of a Convert* (London: Longmans, 1913; repr. Sevenoaks: Fisher, 1994), p. 34.

³ Lyman Tower Sargent, *British and American Utopian Literature, 1516–1985: An Annotated, Chronological Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1988), p. 149.

⁴ Janet Grayson, *Robert Hugh Benson: Life and Works* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1998), p. 221.

⁵ Ker, p. 10.

somewhat straightforward, if not simplistic, interpretations of a problematic which goes beyond and complicates Benson's theology.

Apart from being an arguably theological book, *The Dawn of All* excites analysis because its accounts of the continuities and disruption of memory are measured against prevailing constructions of Englishness. This problematic is closely linked both to Benson's concern about the conversion of England to Catholicism, expressed with fervour in his pamphlet *The Conversion of England* (1906), and to the broader intellectual context of Edwardian England dominated by similar speculations. As Julia Stapleton observes, in the 'Catholic triumvirate' of G. K. Chesterton, Hilaire Belloc, and Maurice Baring, Chesterton searched 'for England beneath what he perceived as multiple layers of concealment, denial, and mistaken identity in the early twentieth century'.⁶ For Chesterton, England's genuine identity was intimately entwined with Catholic faith. In *The Dawn of All* Benson's imaginative powers seek to present a Catholic England whose victorious procession is greeted by the protagonist Masterman in the capacity of Cardinal, with the 'Royal Standard of England' flapping nearby.⁷ However, this triumphant finality seems to be heavily compromised by Masterman's inner conflict. He finds the overwhelming victory of Catholicism appealing to his intellect and imagination, but not quite to his heart. Masterman admires the new profile of London as 'a wonderful white city' where Westminster Abbey has been restored to its Catholic appearance and ownership (*DA*, p. 277). At the same time, he remains steadfastly unconvinced of the full scope of England's alignment with Catholicism: 'Somewhere, down in the very fibre of him, was an assumption that England and Catholicism were irreconcilable things—that the domination of the one meant the suppression of the other' (*DA*, p. 198).

Masterman's reservations concerning the Catholic enterprise in England are connected to the larger narrative, in which his memory itself is placed in doubt. In early utopian traditions of writing, travellers from other spatial or temporal settings are briefed about the norms of a newly discovered socio-political realm, as in the case of *Utopia* (1516), *Civitas Solis* (1623), *The New Atlantis* (1627), *The Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656). The protagonist of *The Dawn of All* is also subjected to an introduction into an unfamiliar milieu, but with a significant difference. He is constantly alerted to the fact that he has been there before and that his lack of understanding stems from his absent-mindedness, 'for which [...] he was almost notorious' (*DA*, p. 28). More than a dozen times in the novel Masterman is cited as 'the man who had lost his memory'.⁸ These reminders of the main character's loss of memory

⁶ Julia Stapleton, *Christianity, Patriotism, and Nationhood: The England of G. K. Chesterton* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), p. 8.

⁷ Robert Hugh Benson, *The Dawn of All* [hereafter *DA*] (London: Hutchinson, 1911), p. 273.

⁸ *DA*, pp. 23, 27, 47, 112, 115, 123, 146, 149, 154, 173, 197, 209, 228, 243, 254, 281, etc.

alternate with the statements about his mental incapacity ('the invalid', 'the wire-bedecked invalid') and amount to his acceptance of the condition into which he is deliberately forced: 'I am crippled mentally; my memory left me a few months ago' (*DA*, p. 241). The failure of the protagonist's memory proceeds in stages. He is first able to relate to the new experience in a Catholic England, then persistently questions it, and finally surrenders his memory to 'the gift of faith'. This progression, punctuated by the protagonist's (and the dying priest's, from whose dream this vision arises) responses to the recognizable or unknown aspects of England, lies at the heart of my argument concerning the continuities and disruptions of memory and identity, and the correlation of memory and faith.

The transformation of Masterman's memory is also implicated in the structural elements of the novel. *The Dawn of All* comprises three clearly marked elements: a prologue, a main body, and an epilogue. The prologue and the epilogue form a unifying frame, very similar to those in Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) or William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), where the time/space travellers lose and subsequently regain their wakeful grasp of reality. In the prologue and epilogue of his novel Benson narrates the story of a lapsed priest lying on his deathbed in a hospital ward near Westminster Abbey. He is said to have allied himself with a historian and carried out research on the papacy in the thirteenth century. These periods of intensive research yielded the disquieting revelation that physical science and psychology had the power to supersede religion (*DA*, p. 10), and this realization subsequently brings about the priest's renunciation of his faith, as well as his mental and physical breakdown. In a brief renewal of memory, the dying man asks to have a priest summoned in order to make his final confession, which may be sufficient to restore his former faith: 'he himself was a priest who had lost the faith' (*DA*, p. 284). Yet the novel's ending is uncertain on several levels: will the dissenting priest disclose the contents of his dream to Father Jervis (whose name also appears in the dream) and the nurse? how robust is the priest's power of memory? and how much will he be able to say in his last hours? The reassertion of memory, which occurs in the epilogue after the rather prolonged and beguiling dream, calls the full restoration of faith into question. By keeping the reader continually alert to the lapsed priest's and the protagonist's operations of memory and faith, the novel highlights a factor which unites their respective experiences: it is an England that becomes immediately recognizable either in the tumult of London or (at a deeper level) in its moderate treatment of dissent before the Catholic regime starts repressing heresy and extinguishing individuality (*DA*, pp. 7, 152, 284). Both the dying priest and Masterman orient themselves with ease in the England continuous with their memories. Faith, on the contrary, requires a leap from

the continuous identity of England to a vision that disrupts the progression of memory. To an extent, this explains why Masterman cannot reconcile England and Catholicism with his immediately available knowledge or experience. Similarly, the priest finds the memory of his research irreconcilable with his faith. Only his dream state permits the ultimate victory of Catholicism to happen, in which the protagonist's faith in the universal Catholic Church eventually reaches a compromised, and yet unresolved, pinnacle at the cost of his memory. It appears that, where memory asserts itself, faith wanes; and where faith intensifies, memory diminishes. This correlation of memory and faith is discussed and specified further in the discussion which follows.

My central contention is that the novel does not quite herald the triumph of Catholicism in England; rather, it seeks to put off any reformist endeavours which are predicated on a leap of faith and which disrupt continuities in the life of the nation. The first section of this article seeks to historicize the Edwardian contexts perceptible in the novel. The next two sections focus upon some of the representations of Englishness which the protagonist initially recognizes and then fails to authenticate. These failures are linked to his burgeoning rebelliousness against the oppressive excesses of the Catholic regime in England. The final section concentrates upon the textual dichotomy of memory and faith, exploring these tensions with regard to the construction of England in the novel.

The Historical and Intellectual Context of 'The Dawn of All'

Published shortly after the close of the Edwardian age, *The Dawn of All* bears witness to major socio-political developments in Britain in the first decade of the twentieth century. The novel refocuses the politics of early twentieth-century English society with 'a reversion to medieval times' (DA, p. 36), turning attention to a system of governance in which liberty equals love (DA, p. 279). From the projected standpoint of the 1970s, Benson equates the growth of Liberalism in England with the reduction of democracy *ad absurdum* and cancels out Ireland's aspirations for sovereignty by designating the whole island as a monastic mental hospital run by European governments (DA, pp. 142, 179). The evocation of medievalism brings into contrast the flux of England's contemporary socio-political life and the vision of a Catholic England which is overwhelmingly religious, stringently hierarchical, and increasingly resistant to change. This anti-modern portrayal can be taken as Benson's reaction to the Edwardian frame of mind and the general mood of the pre-war years. Randall Stevenson notes that in retrospect the pre-war years 'seemed, or could be made to seem, an especially splendid age' marked by coherence, security, and optimism.⁹ H. G. Wells, like many of his

⁹ Randall Stevenson, *Modernist Fiction*, rev. edn (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1998), p. 143.

contemporaries, summed up the pervasive belief of the period as 'we should have peace for ever—and everything else would go on as before'.¹⁰ At the same time, the dominant sense of eirenic existence is perhaps inseparable from what Derek Fraser describes as 'a major non-socialist injection of social welfare into the British system'.¹¹ Indeed, the construction of a Welfare State in Britain during the pre-war period created a much larger presence for the state in various spheres of public life, leading to the People's Budget (1909) and regulating children's nutrition, health care, pensions, and unemployment insurance. However, it was the growth of the state that perplexed Benson. In *The Dawn of All Mr Manners*, a political economist, condemns old age pensions and national insurance as 'a mark of disgrace—for the simple cause that it is not the receiving of money that is resented, but the motive for which the money is given and the position of the giver' (*DA*, p. 36). Furthermore, changes in social policy are found to converge with the mechanism of government and transform the understanding of its exclusive right to punish: 'Society must protect itself. The Church can't interfere there. For it isn't for a moment the Church that punishes with death' (*DA*, p. 166). Contesting these allegedly disruptive social and religious forms of state intervention, the novel emphasizes the traumatizing effect of any transformation. In doing so, it arguably invests in a theory of the continuity of national experience in line with prevailing pre-war views of a coherent and secure English society. Symbolically, the dying priest, who, on relinquishing his ordinary pattern of clerical life, has fallen into a comatose state, eventually returns to his citadel of faith. Because of this reversal, the role of memory deserves further examination.

Preoccupied with the continuous and disrupted progression of national life described through the protagonist's memory, *The Dawn of All* lends itself to analysis through the lens of contemporary psychological theories, which constitute a broader intellectual context of the time. The correlation of memory and faith is taken up as a theme by Samuel Butler, better known for his posthumous novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). In his evolutionary books *Life and Habit* (1878) and *Unconscious Memory* (1880) Butler maintains that memory lies at the foundation of experience and forms an indelible part of human existence: 'The life of a creature is the memory of a creature. We are all the same stuff to start with, but we remember different things, and if we did not remember different things, we should be absolutely like each other.'¹² Holding that each individual life adds 'a small amount of new experience to the general store of memory',¹³ Butler insists that memory is reducible to faith

¹⁰ H. G. Wells, *World Brain* (London: Methuen, 1938), p. 30.

¹¹ Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State: A History of Social Policy since the Industrial Revolution* (London: Macmillan, 1973), p. 156.

¹² Samuel Butler, *Life and Habit* (London: Trübner, 1878), p. 300.

¹³ Samuel Butler, *Unconscious Memory* (London: Bogue, 1880; repr. London: Fifeild, 1910), p. 53.

in so far as it draws on habitual actions which later become instinctive and translate into faith. Instinct, according to Butler, 'is a mode of faith in the evidence of things not actually seen'.¹⁴ Butler seeks to separate things seen from things unseen, which may materialize as 'an epic in stone and marble' in the architecture of colleges and churches.¹⁵ He may be said to have anticipated the Bergsonian distinction between matter which exists in the present and spirit which declares itself as 'a prolonging of the past into the present'.¹⁶ In *Life and Habit* Butler admits that 'reason points remorselessly to an awakening, but faith and hope still beckon to the dream'.¹⁷ Here, faith is cognate with memory as its derivative and is capable of distancing the individual from reality.

As if dovetailing with Butler's concept of habitual actions, Henri Bergson elaborates another essential dimension of memory and wakeful consciousness.¹⁸ In *Matter and Memory* (1896) he differentiates between motor mechanisms, which are based on habitual actions, and independent recollections, which are free images.¹⁹ Motor mechanisms, in Bergson's view, are not premised on special awareness because they resemble the reproduction of a lesson where each consecutive moment automatically follows its antecedent: 'The memory of the lesson, which is remembered in the sense of learnt by heart, has all the marks of a habit.'²⁰ Independent recollections, on the contrary, presuppose attention and reflexivity: 'By this memory is made possible the intelligent, or rather intellectual, recognition of a perception already experienced.'²¹ The two forms of memory singled out by Bergson differ in the amount of conscious effort they require and the output they produce: where motor mechanisms accumulate repeated actions, independent recollections record facts and images which store up and generate new experience. Unlike Butler, Bergson does not reduce memory solely to habits and instincts; this permits him to draw a line between habitual and conscious workings of memory.

Where Bergson's theory is useful in identifying independent recollections which enable continuity, Sigmund Freud's studies of 'Screen Memories' (1899) and *The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis* (1910) are central to interpreting how certain experiences are repressed or substituted, and yet remain continuously present. As Freud suggests in *The Interpretation of*

¹⁴ Samuel Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 275.

¹⁵ Samuel Butler, *Erewhon. Erewhon Revisited* (London: Dent, 1942), p. 91.

¹⁶ Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Dover, 2004), p. 295.

¹⁷ Butler, *Life and Habit*, p. 307.

¹⁸ In her study of Bergson's presence in the theory and practice of British modernism, Mary Gillies further confirms the link between the theories of Butler and Bergson: 'Although there are similarities between Bergson and Butler, Bergson's stress that the creative impulse was not, ultimately, controlled by humans distinguishes the two approaches to evolution' (Mary Ann Gillies, *Henri Bergson and British Modernism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), p. 191).

¹⁹ Bergson, p. 87.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 89.

²¹ Ibid., p. 92.

Dreams (1899), 'Nothing which we have once physically possessed is ever entirely lost.'²² The ideas of Freud were brought to the attention of the English-speaking audience through the activities of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), established in London in December 1882.²³ Betraying some familiarity with this cultural debate, *The Dawn of All* suggestively mentions the development of psychology as an enquiry into 'the subliminal consciousness' which is 'acknowledged, and [...] perceived to move along definite lines of law' (DA, p. 32). Frederick Myers, one of the founders of the SPR, argued for 'the existence of some subliminal continuity of memory, lying deeper down than the evocable memory of common life—the stock of conscious reminiscences on which we can draw at will'.²⁴ The peculiar ability of memory to allow access to deep-laid recollections permits Myers to connect it to the spiritual world with which the personality comes into contact during sleep.²⁵ Since most of the events of Benson's novel take place in the priest's dream, Myers's theory may be instrumental in fathoming Masterman's wakeful life, whose depths, as Mr Manners comments in *The Dawn of All*, manifest themselves 'in a personal, though always a malevolent manner' (DA, p. 32). Perhaps the dying priest's flawed faith readily ties in with his malevolent vision of the Catholic regime, or perhaps the answer is more nuanced than this. In creating a specific sense of continuous psychological experience, the aforementioned theorists offer a rich context for the consideration of how traumatic recollection is repressed in the novel, how memory and faith relate to each other in its narratives, and how individual memory may be read as a response to the continuities and disruptions in the novel's projections of Englishness.

Continuities of Memory and National Identity

In the main section of *The Dawn of All* the protagonist's memory is gradually activated in an environment which at first is profoundly disorienting:

And then in a flash he recognized where he was. He was sitting, under this canopy, just to the right as one enters through Hyde Park Corner; these trees were the trees of the Park; that open space in front was the beginning of Rotten Row; and Something Lane—Park Lane—(that was it!)—was behind him. (DA, p. 15)

What was this vineyard? And why did he appeal to English people in such words as these? Every one knew that the Catholic Church was but a handful still in this country. Certainly, progress had been made, but . . . (DA, p. 16)

After verifying his location in Hyde Park, the protagonist becomes convinced

²² Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. by A. A. Brill (London: Allen, 1913), p. 15.

²³ *Psychical Research: A Guide to its History, Principles and Practices. In celebration of 100 Years of the Society for Psychical Research*, ed. by Ivor Grattam Guinness (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1982), p. 18.

²⁴ Frederick W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (London: Longmans, 1903; repr. Tasburgh: Pelegrin Trust, 1992), p. 69.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

that his memory cannot 'be wholly gone'. Later on, he becomes capable of identifying the Houses of Parliament, Westminster Cathedral, and 'the masses of Buckingham Palace as he seemed always to have known it' (*DA*, pp. 19, 21, 54). Additionally, he makes sense of everyday chatter about the 'extraordinary fairness' of English weather (*DA*, p. 27). Having such vital co-ordinates restored to his memory, Masterman progresses through experiences which remain partially novel yet strangely familiar. He first meets the Cardinal of England, whose face 'was a little hard to make out' (*DA*, p. 47). Then he reaches Lourdes, where the miraculous healing of the sick permits him to connect 'the broken threads' of his memory:

The man who had lost his memory had piled impression on impression during the last forty-eight hours. (*DA*, p. 123)

It was not that his memory had returned. Still, behind his sudden awakening in Hyde Park, all was a misty blank, from which faces and places and even phrases started out, for the most part unverifiable. Yet it seemed both to him and to those about him that he had an amazing facility in gathering up the broken threads. (*DA*, p. 129)

These newly regained threads of memory reinforce the sense of continuity between England's past and its alternative future. In this gradual progression, the initial awakening of Masterman's memory becomes central to, not merely recalling the past, but delineating a future. The repeated formula 'the man who had lost his memory', which specifies the nature of the protagonist's receptivity to this Catholic England, does not simply invalidate his prior experience. In fact, it occurs in episodes where Masterman starts cautiously to recognize images and conversational patterns from his past.

The protagonist's ability to recognize certain conventionalities in this unexpected milieu is also challenged by the re-emergence of his earlier recollections. The next rupture in Masterman's memorial understanding is triggered by the knowledge that Westminster Abbey has been transferred to the Benedictine Order. This change has prompted a reconfiguration of the Abbey itself: 'The old monuments were gone, of course—removed to St. Paul's—and for the first time for nearly three hundred years it was possible to see the monastic character of the church as the builders had designed it' (*DA*, p. 146). Although the main character spends time rejoicing in the return of the Abbey to its original, sanctified purpose, there remains a touch of sentimental nostalgia for 'statesmen in perukes who silently declaimed secular rhetoric in the house of God, swooning women, impossible pagan personifications of grief, medallions, heathen wreaths, and broken columns' (*DA*, p. 147). All these images cluster in Masterman's mind, bearing witness to a church which has undergone a radical process of transformation and cleansing. The rift between the protagonist's earlier image of the place and its currently subdued appearance links closely with Freud's insights into the processes of memory.

In his lectures on *The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis*, Freud claimed that memorials and monuments are 'memory symbols of certain (traumatic) experiences', so that the symptoms of (neurotic) behaviour—on both an individual and a national scale—can be ascribed to remembering and being affected by the distant past.²⁶ From this perspective, Masterman's positive attitude to the restored design of Westminster Abbey, coupled with a pang of regret for what is gone, suggests a balanced remembrance of the two different periods of the past through their respective significations. This operation of memory clearly has an impact upon the understanding of social space, where the removal of the monuments can be regarded as an attempt at detraumatization. Yet, in view of Freud's parenthesis, which suggests that certain experiences are not necessarily traumatic in nature, the act of displacement gives additional prominence to memories that have no disruptive consequence, unless recognized as such. In this context we may be reminded of Masterman's meditations on how irrelevant pasts might be stored and how to negotiate lapses in memory: 'It seemed to him as if in some other life he had once stood here—sure there in that transept—a stranger and an outcast' (*DA*, p. 146).

As the above examples demonstrate, England takes centre stage in the novel's setting, although there are also several other locales: Versailles, Lourdes, Rome, Ireland, Boston, and Berlin. Aside from being aware of Hyde Park, Westminster, and Buckingham Palace, Masterman flies over Brighton and learns about High Mass 'sung in the University churches of Oxford, Cambridge, and Durham' (*DA*, pp. 58, 144). Interestingly, 'Britain', or more specifically Wales and Scotland, never occurs in the novel, nor is there any evidence that they are collapsed into the geography and politics of the Catholic England. By contrast, Ireland, which was also a constituent part of the United Kingdom at the time, is presented as a separate, though secluded, dominion. It can be argued that Benson simply discarded the internal national distinctions in contemporary Britain. But there are legitimate ways to suggest the contrary. Shunning any topographic references to the lands beyond England's borders (with the exception of Dublin and Thurles in Ireland), *The Dawn of All* evokes a Celtic presence in this Catholic England through the character of James Hardy, a smiling and composed leader of the Socialists, demanding 'the formal disestablishment of the Church throughout Europe and the complete liberty of the Press' (*DA*, p. 252). Barely coincidental is the homology of this character's name with that of James Keir Hardie, a working-class Scotsman, chair of the Independent Labour Party (1894–1900, 1913–14), and leader of the Labour Party (1906–08). We may indeed be persuaded that the novel's map of Britain (characterized by fragmentation and erasure) is closely related

²⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis*, intro. by Raymond E. Fancher (Toronto: York University, 1998), pp. 9–10.

to fears surrounding Hardie, who temporarily became associated with the projection of the Celt (or at least the Scot). If Benson's novel critiques the possible excesses of socialism as a disastrous attempt to tyrannize 'first over the minority and then over the individual' (DA, p. 35), it is nevertheless more interested in promoting hierarchical power structures (in essence, synonymous here with despotism and tyranny) than in anxiety-ridden examinations of socialism. As Father Jervis admits, 'We treat our kings like kings [. . .]. And, at the same time, we encourage our butchers to be really butchers and glory in it. Law *and* liberty, you see. [. . .] No republican stew-pot, you see, in which everything tastes alike' (DA, p. 68). In the hierarchical orderliness of Benson's fictional England, the erasures in the Celtic topography of the British Isles (excluding Catholic Ireland) are tantamount to the repression of socialist voices which seek the disruption of English cultural and political life.

The idea of continuity underlies the periodization of England's alternative history which the protagonist is expected to grasp. Since the novel is set in 1973, it flashes back to the socio-political context of the early twentieth century as, retrospectively, a completed cycle of experience in the nation. The initial two decades of the century are recalled by Mr Manners as a period 'of the real crisis' when 'Socialism came most near to dominating the civilized world' (DA, p. 28). In direct comparison with Edwardian Britain, these years became noted for the advancement of social policy—indeed, an unjustifiable growth in the state apparatus. Eventually, the reader learns that the socialist project was overthrown because it had supported the population 'for economic reasons, however conscientious and charitable statesmen may be' (DA, p. 36). Subsequently, the expansion of Catholicism in Benson's England came as an economically auspicious enterprise for the pauper classes of society, and assumed supremacy over the whole country with the reinstatement of medieval precepts of authority and hierarchy. Some forty years after the failure of state socialism to supplant 'Divine methods by human', the Church assumes its place at 'the centre of the national life' (DA, p. 138).

Benson's accounts of the swift transitions from one government to another in the early twentieth century are telling and underline that the new regime is established within a brief time-frame of several decades. In contrast, in *Brave New World*, for example, Aldous Huxley originally allowed some 632 years 'after Ford' to enable the new civilization of utmost order to gain momentum.²⁷ However, after Huxley had 'revisited' his *Brave New World* twenty-seven years later, his optimism about the lifespan of the complete transformation of society abated. In his own words, 'The prophecies made in 1931 are coming true much sooner than I thought they would. [. . .]

²⁷ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* [1932]. *Brave New World Revisited* [1958] (London: Heron Books, 1968), p. 16.

The nightmare of total organization, which I had situated in the seventh century after Ford, has emerged from the safe, remote future and is now awaiting us, just round the next corner.²⁸ For Huxley, the change of heart followed in the wake of the historical experience that included the rise of Stalinism and Nazism. Whereas Huxley draws on the lessons of history, Benson charts and attempts to reduce the threat of socialism. By assigning an ephemeral time-span to the socialist state, *The Dawn of All* represses its reformist endeavours as alien to the English continuities. Instead, historical continuity is realized in the designation of Edward IX as King of England. To Masterman's query as to whether England is a monarchy, Father Jervis replies in the affirmative, assuring him that 'Edward IX—a young man—is on the throne' (*DA*, p. 41). This extension of the Edwardian period underscores the role of monarchs in shaping history and can be interpreted as another effort to extinguish anxieties concerning highly undesirable socio-political transitions and the instability that occurs in the aftermath. Benson may be seeking to reproduce an analogy with the eighteenth century, where the successive accessions of Hanoverian kings all named George (1714–1830) might have been perceived to communicate continuity in the life of the nation. If only in name, the replication of an 'Edwardian' dynasty renews the protagonist's self-conscious alertness to the continuity of his memory and indicates Benson's investment in the undisrupted progression of national history.

From Benson's perspective, it may be that both socialism and Catholicism represent striking challenges to the continuity of English national life and are capable of creating equally disruptive effects. In the novel, the former aims at restructuring the existing authority and distribution of wealth, while the latter aspires to align itself with the state. On closer examination, however, this overriding concern with the question of continuity becomes for Masterman a matter of choosing the lesser evil. Even though it remorselessly limits individual freedoms and takes an inquisitorial line on dissent, the Catholic regime in England, unlike the socialist state, invests deeply in the perceived coherence and stability of monarchical government, 'that faulty mirror of the Divine government of the world' (*DA*, pp. 274–75). Robert Colls stresses that compromise must be an organizing principle in any understanding of Englishness: 'The Englishness of the perpendicular line was matched, apparently, only by the Englishness of the horizontal: as in politics as in climate as in architecture—a characteristically English compromise between one thing and another.'²⁹ The compromise worked out in Benson's novel can be seen to engage closely with this theorization, harmonizing the horizontal line of social cohesiveness with the vertical line of enduring state hierarchies. And

²⁸ Huxley, pp. 237–38.

²⁹ Robert Colls, *Identity of England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 235.

in the novel both axes are viewed resolutely from the perspective of divine power.

Through the operations of the protagonist's memory, *The Dawn of All* foregrounds the continuities of Englishness in a number of ways. Benson's England emphasizes its isolation, indeed excludes the disruptive forces at work in the geographical and ideological extremes of the non-Catholic Celtic lands beyond the nation's borders. The repeating textual stress upon 'successiveness' in political, social, and dynastic terms extends beyond the Edwardian period well into the future. Repeatedly styled as 'the man who had lost his memory', Masterman comes to articulate a resistance to any potential discontinuities in the national life. Indeed, the protagonist's Englishness consists in his capacity to recognize these continuities in native patterns of existence and to identify closely with them.

Disruptions of Memory and National Identity

One of the central disruptions which the novel contests, aside from social reforms and state dominion, is the legacy of Protestantism. Admiring the history of England at large, the Cardinal admits in the novel that 'there is one black blot upon the page, and that, the act of hers by which she renounced Christ's Vicar, by whom kings reign' (DA, p. 205). Even though it is claimed that the English people have eventually returned to the Catholic faith, they should still provide 'corporate reparation' in expiation of their prior separation from the Holy See. This repudiation of Protestantism stands in opposition to the discourse of Englishness promoted by Anthony Easthope as 'a tradition of dissent' having its roots in the English Reformation, which prompted the nation's major cultural and scientific advances.³⁰ Indeed, in *The Mentalities of the Nations of the World*, Georgii Gachev argues that the Protestant tradition gave rise to key ideas associated with Englishness and the construction of national identity.³¹

In *The Dawn of All* it is brought to the protagonist's attention that the Reformation and its outcome in England ushered in 'the experiment of a religion resting on the strength of a national isolation instead of a universal supernaturalism' (DA, p. 277). With a view to combating the national isolation and reconnecting the country to the Continent, Benson devises a system of Catholic rule, and embeds it firmly in the modern age with an air fleet of volors (from the Latin *volare* 'to fly') which reach Rome in a matter of a few hours. Throughout the novel, this emphasis upon the international community in which England participates is set in stark contrast to the time-honoured image of England as a self-consciously insular nation. Whereas Keith Robbins in his

³⁰ Anthony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 62.

³¹ Georgii Gachev, *Mental'nosti narodov mira* (Moscow: Algoritm and EKSMO, 2008), p. 155.

study of national historiography has identified insularity as a defining characteristic of the construction of Englishness,³² Benson's novel perceives this very insularity as a failure in the growth of the nation: 'it had been tried, and found wanting' (*DA*, p. 277).

Protestantism and its perceived isolating tendencies remain locked in the past, and so the novel concentrates its critique upon contemporary social policies and evidence of growth in the apparatus of the state. As the narrative unfolds, the protagonist becomes aware of an evening out in wider social discourse of crucial differences between liberalism and socialism, reducing their distinct programmes to the extension of the franchise and freedom of speech. Voicing a representative fear of mass disorder, Father Jervis argues that

Socialist and infidel speeches can be delivered freely in what are called private houses, which are really clubs. Well, that sort of thing cannot possibly go on. The infidels have complained of tyranny, of course—that's part of the game. As a matter of fact they've been perfectly free unless they gave actually public offence. (*DA*, p. 139)

In contrast, Masterman's attitude to these dissenters proves to be more theological in essence. His visit to the socialist outpost outside Catholic England does not catch him off guard; rather, 'the man who had lost his memory knew that he was coming into a civilization which, although utterly unknown to him by experience, yet had in his anticipation a curious sense of familiarity' (*DA*, p. 228). At the same time, no matter how much Masterman enjoys 'real liberty as he had conceived it' (*DA*, p. 233), he is unable to square his faith with the godlessness of 'the socialist Canaan' providing 'no indication of an incomprehensible Power greater than themselves, no ideal higher than that generated by the common sense of the multitude' (*DA*, pp. 234–35). Unsurprisingly, given the limitations of his outlook, the protagonist cannot countenance the rapprochement between socialism and Catholicism which had gained particular prominence in some socialist factions in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods.

In his account of H. G. Wells's political thought, John Partington gives a panoramic overview of the diversity of socialist opinion inherited from the previous century:

Late-Victorian was an eclectic ideology, gaining inspiration from medieval communitarianism in the case of William Morris, and high industrial efficiency in the case of Edward Bellamy and Karl Marx; relying on the solidarity of the working class according to Friedrich Engels, and on an administrative elite according to Sidney Webb; requiring the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society as far as communists

³² Keith Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993).

were concerned, and needing only to permeate and gradually control the existing political and administrative machinery according to the Fabians.³³

Most of these major strands of socialism remain noticeably unacknowledged in *The Dawn of All*, in which Benson's Catholic ideologues are bewildered not by the diversity of socialist platforms but by the mere fact of their proliferation in England: 'These Socialists are stronger than any one dreamed. Their organization is simply perfect' (DA, p. 215). In offering a sustained examination of the structures of socialist organization, the novel does nevertheless recognize versions of socialism invested in Christian doctrine. At the time, Keir Hardie had argued for the essentially religious nature of the Labour movement,³⁴ and on a strikingly similar note, Conrad Noel, the 'Red Vicar' of the Church of England, equated the principles of Christianity with the principles of socialism.³⁵ Benson's novel also acknowledges 'all the *ideals* of Socialism (apart from its methods and its dogmas)' as 'the ideals of Christianity' (DA, p. 35). However, as Benson's apocalyptic novel *Lord of the World* (1907) stipulates, the divinity and power of God will always surpass and defeat humankind's foredoomed attempts at reorganizing the world. Catholicism stands against socialism, almost like good against evil.³⁶ In this sense, Benson's conservative theology plays a more pivotal role in understanding the tension between the two antagonisms than the availability of various seemingly reformist solutions.

Interestingly, as Masterman progresses through his exploration of this Catholic England, he gradually loses his ability to relate his new experiences to their antecedents. The emerging tendencies in the world around him appear 'strange', in that he finds a discrepancy between what the system practises and preaches (DA, p. 149). His revulsion towards the regime becomes more pronounced when he realizes that any type of reasonable doubt about the righteousness of the Church is treated as treason at the state level. Similarly, insinuations directed against socialist dissidence disturb Masterman, who thinks that the Church was supposed 'to guide the world' without necessarily crusading against its opponents (DA, p. 199). Processing these disorienting developments, the main character's memory increasingly gives way to bouts of amnesia. The growing inability of Masterman's memory to authenticate 'the religion of its Founder' (DA, p. 225) in the oppressive practices of England's Catholic Church explains why some early readers of *The Dawn of All* found its message disconcerting. As Benson's early biographer C. C. Martindale records, 'if only

³³ John S. Partington, *Building Cosmopolis: The Political Thought of H. G. Wells* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 31.

³⁴ James Keir Hardie, *Speeches and Writings (from 1888 to 1915)*, ed. by Emrys Hughes (Glasgow: Forward, 1928), p. 142.

³⁵ Conrad Noel, *Socialism in Church History* (London: Palmer, 1910), p. 7.

³⁶ Robert Hugh Benson, *Lord of the World* (London: Pitman, 1907; repr. South Bend: Saint Augustine's Press, 2001), p. 3.

because it seemed almost cynical that a man should so light-heartedly preach a sermon first on one text and then on its exact opposite'.³⁷ Undoubtedly, if read from this angle, the novel joins hands with the tradition of religious dissent, immediately spotted by both common readers and Roman Catholic officials. In Grayson's words, while 'visiting Rome shortly after publication, Hugh was told of the harm such books were doing, and ceased using the theme'.³⁸

However, this seeming emphasis of the novel upon dissent does not contradict the expression of Benson's religious faith which lies at its heart. Indeed, the direction of Benson's faith is inextricable from the novel's robust image of an England which opposed religious and/or ideological persecution and the infiltration of the Catholic Church into the apparatus of the state. In *The Dawn of All* Masterman's predecessor in the post of Cardinal of England expressed his loyalty in this way: 'I am an Englishman as well as a Catholic, and I love England only less than I love the Church. I say frankly that I do love her less. No man who has any principles that can be called religious can say otherwise' (*DA*, p. 204). This may represent Benson's own point of view, but in the novel the protagonist's failing memory does not comprehend the profound disruptions which have been occasioned by the Catholic regime's key position in the wider life of the nation: 'this vision of earthly peace, this perfection to which order and civilization had come; and then, as he regarded it, it enraged him' (*DA*, pp. 150–51). Indeed, a disrupted vision of Englishness is linked directly to the question of dissent, traceable to the 'black blot' of the Reformation: a universalizing form of Catholicism was brought into being in England to eradicate dissent and the experience of national isolation. Yet Masterman's powers of memory cannot resolve the discordances between the present Catholic enterprise and the remembered continuities of English liberal society. Keenly sensitive to the unease present in this Catholic England, Masterman deems the system to be 'hateful and impossible' and feels 'unhappy altogether' (*DA*, pp. 163, 186). Ultimately, the protagonist is unable to endure the limitations of freedom he witnesses under this regime.

Memory and Faith

It has been noted in the introduction to this article that the tripartite structure of the novel is closely associated with its thematic opposition of memory and faith. Indeed, the uncertainty of memory underpins the fabric of the whole novel in that the protagonist's recollections of the England he knew are contested in his conversations with Father Jervis and, more systematically, in Mr Manners's discourse on the first two decades of the twentieth century. As uncertainty comes to characterize his presence in this Catholic England,

³⁷ C. C. Martindale, *The Life of Monsignor Robert Hugh Benson*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1916), II, 87.

³⁸ Grayson, p. 88.

Masterman assumes increasingly the position of an amnesiac: after he is brought to his lodgings, he picks up a letter in which he recognizes only his handwriting (*DA*, p. 23). His bedroom also strikes him as barely his own: 'he thought he recognized the use of everything which he saw, there was no single thing that wore a familiar aspect' (*DA*, p. 25). These revelations of his psychic impairment lead to a vital moment of self-identification:

A tall mirror, he remembered, hung between the windows. He ran straight up to this and stood staring at his own reflection. It was himself that he saw there—there was no doubt of that—every line and feature of that keen, pale, professional-looking face was familiar, though it seemed to him that his hair was a little greyer than it ought to be. (*DA*, p. 26)

Fully recognizing his appearance in the reflection, Masterman also detects a minor, but extremely significant, change. In view of the further developments in the novel, his 'greyer hair' heralds the onset of a process of becoming, of recognizing change as the determining factor of his existence.

After taking the protagonist through a sustained experience of disorientation and change in this Catholic England, the novel proposes two versions of psychic becoming, predicated on the very opposition of memory and faith. The first is explored in the main section of the text, chronicling Masterman's rise to the rank of Cardinal of England. This is an account riddled with problems of compromise. Continually haunted by the dilemma 'to sink his individuality [and] to throw up his hands and drown, or to assert that individuality openly and defiantly, and to take the consequences' (*DA*, p. 185), the protagonist eventually succumbs to the temptation of power. The fact that he becomes the highest-ranking official in the once abhorred establishment is determined by his choice of acquiescence rather than revolt:

It had seemed to him that Christ had accepted the taunts at last, had come down from the Cross and won the homage only of those who did not understand Him. He had been quieted indeed for a time, under the power of men who, whatever the rest of the world might do, still thought that suffering was the better part. Yet he had been quieted; not convinced. (*DA*, p. 275)

The protagonist is not able to free himself from such angst-ridden reflections until he renounces his allegiances to memory and turns wholly to the demands of faith: 'So there the vision lay before him—this man who had lost his memory and had found a greater gift instead' (*DA*, p. 278). Faith in the arrival of Christ's kingdom both in heaven and on earth, which is evoked at the end of the main section of the novel, serves to disable Masterman's memory and arrest his process of becoming. Faith is allowed to triumph, and the potential for growth which memory offers is thus silenced.

The second form of becoming rooted in memory is communicated most fully in the last scene of *The Dawn of All*, where the dissenting priest, lying

on his deathbed, regains his memory. He makes a confession. However, the reader can only speculate about the contents of the story he is going to relate thereafter. Whereas the main body of the novel may be seen to promote a final victory of faith over memory, the epilogue creates a sense of indeterminacy relating to the fate of the lapsed priest once he has uttered his final words. None the less, the dying man's confession and his alertness to the bells audible on an Easter morning are highly suggestive of the reawakening of his faith as he approaches death's door. These closing moments apparently indicate the convergence of the priest's reasserted memory and perhaps his restored faith. The background to this scene is the dim presence of London outside the hospital ward, with 'the footsteps and the voices and the bells' (*DA*, p. 287). London's continuous, if slightly subdued, energy filling the room with delicate and suggestive noises matches the nearly eternal Westminster Abbey in whose vicinity the priest is about to meet his end. In this way, with its attention to timeless, yet nationally specific, symbols of continuity, the novel's epilogue may be seen to eradicate the need for change, religious or socio-political.

Conclusion

This article has examined how the workings of the protagonist's and the lapsed priest's memory in Benson's novel are transformed by affirmations of and challenges to constructions of Englishness circulating in the opening decades of the twentieth century. In *The Dawn of All* England is symbolized by a pervasive emphasis upon continuity, hierarchy, and dynastic succession. Benson summons up a deeply conflicted version of Catholic England, one which entails the ultimate defeat of memory: any attempt at Protestant or socialist reform gives way to a textual investment in faith.³⁹ While this discussion has promoted the reading of *The Dawn of All* primarily in theological terms, it has also shown that the novel engages tightly with a very distinct socio-political atmosphere being experienced in Edwardian England. The novel's allegedly malevolent vision of a Catholic regime remains crucially rooted in Benson's ongoing anxieties about the reformist endeavours at work in his society. In the final scenes of the novel, in the dying priest's wakeful perceptions, England becomes significantly coterminous with a preordained order of existence, and any threat to the continuity of its progression is bound to fail—unless the powers of memory are usurped by those of faith.

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³⁹ In this respect, *The Dawn of All* anticipates some of the later dystopian fiction marked by what Fredric Jameson describes as 'the elegiac sense of the loss of the past, and the uncertainty of memory' (Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London: Verso, 2005), p. 200).