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# Mourning for the Lost Nation: The Transformative Poetics of Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* and Terence Davies' *Of Time and The City*.

# Luto por la nación perdida: La poética transformadora de Derek Jarman *The Last of England* y Terence Davies *Of Time and The City*.

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**Abstract:** The mourning for the decay of England's glory has become a constant presence in postmodern English culture. There is an ever-present feeling of nostalgia for the dissolution of the past, while, simultaneously, the future is being cancelled. Both Derek Jarman and Terence Davies transformed films into poetic devices where the emotion was to be poured out, reflected upon, and revitalized. This article aims to study how the authors' poetics are articulated, aiming to analyze the intersections between poetry, film, politics, and national identity. To achieve that, the poetic resources and strategies are to be interpreted in relation to the political situation, as both authors establish connections between individual emotions on a micro-personal level and the broader political and collective panorama. Jarman and Davies were adept at crafting a nostalgic epistemology from poetics that allowed them to acknowledge the current state of bleakness while also constructing a new identity for the nation.
**Keywords:** Nostalgia; Film; Politics; National Identity; Poetry; England
**Summary:** Introduction. Weep for *The Last of England*: Jarman's Experience of Despair. The Land of Lost Content: The Elegy of Terence Davies. Conclusions.

**Resumen:** El duelo por la decadencia de la gloria de Inglaterra se ha convertido en una presencia constante en la cultura inglesa posmoderna. Hay un sentimiento siempre presente de nostalgia por la disolución del pasado, mientras, simultáneamente, se cancela el futuro. Tanto Derek Jarman como Terence Davies transformaron las películas en dispositivos poéticos donde la emoción debía ser vertida, reflexionada y revitalizada. Este artículo pretende estudiar cómo se articulan las poéticas de los autores, con el objetivo de analizar las intersecciones entre poesía, cine, política e identidad nacional. Para ello, se interpretarán los recursos y estrategias poéticas en relación con la situación política, ya que ambos autores establecen conexiones entre las emociones individuales a nivel micro-personal y el panorama político y colectivo más amplio. Jarman y Davies supieron elaborar una epistemología nostálgica a partir de una poética que les permitió reconocer el actual estado de desolación, pero también construir una nueva identidad para la nación.
**Palabras clave:** Nostalgia; Cine; Política; Identidad Nacional; Poesía; Inglaterra.


## INTRODUCTION

The cultural postmodern atmosphere gave rise to many speeches lamenting the nation's feeling of being adrift after the dismantling of the post-war consensus and its transition to neoliberal profit policies. The nation's national identity crisis has been attributed to several factors like the inability to mourn the loss of the Empire or the coercive turn in state policies. Many of these discourses were transmitted via cinema, within the margins of the hegemonic cinematic versions of the nation. Films like *A Month in the Country* or *Maurice* (1987) triumphed among mainstream audiences, as the heritage film industry was particularly prominent during the Thatcher years. It often provided audiences with the fantasy of an idealized English past; however, as Higson notes, the historical link between heritage and conservatism was aesthetic and not necessarily discursive. Higson argues that these films' portrayal of the past was complex and contested, despite some critiques displayed narratively to the most prominent societal flaws (class, gender, and race discrimination): "At the level of the image, at the level of the lovingly created *mise-en-scène* of the national past, these films seemed to invite a conservative nostalgic gaze which overwhelmed the narrative critique, a loving, desiring gaze that celebrated the vision of the past" (122). Higson's claims were disputed by other scholars like Claire Monk, who found in heritage films hybrid spaces of shifting identities (123). While Monk's claims are valid, as many anti-heritage critiques are often too categoric, even Monk recognizes the genre's "tension between an excess of period spectacle and the ironic critiques present in the scripts" (123). Consequently, the films offered a

reified vision of the past that did not question the fundamental pillars of British national identity but offered, sometimes, a surface critique of its most problematic aspects.

The margins of cinema provided a space for more alternative filmmakers with independent visions of the nation and different approaches to nostalgia. It is the case of both Derek Jarman and Terence Davies, filmmakers who emerged in the Thatcher years and who converted film into a poetic medium, an evocative rather than narrative device based on rhythm, emotion and imagery. Jarman and Davies were able to transform their anger and despair at the state of the nation into a new idea of how national identities should be approached. The directors' power of transmutation is inscribed within the possibilities of film poetry, of which Ken Kelman explores some of the basic elements: "All elements here exist for the sake of the direct impact of the artist's vision. The effect of the narrative as such, or the rhythm of cutting as such, is completely absorbed in the poetry. We are primarily held by emotion as such" (Kelman 5). Emotions are what drive both Jarman and Davies' works, crafting a poetic reflection on loss, the nation's cultural heritage, and the possibilities for the future.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the poetics of both filmmakers concerning the politics of national identity and their socio-political reflections through the poetic and filmic medium. Derek Jarman proposes a visual allegory on national essence and the causes for the nation's downfall: from the inability to mourn the dismemberment of the empire and the remaining Imperial mindset to the changing paradigm when neoliberalism emerged. Terence Davies instead, crafts an homage to an old Liverpool that represented a different mindset, where communities and the collective were the cornerstones. Both filmmakers converge in transforming the visual medium into a poetical tool that mourns the loss of a cultural and emotional heritage but also elaborates a transformative proposal for a newer and different future for the nation. By exploring visual techniques, the aim is to delve into the differences and connections between their individual emotions and the broader political panorama, bridging the gap between the private and the public, the personal and the political. Ultimately, both directors craft an epistemology of nostalgia as a tool to investigate the causes of the nation's crisis.

## 1. WEEP FOR *THE LAST OF ENGLAND*: JARMAN'S EXPERIENCE OF DESPAIR

Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* serves as a powerful meditation on England's state of fragmentation and dereliction. The visually impactful allegorical poem employs a violent lyrism that reflects on the nation's past and the specters that persist to both haunt the present and abolish the future. Moreover, the choice to use Super 8mm film with low frame rates provides the image with a unique and characteristic texture. The film grapples with the heavy weight of war—there are mentions of both WWII and the Malvinas conflict—deindustrialization, and imperial heritage, all of which are portrayed as the spectral presences haunting English existence. Poetry and politics are constantly intertwined in *The Last of England*. Poetry becomes the medium through which the political nature of the nation's existence is examined and articulated. The nightmarish poetical allegory functions as a macro-whole, providing a liminal space for micro-reflections on England's most powerful ghosts. The political pathos, generated by Jarman's poetics through the experience of a nation in decline, is built upon three main emotions: despair, anger, and nostalgia.

Despair is the everlasting feeling that permeates the whole experience of the film, both visually and narratively. It is rooted in the complete loss of hope and expectations for the destiny of the nation, and it collides with one of the film's most meaningful themes: the cancellation of the future. Temporality is completely disjointed throughout *The Last of England*, lacking references that provide a sense of contemporaneity besides disco music on the diegetic level. Similarly, space is dislocated with the juxtaposition of numerous images that continuously combine past (through home movies) and present (via poetic images of desolation), inducing an effect of panic and anxiety over the loss of epistemological time categories. The idea of the cancellation of the future is deeply related to an existential ennui, hopelessness, and the lack of expectations previously mentioned. Franco Bifo-Berardi elaborated on how this notion develops:

> I am thinking, rather, of the psychological, which emerged in the cultural situation of progressive modernity, the cultural expectations that were fabricated during the long period of modern civilization, reaching a peak after the Second World War. These expectations were shaped in the conceptual framework of an ever-progressing development. (18)

Bifo-Berardi alludes to the post-war consensus and delves into the consequences of the abandonment of both the progressive mentality and temporality for a sort of displacing and dislocating consciousness. Jarman himself expresses the turn in society's expectations for progress: "I grew up in the wind of change ma'am! Quite! Quite blew away my reason" (Jarman 00:31:24). Following Bifo-Berardi's footsteps, Mark Fisher delves into one of the techniques that Jarman employs: the 'jumbling-up of time.' "The 'jumbling-up of time,' the montaging of earlier eras, has ceased to be worthy of comment; it is now so prevalent that it no longer even noticed" (6). According to Fisher, then, Jarman's employment of the technique becomes more to the realist, mimetic, documentarist side than to the poetic, imaginary, version. However, Jarman's alternation of images of past and present creates an oneiric poetical frenzy through scene colors, music, and voiceovers. This fragmented time is realized through a composition and blend of emotions, sounds, and images from different eras, representing England's cultural decline, decaying present, and uncertain future: "Jarman is largely fascinated by the temporal frame-within-the-frame of film narrative, the leap of epochs acting as a disruptive shock not only to the viewer's sensibility but to his/her sense of linear history" (Orr 331). Francesca Balboni explains both the aesthetic and narrative impact of these techniques of mixing past and present, home movies and decadent present landscapes: "With the confluence of past (and future) in the present, various fictions and realities also meet; we cannot so easily separate the presumed 'realness' of the home movies from the fantastic and horrifying events of Jarman's imagined present" (223). The idea of fighting the audience's tendencies to categorize, which both Orr and Balboni mention, enhances a feeling of nightmarish reality with no temporal categories. The film's narrative voiceover starkly declares: "Tomorrow has been cancelled owing to a lack of interest" (Jarman 00:14:11). The paradoxical message's lack of interest reinforces the idea of existential ennui, of a hopeless and passive slumber, alongside the cancellation. The polysemy of the term "interest" also highlights the presence of financial slang and money in public and private arenas, especially concerning time and its categories.

This despair over the cancellation of the future is realized visually and narratively through numerous symbols. References to imagery related to winter—a symbol of darkness, bleakness, and despair—are found within the narration—the voiceover alerts that: "They say that the Ice Age is Coming" (Jarman 00:02:39) or that "The Frosty Heart of England blighted

Each Spring Leaf / all aspiration withered in the blood" (Jarman 00:32:05). These references indicate the despair over being denied the possibility of renewal by the current decaying, violent, and bleak state of the nation. There is a perpetual sense of stagnation that allows nostalgia to flourish. symbol of winter does not appear to be casual, given the time when the film was released. A decade ago, before the film's release, in 1979, James Callaghan was replaced by Margaret Thatcher after what was called 'The Winter of Discontent', a period of social and economic instability that coincided with the coldest weather in 16 years. The period became a conservative myth for the supposedly unstable and inefficient progressive politics, marking the beginning of the neoliberal reign: "The 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978/1979 marked the point of no return when Thatcher's party attracted a "formidable Rassemblement of social forces fearful of further unrest." (Jessop 19). The narrator's words of the 'final winter' seem to imply that England has been in winter ever since Thatcher's rise and that the worst is yet to come, winter also being a symbol of death.

Visually, the film reinforces this constant anguish for this lack of future and the state of the country through visual metaphors: Scenes depict mourners dressed in black with red poppies in a grotesque funeral for the nation; a baby is covered with a blanket made from a newspaper with dreadful headlines of the Falklands War, symbolizing the crushing of future possibilities by the dreadful state of the present. Not only does despair crystalize in the denial of tomorrow but also in the overwhelming dreadfulness of today. Ruins are a recurrent symbol shown throughout the film, juxtaposing a glorious past and the nightmarish present of a nation crumbling. The ruins, often factories, both reference the destruction after WWII and the aggressive deindustrialization of Thatcherism.

England is portrayed in its highest moment of decadence, with individuals who wander around alienated from their own existence and who only appear to depart from such existential confusion and ennui through the experience of sex or drugs: In one scene, a number of drug addicts are about to shoot heroin after confusingly wandering through the landscape. The anesthetized state of the boy, never looking at the camera but focus on his fags and drugs with deadened eyes, and the shaky camera movements suggest anxiety and hopelessness. Drugs are the only remaining route to evasion from the bleak reality, as the narrative voiceover reminds us: "What's the password? EVASION" (Jarman 00:13:40). Evasion is the key to salvation here but also the cause of death. The film's imagery evokes intertextual allusions to T.S. Eliot's *The*

*Hollow Men*, an apocalyptic poem that meditates on the decadence of existence. This is not the only connection between Jarman's oeuvre and Eliot's work; the film's apocalyptic tone and the leitmotif of garbage echo the poet:[1] "Picking through the tatters of your lives we jumbled the lot, and squatted your burnt-out hearths / Your world, beavering away at its own destruction" (Jarman 00:07:52). In this part of the narrated poem, Jarman creates a dialectical opposition between a 'we' and a 'you,' criticizing the lack of rebelliousness to daily capitalism: "Not your clean-limbed cannon fodder for the drudgey nine-to-five" (Jarman 00:07:02).

Disjointed temporality, modernist undertones, combinations of death imagery, an apocalyptic tone or juxtaposition, and intertextuality are some of the other common traits between Eliot and Jarman. Both works also convey a tone of growing disillusionment, as well as featuring radical, meditative, and hermeneutic poetic voices. The apocalyptic vision that links Jarman to T.S Eliot is also realized by means of the film's aesthetic process. Beyond the already discussed visually driven narrative, Jarman transferred the film footage to video, allowing a degradation of the image's quality that enhances the feeling of apocalyptic decay.

The feeling of despair is always coupled with what may be considered one of the most primary emotions: anger. There is a space for anger and rage at the English status quo, and how the rulers, with the passivity of some, use the national icons as a smokescreen to conceal the failed and corrupt state of the nation: "A thin yellow pus drained through exhausted institutions / Citizens stood mute, watching children devoured in their prams. And all you did, in the desperation, was celebrate the Windsor, yet again" (Jarman 00:08:22). The reference to yellow is a common motif of the decadent movement, and a symbol for decay and death used, among many others, by Arthur Conan Doyle in his description of London: "The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air, and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare" (Conan Doyle 19). Conan Doyle's portrait of London shares this murky ambiance and alludes to yellow as a sign of decadence. In Jarman's case, however, the reference to the color functions in a more metaphorical way, as it is referencing the rottenness of the English

[1] There are many similarities between Jarman and T.S Eliot. Formally, they are defined by fragmentation, blending different forms like nursery rhymes through rhythm and collapse. Thematically, just like Eliot, Jarman was mourning the ruins of a civilisation through cultural lament.

institutions. The British monarchy, "one of the sociological wonders of the contemporary world, Europe's greatest living fossil, the enchanted glass of an early modernity which has otherwise vanished from this world" (Nairn 115), is usually used as a smokescreen to cover up the country's situation. Tom Nairn sardonically explains the performative character of the institution of the monarchy, considering it anachronistic and useful only as patriotic exaltation, in line with the film's denunciation. Anger permeates the film, directed at the experience of despair, at the state of the nation, at the ruling of violence, at the loss of the national essence and identity: "Outside in the leaden hail, the swan of Avon dies a syncopated death" (Jarman 00:03:02).

The metaphor for the loss of national culture, using Shakespeare's nickname, is realized through the imagery of violence. Violence is provoked by anger and anger derives from the current broken condition of the nation. The montage and the breakneck speed of the scenes signal the violence. The diegetic sound contributes to enhancing the experience of violence throughout the film, including the gunshots heard numerous times to accompany the visuals and create contrast against the peacefulness of the images. The domesticity of the footage of Jarman's father, a pilot for the RAF, is mixed in with the looming anxiety over an imminent threat, which occurs commonly throughout the film. There is also anger in the portrait of the escalation of violence in which the nation has seen itself immersed. Juxtapositions of clustered images of fire and water, alongside images of police riots, display one maxim: the violence never stops. Jim Ellis indicates the nation's transition: "The bombed-out buildings of the Blitz are replaced by the abandoned houses and factories of Britain's industrial decline, and a nervous optimism has given way to anger and despair we go from the people's war to Thatcher's war on the people" (Ellis 140). Once again, as highlighted by Ellis, anger and despair appear as the main protagonists. The presence of hooded men in balaclavas, whose function is unclear, adds another layer to the disquieting feeling of violence and anxiety. The men appear to be guardians or custodians of the dystopic city, and they stroll around and dance. However, they also point guns at people, who appear to be expatriates or refugees. No one is freed from such threat and, although there is a vague resemblance to the IRA because of the chosen attire, there is no specification as to such. Steven Dillon alludes to some context provided by Jarman himself, explaining a similar plot, and illustrates how many times, at least for the spectators' experience, violence arises from confusion:

> The angels were a paramilitary group called the Outriders engaged in mopping up the remains of a world, our world, that had passed away (…) *The Last of England* does not allow its soldiers or its apocalypse to inhabit the conventional cinematic genre. These soldiers are all the more terrifying for their lack of context. (174)

One of the most terrifying moments regarding the paramilitary group is in the funeral scene where a conversation occurs between these men and the mourners dressed in black wearing a death crown and poppies. While it remains unclear if the ladies symbolize Thatcher, it is evident that they share her mentality:

> - LADY: "Did you enjoy the Falklands?
> - SOLDIER: Oh, yes, Ma'am.
> - LADY: Preparing for the next one?
> - SOLDIER: Yes, Ma'am
> - LADY: It's going to be a big one, isn't it?
> - SOLDIER: I hope so, Ma'am.
> - LADY: Keep up the good work" (Jarman 01:15:09)

The cycle of violence is once again depicted as never-ending and exhausting, although the ladies on the scene appear to enjoy it. The Falklands War was Thatcher's master movement to hide her inefficacies under the flag of exacerbated patriotism: "The Falklands/Malvinas witnessed a reinvigoration of residual discourses of martial and religious patriotism, unwittingly laying bare the archetypal myths and mechanics of popular nationalism" (Belgley 232). The film seems to highlight what Jon Belgley alludes to the links between the Malvinas War and a wave of populist patriotism that sought the population's approval.

Neoliberal creeds, such as the fetishization of money and the pursuit of maximum profit are also present in the form of images of excess. A boy, seemingly of a higher social status, indulges excessively in drinking, a symbol of decadence. The poetic metaphor of the Union Jack surrounded by booze and syringes expands as the boy starts engaging in sexual intercourse with one of the men in balaclavas. Besides other readings this article does not focus on, like the corporality of queer bodies, there is also a strong political reading: the alliance and copulation of crime and the higher strata of society, a symbol of the corrupted state of the country: "In the silence of an English suburb, power and secrecy dwell in the same

house" (Jarman 00:32:12). The boy represents power not only because of his attire but also because he is the one exhibiting agency; he approaches the paramilitary and initiates a sexual affair. On the other hand, the paramilitary is an obvious symbol of secrecy, the soldier wearing a balaclava that covers his face. This uncanny alliance of shadowy power was illustrated by Niven as one of England's founding maxims:

> But by far the most complex and profound facet of Englishness is the third and final of the triumvirate. This is the notion of hiddenness and void . . . the feeling that the governing processes of English social and political life are somehow taking place out of view is, like confinement, a sensibility with roots in the older feudal system. (40–41)

This tradition is reflected by Jarman in this powerful allegorical scene. On the Union Jack power and secrecy lay together in ardent desire. The bandit and his confusing role echo Niven's arguments about the governing processes of the nation occurring out of public sight.

Anger and despair are just two of the emotions expressed through lyrism and visual poetics by Jarman. Both emotions are related to the present state of the nation, related to each other, and related, also, to the third and most complex emotion distilled in the film: nostalgia. Nostalgia is a complex emotion that is mainly anchored in the past whilst also rooting itself in the future. It allows Jarman to explore and criticize the hopelessness and denial of the future through the erasure of the temporal distinctions of past and present, as Oliver and Whitehall point out: "The dream like structure of *The Last of England*, both literal and metaphorical, facilitates this interrogation its mutability enabling a fluidity of colour that helps blur the distinction between past and present" (7). Therefore, the formal experimentation both in the structure of the film with the fragmented narratives and through the formal elements enhances the film's poetics, revealing the cultural decadence of the Thatcherite era. However, the film does not dwell so much on the nostalgia of an idealized past or an English Arcadia. Unlike other films like *Jubilee* (1978), it instead focuses on a feeling of loss, an essence miscarried of a heritage long forgotten. Jarman explained that he "need[ed] a very firm anchor in that hurricane, the anchor is my inheritance, not my family inheritance, but a cultural one" (*Kicking the Pricks*, 177). All the intertextual references, as well as the poetry, seem to be an attempt to resuscitate a cultural anchor from the slumber of current Englishness. Jarman links his micro-identity and

Englishness, the poetic is political, and the political poetic, everything is interrelated.

The poem evokes this nostalgia through its exclamation that "on every green hill mourners stand, and weep for *The Last of England*" (00:03:53). The green hills are evocative of a pastoral, pre-technological England. These references to England's past depart from the bleakness of most shots: Tilda Swinton, Jarman's muse, first appears with her long hair loose and wearing a long dress that resembles the women of Pre-Raphaelite movement paintings. It could be argued that her character embodies Jarman's trajectory and feelings towards England. Her first shots are the embodiment of innocence and calmness, sitting in a tree surrounded by daffodils. As described in the Wordsworth poem, Swinton seems to find bliss in solitude and the natural world in that initial stage. The initial shots, alongside the shots of natural beauty, seem to reinforce, not a sense of glorifying the nation, but a notion of longing for a paradise that has been lost, as Jarman himself suggested: "The home movie is the bedrock, it records the landscape of leisure: the beach, the garden, the swimming pool. In all home movies is a longing for paradise" (qtd. in Brydon 120). The natural shots also hint at a possibility of rebirth and renewal, a theme that will be further explored in the film's final scenes. However, to contemplate the possibility of rebirth, a thorough exploration of the malaise is needed first.

The film's title is a direct reference to Pre-Raphaelite Ford Maddox Brown's painting *The Last of England* (1855), which depicts a couple sailing away from the country, a motif repeated throughout the film. In addition to the group of immigrants being deported, there is a recurrent shot in which a man, either in a boat, or walking is being followed by the immigrants while illuminating the darkness with light. The recurrent image aligns with the allegorical undertones of the film, reminiscent of both Virgil and Dante. The metaphor of the guide of the light illuminating in the darkness can be interpreted both as the possibility of renewal after the destruction of the land, akin to Aeneas. Simultaneously, it serves as a guide for the poet, paralleling Dante's descent, to dig up the sin in the soul of the nation. The nostalgic undertones of a loss of essential national identity coexist with tracing the story of England, and, thus, analyzing its sins. Beyond the sardonic reproach aimed at the Windsor family and their power and the cycle of never-ending violence, the film also incorporates clusters of images with Imperial tones. The Albert memorial is juxtaposed with military parades and scenes of Indians serving their colonial rulers.

Here lies one of the juxtapositions of Jarman's work as the film feels nostalgic about the loss of a cultural heritage but also exposes the dark underbelly of nostalgia by linking it to imperialism and violence. Moreover, the idea of enclosure is also a recurrent English theme, with the projection of northern houses fenced with barbed wire. The feeling of being enclosed has always been one of England's founding maxims too, an early initiator of capitalism that abandoned the previous pastoral collectivism. Niven also comments on this traditional feeling:

> The deliberate enclosure of the English landscape in successive waves from the medieval period to the nineteenth century is clearly partly at the root of this cultural mode, as of course, slightly more recently, is the industrial class system, which scored rigid and often immovable lines across the social architecture of the nation. Whatever the cause, the lasting effects of these deep structural presences are all around us. (39)

The film portrays the effects of the feeling of enclosure, coupled with the perception that England's ruling forces operate in secret shadows, leading to chaos, ruin, and desperation. Despite the prevailing bleak tone, there is, however, space for rebirth and renewal in the last scenes of the film.

Tilda Swinton's character evolves from an initial stage of innocence to a period of commitment and maturation, culminating in the last scenes where she is shot amongst water, next to a burning pyre. Commitment has given way to solitude, desperation, and chaos. Initially, she wanders, lost, and confused. As the moments pass by, the cathartic energy of her desperation and anger takes over and she discards classic symbols concerning two institutions: the wedding gown and the rose, corresponding to marriage and the nation. Fragmented shots and a whirling rhythm accompany Swinton in her dance of destruction which becomes more and more powerful. Her cathartic energy of destruction seems to become godlike; she has gained the consciousness of her grief and desperation and has been able to get rid of her constraints and master them. The poetry of the scene emerges through the lyric dance combined with the vibrant colors and the elements of fire and water. The awareness of destruction opens the door to a new beginning. The last shot mirrors the opening one—the guide blasting light on a boat full of people. It remains unclear whether they are the refugees being deported by the paramilitary, but the poet, having uncovered sin and illuminated the darkness, guides

them now towards a potential new beginning, or, in a Greek homage, possibly to death.

*The Last of England* is a film where poetry permeates every aspect; from the visuals, including the structure and conception, to the narrative voiceover, and the political message. It bridges the individual and internal perception of the filmmaker with the collective and external experience nation's transformation. The poetics that Jarman unravels are politically charged and aesthetically impactful but never explicitly dictated. Poetry is the tool through which the essence of the country is explored and mourned for, but meaning is never closed, as it is the form through which England's enclosure can be fought against in the best manner: "There are more walls in England than in Berlin, Johnny" (Jarman 00:06:41). The poetic feeling becomes the way of debunking those walls, of existing both in the ruins of the English cultural and moral heritage, as well as in the ruins of the self. The walls and the multiple scenes of bars and barbed wire are negotiated with the awareness that through the chaotic and destructive expression something can be created, something can be debunked, trespassed. Oliver and Whitehall refer to the idea of identity reconstruction, allowing a new place to start without embodying complete rejection of British identity: "There is foregrounded a locus of a particular construction of identity, that inherently needs to be acknowledged, worked through and presented rather than rejected. Like all the paradoxes in Jarman's work this ambivalence aims to interrogate rather than erase" (7). The film interrogates those identity aspects through the discursive representation of some recurring elements like desolate auras or decaying landscapes. It is an allegorical poem with elements of elegy, of mourning for what has been lost. Through avant-garde experimentation and punk aesthetics, Jarman recreates the decaying state of Thatcherite England. The fragmented time reminisces a fragmented consciousness but also a fragmented national identity, challenging hegemonic notions of the Empire that were reinforced at time through political discourses. Herein, T.S. Eliot's influence comes to fruition as, despite the postmodern qualities, the film plays out like a modernist poem at the end; historically aware of the weight of the past undergirding the need for a new point to start the present. T.S. Eliot pointed out the need for truly modern and new art to relate to the previous tradition, even to debunk it, as no art can stand in isolation without relation to the past. By calling attention to the decadence and void of the present era and the flaws and victories of the past cultural heritage, Jarman reinterprets

tradition inserting his allegorical oeuvre and therefore altering past and present.

The film's recurrent symbols of violence and death, but also its emphasis on defiance, evoke a critique to Thatcher's government but also have implications for Jarman's own authorship, his AIDS diagnosis being discovered during the film's production. Daniel Humphrey points out the links between the personal and the political: "The kind of historical consciousness his traumatic aesthetic expresses—infected by his personal trauma—reveals something more. It exposes the latency from which historical interpretation and meaning must emerge in order to confront the ideologies responsible for social injustice" (214). The film leads the audience to question their assumptions regarding a dialectic history through the visual and symbolic representation of moral ideas. Jarman's allegorical poem represents abstract ideas about sickness, death, or the nation by merging fragmented imagery with recurrent symbols. Jarman himself alluded to the allegorical nature of his film: "In dream allegory the poet wakes in a visionary landscape where he encounters personifications of psychic states. Through these encounters he is healed … *The Last of England* is in the same form" (*Kicking the Pricks*, 156).

As Jarman emphasizes, the poet turns out to be the medium, never imposing a meaning, for all the interpretations given are valid, as the poetic voice also states at the beginning: "I leave footprints for others to excavate" (Jarman 00:02:34). By having the agency to excavate, holding the strength to embrace the most primary drives while digging up the past, a political pathos can be articulated that allows reconstruction from death, despair, and destruction.

## 2. THE LAND OF LOST CONTENT: THE ELEGY OF TERENCE DAVIES

Terence Davies's *Of Time and The City* takes the form of an elegiac visual poem that mourns the loss of the former Liverpool. It is also a meditative and philosophical reflection on the passing of time and the inextricable binds between a space, in this case, a city, and those who inhabit it. Composed of vintage archive footage and narrated by Davies himself, the film traces the evolution of the city which, as was the case for Jarman and *The Last of England*, is linked to the creative evolution of Davies. From its early days to its current, unrecognizable present, the audience accompanies Davies on a coming-of-age journey. The elegiacal tones are representative of the permanent feeling of loss and the mourning for the

days that will never return. Besides the combination of old and contemporary footage, the soundtrack fulfills a diegetic role that also inspires the nostalgic mood that impregnates the whole film.

In Jarman's film, feelings and emotions are intertwined, although despair, anger, and a hint of nostalgia are the most noteworthy. This variety of emotions and the primacy of violence obeys the violent times the film was released, in 1987, towards the end of Thatcher's tenure with the complete collapse of collective struggles, such as can be seen in the miners' strikes, and a climate of bleakness and destruction. In Davies' work nostalgia reigns as the dominant emotion for the length of the film, punctuated only with occasional notes of irony. The film was released in 2008, when Gordon Brown was Prime Minister and the principles that had given New Labour a wide victory almost ten years previous were now worn down. Liverpool's appointment as European capital of Culture allowed the filmmaker to do an historical overview of the urban development and rapid changes overcoming the city. To evoke this sense of nostalgia, visual and narrative techniques are articulated to reflect on the rapid speed of time. Davies combines archival footage with his personal narration to achieve a unique and nostalgic tone.

The many poetic devices employed contrast, in some cases, with those employed by Jarman, but there are also similarities at the core. One of the most notable differences is the rhythm. Unlike Jarman, who employed whirlwind clusters of images and shaky camera movements, all such techniques in Terence Davies's film are slow and paused, recreating the sights of simpler times. The slow rhythm alludes to a pastoral and at times idealized period of the post-war consensus. Davies himself references many times that slow rhythm: "On slow Saturdays, when football, like life, was still played in black and white, and in shorts as long as underwear. When it was still not venal" (Davies 00:09:17). Slowness is constantly associated with leisure, and leisure is spoken of as if was not yet spectacularized, or at least not in the same terms as technological capitalism, where leisure has become yet another fetishized arena.[2]

Davies values the period of peacefulness and social advances of the post-war consensus: "World War II was over / peacetime and hardship

[2] Capitalism has turned leisure into a commodity, shaping the ways we desire to rest from work. Many activities become a marker of social status or identity, like skying or a wellness spa. The platforms we watch TV on or even the steps we walk a day have become instrumentalised consumer goods.

eased / And all day on the beach / completely unsupervised" (Davies 00:42:27). Time seems to pass slower for Davies in these early childhood days when slowness meant having the time to reflect, where things were not done for profit, as the filmmaker subtly mentions. Annette Holba explains the worth of leisure as departing from the fast-paced logic of capitalism in the pleasure of doing something just for the sake of the action and not the result: "Mitchell Haney (2010) argued that the value of leisure is inherently in its slowness. . .. Leisure involves a mindful doing without an interest in the end result" (184). Davies recreates those idle, slow days when his childhood and adolescence were linked to watching movies or boxing matches in black-and-white Liverpool.

In the nostalgic tone of the film, the idea of slowness is not only associated with the idea of leisure but with the idea of time: "Davies's narrative recreates a personal time that is lost forever and yet still present and 'real'" (Everett 30). Time is perhaps, alongside architectural Liverpool and a type of omniscient narrator-flaneur, the great protagonist of the oeuvre. Despite the occasional footage of present-day Liverpool at the beginning and middle of the film, time here, unlike in *The Last of England*, is not disjointed, fragmentary, or broken. There is a clear temporal line that begins with the blooming of the city, as the first shots of the railroads show, continues with Davies's childhood, and ends in the contemporary era (2008). Wendy Everett distinguishes between different types of time within Terence Davies' filmography. While there are examples of expanded and, especially, autobiographical time—as the film establishes links between filmic time, memory, and ontological subjectivity—the most prominent temporal mode referencing the aforementioned stillness and slowness is "arrested time." Most frames, notably those in black and white, reminiscing the past, are still: "Davies's dense and beautiful image uses stillness to create a network of virtual images and sensations associated with time and space" (Everett 35). The stillness invites the reader to reflect on the nature of time and its connections to memory and nostalgia, as well as the inner structures behind our relationship to the spaces we inhabit.

The film opens with a shot of a red theatre curtain opening while A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad* is recited by Davies:

> Into my heart an air that kills
> From yon far country blows
> What are those blue remembered hills

> What spires, what farms are those?
> That is the land of lost content
> I see it shining plain
> The happy highways where I went
> And cannot come again (Housman XL)

The nostalgic tone of Housman's poem is echoed by Davies, once again sharing with Jarman the notion of a paradise lost. Time, Davies warns us, "renders, deceives the eye, deceives the heart" (Davies 00:25:58). One of the technical similarities between Jarman and Davies is the presence of intertextuality that connects all national cultural legacy, not through pastiche, but rather through craftmanship. It is worthwhile mentioning, however, how Jarman resembled Eliot in his disjointed style and temporality and how Davies resembles Housman. In a time of avant-garde techniques, Housman looked to classicism for inspiration, making traditional rhyme, slow rhythm, and melancholia his poetry's biggest virtues. Davies is doing precisely what Housman did in *A Shropshire Lad*; he is observing the passing of time on the land that once was his home and regretting the loss and futility of those days. "We leave the place we love, then spend a lifetime trying to regain it" (Davies 00:05:17). The elegy is Davies's way of trying to regain a sense of the place he loved as a child.

Time is also deeply related to memory and also to dreams. At the beginning of the film, when the stage curtain is opening and succeeding the recitation of Housman's poem there is a reference to dreams which presents itself almost as a metatextual invite: "Come closer now. . ./ . . .and see your dreams./Come closer now. . .and see mine" (Davies 00:05:27). As with Jarman's text, the audience is induced to the oneiric and particular world of the author. The metatextual invite is also supported by the fact that every break of the fourth wall is accompanied by a dolly zoom: "No detached ethnography, *Of Time and The City*, is a ruminative and wistful journey into a past that for Davies is always present" (Koresky 19). The mythical reconstruction of Davies' Liverpool that started for him in his 1950s childhood represents a pseudo-autographical abductive fiction and, hence, the continuous references to dreaming and memory:

> The film's cartography of memory is therefore structured in accordance with the same spatializing logic that underpins the model of the archive city as a relational assemblage: a navigation through different stopping off points in a database of archival film memory. (Roberts 6)

The imagery related to dreams and memory provides an ontology of the self that is bound by the landscape; but more than a documentary, it appears as a Simmelian metropolis of the mind; a contrast of external and internal stimuli and past and present impressions that heighten the emotional charge while highlighting the relationship between the city and the psyche. It is also a mythical reconstruction that, as we saw with Jarman, does not forget the US. Britain is once again defined through dialectical opposition to the US, the English presented as being what Americans are not. Unlike Jarman, however, the comparison is voiced and not visual. The ode to simpler times and the elegy to its loss that Davies tries to evoke are not without nuances. A part of his mythical construction resides in the fact that he is crafting the poetics both in a provincial and a universal tone: from his soul and his city to the rest of the world.

That Liverpool is mostly idealized, but not without notes of irony and inquisition, especially when it comes to matters related to the hegemonic English essence such as the church, or, more specifically, the monarchy. As well as in Jarman's text, the most ironic and raging undertones appear when "the institution" is brought up, with Davies's attack being even more direct than Jarman's. The Liverpudlian filmmaker recalls the number of items spent on Elizabeth II's coronation, to whom he refers to as 'Betty' (Davies 00:26:12), stripping her of all sacrosanct worth and presenting her as a mundane subject. The footage of the coronation is presented in golden tones, a symbol of lavishness and unnecessary splurging. In contrast, the footage of the masses celebrating is presented in black and white, expressing poverty and simplicity Davies ironizes: "Her Majesty allegedly saved all her clothing coupons" (Davies 00:29:49). While the masses are fighting starvation and attempting to recompose the nation after the war, obscene quantities of luxurious items and money are wasted on the Queen's coronation. Davies takes the opportunity to express his perspective on the monarchy: "as yet another fossil monarchy justified its existence by tradition and deluded itself with the notion of duty" (Davies 00:30:03). In *The Last of England*, Jarman bitterly complains about the obeisance surrendered to the institution and how it has become a smokescreen to cover up the nation's real problems. Similarly, Davies antagonizes the monarchy as a pointless oxymoron, a 'fossil,' something that time has left untouched in an oeuvre where the passing of time is its biggest lament. The director plays with antithetical terms like sleeping and awakening throughout the whole film but, here the antithesis to time is the

mere existence of the monarchy and the waste: "Privileged to the last, whilst in England's green and pleasant land, the rest of the nation survived on rationing" (Davies 00:30:10). There is an acute contrast between the higher and lower strata of society.

Wars, such as the Korean War, come, and the fantastic golden tones are replaced by more realistic ones with the violence of suffering, "after farce, realism" (Davies 00:31:36), as spectators are told by the director. This is the part where the architectural landscape gains the most prominence; it is the key for the audience to realize of the passing of time. The audience witnesses the demolition of the characteristic red brick buildings in favor of the classic 60s and 70s housing: cheap high-rises. The spirit of the city and all its mutability are projected into the architecture:

> *Of Time and The City* is most fascinated by architecture—how we interact with it, and how it defines landscape, character, and national and local identity. Liverpool's buildings, from its terraced working-class row houses to its municipal establishments, are the clearest evidence of the simultaneous development and decay that are the twinned hallmarks of any Western city throughout the twentieth century. (Koresky 19–20)

Architecture also appears in the narrative arena of the film, not only in the visual, and populates Davies' mental landscape and, thus, its language. It embodies change with visual metaphors like the 'Empire' closing (referring to Liverpool's Empire building as well as to the British Empire,) but it is also a symbol for the old times of optimistic youth: "hopes as high as Blackpool Tower" (Davies 00:43:53). There is everlasting dialectics between past and present that locates that past as a site of nostalgic tenderness while signaling the alienation from an incomprehensible present. The nostalgic tones that the film evoke are also enhanced by the choice of music, creating a counterpoint between music and visuals that heightens the narration. The previously mentioned scenes of demolition are accompanied by Peggy Lee's "The Folks Who Live on the Hill" (Davies 33:28), thus maximizing the nostalgia.

Time is related to memory, to dreams, and to the slowness of times past, although ultimately, time is mostly a cycle for Davies. In his use of oxymorons and antithesis, dialectical oppositions like living and dying or lying awake and sleeping are recurrent. The author possesses a classical perception of time and nature as a type of physis, a recurrent cycle of all living beings from birth to death. Everything grows older, everything

changes, everything does and is born again, differently. Davies repeatedly reminds the audience and himself of such an inescapable fact: "in my end is my beginning" (Davies 00:58:23). The idea of cyclical time is of the utmost importance to him; he repeatedly complains and regrets the loss of his childhood and those golden days but as the end will reveal, cyclical time offers a chance for hope. Time and time lost are deeply attached to childhood memories and the evocation of meaningful Liverpudlian locations, something Davies already explored in previous autobiographical works, as Álvarez puts it: "His autobiographical cycle, composed of the shorts *Children (1976)* [*sic*]*, Madonna and Child (1980)* [*sic*] and *Death and Transfiguration* [*sic*] . . . explore the traumatic memories of his childhood." However, Álvarez comments on how, in these other works, Liverpool is depicted as more of an oneiric place that matches the filmmaker's memories rather than a real one (42). However, in *Of Time and The City* the spaces are depicted, not only evoked, and there is a specific linear narrative that contrasts past and present, thus reinforcing Davies's topographical identity to Liverpool's past. Davies feels outside time in a moment he no longer understands, and neither is he able to feel a sense of belonging: "Alien in my own land" (Davies 00:59:56).

The film was released in 2008, celebrating Liverpool's nomination as European Capital of Culture. The financial crisis and the beginning of Austerity Britain had left the nation with little to celebrate, a perfect opportunity to momentarily escape to the past when facing a decadent present. Moreover, the Labour Party's change in policies had left some classical voters alienated from their ideas, as many believed that class experience had been replaced by status and multiculturalism. While the film is subtler than *The Last of England* in its political reading, there is an implicit critique of the path the nation has taken that is materialized in the way Liverpool has changed. This critique is realized in two ways; first, by portraying the distance between the exported concept of nation and the reality of the population. As previously mentioned, there are remarks on the 'farcical monarchy' or the wars and losses that common people had to face. These contrasts are also emphasized in the film through the architectural shots: "The presence of these and other recognizable landmarks in *Of Time and The City* emphasises the stark contrast between the representations of the imperial, economic or religious power and the streetscape where people hustle and bustle in their everyday life" (Álvarez 44). The second way in which the film enacts a political reading is through a critique of the decommissioning of the pillars that once sustained

Davies's ideas about the nation. The dismantling of the post-war consensus, the urban renewal, and the entering of neoliberal policies influence the way Liverpool changes. These changes prompt Davies to feel alienated from what it used to represent regarding his topographical identity. However, as the film progresses, he gains awareness of his role as the poet/filmmaker/narrator of the times: "Nietzsche writes that the genius is always ahead of his or her time since he or she is thrown into the flow of time in order to stop the wheel from spinning so quickly, to be a brake on the cycle of time" (Miller 17). Through his visual poetry, there is an attempt to stop the wheel of time from spinning so quickly. However, there is a Nietzschean reversal, for in the end Davies realizes that his cycle is coming to an end, or, as he ponders, a new beginning, while reciting Sir Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" where there exists a lament for time passed, but also a final acknowledgment that the real importance lays in the memories made along the way. Davies ultimately fulfils that purpose through his visual poetry. With the employment of old footage and its everyday poetry, the director is able to reconstruct his mental, mythical Liverpool, tracing a journey from innocence to maturation, to final illumination: "We shall not cease from exploration. / And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started / and to know the place for the first time" (Davies 01:04:09). Poetry allows him to explore those corners of his mind so as to find the seeds of his beloved youth and to truly understand the cycle of life: "when the last of earth left to discover is that which was the beginning" (Davies 01:04:18). Just like Jarman did, Davies is quoting T.S Eliot. In his poem "Little Gidding," a part of the *Four Quartets*, Eliot referenced the circularity of time and the paradox that the end of a spiritual journey can be a new beginning. Again, there is a juxtaposition of opposing concepts, a symbol of the unstoppable dimension of change. The Liverpool depicted is a Liverpool Davies fails to recognize, as Álvarez remarks: "Liverpool's waterfront is currently a city tableaux in which Davies is so out of place that he had to dive into archival footage to find his way back to the city that shaped his personality" (51).

The final scenes depict a grandiosity far from the black-and-white industry scenes of the beginning. The social and economic fabric have shifted, and the city has changed. The ending does not revive a lost positivity but gains a peaceful acceptance. In his acknowledgment of his approaching the end of the timely cycle, Davies is able to create a new beginning. This provides the filmmaker with existential comfort.

Consequently, one of the last sentences of the film, before bidding the audience farewell with a good night, is a sincere "and all shall be well" (Davies 01:04:25). In gaining the conscience of the ending, of death, of the inescapability of change, Davies has opened a new beginning, a rebirth that may restart again the whole cycle.

## CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this article was to study and explore the poetical strategies and aesthetic resources employed in Derek Jarman's *The Last of England* and Terence Davies' *Of Time and The City*, focusing on their role in negotiating nostalgia, cultural memory, and national identity. Despite working in different temporal and political contexts, both authors converge in their use of the cinematic medium to elaborate a poetics tinted with despair for the national situation. They transform their personal despair into a deeper reflection on the state of the nation, using film as a poetic canvas to narrate a loss.

Derek Jarman's poetics are based on juxtaposition, combining elements of acceleration and stillness, the old and the new, the personal and the allegorical. Through these allegorical elements, Jarman illuminates the darkest corners of his mind, as well as the darkest corners of the nation, tracing both a synchronic and a diachronic reflection on the state of the nation and why and how the situation has ended the way it has. His fragmented and dislocated imagery mirrors the disintegration of both his inner world as well as the outer nation under Thatcher's government. However, Jarman is never unidimensional and refuses to impose a singular vision on the audience, always allowing the audience the space to navigate the layers of meanings and symbolism and search for their own interpretation. This openness, alongside his deeply unique experimental vision, make of his poetics something worthy of analysis in consonant with national identity.

In contrast, Davies' poetics are more traditional and slow-paced but share the same meditative depth: "Without ever losing the beat, Davies synchronises his personal memories with archival footage, merging history and story, past and present, and facts and feelings, in an ambitions combination that manages to bring back the old cityscape to the screen" (Álvarez 52). He uses his city as a mythical landscape and as a way of reflecting on the passing of time. The awareness of change and evolution provides Davies with the knowledge to ease his anxiety and minimize his

nostalgia about how the land of his childhood and of his heart has changed. Unlike Jarman's raw despair, Davies reflection is loaded with an awareness of evolution and acceptance of time's course.

Melting their inner worlds and dreams with the outer political realities allows both poetic filmmakers to articulate an epistemology of nostalgia for a lost, or at least crumbling, mythical landscape. In their forms of poetic expression, they mourn the loss of a cultural legacy, while also interrogating the limits and purpose of mourning the past. Therefore, their way of articulating nostalgia is not a nostalgia mistaken for a truth that expects to bring back the past in a national rant. It is an epistemology of nostalgia because it reflects, through the poetic mimesis in both cases, the very same notion, its limits, and its potential. However, it involves departing from the usual undertones of the conservative gaze of the heritage film[3] while adopting some of the recurrent tropes of a paradise lost and mixing them with present footage and more disruptive elements. For Jarman it involves converting laments into rebelliousness and defiance and confronting the state of the nation. In contrast, Davies' work involves his reconciliation with change while preserving the cultural memory of his childhood Liverpool. Film becomes poetry, and poetry becomes a vehicle to achieve and raise awareness of the political; from the inner to the outer, from within to the outside. Following this path and this pathos, both Davies and Jarman get to overcome the initial mourning, transforming their laments into a new notion. Both directors emerge with a renewed idea of the nation and a new identity that never forgets the past, tries to grasp the present, and may even look forward to the future.

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[3] While most heritage films offered a linear, stable picture of the nation that projected nostalgia for an idealised past; Jarman and Davies enact a counter heritage that is queer and working-class through their formal innovations and radical politics. Both filmmakers use nostalgia as means of resistance rather than preservation.

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