

## Brexitland's Emerging Identities in Clint Dyer and Roy Williams's *Death of England* Trilogy

Brexit Ülkesi'nin Yükselen Kimlikleri: Clint Dyer ve Roy Williams'ın *Death of England* Üçlemesi

**Hakan Gültekin**  0000-0001-7802-7009  
Artvin Çoruh University

### ABSTRACT

This article examines the intersection of political identities and cultural conflicts in the post-Brexit United Kingdom through Roy Williams and Clint Dyer's *Death of England* trilogy. It examines how individuals in the United Kingdom, already marked by deep identity divisions, confront identity, belonging and nationalism, and how they redefine these concepts in a changing socio-political context. The first play in the trilogy, *Death of England*, is about Michael coming to terms with his father Alan's nationalist and xenophobic views. The play explores how Brexit has exposed individual and generational tensions and addresses identity crises on a personal level. The second play, *Death of England: Delroy*, shifts the narrative to the perspective of a Black British character, examining Delroy's vote to leave the European Union despite his marginalisation. This conflict reveals how race, immigration and class dynamics are intertwined with nationalist discourses. *Death of England: Closing Time*, on the other hand, critiques the gendered dimension of national identity politics by focusing on the perspectives of female characters Carly and Denise. Drawing on Soboleska and Ford's (2020) concept of Brexitland, which also gives its title to the book, the article discusses how Brexit has pushed traditional economic class conflicts into the background and brought identity-based divisions to the forefront. As a result, the plays bring the emotional and ideological fractures created by Brexit to the stage, demonstrating that theatre is a critical tool for understanding this transformation.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 30 Jan 2025

Accepted 07 Apr 2025

### KEYWORDS

Brexit, Identity Politics,  
Nationalism,  
Contemporary British  
Theatre, Britishness

## Introduction: The Way to the "Brexit" Referendum

Throughout the history of the countries in the European continent, it is clear that many kings, statesmen, philosophers or writers, spread over periods, emphasized the need for the unification of Europe or at least to act with a common mind on certain issues. As Fontaine (2010) asserts famous French Writer Victor Hugo, who lived in the 19th century, is one of the most prominent examples of this situation, with a humanitarian approach and a peaceful "United States of Europe" (p. 3) discourse. Although European countries have been involved in wars with heavy consequences, the need for a united Europe has become indispensable after the calamities that have had heavy costs over the years.

**CONTACT** Hakan Gültekin, Asst. Prof. Dr., English Language and Literature, Artvin Çoruh University, Türkiye | [hagultekin@artvin.edu.tr](mailto:hagultekin@artvin.edu.tr); ORCID# 0000-0001-7802-7009; <https://doi.org/10.47777/cankujhss>

**CUJHSS** (e-ISSN 3062-0112) Published by Çankaya University. © 2025 The Author(s)



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which 'enables reusers to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon the material in any medium or format, so long as attribution is given to the creator.'

As Dinan (2004) reports major European countries such as Italy, France or Belgium founded the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1951. Throughout the 1960s, the cooperation became the trigger for the enlargement movement. This inclination continued in the following years and the number of members gradually increased. Organized collaborations that started on specific topics such as steel, coal, or atomic studies have evolved into a single organization over the years and have grown stronger over the years. Qualitative and quantitative increases continue in terms of the number of participants in cooperation and political effectiveness. Eventually, the European Union was officially established in 1993.

European Union experience of the UK goes back half a century. Although the country had been a member of the union, it was always a matter of debate among the political actors in the country before and after membership. According to Harris (1992), contrary to many countries occupied in Europe after World War II, the UK described itself as having emerged victorious from the war. Also, World War II had a unifying character among the British people, in which various distinctions were set aside and a kind of national unity was achieved. The exposure of all social and economic classes to the bad conditions of the war during the war brought people together; collectivism gained strength and individualism left its place to social actions in the post-war period. Depending upon the post-war context, The UK governments started to get closer to the European Union and even applied to become a member of the Community twice in the 1960s. However, these attempts were rejected, especially with the opposition of France. The United Kingdom eventually joined the union in 1973, bringing the number of European Union members to nine, along with Denmark and Ireland. Integration of the UK into the union gave moral strength to an ancient European state called 'the empire on which the sun never sets' to join the union, and material strength for the joining of an industrial power with rich resources, although it had some difficulties.

In many ways, Brexit is not a surprise when one looks at UK political history. Britons have always preferred to look at the glass half empty at European unification. Although the idea of an economic and political union with Europe is always a subject that finds many supporters; it has also become an area where so many dissident citizens are organized. For example, Helm (2016) reports that Margaret Thatcher, believing in the power of the transatlantic relationship, often mentioned in her speeches during her time in office that being under the control of a transnational power within the framework of Europe would create disadvantageous situations. So much so that although European scepticism is identified with the Brexit referendum, in fact, not one but two referendums have been held in order to leave the union over the course of decades.

Although there are sometimes positive discourses in the atmosphere created by these changing figures, The United Kingdom "has never joined either the eurozone or the Schengen area, and it managed to opt-out from the full application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (the Charter) on its territory" (Besirevic, 2020, p. 622). Over time, this situation started to support the existing and deepening problems related to the idea of being subject to the EU. Euroscepticism among citizens continues to increase, and many citizens have even started to attribute the causes of the worsening economy to European Unionist policies. Euroscepticism, which is prevalent in the UK political universe, has increased over time, combined with other factors. The cost of living crisis, anti-immigration, Austerity policies and the increasing discourse of politics of nostalgia focusing on Britain's imperial past have made the Brexit referendum necessary.

Following a referendum held on 23 June 2016, the United Kingdom finalised its intention to leave the EU on 29 March 2017, and Brexit took place on 31 January 2020. In the referendum, "the United Kingdom as a whole chose to leave the European Union (EU) by a narrow margin: 51.9% to 48.1% of those who voted" (Henderson et al., 2017, p. 631). Negotiations to sign a new Trade Agreement, which will shape relations between the EU and the UK in the new period, were completed on 24 December 2020, and the Agreement entered into force provisionally on 1 January 2021 and entered

into force on 1 May 2021. Many things have changed radically in the UK since Brexit.

### **Identity Politics and Mainstream Identities in the UK**

Identity politics refers to the ways in which individuals and groups organize around social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, and religion, to address issues of systemic oppression and discrimination. The United Kingdom is a diverse country with a range of identities including national, ethnic, cultural and religious identities. Overall, identities in the UK are complex and diverse, reflecting the country's rich cultural fabric and history. The most mentioned and ancient identity in the UK is naturally British. Mike Wayne argues that capital "has been a decisive force in helping to shape British national identities" (2018, p. 9). According to Wayne, within the framework of its historical development, British-based capital movements played a leading role in the formation of political and national identities in the country. The first British national identity, known as the 'Nation of shopkeepers', diversified over time with the development of maritime trade. For Wayne, "growth in trade preceded, helped capitalise and then helped expand other forms of capital and therefore extend the material terrain for other versions of national identity" (p. 10). There has been a relative increase in the diversity of identities in the UK, driven by maritime trade and new geographical discoveries.

With the industrial revolution, a new phase has begun in the diversity of UK identity. The British, who were called the nation of shopkeepers until 200 years ago, started to be known as the owner of 'the industrial workshop of the world' after the Industrial Revolution. Industrial capital then produced irreversible changes in the diversity of British identities. While these identities have positive qualities like 'the pioneers of the technic and industry', they also have negative features that are hostile to the environment, like "the Dirty Man of Europe" (Porritt, 1989 p. 489). Robin Richardson (2015) argues that Modern Britishness is a complex and multifaceted identity concept embracing a range of social, historical, political and cultural parameters. Robinson argues that modern British identity is a "multi-layered and multi-faceted mixture and muddle of turbulent anxieties and uncertainties around national identity" (p. 38). At the same time, Robinson argues that British identity is shaped by a series of tensions and contradictions, such as the tension between nationalism and internationalism, the tension between tradition and modernity, and the tension between individualism and community. He argues that these tensions reflect broader debates within British society about the nature and direction of modern British identity.

The United Kingdom's composition four primary countries; Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales, serves as the foundation for its diverse identity. In *British Cultural Identities*, Peter Childs and Mike Storry (2022) argue about the various regional identities that exist within Britain, and how they have been shaped by history, geography, and culture. The authors discuss different parts of England, including England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and how each region has its own distinct identity. They note that regional identities are often linked to local history and traditions, "such as Cornish (from Cornwall) and Manx (from the Isle of Man)" (p. 222). The authors also explore the influence of geography on regional identities, such as Scotland's rugged landscape that helped shape Scottish identity. The authors note that regional identities may also be influenced by economic factors, such as the decline of the coal industry in Wales, which has had a significant impact on Welsh identity.

According to David Voas and Alasdair Crockett (2005), the UK's religious identities are diverse and complex. Christianity is the predominant religion in the United Kingdom and the Church of England is the established church. The country is also home to other Christian denominations, including the Presbyterian Church, Roman Catholic Church and Methodist Church. Christianity has been the dominant religion for centuries, but its influence has waned in recent years. Voas and Crockett state that other religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Sikhism have grown in the UK due to

immigration and conversion. The authors also note that a significant percentage of the population is non-religious, with the number of people identifying as non-religious increasing in recent years. Religious identities in the United Kingdom are diverse, with a range of religions and beliefs represented. The main religions in the UK are Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Judaism.

In the UK Political identities have been the most crucial identity forms that define the general structure of the society and the general course of the country. As Frank McDonough (2016) states, class has historically played an important role in shaping politics and society in the UK. The class system is based on social and economic status, with different groups having different levels of power, influence and access to resources. This has led to a hierarchical structure in society and created the classical binary in the society: the tension between the upper class and the working class. The polarization “produced a society divided between ‘Us’ (the workers) and ‘Them’ (the rich and the bosses). Pubs always had a ‘public bar’ and a ‘lounge’” (p. 177). “The traditional upper-class members were “hereditary elite whose wealth and position were based on property and title. These were both used to gain substantial political privileges” (McDonough, 2016, p. 178) on the other hand, working class individuals generally have less political power and representation than those in the upper classes.

Political parties in the UK have often aligned themselves with certain class interests. For example, the Labour Party traditionally represents the interests of the working class and seeks to promote greater equality and social justice, while the Conservative Party traditionally represents the interests of the middle and upper classes and seeks to maintain the status quo. According to Alistair Clark’s statement based on the study, *Political Change in Britain: Basis of Electoral Choice*, done by David Butler and Donald Stoke, “72 per cent of the working class identified themselves as Labour supporters, a figure which rose to 77 per cent for the lower working class” (2018, p. 31). By contrast, the same study points out that more than 75 percent of the middle classes and 100 percent of the upper class reported that they identified as Conservative party voters.

According to Clark (2018), the Liberal Democrats, the third largest party in the Westminster system, are a party that has the capacity to get votes from both the working class and the upper classes. The relationship between class and politics has become more complex in recent years with changes in the economy and changes in social attitudes. For example, the decline of traditional working-class industries and the growth of the service sector have led to new forms of class identity and political participation. Precariat as “a new dangerous class” (Standing, 2011, p. 1) might be a suitable example for the new diversified social class positions. Additionally, issues such as gender, race, and identity have become increasingly important in shaping political views and trends. The Scottish National Party, “promoting Scotland’s interests rather than such ideological positioning” is a political organisation that focuses on anti-statism and decentralisation rather than class politics and advocates the independence of Scotland from the United Kingdom. Additionally, Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) is the major representative of identity politics in Wales and Democratic Unionist Party is for Northern Ireland.

Maria Soboleska and Robert Ford (2020) examine contemporary UK identity variations in detail in their work *Brexitland*. For example, the authors note that ethnic minority voters in the UK are generally close to liberal think tanks that hold a pro-immigrant position. According to the authors, these voters unconditionally approve of the immigrant-friendly policies of political parties, but generally do not support policy positions on LGBTQ+ or gender equality issues. The authors call this type of voter, who exhibits a kind of political expediency, “necessity Liberals.” (p. 6). In this respect, they differ from the political identity group they call “conviction liberals”, who are classically endowed with liberalism as an ideological stance and for academic and technical reasons. Soboleska and Ford (2020) also position a political identity group they call “identity conservatives” (p. 6) in opposition to the political identity group they call necessity liberals. This group is a political group

that divides society into two as 'us' and 'them', generally consisting of white men, and can be called the locomotive of the ethnocentrism approach, which is a political discourse.

### **Brexit and Political Identities in "Brexitland"**

After 2010 election, Euroscepticism grew stronger and Prime Minister David Cameron had to come up with new plans to be re-elected in 2015 and to win back his supporters who had moved to the UK Independence Party (UKIP) founded by Nigel Farage and who did not support the European Union. He also wanted to ensure that the eurosceptics in his own party remained in the party. As a result of these events, Jensen & Snaith (2016) state that Cameron declared as an election promise that he would ask the people through a referendum whether he would continue with the European Union if he became prime minister, and that he would continue on his way with the decision of the people. Thus, the road to Brexit was officially opened. As Brown (2017) informs, participation in the referendum was achieved with a rate of 72.2%, and the voters of the United Kingdom expressed a will to leave the European Union with a rate of 51.9%.

One important issue that was overlooked after the Brexit referendum was that identity, particularly British nationalism and ethnocentrism, played a role in deciding whether to leave the European Union. The European Union, which did not expect such a result, did not seem very prepared for the situation. Because the UK had been one of the strongest partners in the Union for years. The United Kingdom implemented the decision to leave as a result of the referendum and left the European Union in the first month of 2020. The United Kingdom, considering the fact that the common policies and privileges within the European Union were not sufficient for their own countries, added the word 'Brexit' to the world literature and ended 43 years of cooperation.

In 2015 general elections, the influence of identity politics was evident "in the rise of UKIP and the decline of the Liberal Democrats in England and Wales, and the rise of the SNP and decline of Labour in Scotland" (Soboleska and Ford, 2020, p. 223). However, the Conservatives managed to succeed by exploiting their geographical advantage and the continuation of traditional economic divisions. However, this return to political normality was short-lived, as their majority in the House of Commons forced an EU referendum, which quickly became more than a simple ballot question and a battle of identity politics. For Soboleska and Ford, the Leave side has turned the issue to ethnocentrism, instead of discussing the pros and cons of the European Union with quantitative and qualitative data. For instance, the leave side "drew attention to Turkey's 76 million-strong population, and linked this to immigration by presenting maps with very large arrows drawn from Turkey to the UK" (p. 227). On the other hand, "the Remain campaign was not able to mobilise tolerance and inclusiveness as core values to rally its own supporters around" (p. 229). Consequently, The EU Referendum has divided British voters along new fault lines, pushing traditional economic conflicts into the background and bringing identity-based conflicts to the forefront.

Norris and Inglehart (2019) examine voting trends from 2014 to 2017 and argue that they find rich sociological evidence to further test voter and party relationships over this period. The authors compare voting behavior and public opinion in the United Kingdom over time, examining the dynamics of support for authoritarian populism for both Brexit and recent reactionary parties such as UKIP. The authors analyze several studies conducted at different scales, using the results of the 2015 UK general election, the 2016 Brexit referendum, and the 2017 general election as a basis. The result "confirms that populism is indeed statistically significant as a predictor of voting Leave and supporting UKIP, as hypothesized." (p. 390). Calhoun (2017) argues that the interaction between Nationalism and populism is a phenomenon that resonates with the UK electorate. To Calhoun, "Nationalism flourishes precisely when people feel threatened by international forces. Populism flourishes when people feel betrayed by elites" (2017, p. 63). Calhoun states that Multiculturalism,

which became a state policy under the leadership of Tony Blair's Labour Party in the 1990s, turned into a nationalist populism after the mid-2000s instead of creating a cosmopolitan society as planned. This type of populism was also one of the important factors that triggered Brexit.

Soboleska and Ford (2020) prefer to name post-Brexit Britain as 'Brexitland'. They declare that 'Brexitland' is the name we give to our divided nation" (p. 2), the Brexit referendum is a turning point. They claim that a society whose unity has been damaged for many years has experienced a final division with Brexit, and they call this divided country Brexitland. According to Soboleska and Ford (2020), "The 2016 referendum was the first national political choice to be structured primarily around identity divides" (p. 11). For them, the 2016 Brexit referendum was the first election dominated by identity politics. Classic political polarizations such as class differences, income distribution and ideological oppositions were replaced by tensions between ethnic minorities and conflicts between new identity-focused groups such as whites and blacks or young and old. Identity-based polarizations marked the campaign period. During the campaign, new identity groups were formed as "two tribes of antagonists 'Leavers' and 'Remainers'" (p. 218), which brought together all these identity groups under two main headings.

During the referendum campaign, remainers based the need for the United Kingdom to remain the United States largely on economic grounds, while Leavers were fuelled by factors such as the immigration invasion, the loss of British values and the dream of becoming a superpower again. As John Curtice states, "remainers are mostly convinced that Britain's economy will be weakened by Brexit, the vast majority of very strong Leavers are of the opposite view" (2018, p. 16). Referendum identities are constructed through mutual accusations and hostilities. As "Leavers' attacked 'Remainers' as metropolitan elites stuck in a bubble of privilege" (Soboleska and Ford, 2020, p. 218), remainers labelled leavers as ignorant voters who knows nothing about the country's good.

### **Exploring Brexit identities in *Death of England* Trilogy**

The main argument of this article is to demonstrate that the reflections of political identities and cultural conflicts in the post-Brexit United Kingdom on contemporary English literature can be examined through theatre. The article explores how individuals in the United Kingdom, marked by deep identity divisions, confront identity, belonging and nationalism and redefine these concepts in a changing socio-political context through the *Death of England* trilogy by Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. The play explores how Brexit has exposed individual and generational tensions and addresses identity crises on a personal level. The present article discusses how Brexit has pushed traditional economic class conflicts into the background and brought identity-based divisions to the forefront. As a result, the plays bring the emotional and ideological fractures created by Brexit to the stage, demonstrating that theatre is a critical tool for understanding this transformation. *Death of England* was written by Roy Williams and Clint Dyer and commissioned by Guardian News and Media Ltd and the Royal Court Theatre. First staged at the Dorfman Theatre in 2020, this compelling work is set in the UK post-Brexit and explores deep social issues such as British identity, class, and race. The play begins with a striking speech by Michael at the funeral of his father Alan, immediately drawing the audience into the story. Furthermore, the fact that Alan, Michael and Delroy are played by the same actor enhances the multi-layered nature of the story, inviting the audience to explore the internal and external conflicts of the characters more deeply. According to Roy Williams (2023), the thematic structure of the play is shaped not only by individual loss but also by collective loss. The death of Michael's father and the decline of England's status as football champions serve as metaphors for the country's changing identity in a broader context. The play questions the lost opportunities of the white working class who feel left behind, the fading power of Britain, once an influential empire on the world stage, and how traditional ways of life are losing their place in new Britain rich with culture and colour. The hostility and tension created by these losses are at the heart of the play and are felt strongly even without being explicitly presented to the audience.



*Death of England: Delroy* is a compelling sequel to *Death of England*, written by Roy Williams and Clint Dyer. First staged at the Olivier Theatre in London in October 2020, the play focuses on Delroy, Michael's friend raised by his Jamaican-born mother who remained silent in the previous play. In *Death of England*, Delroy's British identity was challenged, and his pro-Brexit political stance is mocked. As Arifa Akbar (2020) states, in this sequel, themes of belonging and identity become the main focus of Delroy's story. The character responds to Michael's criticism with his unique wit and anger. Although Delroy is equipped with a rapid and uninterrupted narrative power like Michael's, his words are as full of humour as they are of anger. Delroy's uniquely witty charisma eases the play's sharp tensions while compellingly engaging the audience. *Death of England: Closing Time* is the final play in the trilogy and was first staged at the Dorfman Theatre in London in 2023. The events and situations described through Michael and Delroy in the first two plays are this time depicted with the help of Michael's sister and Delroy's partner Carly and Delroy's mother Denise. As Arifa Akbar asserts, "Clint Dyer and Roy Williams' state-of-the-nation series continues, this time giving the perspective of the women in its central duo's lives" (2023).

At the beginning of *Death of England*, Michael starts a monologue discussing what kind of person his father was at his father's coffin. He goes back to his childhood and tells that he once argued with Delroy about who broke his Nintendo and it turned into a fight. He states that his father wanted him to keep fighting Delroy until he won even after the fight was over, but he added that he never won. He says that his father covered his ears when a black player was insulted in Leyton Orient matches, "But never at his stall. Black, Asian, yellow, it didn't matter to him who bought flowers, not a jot" (Williams and Dyer, 2024, p. 13). From Michael's description, it is clearly understood that his father Alan has a racist political identity. Later in the monologue, Michael brings up an interesting point about the Brexit process and his father's political identity. He states that his father kept his negative comments about black people and other races to himself, but when the European referendum was announced, he could no longer hold it in. Michael states that the conversations his father had at the counter at that time were entirely about this issue, and that the Brexit process released the nationalist feelings that his father and many people around him had suppressed for years.

In *Death of England*, Michael says that his father got excited with statements like "we are going to get our country back, immigrants out" (Williams and Dyer, 2024, p. 17), which meant nothing to him but were very important to his father. He states that in the months leading up to the referendum, his father's conversations at the counter focused entirely on these issues and that during this period he made the worst sale he had made in years, but he never questioned or refused to question the reason for this. Michael states that after 'Leave' won the referendum, his father frequently said "England belongs to the English" (ibid, p. 13) and that this made him sound like someone who had never read a book or watched *Passage to India*. From what Michael says, it is clear that his father Alan had traditionally racist political views. However, from what Michael says, it is also clear that Alan experienced a transformation as a result of the Brexit referendum.

Identity Conservatists are a political group that can be called the locomotive of the ethnocentrism approach, which "is a technical term for a persistent tendency to see the social and political world as a battle between groups, pitting the familiar 'us' against the unfamiliar 'them'. This tendency makes this group experience demographic and social change as a threat, and as they want to slow or reverse this change" (Soboleska and Ford, 2020, p. 6). As an example of ethnocentrism, the authors give a group in the United Kingdom, generally led by white people known as 'school leavers', who are over middle age. This group is a politically extreme group that works to slow down any kind of change in society. According to Soboleska and Ford, both good and bad changes scare this group. One of the symbolic political stances of this group, anti-immigration, for example, is based on this ethnocentric attitude. They always produce hate speech through groups belonging to the social layers they marginalize as "them" due to the pain of social transformations.

In *Death of England: Closing Time*, Alan states that “an Englishman’s home is his castle” (2024, p. 110). It has been a common proverb and, as Archer Taylor (1965) mentions, the earliest recorded use of this proverb dates back to 1567, and it has remained a part of British everyday life in some form ever since. Alan certainly did not use this proverb, which sums up the fact that the British people should decide for themselves what happens in their own homes and that no one should tell them what to do in such an innocent context. Alan refers to ‘home’ as the territory of the United Kingdom. He argues that the arrival of immigrants has polluted this land and that, like a man’s private property, the homeland must be defended. These words clearly symbolise Alan’s ethnocentric character. Alan, in addition to voting Leave in the referendum, is an identity conservative who has internalized his vote too much. When Michael’s description of Alan is considered, Alan’s ethnocentric political identity becomes clear. In addition, Alan’s ethnocentric preferences are also influenced by his belonging to the ‘Leavers’ group, which is a Brexit political identity.

In *Encyclopedia of Personality and Individual Differences* (2020), ethnocentrism is described as “a multidimensional attitudinal construct, comprising intergroup and intragroup attitudes, emanating from the belief that one’s own ethnic group is of immense importance” (p. 1701). Soboleska and Ford (2020), “ethnocentrism may be an aspect of the ‘authoritarian personality’” (p. 37) and Alan is a quite convenient character of this kind of personality. In addition to the level of education, another defining feature of ethnocentrism is naturally ethnic identity. In recent years, due to increasing ethnic diversity, new gaps have emerged between ethnocentric voters and those who reject group-centred worldviews. In *Death of England*, Alan’s remarks about English national football player Raheem Sterling during a conversation are particularly significant in this context:

**Alan** Look at their shirts. They look like table cloths.– *he joked*. Can’t believe he’s still playing Sterling he’s shit for England.– now looking serious, almost violent. I thought I’d try and calm him down.

**Michael** He’s low on confidence aint he?

**Alan** He’s low on fucking Englishness.–

*he sharply replied, swigging his third pint.* (Williams and Dyer, 2024, p. 14)

This conversation clearly reveals the authoritarian personality and Alan’s ethnocentric worldview. The phrase “low on fucking Englishness” that Alan uses to criticize the football player Sterling shows that he defines the concept of “Englishness” within a narrow framework of national identity and is prone to excluding individuals who do not fit this framework. Sterling’s attribution of his performance to a lack of “Englishness” implies that Alan relies not only on rational reasons such as lack of talent or confidence but also on cultural and ethnic prejudices. This perspective shows that Alan’s authoritarian attitude is based on a mindset that sees his own ethnic group as superior to others. Moreover, his use of a sarcastic tone throughout the conversation and his increasingly violent attitude clearly reveal how this prejudice guides his behaviour.

Soboleska and Ford (2020) note that identity conservative voters have until recently constituted the overwhelming majority of the total electorate and highlight the importance of this group for understanding UK politics. From the ethnocentric white school leavers perspective, society has evolved, leaving these individuals feeling left behind, with their primary perceived only failing being their inability to adapt. As a result, they often adopt a conservative stance, aiming to slow or reverse social changes that they regard as a threat to their group and that erode their former dominant status. For ethnocentric white school leavers, change is synonymous with loss. The loss of their position and the loss of cultural cohesion and continuity that they value terrify them. Many within this group regard the expansion of education and growing ethnic diversity with a loss of political status. Such a tendency is also consistent with the ethnocentric worldview of these voters. When such people are chronically inclined to view politics as a conflict between ‘us’ and ‘them’, they will



naturally tend to believe that the rise of new groups can only be accommodated by marginalising formerly dominant groups in politics. It is therefore not surprising that restoration slogans such as “immigrants out!” (Williams and Dyer, 2024, p. 19) or “take the country back from the Blacks” (p. 20) used by Alan in the play resonate with identity conservative voters. All types of identity stances are represented in the *Death of England: Delroy*.

Such divisive expressions can be observed in Delroy's speeches. His monologue at the very beginning of the play, which is adorned with issues of belonging, identity, and national consciousness, can be a good example of this situation. At the beginning of a long speech in which Delroy questions his own life and existence in the world, he also makes speeches touching on his national identity:

**Delroy** That's my favourite ... he ain't paid his bills and I'm the scum. 'How dare you!' Jokes, man. He drinks down the last of the Guinness and opens another. Then ... he wants my sympathy ... I mean what the actual fuck ... I was like Mate, I'm a black man. Of West Indian descent, claiming some kinda Britishness ... on the account of the fact that I was born here and my grandparents was born in a British colony that 'reach inna England' with a British passport in the fifties, and had learnt all the British values there, of not giving a shit about anybody! Part from their kin ... I'm a product of this country! (Williams and Dyer, 2024, p. 51)

As a Black man, Delroy constantly feels the need to emphasize his British identity. In *Death of England: Closing Time*, he even defends the Crown against his mother Denise, who disdains his coronation ceremony, by saying “Slavery is over, let them have their day” (Williams and Dyer, 2024, p. 124). Britishness always runs through some of his speeches, and it is important for Delroy to insist on this. Because deep down, he lives with the preconception that the British, especially the white British, do not see him as one of them. This situation makes the audience sense from the very beginning that Delroy is psychologically deficient or fragile. In other words, Delroy does not feel free and equal in the country where he was born, paid taxes, voted, and went to school. According to Soboleska and Ford (2020), the rise of ethnic diversity has led to new debates about the meaning of British identity. While ethnic minorities born in the UK have embraced a multicultural understanding of Britishness that recognises and includes them, older white voters still cling to a traditional sense of Britishness shaped by a homogeneous society before immigration. This traditional approach has been so strong at times that state-backed repatriation schemes have been proposed to reverse ethnic change, and have won the support of many white voters for many years following mass immigration.

Delroy was born in the United Kingdom and has been shaped by the sociology of this country since childhood. However, he always carries a deep sense of immigration in his heart, as his ancestors immigrated to the United Kingdom. In *Death of England: Delroy*, he asserts:

**Delroy:** all of dem island mentality innit. All that European shit ... don't connect to me, man, as long as my tax ain't too high, why should I care? ...no one cares bout me. Had no European Union questioning the police stop and search figures for black people here. Checking up on our black deaths in custodies, black mental health figures... no European law on dat is there. 'Bout he's cussing me out at his dad's funeral for voting Brexit. (Williams and Dyer, 2024, p. 53)

Although Delroy was born in the United Kingdom, he is still a second-generation black immigrant due to his family's ethnic origins. Soboleska and Ford (2020) emphasize that ethnic minority voters in the United Kingdom have traditionally been more liberal. They also reveal that in the Brexit vote, ethnic minority voters voted 'Leave' instead of the relatively more liberal option of 'Remain'. This result is surprising to them. Delroy's words reflect the social and political identity search of a Black British person who is confronted with his immigrant identity. Delroy does not want to define

himself as an immigrant because, according to him, the indifference of the European Union and Europe in general to the injustices against Black British people has made it difficult for him to accept this identity. Also, “ethnocentric views are prone to perceive immigrants as a threat to the national in-group and will mobilize to defend their national in-group” (Soboleska and Ford, 2020, p. 43), thus Delroy refrains from being labelled as an immigrant. He also bases his choice of “Leave” on Brexit on the lack of any effective intervention by the European Union against the mistreatment of Black people in the UK. For him, he has no connection with Europe itself and sees no reason to be interested in its policies outside of his personal interests. Delroy’s perspective includes not only an identity-based rejection but also a critique of the discriminatory nature of social structures and policies.

It is interesting that Delroy used sentences in his speech that were incriminating the European Union. Another major factor in the ethnic minority voting “leave” appears here. It is a known fact that the Windrush Generation, known as “British citizens who came to the UK from Commonwealth countries in the period 1948–1971” (Taylor, 2020, p. 3), was subjected to intense procedures and psychological pressure in order to become British citizens. Before the referendum, “the idea that leaving the EU might lead to more equal treatment of all migrants, with greater control of European migration and more liberal rules for Commonwealth migrants reflecting their home nations’ historical connections to Britain was popular among ethnic minority voters” (Soboleska and Ford, 2020, p. 237). This generation and their children are disturbed by the fact that the last wave of EU-based immigrants, who came to the country intensively during Tony Blair’s government, have had a relatively more comfortable and practical citizenship application system than their own. As a member of a Windrush Generation family, Delroy remembers on a postmemorial level that his family and circle were subjected to intense procedures and psychological pressure in order to become British citizens. It is an indisputable fact that this was Delroy’s motivation behind voting Leave in the Brexit referendum. As a second generation descendant of the post-Second World war immigration wave, Delroy was born and raised in Ebghland. Even though his ethnicity is different and he has been marginalized at certain periods of his life, Delroy finds himself marginalizing immigrants who came to the United Kingdom with another wave of immigration in the 1990s. In fact, in addition to not wanting them, Delroy was also affected by the danger of new waves of immigration, which was frequently emphasized in the Leave campaign, and he determined his voting preference accordingly.

## Conclusion

Roy Williams and Clint Dyer’s *Death of England* trilogy investigates the depths of identity, belonging and cultural conflicts in post-Brexit Britain. Each play in the trilogy examines how the characters define and transform their identities and social roles. Brexit is not just a political choice, but also a major transformation in the cultural and social structure of England. Each character experiences different aspects of this change after Brexit and reveals their own search for identity. The first play is *Death of England*. This play begins at the funeral of Michael’s father Alan, which marks a turning point in the search for identity and social questions. Michael’s relationship with his father opens with a monologue in which he questions Alan’s views on ethnic identity and racism. Alan supported the Leave campaign and argued that England’s cultural identity was under threat with statements such as ‘England belongs to the English’. Michael criticizes his father’s racist and ethnocentric views, while explaining how Brexit has brought such feelings to the surface. Alan’s identity crisis is not only an individual issue but also reveals the social tensions of the post-Brexit era. Michael questions his father’s views and tries to understand England’s historical identity and how this identity has transformed.

*Death of England: Delroy* focuses on Delroy’s perspective, as the name suggests. Unlike Michael, Delroy defends his own identity and discusses his connection to the concept of ‘Britishness’. Delroy

defines himself as British, but on the other hand, he is also influenced by his origins and past. During the Brexit process, he feels that the European Union is not beneficial enough for the Black British community and votes leave. Delroy's story reveals the efforts of ethnic minorities to redefine their identities, and the feeling of exclusion imposed on them by the social structure. While his search for identity is shaped as an individual effort to defend his freedom and rights, the problems of social identity and belonging are also brought to a broader perspective. Delroy struggles with the divisive discourses brought about by Brexit in his quest for a definition of 'Englishness' that does not ignore cultural diversity and historical ties.

The third play, *Death of England: Closing Time*, deals with social issues from the perspective of female characters. Carly questions the worldviews of men as Delroy's partner, while Denise challenges the moulds of the past and family as Delroy's mother. This play goes beyond the male-dominated narrative and says more about women's lives and their social and cultural identities. Carly and Denise's stories reflect the experiences of women who resist social norms and the effects of the past, trying to reshape their own identities. This play discusses the effects of social transformation on individual and family relationships, while also revealing how women adapt to this transformation and construct their own identities.

The trilogy deals with the social tensions and identity searches of the post-Brexit period. Michael's father Alan sees ethnic diversity as a threat by confining his ethnic identity within a certain national framework, while Delroy, as an individual who questions his own belonging and British identity, opposes social injustice. The tension between the perspectives of these two characters reflects the social changes in England after Brexit, offering the audience a deep intellectual experience. While the conflict between Alan and Michael reveals the effects of the wave of nationalism brought by Brexit on individual relationships, Delroy's story offers an important perspective on the exclusion and identity crisis that ethnic minorities face. This trilogy examines the changes in England's social structure after Brexit, how different identity groups cope with this change, and how each individual constructs their own identity. Through characters such as Michael, Alan, Delroy, Carly, and Denise, the audience is shown the social and cultural effects of Brexit through cultural conflicts, identity crises, and questions of belonging. Each of these characters plays an important role in understanding England's modern identity and reflects the difficulties of this identity.

### Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

### References

- Akbar, A. (2020, November 5). Death of England: Delroy review – brash and brilliant theatre. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2020/nov/05/death-of-england-delroy-review-olivier-national-theatre-london-roy-williams-clint-dyer>
- Akbar, A. (2023, October 10). Death of England: Closing Time review – riotous comedy with a serious sting. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2023/oct/10/death-of-england-closing-time-review-dorfman-national-theatre-hayley-squires-clint-dyer-roy-williams>
- Besirevic, V. (2020). *A short history of Brexit*. In T. Ilić & M. Božić (Eds.), *Nomophylax: Collection of papers in honor of Srđan Šarkić* (pp. 621–645). PFUUB & Službeni Glasnik.
- Bizumic, B. (2020). Ethnocentrism. In *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences* (pp. 1415–1418). Springer International Publishing.

- Brown, H. (2017). Post-Brexit Britain: Thinking about 'English nationalism' as a factor in the EU referendum. *International Politics Reviews*, 5(1), 1–12.
- Butler, D., & Stoke, D. (1974). *Political change in Britain: Basis of electoral choice*. Springer.
- Calhoun, C. (2017). Populism, nationalism and Brexit. *Brexit: Sociological Responses*, 57-76.
- Clark, A. (2018). *Political parties in the UK*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Curtice, J. (2018). *The emotional legacy of Brexit: How Britain has become a country of 'remainers' and 'leavers'*. National Centre for Social Research Report.
- Dinan, D. (2004). *Europe recast: A history of European Union* (Vol. 373). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fontaine, P. (2010). *Europe in 12 lessons* (p. 6). Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Harris, J. (1992). War and social history: Britain and the home front during the Second World War. *Contemporary European History*, 1(1), 17–35.
- Helm, T. (2016, September 3). Margaret Thatcher would not have supported Brexit, says top aide. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/sep/03/margaret-thatcher-would-not-have-supported-brexit>
- Henderson, A., Jeffery, C., Wincott, D., & Wyn Jones, R. (2017). How Brexit was made in England. *The British journal of politics and international relations*, 19(4), 631-646.
- Jensen, M. J., & Snaith, H. (2016). When politics prevails: The political economy of a Brexit. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 23(9), 1302–1310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2016.1174531>
- McDonough, F. (2016). Class and politics. In *British cultural identities* (pp. 199–222). Routledge.
- Norris P, Inglehart R. Brexit. In: *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge University Press; 2019:368-406.
- Porritt, J. (1989). The United Kingdom: The dirty man of Europe? *RSA Journal*, 137(5396), 488–500.
- Richardson, R. (2015). British values and British identity: Muddles, mixtures, and ways ahead. *London Review of Education*.
- Sobolewska, M., & Ford, R. (2020). *Brexitland*. Cambridge University Press.
- Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Storry, M., & Childs, P. (Eds.). (2022). *British cultural identities*. Taylor & Francis.
- Taylor, A. (1965). The road to an "Englishman's house...". *Romance Philology*, 19(2), 279–285.
- Taylor, C. (2020). Representing the Windrush generation: Metaphor in discourses then and now. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 17(1), 1–21.
- Voas, D., & Crockett, A. (2005). Religion in Britain: Neither believing nor belonging. *Sociology*, 39(1), 11–28.
- Wayne, M. (2018). *England's discontents: Political cultures and national identities*. Lightning Source Inc.
- Williams, R. (2023, September 12). 'We messed with some heads': Roy Williams on tackling a torn nation in Death of England. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2023/sep/12/roy-williams-death-of-england-clint-dyer-national-theatre>
- Williams, R., & Dyer, C. (2024). *Death of England: The plays*. Methuen Drama.