

‘It’s (not) coming home’: desire, drive and the melancholy of English football

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Desire, Drive and the Melancholy of English Football: 'It's (not) Coming Home'

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Abstract

In 2021, the men’s English national football team reached their first final at a major international tournament since winning the World Cup in 1966. This success followed their previous achievement of reaching the semi-finals (knocked-out by Croatia) at the 2018 World Cup. True to form, the defeats proved unfalteringly English; with the 2021 final echoing previous tournament defeats, as England lost to Italy on penalties. However, what resonated with the predictability of an English defeat, was the accompanying chant, ‘it’s coming home’. A ubiquitous presence throughout the course of both tournaments—while chanted at England football matches, it was also repeated across social media, the press and commercial advertising—the chant originates from the 1996 single, *Three Lions (Football’s Coming Home)*, performed by David Baddiel, Frank Skinner and The Lightning Seeds.

In what follows critical attention will be given to examining how the song offers what will be argued is a melancholic outlook. By re-approaching examples of English nostalgia and hubris, this chapter will expose how illustrations of English melancholy offer the potential for promoting collective forms of expression, which, when contextualized alongside England’s lack of footballing success (for the men’s team, at least), can be offset against a melancholic mediation that is cognizant of the centrality of loss—both for the subject and our collective sporting endeavours.

Introduction

In 2021, the men’s English national football team reached their first final at a major international tournament since winning the World Cup in 1966.¹ This success followed their previous achievement of reaching the semi-finals (knocked-out by Croatia) at the 2018 World Cup. True to form, the defeats proved unfalteringly English; with the 2021 final echoing previous tournament defeats, as England lost to Italy on penalties.²

However, what resonated with the predictability of an English defeat, was the accompanying chant, ‘it’s coming home’. A ubiquitous presence throughout the course of both tournaments—while chanted at England football matches, it was also repeated across social media, the press and commercial advertising—the chant originates from the 1996 single, *Three Lions (Football’s Coming Home)*, performed by David Baddiel, Frank Skinner and The Lightning Seeds.

In what follows critical attention will be given to examining how the song offers what will be argued is a melancholic outlook. By re-approaching examples of English nostalgia and hubris, this chapter will expose how illustrations of English melancholy offer the potential for promoting collective forms of expression, which, when contextualized alongside England’s lack of footballing success (for the men’s team, at least), can be offset against a melancholic mediation that is cognizant of the centrality of loss—both for the subject and our collective sporting endeavours.³

In meeting these aims, this chapter will ultimately seek to both introduce and apply a psychoanalytic perspective to sport, football and social theory. For psychoanalysis, any critical interpretation of our social practices requires us ‘to question the specifics of desire’ (Reynoso 2021, 593). Such questioning proves essential to the study of sport (and its enjoyment), for which the most puzzling aspect is the fact that while our relation to sport remains driven by attempts at ‘victory’, ‘what the average fan will have to acknowledge, even begrudgingly, is that much of fandom involves tarrying with failure and loss’ (Reynoso 2021, 593). It is in tarrying with this inherent ‘loss’ that a melancholic outlook can prove significant.

“Cause I remember...’: England’s national nostalgia

The original release of *Three Lions* accompanied England’s hosting of the 1996 European championship (‘Euro ‘96’).⁴ Originally referring to the fact that ‘Euro ‘96’ was the first time that England had hosted a major football tournament since 1966 (when they hosted the World Cup), the phrase has come to certify a provocative English hubris, with the assumption that football was (or presumptuously *is*) returning home to ‘England’—a nation who so often credits itself with ‘inventing’ the game of football. Since then, the line has undoubtedly become tied to the desire for an international trophy to ‘come home’. This development was echoed by the fact that Italian fans

provided their own resignification ('it's coming Rome') during the 2020 European Championship final.⁵

With criticisms suggesting that the lyrics help to perpetuate an arrogant English exceptionalism, alluding to certain national myths that evoke a sense of English entitlement, the chant can be perceived as a clear example of English nostalgia: a nostalgia which, in the case of football, is repeatedly associated with England's success in '66 as well as a post-war fascination tied to working-class grit and true English professionalism (Holt 1992). Though these themes underlie the song's lyrics, more broadly, they remain a reoccurring presence within accounts of English sporting culture as well as its nationalism and national identity (Black, Fletcher and Lake 2020). In fact, during the Euro '96 finals, Garland and Rowe (1999, 82) highlighted how 'Nostalgia for a lost era of football triumph and national self-certainty was a recurrent feature of the press coverage'. Equally, for Carrington (1998), the 'it's coming home' chant constituted a mantra for a nostalgic, culturally homogenous, and racially 'white' England. In so doing, both the chant and the Euro '96 tournament were neither representative nor inclusive, but, instead, through the conjunction of sport and popular culture helped to perpetuate a pervasive cultural racism.

Certainly, while examples of British/English decline continue to be filtered through narratives that seek to frame this decline as set against Britain's former imperial dominance (Black 2016, 2019), to assert that the song offers nothing more than an ethnocentric account of England's control of the game, as well as an open resentment towards the apparent defects of uncontrolled immigration, is to play into the very hands of those who would seek to delimit what is 'good' about the nation and, thus, what must be 'dropped' and excluded. If anything, it downplays the extent to which such an 'impossible object'—in this case, the nation's 'essence'—is predicated on the fact that there is some *assumed* national essence that can be protected and shared amongst the included, while also critiqued and condemned on the grounds that it establishes exclusionary practices (Black 2021b). Whether one adopts a position of fervent nationalism (bolstered by a nostalgic 'desire' to return to the nation's past) or whether one justifiably critiques the very racial boundaries that delimit a sense of (false) national homogeneity, what both positions assert is a conception of the nation that bears no antagonism and which rests solely on the impossible demand that this 'nation' could ever be so clearly defined and so easily united.

Paradoxically, therefore, whether one remains favourable to promoting a nostalgic ‘English’ depiction or seeking its critique, both positions maintain a politically conservative social form, which either willingly relies upon or critically understates the importance of the ‘nostalgic promise’: a promise predicated on the fact that ‘Nostalgia remains a useful political tool only insofar as one doesn’t effectuate it’ (McGowan 2013, 44). In other words, it is only in relation to a nostalgia that cannot ever return to ‘the past’ that its cultural and political effectiveness is maintained amongst both its proponents and its detractors. Indeed, it is the contention of this chapter that the song—and specifically the chant, ‘it’s coming home’—does not exhibit a nostalgic significance, but, rather, points to the importance of adopting and promoting a melancholic outlook.

‘Everyone seems to know the score...’: Melancholic loss

We can differentiate between nostalgia and melancholy by noting that, while both rely upon ‘the past’, it is melancholy which ‘describes an outlook that looks less to re-living the past than to coping with the contemporary situation in which members of a particular linguistic and cultural community find themselves’ (Resnick 2008, 790). This emphasis on ‘coping’ is echoed in a second differentiation that is identified in the distinction between mourning and melancholy, as detailed in the work of Sigmund Freud (2005).⁶ In a clinical sense, mourning is often preferred to—even encouraged over—melancholy, so that while mourning refers to a painful working through of loss, from which the individual can then ‘move past’ (indeed, one works through their loss, eventually finding some manner in which to ‘let go’); for the melancholic, there is no separation from loss, no ‘moving beyond’. Thus, melancholy occurs when one can’t let go of this loss, and, as a result, the subject ends-up in a position of inertia, where, consumed by loss, they suffer psychological dysfunction. In examples of nationalism, instances of melancholy become apparent when a certain lamentation for a ‘lost’ national past is performed (Black 2016; Resnick 2008).

Nonetheless, Freud’s differentiations between mourning and melancholy have come under criticism, especially when considered in relation to historical traumas and catastrophe. For example, does the preference for mourning simply absolve one of the loss of the past? What if one’s relation to this very past is based upon their own perpetration of violence, or, in the case of former imperial states, the perpetuation of an

abhorrent colonialism, for whom responsibility can, following Freud, simply be abdicated and, ultimately, forgotten. According to McIvor (2020, 37), ‘Mourning, in this context, is perhaps only a means of reinforcing existing dynamics of power and powerlessness—calling on the (relatively) powerless to forgive and forget that which has not even been remembered’.

These contentions underscore Paul Gilroy’s (2005) account of contemporary Britain as marked by a national malaise that remains tied to its imperial decline. Encapsulated in what he refers to as a ‘postcolonial melancholia’, for the U.K., it is the effects of this melancholy that have resulted in ‘a collective loss of memory that manifest[s] itself as an identity crisis and a neurotic preoccupation with heritage’ (Dworkin 2009, 532). Such manifestation works to avoid:

the painful obligations to work through the grim details of imperial and colonial history and to transform paralyzing guilt into a more productive shame that would be conducive to the building of a multicultural nationality that is no longer phobic about the prospect of exposure to either strangers or otherness (Gilroy 2005, 99).

It is this obligation which is ambivalently managed by a postcolonial melancholia that works to disavow the very melancholy it relies upon. As Fisher (2014, 24) explains, ‘The postcolonial melancholia doesn’t (just) refuse to accept change; at some level, he refuses to accept that change has happened at all’.

However, what remains under-explored in Gilroy’s (2005) account is the effects of this disavowal in elucidating upon the misrecognition it subsequently relies upon. Though, for Gilroy, the loss of empire can be ‘transformed’ via a socially critical and politically engaged discussion of its legacies, what it neglects to recognise is the sense of ‘loss’ that mediates the melancholic’s position and how our present relations to the past are grounded in but also maintained by this constitutive ‘loss’. As a result, Gilroy’s postcolonial melancholia never elucidates upon the very loss that pre-empted the melancholic’s disavowal, ignoring the fact that it is this disavowal that works to ‘protect’ the melancholic subject, for whom the past as well as the present is always-already lost.

Indeed, the distinction between past and present in accounts of melancholy is given further consideration by Slavoj Žižek (2008, 14-15), who argues that ‘when a

certain historical moment is (mis)perceived as the moment of loss of some quality, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the lost quality only emerged at this very moment of its alleged loss'. Certainly, Žižek's remarks should not be viewed as a dismissal of historical loss but, rather, reconsidered on the basis that it is the (mis)perception of an 'alleged' loss which is fundamentally related to a lack that forever frames this loss. It is on this basis, that Žižek's approach to melancholy offers a stark critique to that of Freud, drawing instead from the psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan. Here, Žižek (2000, 658) notes:

Against Freud, one should assert the conceptual *and* ethical primacy of melancholy. In the process of the loss, there is always a remainder that cannot be integrated through the work of mourning, and the ultimate fidelity is the fidelity to this remainder. Mourning is a kind of betrayal, the second killing of the (lost) object, while the melancholic subject remains faithful to the lost object, refusing to renounce his or her attachment to it.

Elaborating upon this 'faithful' relation to the 'lost object', Žižek adds that 'A melancholic is somebody who has the object of desire but which has lost the desire itself. That is to say, you lose that which makes you desire the desired object' (Žižek and Daly 2004, 112-113). Indeed, what remains central to Žižek's (2000) account is the very way in which the melancholic relates to but also, more importantly, accepts 'loss'.

According to Lacan (2004), this sense of loss is, for the subject, a constitutive part of the subject's symbolic castration: that is, it occurs as part of the subject's entry into language. Here, language presents no fulfilment for the subject, but rather cuts the subject—or, 'castrates' the subject—from a *perceived* prior fulfilment, now lost. The key to Lacan's (2004) account of loss, however, is that this loss is primarily imagined. The subject never had what it thinks it lost and it is this constant searching for the lost object which preserves our desire. Where the subject's desire is founded in relation to some lost object, it is this 'impossible' object which, for Lacan (1991), constitutes the subject's lack. As a result, attempts to overcome loss are often fuelled by excessive efforts to overcome this inherent lack (which, nonetheless, remain lacking), with sport proving a notable example. Reynoso (2021, 594) emphasises that for both 'fans and many retired athletes ... , winning does not satisfy permanently but only perpetuates the quest for more'.

Consequently, it is not the case that when we receive the object we desire our desire disappears, but that it is desire itself which must continually be perpetuated. As a result, 'Desire, ... is the desire for nothing nameable' (Lacan 1991, 223). Though we remain tied to objects of desire, what this desire rests upon is the very 'object-cause' (*objet petit a*) of desire itself, that which causes us to desire in the first place. If, as Lacan (1991, 223) asserts, 'Desire is a relation of being to lack', then it is this object-cause that is fuelled by the subject's lack.⁷ In the case of melancholia, what we perceive is a 'subject who possesses the object but has lost his desire for it because the *cause* that made him desire this object has withdrawn, lost its efficiency' (Žižek 2000, 662, italics added). It is in this way that the lacking object takes on a certain positivization for the melancholic: the 'presence' of the object is total, but the desire for it (the object-cause of desire) has been lost. In so doing, the 'deceitful translation of lack into loss enables us to assert our possession of the object; what we never possessed can also never be lost, so the melancholic, in his unconditional fixation on the lost object, in a way possesses it in its very loss' (Žižek 2000, 659-660).

To this extent, we can conceive how it is the melancholic who presents a transmutation of lack into loss. For example, in the case of a melancholic romance, it is often the lack of the very romantic relationship which in turn becomes melancholically transferred to one of loss. What is unique to this melancholic process is that the object of desire—the romantic relationship—never occurred and thus retroactively the lack of this relationship is conceived as already lost (before it even began). Subsequently, in contrast to any 'overcoming' or 'working through' of melancholy, what the melancholic position actively announces is the importance of loss and, as will be depicted in the case of 'it's coming home', the transferral of this loss into a shared symbolic frame of reference.

'Never stopped me dreaming': From desire to drive

Through the loss of desire, the melancholic stays clear of availing the desired object any exceptional status. What the melancholic provides, therefore, is the opportunity for an orientation that does not submit to the burdens of desire. In this sense, rather than succumbing to the ambivalence that constitutes one's disavowal of loss, as seen in Gilroy's (2005) postcolonial melancholia, the nation's past, its former glories, and its sense of purpose are for the melancholic already pre-emptively lost, thus, traversing

desire by aligning the melancholic with the constitutive loss that structures both object and subject. This alternate experience of loss, separate from desire, steers towards Lacan's (2004) account of the drive.

Primarily, the distinction between desire and drive is one that can be articulated via the relation between the object-cause of desire and the location of its loss. For desire, the object-cause is always-already lost, resulting in the subject desiring a reprieve to this loss, so that desire 'emerges as lost' (Žižek 2006, 62). In the case of drive, however, the object-cause 'is ... loss itself', so that 'in the shift from desire to drive, we pass from the *lost object* to *loss itself as an object*' (Žižek 2006, 62). In sum, 'the weird movement called "drive" is not driven by the "impossible" quest for the lost object; it is *a push to enact "loss"—the gap, cut, distance—itsself directly*' (Žižek 2006, 62).⁸

In examples of nationalism, we can observe the distinction between desire and drive as the void (or gap) which constitutes nationalism's 'lost object' (Black 2021b). Here, 'The mythic point of origin around which nationalism revolves is actually nothing but a gap or void that is positivized through the actions of believers' (Wood 2012, 37). This can be seen in Kenny's (2016, 300) claim that, for some, Englishness 'is ... a kind of void, an empty vessel'. This is echoed by Niven (2020), who highlights that 'One of the major problems with contemporary debates about "Englishness" is that England does not really exist as either a coherent idea or a concrete political reality'. The 'unsurprising' result of this is that 'England' very easily ends up 'as a receptacle for feelings of political disenfranchisement' (Niven 2020). As a receptacle to such disenfranchisement, we can link these examples to a constitutive void for which an apparent loss underlies a 'mythic point of origin' that structures the very object-cause of desire (Wood 2012, 37). That is, it is our desire to fill the void—in this case to fill the 'empty vessel' of nationalism with 'mythic origins' or 'feelings' of 'disenfranchisement'—that permits us to mask or veil our loss with an array of opposing and contradictory national myths, fantasmatic narratives and nostalgic lamentations.⁹

Thus, in contrast to the metonymic process that underscores (nationalist) desire, we can, in accordance with the object-loss of drive, seek to locate a position which echoes that of the melancholic. We can, in other words, 'enjoy the experience of loss—the loss of the privileged object' (McGowan 2013, 70). This is clearly echoed in accounts of sport where so much of 'one's time [and enjoyment] as a fan is psychically spent avoiding loss, displacing loss, inflicting loss, minimizing loss, repairing loss and

tolerating loss' (Reynoso 2021, 593). The effects of this form of enjoyment—predicated on drive and adherent to the melancholic position—is one that can both impede but also reorientate the potentially debilitating effects of nationalism through examples of melancholy. I would go further here and argue that what melancholy provides—especially in accounts of nationalism—is the direct enactment of the presence of the lost object, from which a 'preoccupation with the past that often appears to be nostalgic [... can] contain a strong element of critical reservation' (Purifoy 2010, 26). Such critical reservation is essential, not just for its aversion to a nostalgic promise of fulfilment, but for the fact that it prescribes a melancholic mediation that presupposes the very loss that endorses one's desire. It is this sense of melancholy that is best encapsulated in the 'it's coming home' chant.

'It's coming home...': The melancholic enjoyment of loss

In interpretations of the 'it's coming home' chant, and the song itself, due attention has been given to the sense of 'irony' it evokes. Greene (2018) asserted that 'the chant-turned-phrase-turned-meme is a winking catch-all to evoke an ironic sense of hope that England could go all the way'. Indeed, the prevalence of such 'humour' was echoed by the current England manager, Gareth Southgate, who sought to link the song with well-known British comedies, such as *Fawlty Towers*, but who also suggested that such humour can very easily be misconstrued as a sense of English 'entitlement' (Mann-Bryans 2018).

Notably, examples of irony are, for the English, a formative part of what Easthope describes as a repetition of Empire. Here, examples of irony allow the English to recognise the 'inevitably' of empire's loss, while also mourning this loss itself. Easthope's appraisal bears a notable resemblance to the ambivalence that characterises Gilroy's (2005) postcolonial melancholia; an ambivalence evidenced in Malcolm's (2012, 163) concern that humour frequently serves to 'absolve the English from the negative connotations' associated with exclusionary forms of English identification. However, what each of these examples speak to is the very way in which irony serves to *distance* the comic defender from the social context, allowing them to humorously discount any cries of wrongdoing (Black 2021a). Accordingly, what examples of irony reveal is the very disavowal they contain *and* rely upon: expressed via a certain... 'I know this is racist, but I'm being ironic, let me have it (and have a laugh)'.

To this end, I argue that neither the chant, nor the song, depict some form of ‘ironic Englishness’, but that any notion of comedy which may be perceived from the chant, stems primarily from the comic subversion that it melancholically enacts (Žižek 2000). This subversion is encountered when examples of loss, perceived as a generative feature in the practice of sport as well as its spectatorship, are pinned to the subject’s lack (Lacan 1991). This lack is exhibited when we consider the far more obvious assertion that, in 2021, for many attending the games, fan parks, bars, pubs or watching from home, the jubilation of England’s success in ’66 was a triumph that took place before they were born, and, as such, the essential narrative elements that comprise the lyrics have never been experienced. Equally, though these elements constitute a lack for those who did not experience England’s World Cup success, such lack is also apparent for those whose very lived experiences of ’66 posit an absence that continually frames the England team’s subsequent endeavours. As a result, the self-sustaining efficacy of this mythic moment, and the enjoyment it evokes, stems primarily, I argue, from the song’s clear sense of defeatism. Note the following from Greene (2018):

The intro features a recording of soccer commentator Alan Hansen complaining about how bad the national team is. ‘We’re not creative enough, and we’re not positive enough,’ he says. ‘The song is aware of the negative aspects of being an England football fan,’ songwriter Baddiel told *The Independent* in 1996. ‘The fact the FA [Football Association] let us do it at all shows a lot of balls on their part.’ The chorus mentions ‘30 years of hurt,’ a reference to the 1966 World Cup in England, the last and only time the country has ever won a major tournament. Euro 96 gave fans reason to believe that England could once again ‘bring football home,’ and ‘Three Lions’ oscillates between fatalism and optimism for the team’s chances.¹⁰

This defeatism can be identified in the melancholy that underscores the song’s lyrics, whereupon ‘the singers ... rehearse a pain that will not be overcome’, a pain emphasised by Young’s (2007, 18, parenthesis removed) clarification that ‘the Jules Rimet trophy that still gleams in the song was given to Brazil for winning it three times, and therefore can never be won again’. Young’s comments are not mere pedantry, but, instead, help to expose the lack of certainty and inevitable loss which echoes throughout the song:

*Everyone seems to know the score,
They've seen it all before,
They just know, they're so sure,
That England's going to throw it away,
Gonna blow it away*

The repeated, 'it's coming home', stands, in this light, as a signifier of melancholic loss; indeed, a loss which sits closer to the constitutive loss that characterises the Lacanian drive. As a mediation of melancholy—a nonetheless 'enjoyable' form (based, if only, on the fact that the popularity of the song posits a level of enjoyment on behalf of those singing it)—the song embodies loss and the enjoyment therein.

More importantly, this loss is not simply attributed to the fact that England remain, since '66, without an international trophy; instead, the song, the chant, and the sense of loss that it portrays, provide a unique possibility of procuring an alternative position to desire. It is by both outsourcing and, thus, evoking, our enjoyment through a collective mediation of loss, unreturned, that this position is averred. That is, while the heartbreak felt by English fans upon witnessing their team lose another penalty shootout can be devastating; and, though the possibility of footballing success would undoubtedly provide a clear sense of elation (for England fans, at least), what both responses ignore is the realisation that our 'enjoyment resides in the moment of the loss of the privileged object, not in the image of its return' (McGowan 2013, 220).¹¹ By accepting this loss at its very inception, we can assert the melancholic outlook that underlies 'it's coming home' as part of a collectively informed alienation (a universal lack)—one constituted through the inherent sociality of our shared sporting encounters (win or lose).

"It's (not) coming home...": Conclusion

This chapter has argued that an account of melancholy offers a unique response to English football and, specifically, to contemporary accounts of English nationalism. Theoretically, this significance draws primarily from a psychoanalytic (Lacanian/Zizekian) account of the subject and the potential that is afforded in applying Lacan's desire and drive to socio-cultural analyses of sport, football, and society. Though this chapter has focused specifically on examples drawn from the English

national football team, the adoption of a Lacanian inspired and Zizekian influenced account of desire, drive and melancholy offers a novel, yet important, avenue of inquiry into the critical study of sport and, specifically, football. Moving beyond common misconceptions that perceive psychoanalytic theory as concerned with unearthing our subjective depths for signs of malignance; as a method of behavioural alteration; or, as a path to recentring the 'ego', what psychoanalytic theory provides is a considered engagement with the fundamental inconsistencies and contradictions that ontologically frame both 'reality' and the 'subject' (Zupancic 2008).

In relation to the socio-symbolic field (the 'big Other'), sport plays a unique role in positing these very contradictions, from which 'Sports fandom offers psychoanalysis an unrivaled example of how subjectivity is not only rife with contradictions and conflicts but seeks them out' (Reynoso 2021, 592). Indeed, any relation that we may have with the world's 'beautiful game' is indelibly grounded in a host of social, political, and cultural inequalities that are widely known and subsequently disavowed by football fans (as well as sports fans, in general). In fact, limited as much by its capacity to enthrall as it is by its frequent frustrations, football's contradictions are not only marked by the well-known corruptions of a sports industrial complex (Maguire 2004), but also by an invented set of arbitrary injunctions, rules and regulations which constitute the game itself (Black 2021c). This is perpetuated in the very inequity that our unconscious sporting desires evoke. As a result, psychoanalytic theory allows us to explore how these contradictions rest upon the subject's unconscious subversion of desire and the enjoyment therein. Though often disavowed, it is here that sport serves to tie the subject to a range of social exclusions, which remain predicated on global systems of injustice that underscore sport's socio-political importance. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the game of football.

In this chapter, these sporting contradictions have been considered in relation to the melancholic significance of the English national football team and the constitutive loss and desire that such melancholy can evoke. Key here is the loss of desire that the melancholic position professes, one that does not succumb to a self-involved, narcissistic decline but which offers a far more critical account of the role of 'loss' for both the subject and society. By paying attention to examples of English melancholy as well as English sporting failure(s) we can observe how enjoyment occurs not at the accomplishment of what may seem impossible, but in the realisation that enjoyment relies on the intersection of loss and its inception: a fundamentally melancholic

perspective that underpins our sporting endeavours and the nationalism it undoubtedly evokes.

On this basis, both the song, *Three Lions* and the accompanying chorus, ‘It’s coming home’, encapsulate and exhibit a melancholic English nationalism that is perhaps best reflected in the current English national football team. Though the English may no longer have a tackle by Moore, a goal by Lineker, a Bobby to belt the ball or a Nobby dancing, there is the opportunity to break the cynicism and hubristic arrogance that so often follows accounts of English nationalism and, more importantly, remake and comically enjoy a unequivocally multicultural, heterogenous England football team—an England team whose very Englishness is, if anything, certified with its (at present) lack of success. This lack does not desire loss but approaches it as a constitutive feature of English melancholy. A comic resource, that always finds it home in ‘our’ very English failure.

Endnotes

¹ For clarity, any further reference to the ‘English national team’ will refer explicitly to the men’s team.

² The initial idea for this chapter emerged after England’s semi-final defeat at the 2018 World Cup. The relative success of the England team at the most recent international tournament (the 2021 European Championships) has meant that the following discussion will refer to both these tournaments.

³ Thankfully, on Sunday 31st July, the England women’s team won the Women’s Euro 2022, beating Germany 2-1 in extra-time.

⁴ Since 1996, the song has received later releases and re-issues, with new version also recorded (Porter 2009). In this chapter, the original 1996 release will be referred to.

⁵ Originally, the European Championship would have been hosted in 2020, but, due to COVID-19, was postponed until 2021. The 2020 final took place on 11th July 2021.

⁶ The original essay was titled ‘*Trauer und Melancholie* (Mourning and Melancholia)’ and published in 1917. I have drawn from a later publication (Freud 2005).

⁷ Žižek elaborates: ‘The object-cause of the desire would be that strange imperfection which disturbs the balance, but if you take it away the desire object itself no longer functions, i.e., it is no longer desire. It is a paradoxical obstacle which constitutes that towards which it is an obstacle’ (Žižek and Daly 2004, 113).

⁸ A further way of differentiating between desire and drive is in McGowan’s (2011) contention that desire is a means to an end, for drive, the means is the end.

⁹ In accounts of leftist melancholia, and in examples of nostalgia, it is a fantasy of loss which functions as a defence for the subject against the trauma of their enjoyment, but also the subtle—yet traumatic—realisation that one’s loss is constitutive. Fantasy, melancholy, and nostalgia are, in these instances, defences against the subject’s castration.

¹⁰ It is worth noting that Alan Hansen is a former Scottish footballer, playing for Partick Thistle, Liverpool, and the Scottish national team. His comments in the song's intro refer specifically to the 'English game'.

¹¹ Here, Reynoso (2021, 12) emphasises, 'even when our favored athlete is triumphant and exposes the gap of vicarious relation, fans dwell in incompleteness'.

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