

# **Brexiting Humanity:**

## **Walls, Borders, and the Posthuman in John Lanchester's The Wall**

Laurance J. Splitter

School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne,  
Parkville, VIC 3010, Australia

Kristen Sandrock (2020) connects John Lanchester's 2019 Brexit novel *The Wall* with what she refers to as 'British border epistemologies'; that is, a radical process of re-bordering due to global warming and its impact on human mobility. The literary phenomenon that is now referred to as 'BrexLit' bears witness to the way in which borders and the fear of the other seem to impinge on contemporary British fiction. BrexLit is framed by an increasing global interest in exploring interdisciplinary bordering practices. Primarily, BrexLit manifests through realist and/or speculative long fiction, although there are numerous short stories and poetry that deal with this seismic political event. This article proposes to focus on different samples of speculative long fiction born from Brexit before highlighting Lanchester's *The Wall*. Posthuman studies offer a convenient theoretical framework with which to approach this specific text where the British border, refugees and the fear of the other are the drivers of the plot. Thus, this contribution will explore alien configurations of refugees in contemporary British speculative fiction and the way in which these texts question Brexit rhetoric in an eye-opening and thought-provoking way, assisting readers to understand the context and consequences of such a profound political event.

**Keywords:** BrexLit; posthumanism; bordering practices; refugee narratives; climate fictions; global mobility; refugeehood

### **1. Migration, Borders and BrexLit**

There is an increasing number of people on the move at this moment in time. From Central to North America and from the Middle East to Europe, among other important routes in different continents, women, men and children risk their lives crossing borders in the most precarious of ways. In 2009, Nicolas

Bourriaud predicted that the twenty-first century was going to be a century of migrations due to globalisation, which he refers to as “our barbarism”: “The number of migrants has doubled since the 1970s. About 175 million people are living outside their native countries, a number that continues to rise and is doubtless underestimated” (Bourriaud 2009, pp. 17–18). For Bourriaud, the immigrant, the exile and the refugee are some of the most dominant figures of contemporary culture. Despite the ongoing debate regarding the categorical limits of these terms, they should not be used interchangeably. The term migrant is frequently used as a neutral term to refer to processes of mobility in general, including both voluntary and forced mobility. However, the term refugee is narrower in its definition and, according to the 1951 Convention on the Status of Refugees, the term is applied to any individual who “is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion” (Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees 1951, online).

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been an exponential increase in interdisciplinary approaches to the figures of migrants and refugees from within academia. These approaches have tried to reconfigure the concept of border from different perspectives (Bern and van Houtum 2004; Brunet-Jailly 2004; Kolossov 2005; Nicol and Townsend-Gault 2005; and Ganster and Lorey 2005, to name a few). The renaissance of border studies is due, to a large extent, to the change in global border policies that arose from 9/11 and that continue to have an impact today. The idea of globalisation without borders (Newman 2006a, 2006b) has given way to an unparalleled tightening of physical borders in an era where capital can move freely, but people cannot. This is raised by Fabian Georgi, who refers to the connection between migratory movements and current border policies by utilising the term “Fortress Capitalism”, which he defines as “the severely restrictive and violent elements of today’s migration and border regimes as well as a future scenario in which these elements are massively expanded, possibly as part of a twenty-first-century fascism” (Georgi 2019, p. 572). Fortress Capitalism is not the only term that has appeared in recent years due to the rise of the far-right in global politics and which has its most immediate consequences in the notion of border control: “global Apartheid” (Golash-Boza 2015), “bordered capitalism” (Chang 2017), or “national chauvinism” (Bieber 2018) are other terms that have emerged, above all, to try to explain the new political and economic dynamics of our times regarding bordering practices.

This global scenario is what contextualises the events in the United Kingdom when on 23 June 2016, 51.9% of Britons voted in favour of Brexit, that is, in favour of the departure of the United Kingdom from the European Union. For Janine Hauthal, Brexit is the result of a process of reconfiguration of

British national identity, which she defines as the “British Self” vs. the “European Other” (Hauthal 2021, p. 303). This dichotomy between the self and the other is what Kristen Sandrock (2020) utilises to approach John Lanchester’s 2019 novel *The Wall* through what she refers to as “British border epistemologies”, talking here about the way in which the United Kingdom has redefined its relationship with the rest of the world. The Others in *The Wall* come from the mostly unknown locations worldwide, not just from the greater European continent. In Lanchester’s novel, the Others are refugees who escaped from their countries of origin, due to the consequences of an unspecified environmental crisis, and whose plight was exacerbated by Britain’s radical border policies, echoing Brexit and its aftermath. Thus, *The Wall* seems to join a number of literary works known as BrexLit (Day 2017; Eaglestone 2018; Korte and Lojo 2019; Shaw 2021, among others). BrexLit, generally speaking, makes reference to a literary corpus inspired, directly or not, by this seismic political event. There appears to be a general agreement that identifies migration as one of the main motivators for Brexit (Fabbrini 2017; Kohajda et al. 2018; Bellamy and Castiglione 2019; Bulmer and Quaglia 2020; Calvo Vérez 2020; Gänzle et al. 2020; Pittock 2021, among others). The need to reinforce border control during and after the Brexit campaign was highlighted in political discourse and public debates, which ramped up public anxiety surrounding immigration policies in the United Kingdom—hence the need to re-evaluate border policies shaped the events that followed Brexit to the point that it divided the nation into leavers and remainers, a cut that can still be observed nowadays. This division has been the focus of a significant literary corpus over the last few years, pieces of fiction, drama and poetry through which authors ponder the consequences of this social and political event. This article proposes to focus on different samples of speculative long fiction born from Brexit before showcasing Lanchester’s *The Wall* as a paradigmatic example of this literary trend. Posthuman studies (Haraway 2003; Braidotti 2013; Bartosch and Hoydis 2019, among others) will serve, in this particular case, as the theoretical framework to approach this specific text where the British border, refugees, and the fear of the other are the drivers of the plot.

## 2. Brexit and Speculative Fiction

Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union was one of the most controversial events of our time, both in the political and social fields. Non-British citizens became, over the course of the months, the Other; an Other in capitals as Edward Said wrote it in his foundational work *Orientalism* (Said [1978] 1995) and as Lanchester does in his novel *The Wall*, connecting this term with the idea of an enemy. Taking this image of the other as an enemy as a point of departure, Julia Kristeva reflects in her *Strangers to Ourselves* (Kristeva [1988] 1989) on the concept of foreignness and the act of expulsion or rejection

that arises from it. Kristeva, who in her book explores the notion of foreignness from historical and philosophical perspectives, describes this image of the foreigner as a choked up rage deep down in my throat, a black angel clouding transparency, opaque, unfathomable spur. The image of hatred and of the other, a foreigner is neither the romantic victim of our clannish indolence nor the intruder responsible for all the ills of the polis [. . .] Strangely, the foreigner lives with us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder. (Kristeva [1988] 1989, p. 1)

Kristeva wonders if the foreigner, this enemy of primitive societies, will ever disappear from modern societies. Both Brexit, as a political phenomenon, and BrexLit, as a literary one, suggest that the idea of foreignness is more present than ever. Accordingly, this enemy other turns into an abject subject, using Kristeva's terminology, a subject that is expelled, thrown away; someone redundant that is no longer useful and, therefore, becomes refuse. This abject other is induced into a rejection that gives rise to a sort of crisis of subjectivity. Accordingly, the foreigner, be they immigrants or refugees depending on their legal status, continues to be an enemy to be beaten and condemned to wander because of the uncertainty of knowing whether they will secure a place either in their host or home country. They become dispensable beings; the redundant leftovers of migration policies that drive them towards nomadism.

Literature finds in this image of the foreigner, the immigrant or the refugee, a source of inspiration to capture a disheartening reality. It is important to note that foreigners, immigrants and refugees were turned into subaltern subjects in the United Kingdom before Brexit. However, it is in the years following the Brexit referendum when an important body of literature, largely fiction, emerged in the United Kingdom to illustrate, or often reimagine, the aftermath and consequences of this poll and its link to mobility. English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish authors have embarked on this project of critical reflection through their literary creations. It is true, as Kristian Shaw highlights (Shaw 2021), that British literature had already begun to imagine its withdrawal from the European Union way before Brexit was even a possibility. *The Innocent* (McEwan [1990] 2001), by Ian McEwan, or *Expo 58* (Coe 2013) by Jonathan Coe, are examples of novels that deal with the controversial relationship between the United Kingdom and continental Europe years before Brexit. However, the connotations of BrexLit go beyond the anecdotal to become a counter-discourse. BrexLit questions, through fiction, the exclusionary rhetoric used by politicians and the media, which insisted that leaving the European Union was the only way to protect national interests. As a matter of fact, Brexit was built over neo-nationalist conceptions that sought nothing more than to reaffirm a particular concept of the nation-state around patriotism of convenience.

Generally speaking, there are two identifiable trends regarding long fiction, bearing in mind that BrexLit is a living corpus that frequently receives new contributions: realistic texts and speculative fictions. Both groups often imagine a divided, turbulent and isolated United Kingdom, a country hostage to its own mistakes and which has to face some catastrophic consequences for this isolation. Many of these texts seem to be conceived to analyse the state of the nation before and after the referendum. This state of the nation is illustrated in fiction through conflict. Novels such as *Exit West* (Hamid 2017) by Mohsin

Hamid, *Perfidious Albion* (Byers 2018) by Sam Byers, *The Wall* (Lanchester 2019) by John Lanchester, *The Cockroach* (McEwan 2019) by Ian McEwan or *the Paper Lantern* (Burns 2021) by Will Burns are good examples of the way in which speculative fiction serves to reflect on the near future of the post-Brexit United Kingdom. Something similar happens in the most immediate present through the realism found in novels such as *Autumn* (Smith 2016) by Ali Smith, *The Lie of the Land* (Craig 2017) by Amanda Craig, *The Cut* (Cartwright 2017) by Anthony Cartwright, *Middle England* (Coe 2018) by Jonathan Coe or *A Stranger City* (Grant 2019) by Linda Grant. Although this list of realist novels offers an accurate approach to the state of the nation, above all *Middle England*, which could be considered the most paradigmatic example of BrexLit, the truth is that speculative fiction entails an interesting turn of the screw towards the way in which the state of a nation can be imagined through dystopic means.

Speculative fiction is an umbrella term that refers to certain texts that include elements characteristic of science fiction, horror or magical realism, among others, to speculate, above all, about the near future. For Ingrid Thaler, the term speculative fiction refers to the process of “imagining [. . .] the future via the present with an awareness of the past that permeates the present” (Thaler 2010, p. 2). In a different vein, Mark A. Heberle (2005) considers that this sub-genre imagines different scenarios that transcend reality, opening it up to multiple interpretations that may go beyond temporal limitations. Similarly, speculative fiction author Nalo Hopkinson opts for a wider approach to the term, explaining that for her “speculative fiction comes out of rational world view. It dumps the odd or impossible things into fiction so that we can talk about them for a while outside our rational lives” (in Batty 2002, p. 183). Speculative fiction, thus, allows authors and readers to imagine alternative possibilities, including posthuman futures. The connection between speculative fiction and posthuman theory is obvious in this respect: both challenge established categories in the literary and in the philosophical fields. According to Rosi Braidotti, the posthuman condition introduces a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship with the other inhabitants of this planet. This issue raises serious questions as to the very structures of our shared

identity—as humans—amidst the complexity of contemporary science, politics and international relations. Discourses and representations of the non-human, the inhuman, the anti-human, the inhumane and the posthuman proliferate and overlap in our globalized, technologically mediated societies. (Braidotti 2013, pp. 1–2)

Speculative fiction favours the blurring of borders between what Braidotti refers to as the categorical distinction of the given (which she identifies with nature) and that of the constructed (culture, according to her). *BrexLit* speculative fiction offers some good examples of this divide. For example, Ian McEwan utilises the animal world in his political satire *The Cockroach* (McEwan 2019) to rewrite Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. McEwan, who defined Brexit as “the most pointless, masochistic ambition in our country's history” (McEwan 2020, online), uses one of the least popular insects, the cockroach, for his take on this political event. *The Cockroach* is an uncanny novella, which keeps referring back to the events occurring around the Brexit referendum. In the text, a cockroach wakes up one morning under the corporeal figure of Britain's Prime Minister in order to take revenge against the human race. The so-called Reversalism is the revenge of the insect world against its arch-nemeses, the humans. Reversalism is a ridiculous plan to reverse the world's economy so that dealers and suppliers have to pay clients and consumers for the products they offer. Reversalism would appear as the antagonist system to capitalism with the only significant problem being that Britain would be the only nation in the world to implement this change. As one can imagine, Reversalism is a clear metaphor for Brexit. The fact that McEwan chooses as the main protagonist of his novel one of the most disgusting, yet resilient, insects on earth to personify Britain's Prime Minister is highly significant. McEwan utilises a mock-heroic rhetoric to question Brexit through this idea of Reversalism: “Britain must go it alone and convert the rest of the world by example” (McEwan 2019, pp. 30–31), “[w]e will stand alone just as we have stood alone in the past” (p. 47), or “Britain stood alone!” (p. 96) are some of the mantras repeated by this cockroach-cum- Prime Minister and his cabinet of human cockroaches. The cockroach is a repulsive creature condemned to hide to coexist with humans without being killed. The fact that, in the text, non-human animals occupy 10 Downing Street and interact with the rest of the world's politicians in the political arena is satirical. *The Cockroach* does not offer an ecocritical reading (Coupe 2000; Garrard 2004; Buell 2005; Clark 2011; Segarra 2022, among others) of Brexit or of current politics. Here, McEwan, unlike Lanchester for example, does not address the environmental crisis. McEwan does not even offer a dichotomy between human and non-human perceptions or, through metaphors, suggest the need to change the world in order to save humanity. The text actually works in the opposite direction. Reversalism is a metaphor for political nonsense and manipulation as nobody

appears to question a plan doomed to failure.

Similarly inspired by Brexit, *Perfidious Albion* (Byers 2018) by Sam Byers offers another interesting satirical reading of British politics. Here, technology plays a fundamental role in order to keep the British population under control, in the most Black Mirror-esque of styles. Despite the fact that Brexit is only mentioned once throughout the narrative, there is no doubt that it is fundamental to the plot. The title of the novel itself is significant as it refers to a famous expression to define the untrustworthy nature of England, one that became popular during the Napoleonic Wars and became relevant once again during the Brexit negotiations. England Always is the political party that appears in this near-future dystopia against immigration and refugees. Byers also reproduces some of the mantras repeated time and time again during the Brexit campaign in order to question political anti-immigration dialogue. Migrants and refugees, therefore, appear demonised through these political discourses that accuse them of all the problems in the nation in order to justify “[c]ontrol over our borders, our laws, our culture. We need to ensure we’re all literally and hypothetically, speaking the same language” (Byers 2018, p. 253). The power of the Internet and new technologies is central to the novel as it highlights the way in which the British population is manipulated. Social media, and its utilisation for the dissemination of propaganda, is one of the novel’s main topics, which provides a strong critique of the post-truth system that operated during and after the Brexit campaign. In the novel, Britain turns into a state of control and manipulation subject to technological biases that turn civilians into social experiments with neither their knowledge nor consent. Edmundsbury, the place where most of the story is set, becomes what is referred to as a site for white

British refugees who do not find their place in a multicultural Britain. Ultimately, *Perfidious Albion* is a novel that confronts white supremacy and great-replacement theories.

Imperial nostalgia blooms naturally from the two previously mentioned texts, as it also does in Douglas Board’s *Times of Lies* (2017), a Dr. Strangelove inspired political satire based on what he calls the Borisgate; that is, “[t]he leak of five thousand emails exchanged between Brexit ministers in the run up giving notice” (p. 11). Janine Hauthal (2021) employs Paul Gilroy’s term “postcolonial melancholia” to explore the representation of British identity at a time of political turmoil. For Gilroy, postcolonial melancholia addresses the duelling senses of both guilt and pride which have long characterised British identity right up to the present day thanks to Britain’s colonial past. Accordingly, British citizens are well aware of the “repressed and buried knowledge of cruelty and injustice” (Gilroy 2004, p. 102) which can be found throughout British history. For Gilroy, there is a sense of latent failure in Britain for the loss of its empire, which is compensated for, at least in popular culture,

with their (and, tellingly, no one else's) victory in World War II. Hauthal posits that Gilroy's concept of postcolonial melancholia should also be applied to the very foundation of the leave campaign. Thus, the Brexit vote was driven not only by political and economic factors, but also by a sense of pride which Hauthal refers to as "the continuous imperial nostalgia in Britain today" (Hauthal 2021, p. 305). These realistic texts around Brexit are illustrative of the way in which both postcolonial melancholia and imperial nostalgia are still flourishing in British cultural imagery.

In another vein, *The Paper Lantern* (Burns 2021) by Will Burns offers its own take on the way in which Covid19 added a further layer of turmoil onto an already disoriented nation still reeling from the consequences of exiting the European Union. This seemingly dystopic novel is set in the heart of Brexit-country, the safest Tory seat in the house and over the previous couple of years, had you engaged in conversation with any one of the know-alls in any one of the village's pubs you would have got the secondhand opinions or dimly recollected experiences of Europe, or the EU, foreigners, which they touted as hard empirical evidence of how things really stood. (Burns 2021, pp. 4–5)

This male-centred novel, where most of the characters are called Pete, shows an isolated society both by means of the aftermath of Brexit and due to the enforced lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

British politics including border control, immigration and refugees are all represented in the cores of the previously mentioned texts. Similarly, Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* (Hamid 2017) provides an important attempt to reflect on the way in which Brexit was actually conditioned by the global anxiety concerning mobility and the need to fortify national borders. There are obvious connections between *The Wall*, which will be analysed in the next section, and *Exit West*. Hamid's (2017) Man Booker Prize-shortlisted novel is definitely one of the examples of BrexLit that has received significant attention from within academia (Shaw 2018; Sadaf 2021; Bellin 2022, among others). It is a novel contextualised by the European humanitarian crisis in 2015 when thousands of people were trying to enter what Helma Lutz (1997) together with Eleanore Kofman and Rosemary Sales (Kofman and Sales 1998) referred to as Fortress Europe. In the novel, borders become porous geographical sites thanks to a number of magical portals which teleport individuals from one place to another. *Exit West* provides not only a strong critique of Britain's migratory policies but also of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, whose practices have been highly questioned by human rights NGOs. Nadia and Saeed are the two protagonists of a text which connects an unspecified country menaced by civil war with a number of overseas locations. Mykonos is the first of these, where they arrive after discovering one of the portals. There, they share their own migratory experience with thousands of other immigrants and refugees who are kept in a refugee camp, similar to the ones that physically exist on this



Greek island which, in 2015 and the following years, frequently appeared on the news due to the inhuman living conditions that people had to endure there (Fallon 2021; Kitsantonis 2019; Leadbeater 2016; Molnar 2021, among others). However, London, the second location where this couple is magically transported, is where the story is focused. London is portrayed as an incredibly hostile place due to the process of exclusion favoured by the British migrant policies and which keeps migrants and refugees secluded and under surveillance. Ultimately, these magical portals, framed as a beacon of hope at the beginning of the novel, turn into control sites similar to any other borderland.

As will be seen in the following pages, there are many points in common between *Exit West* and *The Wall*, which could imply an interesting avenue of research for comparative analysis. In what follows, Lanchester's border fable will be approached through the lens of posthuman studies in order to explore the way in which the author offers his particular reading of Brexit, refugeehood and the current climate crises that menace the world.

### **3. A Posthuman Approach to John Lanchester's *The Wall***

John Lanchester's *The Wall* is a Man Booker Prize-longlisted dystopic, climate fiction clearly inspired by Brexit and in which the author reimagines Britain's border control practices via the inhumane rejection of climate refugees. There is an exponential interest in exploring, from the most interdisciplinary perspectives, "climate-induced migration", a term used by Gregory White (2011) to reflect on the growing presence of climate refugees in contemporary migrant flows. For White, climate-induced migrations, much like the ones that instigate *The Wall*'s plot, are already regarded as an external threat to national borders, which, accordingly, explains the "efforts to control immigration have become so thoroughly politicized and so much a part of the electoral landscape that they are almost taken for granted" (White 2011, p. 5). White offers an approach to climate-induced migration which entails political, economic, philosophical and ethical points of view to warn about "rising sea levels, increasing temperatures, and changing precipitation patters [which] will likely affect migration patterns in the decades to come" (p. 4). This is the backdrop for *The Wall*, a novel that reflects on the implications of climate-induced migration and environmental refugees on the British border, as well as on issues regarding sovereignty and national security. As White explains, any governmental response to climate change that is limited to the building of floodgates, fences or walls that exist merely to assuage public anxiety over migration will be doomed to failure: "[b]uilding a fence is easier than changing lifestyles. Yet the injection of security imperatives into climate-induced migration is unethical and unworkable" (White 2011, p. 7). Lanchester, as White, is concerned about the ethical implications of the massive enforcement of borders, the criminalisation

of migration, and the environmental collapse experienced worldwide.

Lanchester, who has experienced migration himself as a child after living in Calcutta, Rangoon, Brunei and Hong Kong before his family settled in the United Kingdom when he was ten, shows a special concern for the most immediate future of our planet due to the environmental damage that our generation is causing. The author utilises a simple but effective rhetoric to place the reader in a hostage Britain, which has built a wall around the ten-thousand-kilometre-plus coastline in order to protect itself from the rising sea levels, as well as from the arrival of those who are referred to as the Others. Northern Ireland and the small British islands seem to have disappeared, considering these geographical references do not appear in the text. The event that caused this situation is known within the British borders as the Change. Within the wall, the lives of citizens continue with relative normality, aside from the fact that the new generation of Britons born post-Change need to spend two years of service as Defenders of the Wall, to protect the border from the arrival of the Others.

The novel is divided into three sections: The Wall, The Others and The Sea, following the three main metaphors that can be found in the text. The novel starts in *media res* when Joseph Kavanagh, an English boy who may be in his late teens or early twenties, starts his service as a Defender at the Wall. Accordingly, we are introduced to life at the Wall and the workings behind the fortress' defence. Through twelve-hour shifts, Defenders must guard the coast and identify any sign that might suggest that Others are arriving. Life at the Wall is tough, yet the consequences of not defending it properly are even tougher. For each Other that enters the Wall, one Defender is put to sea. Additionally, any Others who successfully enter are given three options: they can return to the sea, they can opt for euthanasia or they can become Help, a euphemism for slaves who shall serve national residents. After spending a few months as a Defender, Kavanagh, who is both the protagonist and the narrator, is put to sea when a group of Others cross the border with the assistance of rebel nationals who are protesting against refugee rejection. Kavanagh, thus, turns from Defender into Other through a single event out of his control.

Sandrock (2020) identifies three major themes in this novel, which she connects with "British border epistemologies": re-bordering processes such as Brexit, environmental crisis and global nomadism due to global warming. The Wall, without a doubt, is the element that links these three topics. It is the main protagonist of the two first parts of the text since its presence is overwhelming: "the Wall is the dominant thing in your life and the life of everyone else around you, and your responsibilities and your day and your thoughts are about the Wall, and your future life is determined by what happens on the Wall" (Lanchester 2019, p. 14). This wall appears to be not only inspired by the metaphorical wall implied by Brexit, but by other tangential walls of our times:

from the Berlin wall to the wall that the Trump administration tried to build on the United States–Mexico border, or from the existing border between Northern Ireland and Ireland to the border that separates the European Union and western Middle East countries. As a matter of fact, the story is clearly influenced by the 2015 humanitarian crisis that also inspired Hamid to write *Exit West*, although from a different perspective. This way, *The Wall* “asks readers to confront uncomfortable scenarios of global migrancy through its portrayal of contrasting border perspectives” (Sandrock 2020, p. 167). Instead of choosing

the point of view of the victim, of those subaltern subjects who are denied a voice in the real world, Lanchester chooses as the main protagonist one of those who had to forcibly implement the cruel anti-immigration policies. We are all familiar with border policies due to numerous political discourses and journalistic coverage, but we hardly ever hear the voice of those whose job is to implement those policies. *The Wall* gives voice to one of these Defenders, who could actually represent a member of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency or a similar figure within a dystopic United Kingdom. For Ewa Rychter, the novel exemplifies several of our current crises: “the Brexit xenophobia; the economic domination of the West; the Western complacency and irresponsibility in the face of the collapse of the global South; the neoliberal narrow-mindedness; the anti-refugee populism; the anthropogenic environmental catastrophe” (Rychter 2022, p. 292). All these crises force this fictional Britain into isolation from an impoverished and collapsing world.

The word refugee does not appear in the novel, despite their overwhelming presence in the narrative. Those who arrive on Britain’s shores from elsewhere, including those from the global South as there are a handful of references to some being of African origin, are always referred to as Others, a term which implies a process of extreme dehumanisation. Others are obvious examples of exclusion, modern pariahs, as Hannah Arendt (2004) would call them. Arendt identifies four types of pariahs in contemporary society: innocent pariahs, conscious pariahs, suspicious pariahs, and parvenu pariahs. In *The Wall*, Others are simultaneously both innocent and suspicious pariahs, whereas those Defenders who become Others could easily be identified as conscious pariahs. Lastly, the Captain, who is an insurgent who aided Others in crossing the border, is an apparent parvenu pariah, that is, an Other who was partially integrated into the host society and rejected his/her origins until they reveal themselves to be an insurgent subject. They are all marginalised pariahs who are permanently excluded from society, be they Others, Defenders or insurgent citizens. Éléni Varikas (2007) takes this idea of the pariah to offer her own reading of these figures of exclusion, focusing on the way their image is relatively unchanged throughout history. As a matter of fact, and as Varikas comments on her approach to these communities, historically speaking, migrants, exiles and refugees have been the most characteristic figures of

exclusion from society. In *The Wall*, the Others are excluded from British society because they are regarded as a threat to British national security. They are certainly regarded within these borders as other-than-human beings which, narratively, creates an urgent redefinition of the notion of the human. With this characterisation of pariahs who keep wandering around the world in search of an opportunity, this novel seems to follow Braidotti's train of thought when she affirmed that "the crisis of the human and its posthuman fallout has dire consequences" (Braidotti 2013, p. 10). As Francesca Ferrando points out, posthumanism leads "the deconstruction of the human to its extreme consequences by bringing to its theoretical revision speciesism, that is, the privilege of some species [British citizens in *The Wall*] over others [Others in this particular case]" (Ferrando 2019, p. 2). Ferrando, who coined the term "philosophical posthumanism", explores the implications of Braidotti's approach to otherness, defined by Braidotti herself as "the negative opposite of the dominant subject position and inscribed in a hierarchical scale that spells inferiority" (Braidotti 2019, p. xiii). It is perfectly clear which place the Others occupy in the novel's societal hierarchy. Accordingly, the posthuman predicament is illustrated in *The Wall* through the brutality of what this dystopic new world order implies.

Both Defenders and Others are disposable subjects unless they serve a clear nationalistic purpose. Braidotti relies on Achille Mbembe's approach to the politics of death when she generally refers to "the governance of fear" (Braidotti 2013, p. 9), which can also be found in the dystopic society portrayed in *The Wall*. For Mbembe, contemporary bio-power and necro-politics, two concepts that articulate Mbembe's thought, divide society into "rebels, child soldiers, victims or refugees, or civilians incapacitated by mutilation or massacred on the model of ancient sacrifices, while the 'survivors', after a horrific exodus, are confined to camps and zones of exception" (Mbembe 2003, p. 34). Similarly, in this new Britain after the Change, death is common. Others are "spotted and attacked from the air, just in case some of them had survived and might still be coming in our direction" (Lanchester 2019, p. 11). Despite the institutionally induced process of dehumanisation, the narrator keeps utilising the Others as the measure of all things:

We were cold but the Others were colder. We were bored and tired and uncomfortable and anxious, they were angry and frightened and exhausted and desperate. God, the Wall must look like a terrible thing from the sea, a flat malevolent line like a scar [ . . . ] We must seem more like devils than human beings. Spirits, embodied essences, of pure malignity. (Lanchester 2019, pp. 65–66)

The novel's post-anthropocentric shift, found after the allegedly human-induced Change, highlights the numerous complexities and paradoxes of modern times. Britain is running out of people because the eldest generation, the

one born before the Change, is aging and the new generation, the one born after the Change, does not want to reproduce “because the world is such a horrible place” (Lanchester 2019, p. 35). Despite the low birth rate within the Wall, and despite the fact that Britain needs more than three hundred thousand people to protect its national borders, refugees are still not welcome. It is a paradox within another paradox: according to the narrator, refugees could sort out the British demographical problem, but they create a problem for national identity; therefore, refugees are rejected despite the shortage of people within the wall.

But the novel also highlights the connection between posthumanism and the way in which science and biotechnology could affect human existence. It is clear that the Others represent the posthuman since “the posthuman becomes part of the process of being human, which involves shaping and being shaped by our environments” (Toffoletti 2007, p. 12). The Others are the *doppelgänger*s of those who live seemingly normal lives within the Wall. Within the narrative, they represent the “dialectics of difference [. . .] who coincide with categories of negative difference [. . .] whose social and symbolic existence is precarious and exposed to all kinds of risk” (Braidotti 2019, p. xiii). However, there is one interesting characteristic found in everyone who lives within the Wall since, as the narrator explains, chips are inserted into every single citizen in order to identify those who belong and those who do not. This is part of the posthuman predicament, the becoming-machine process that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari anticipated in 1987 and that Braidotti recovers in her conceptualisation of the bio-mediated other: “Post- anthropocentric technologies are also re-shaping the practice of surveillance in the social field. Border control of immigration and the smuggling of people are major aspects in the contemporary inhuman condition and central players in the necro-political game” (Braidotti 2013, p. 127). Braidotti herself also relies on Bülent Diken when she affirms that “refugees and asylum seekers become another emblem of the contemporary necro-power, because they are the perfect instantiation of the disposable humanity that Agamben also calls ‘homo sacer’ and thus constitute the ultimate necropolitical subject” (Braidotti 2013, p. 127, emphasis in the original). Rather than becoming transhumans (Ferrando 2019;

Karkulehto et al. 2020; More and Vita-More 2013; González Arribas 2021, among others), British citizens are transformed into cyborg beings by mandate. Transhumanism is “a class of philosophies that seeks the continued evolution of human life beyond its current human form as a result of science and technology guided by life-promoting principles and values” (More and Vita-More 2013, p. 1). However, the cyborg (Clynes and Kline 1960; Haraway 1985; Balsamo 1996; Gray 2001, among others) is the result of the combination of biology and technology, even when this technology is as small as a mere microchip and only serves the purpose of keeping citizens under control. In *The Wall*, society is organised within a state of constant control and surveillance in

order to identify any Others who manage to enter. To assist in this plight, every single citizen has an identifying chip implanted at birth. Hence, humans become hybrid; they are enhanced cyborgs serving a purpose, and that purpose is keeping the British border under control. However, as happens to Kavanagh and his group of Defenders towards the end of the book's second section, the chip is removed once Defenders become Others and are put out to sea. The process of becoming an Other is this simple and is done in the name of the national interest. Subsequently, every character in the novel becomes a political category, which is a classification that according to Roman Bartosch and Julia Hoydis, "challenges the ontological difference of the human and seek to acknowledge agency in non-human objects" (Bartosch and Hoydis 2019, p. 13). This institutionally forced transition from Defender to Other is what makes Ben De Bruyn affirm that "privileged citizens and irregular migrants are fundamentally similar, despite their militarized separation, and climate change threatens to make environmental refugees of us all, with or without borders" (De Bruyn 2020, p. 8). As a matter of fact, *The Wall* turns into a "corrective to [British] insularity" (Moore 2021, p. 41) once the main protagonist reflects on his identitarian transition:

I've been brought up not to think about the Others in terms of where they came from or who they were, to ignore all that—they were just Others. But maybe now that I was one of them, they weren't Others any more? If I was an Other and they were Others perhaps none of us were Others but instead we were a new Us. (Lanchester 2019, p. 203)

This is, indeed, the ultimate moral of the novel. The text compounds this evolution from human to posthuman and it does so in different ways. On the one hand, Kavanagh, the protagonist and narrator of the novel, keeps internally questioning not only the totalitarian system that seems to rule Britain but, also, puts the non-British subject, the Other, at the centre of his concern. In the beginning of the novel, he does not share these concerns with anyone else, but he is increasingly aware of how weak the mechanisms that he is a mere cog in really are. The process of transitioning from human to posthuman is made plainly obvious when his chip is removed and he is put out to sea. It is when he becomes an Other that he finally realises that the divide between Others and non-Others is non-existent. He finds that, maybe, he has always been an Other, that he has always been posthuman. Lanchester turns characters in his novel from inhuman beings (Lyotard 1991) into posthuman subjects (Braidotti 2013) through a radical process of construction and reconstruction. This is an important shift to note and one which implies a transformative force that creates new post-anthropogenic categories. As Ferrando points out, "[i]n Western history, 'human' referred, more specifically, to white, male, heterosexual and propertied citizens, who would comply with institutionalized norms, as well as ethnic, cultural, and physical characteristics" (Ferrando 2019, p. 4). In this

particular case, climate change and the advent of the Anthropocene do not simply imply a reconfiguration of national borders or national identity but also create a direct challenge to the very notion of being 'human'. The posthuman subjects found in the novel, thus, turn into pariahs due to dislocation, uprooting and resilience.

#### 4. Conclusions

Literary texts do more than explore cultural implications of certain policies. In some cases, literature offers a harsh critique of the most recent events. In *The Wall*, Lanchester challenges exclusionary border policies by offering his own posthuman reading of Brexit. The author also uses the idea of climate collapse to take his borderland metaphor to another level since climate disaster is the event that apparently turned Britain into the only safe place on Earth. Global warming has forced a massive exodus of the human population northwards as the Global South, and possibly beyond, has become inhospitable. In the novel, the millions, maybe billions, of climate refugees created by the Change have had their humanity removed by those who occupy a privileged position; by those who, by chance, just happened to have been born in a safe place. Accordingly, the Others are turned into other-than-human beings. They become posthuman because they question dominant configurations of the human, that is, of the Vitruvian European male as the measure of all things, to rather focus on those traditionally excluded from classical humanist thought. That is the only way to process, but not justify, the unintentional genocide of the majority of the world's population.

*The Wall* showcases the way in which British border practices promote the idea of the other being an enemy simply because of the challenge they pose to the British national identity. The notion of British national identity is never explicitly mentioned or expanded upon throughout the novel. This sense of national identity is built around rejection of the Other: Britons are Britons because they are not Others. On the surface, it appears to be as straightforward as this; however, the different layers found in the text push that notion of national identity further. *The Wall* is simply a metaphor for social exclusion. It is a metaphor taken to its limit. The novel shows a divided, turbulent and, above all, an isolated Britain, in a similar way to other BrexLit novels, such as *The Cockroach*, *Perfidious Albion* or *Exit West*. It also shows a disaffected society unable to deal with generational guilt. It is a society that is aware of its limitations and, consciously or unconsciously, refuses to accept new beings into it unless, as pointed out, they serve a clear nationalistic purpose. All in all, the novel questions the exclusionary rhetoric used by politicians before and after the Brexit referendum, a theme that can also be identified in other BrexLit novels like *Middle England* or *The Cut*. *The Wall*, in this particular case, confronts readers with an uncomfortable scenario covering global mobility and

national interests.

## References

- Arendt, Hannah. 2004. *La Tradición Oculta*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Balsamo, Anne. 1996. *Technologies of the Gendered Body: Reading Cyborg Women*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Bartosch, Roman, and Julia Hoydis, eds. 2019. *Teaching the Posthuman*. Heidelberg: Universitätsberlag Winter.
- Batty, Nancy. 2002. 'Caught by a . . . genre': An Interview with Nalo Hopkinson. *Ariel* 33: 175–201.
- Bellamy, Richard, and Dario Castiglione. 2019. *From Maastricht to Brexit: Democracy, Constitutionalism and Citizenship in the EU*. London: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Bellin, Stefano. 2022. Disorienting Empathy: Reimagining the Global Border Regime through Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. *Literature Compass* 19: e12694. [CrossRef]
- Bern, Eiki, and Henk van Houtum. 2004. Routing Borders between Territories, Discourse and Practices. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Bieber, Florian. 2018. Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends. *Ethnopolitics* 17: 519–40. [CrossRef]
- Bourriaud, Nicolas. 2009. *The Radicant*. Translated by James Gussen, and Lili Porten. London: Lukas & Sternberg.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2019. Preface: The Posthuman as Exuberant Excess. In *Philosophical Posthumanism*. London and New York: Bloomsbury, Francesca Ferrando, pp. xi–xvi.
- Brunet-Jailly, Emmanuel. 2004. Toward a Model of Border Studies. *Journal of Borderland Studies* 19: 1–18. [CrossRef]
- Buell, Lawrence. 2005. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Malden: Blackwell.
- Bulmer, Simon, and Lucia Quaglia. 2020. *The Politics and Economics of Brexit*. London: Routledge.
- Burns, Will. 2021. *The Paper Lantern*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Byers, Sam. 2018. *Perfidious Albion*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Calvo Vérguez, Juan. 2020. *El Brexit y su Incidencia en el Futuro de las Relaciones UE-UK*. Cizur Menor Navarra: Thomson Reuters Aranzidi.
- Cartwright, Anthony. 2017. *The Cut*. London: Peirene Press.
- Chang, Dae-oup. 2017. Subversive Migration, Citizenship from below and Democracy against Bordered Capitalism. In *Return of Marxian Macro-Dynamics in East Asia*. Edited by Masao Ishkura, Seongjin Jeong and Minqi Li. Bingley: Emerald, pp. 253–83.
- Clark, Timothy. 2011. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.
- Clynes, Manfred E., and Nathan S. Kline. 1960. *Cyborgs and Space*. *The New York Times*. Available online: <https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/library/cyber/sorf/022697surf-cyborg.html> (accessed on 26 July 2023).
- Coe, Jonathan. 2013. *Expo 58*. London: Penguin.
- Coe, Jonathan. 2018. *Middle England*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees. 1951. Available online: <https://www.unhcr.org/media/convention-and-protocol-relating-status-refugees> (accessed on 10 January 2024).
- Coupe, Laurence, ed. 2000. *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge.
- Craig, Amanda. 2017. *The Lie of the Land*. London: Abacus.
- Day, John. 2017. *BrexLit: The New Landscape of British Fiction*. *Financial Times*. July 28. Available online: <http://www.ft.com/content/30ec47b4-7204-11e7-93ff-99f383b09ff9> (accessed on 18 June 2023).



- De Bruyn, Ben. 2020. The Great Displacement: Reading Migration Fiction at the End of the World. *Humanities* 9: 25. [CrossRef]
- Eaglestone, Robert. 2018. *Brexit and Literature: Critical and Cultural Responses*. London: Routledge.
- Fabbrini, Federico. 2017. *The Law & Politics of Brexit*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fallon, Katy. 2021. EU Announces Funding for Five New Refugee Camps on Greek Islands. *The Guardian*. March 29. Available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/mar/29/eu-announces-funding-for-five-new-refugee-camps-on-greek-islands> (accessed on 20 June 2023).
- Ferrando, Francesca. 2019. *Philosophical Posthumanism*. London and New York: Bloomsbury.
- Ganster, Paul, and David Lorey, eds. 2005. *Border and Border Politics in a Globalizing World*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gänzle, Stefan, Benjamin Leruth, and Jarle Trondal. 2020. *Differentiated Integration and Disintegration in a Post-Brexit Era*. New York: Routledge.
- Garrard, Greg. 2004. *Ecocriticism*. London: Routledge.
- Georgi, Fabian. 2019. Toward Fortress Capitalism: The Restrictive Transformation of Migration and Border Regimes as a Reaction to the Capitalist Multicrisis. *CRS/RCS* 56: 556–79. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Gilroy, Paul. 2004. *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* London: Routledge.
- Golash-Boza, Tanya. 2015. *Deported. Immigrant Policing, Disposable Labor, and Global Capitalism*. New York: New York University Press.
- González Arribas, Brais. 2021. *Transhumanismo: Tecnociencias e antropotecnias*. Vigo: Euseino.
- Grant, Linda. 2019. *A Stranger City*. London: Virago Press.
- Gray, Chris H. 2001. *Cyborg Citizen*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Hamid, Mohsin. 2017. *Exit West*. New York: Riverhead Books.
- Haraway, Donna J. 1985. A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s. *Socialist Review* 5: 65–107.
- Haraway, Donna J. 2003. *The Companion Species Manifesto. Dogs, People and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Hauthal, Janine. 2021. Explaining Brexit: (Re)Thinking the Nexus of Nation and Narration in Pre- and Post-Referendum British Fiction. *De Gruyter* 71: 297–321. [CrossRef]
- Heberle, Mark A. 2005. Review to *An Inquiry Into the Purposes of Speculative Fiction—Fantasy and Truth*. *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies* 19: 142–45.
- Karkulehto, Sanna, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, and Essi Varis, eds. 2020. *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Kitsantonis, Niki. 2019. Greek Refugee Camps Are Near Catastrophe, Rights Chief Warns. *The New York Times*. October 31. Available online: <http://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/31/world/europe/migrants-greece-aegean-islands.html> (accessed on 20 June 2023).
- Kofman, Eleanore, and Rosemary Sales. 1998. Migrant Women and Exclusion in Europe. *The European Journal of Women's Studies* 5: 381–98. [CrossRef]
- Kohajda, Michael, Tomás Sejkora, and Václav Smejkal. 2018. *Financial System of the European Union after Brexit*. Passau: RW&W Science & New Media.
- Kolossov, Vladimir. 2005. Border Studies: Changing Perspectives and Theoretical Approaches. *Geopolitics* 10: 606–32. [CrossRef]
- Korte, Barbara, and Laura Lojo, eds. 2019. *Borders and Border Crossings in the Contemporary British Short Story*. Cham: Palgrave.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1989. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press. First published 1988.
- Lanchester, John. 2019. *The Wall*. London:

- Faber&Faber.
- Leadbeater, Chris. 2016. Which Greek Islands Are Affected by the Refugee Crisis? *The Telegraph*. March 3. Available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/destinations/europe/greece/articles/greek-islands-affected-by-refugee/crisis/> (accessed on 20 June 2022).
- Lutz, Helma. 1997. The Limits of European-ness: Immigrant Women in Fortress Europe. *Feminist Review* VII: 93–111. [CrossRef] Lyotard, Jean-François. 1991. *The Inhuman*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2003. Necropolitics. *Public Culture* 15: 11–40. [CrossRef] McEwan, Ian. 2001. *The Innocent*. London: Vintage. First published 1990. McEwan, Ian. 2019. *The Cockroach*. London: Jonathan Cape.
- McEwan, Ian. 2020. Brexit, the Most Pointless, Masochistic Ambition in Our Country's History, Is Done. *The Guardian*. February 1. Available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2020/feb/01/brexit-pointless-masochistic-ambition-history-done> (accessed on 5 June 2022).
- Molnar, Petra. 2021. Inside New Refugee Camp Like a 'Prison': Greece and Other Countries Prioritize Surveillance over Human Rights. *The Conversation*. September 27. Available online: <http://theconversation.com/inside-new-refugee-camp-like-a-prison-greece-and-other-countries-prioritize-surveillance-over-human-rights-168354> (accessed on 20 June 2023).
- Moore, Lindsey. 2021. Brexit Literature's Present Absentees: Triangulating Brexit, Antisemitism, and the Palestinian Crisis. In *Writing Brexit: Colonial Remains*. Edited by Caroline Koegler, Pavan Kumar Malreddy and Marlena Tronicke. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 37–49.
- More, Max, and Natasha Vita-More, eds. 2013. *The Transhumanist Reader*. Malden and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Newman, David. 2006a. Borders and Bordering: Towards an Interdisciplinary Dialogue. *European Journal of Social Theory* 9: 171–86. [CrossRef]
- Newman, David. 2006b. The Lines that Continue to Separate Us: Borders in Our 'Bordeless' World. *Progress in Human Geography* 30: 143–61. [CrossRef]
- Nicol, Heather, and Ian Townsend-Gault. 2005. *Holding the Line: Borders in a Global World*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press.
- Pittock, Murray G. H. 2021. *Scotland and Brexit: The Road to Now*. Antwerp: Peristyle.
- Rychter, Ewa. 2022. Testing the Limits: Boundaries and Fault Lines of Dystopia in John Lanchester's *The Wall* (2019). *Polilog: Studia Neofilologiczne* 12: 291–301. [CrossRef]
- Sadaf, Shazia. 2021. 'We Are All Migrants through Time': History and Geography in Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. In *Writing Brexit: Colonial Remains*. Edited by Caroline Koegler, Pavan Kumar Malreddy and Marlena Tronicke. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 52–63.
- Said, Edward. 1995. *Orientalism*. London: Penguin. First published 1978.
- Sandrock, Kirsten. 2020. Border Temporalities, Climate Mobility, and Shakespeare in John Lanchester's *The Wall*. *Journal of Modern Literature* 43: 163–80. [CrossRef]
- Segarra, Marta. 2022. *Humanimals: Abrir las fronteras de lo humano*. Madrid: Galaxia-Gutenberg.
- Shaw, Kristian. 2018. BrexLit. In *Brexit and Literature. Critical and Cultural Responses*. Edited by Robert Eaglestone. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 15–30.
- Shaw, Kristian. 2021. *Brexlit: British Literature and the European Project*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Smith, Ali. 2016. *Autumn*. London: Hamish Hamilton.
- Thaler, Ingrid. 2010. *Black Atlantic Speculative Fictions*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Toffoletti, Kim. 2007. *Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls. Feminism, Popular Culture and The Posthuman Body*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.
- Varikas, Éléni. 2007. *Les Rebut Du Monde: Figures du paria*. Paris: Stock.
- White, Gregory. 2011. *Climate Change and Migration. Security and Borders in a Warming World*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.