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Cricket pastoral and Englishness

English cricket has been portrayed in a substantial body of imaginative literature as quintessentially southern, rural and amateur. In this way English cricket pastoral has become an enduring cultural myth that obscures any sense of the game as a highly rationalised and commercialised national and international sport, as it has been for over two centuries.¹ Even when cricket had spread to the industrial centres of Victorian Britain and to the various parts of the British Empire, its literary image remained an overwhelmingly rural one. The rural cricket field, imaginatively at least, could be transported to the most alien urban and colonial environment to fulfil its cultural work. Not least among the reasons for this was the belief that the mythical notion of Anglo-Saxon racial purity resided in the English countryside. At the same time these representations consistently presented a nostalgic ideal based on both social hierarchy and social harmony. This mythical ideal of English cricket was thus profoundly conservative, a vision of Englishness in which ‘organic’ rural custom betokens ‘organic’ social order. Through a discussion of prose, poetry and fiction, this chapter traces the emergence and development of cricket pastoral between 1820 and the present day. In doing so it suggests that, though a consistent feature of the sport’s literary tradition, cricket pastoral has tended to flourish during periods of accelerated social change or perceived national and imperial crisis, periods when collectivist concepts of Englishness were deployed within other forms of literary discourse as imaginary resolutions to such tensions.

Cricket literature and Englishness

Cricket’s Englishness was as much an invention of its literary gatekeepers as it was due to the game’s origins in rural southern England. Although in 1671 the philologist Stephen Skinner had calmly proposed French derivations for both the game and its name,² by 1755, in Samuel Johnson’s *Dictionary of the English Language*, the sport was being Anglicised as deriving from the

Anglo-Saxon ‘cryce’, meaning a ‘stick’.³ Henceforth images of shepherd boys playing the game in a pastoral setting became commonplace. Yet by the mid eighteenth century cricket was already taking on the form of a recognisably modern sport, with clearly defined rules (or, more precisely, ‘laws’, codifying a seemingly pre-existing, ‘natural’ phenomenon) as well as financial support provided by aristocrats and entrepreneurs. Cricket was also attracting large crowds who frequently placed bets on the outcome of matches. However, its literary image somewhat concealed these commercial realities. In a poem called ‘The Kentish Cricketers’, for example, John Burnby located the Kent versus Surrey match of 1773 in an Arcadian landscape of ineffable beauty with ‘matchless cricketers’ in ‘milk-white vestments’ a seemingly organic part of the landscape.⁴

As cricket became increasingly commercial, as professionalism and gambling continued to accompany the sport, and as the economic and administrative power base of cricket moved to London, cricket pastoral continued to define the game’s image. At the elite end of the literary spectrum particularly, cricket identified with its rural past at the very time that it was inaugurated as a product of modernity. William Blake’s illustration of a boy cricketer in ‘The Echoing Green’ from *Songs of Innocence*, Leigh Hunt’s essay on ‘Cricket and other Pastimes’, representations of cricket in the poetry of Wordsworth and Byron, and William Hazlitt’s ‘Merry England’ all celebrate cricket as essentially rural. As it took on the form of a recognisably modern sport, cricket was being written into existence as a legacy of a near-extinct folk culture, as uncontaminated by modernity, and hence as authentically English.⁵

With the countryside and the rural communities under threat during the early Industrial Revolution, a form of popular literature emerged from the 1820s which both elegised the loss of this way of life and sought to reaffirm its ideals. Works such as William Cobbett’s *Rural Rides* and Mary Mitford’s *Our Village* thus contributed to a perception of the countryside and its inhabitants that was to remain deeply embedded in English literary culture. Significantly, Mitford’s book, which was initially serialised in *The Lady’s Magazine* between 1824 and 1832, contains the first comprehensive prose description of a cricket match. The account begins as follows:

I doubt if there be any scene in the world more animating or delightful than a cricket-match: – I do not mean a set match at Lord’s Ground for money, hard money, between a certain number of gentlemen and players, as they are called – people who make a trade of that noble sport, and degrade it into an affair of bettings, and hedgings, and cheatings ... nor do I mean a pretty *fete* in a gentlemen’s park ... where they show off in graceful costumes to a gay marquee of admiring belles ...

No! the cricket that I mean is a real solid old-fashioned match between neighbouring parishes, where each attacks the other for honour and a supper, glory and half-a-crown a man.⁶

Mitford's often eroticised cricket episode is not simply a celebration of village cricket over and above urban, commercialised or more socially sophisticated versions of the sport. As Elizabeth Helsinger has noted, in describing aspects of village life Mitford's accounts frequently return to the idea of representation and draw attention to their own artifice by describing themselves as 'pictures' and 'scenes'.⁷ As much as any feature of the village, Mitford's cricket field has no pretensions to be authentic; rather, it is a self-consciously rendered aesthetic artefact believed to possess significant symbolic capital at a time of unprecedented social and economic transformation.

The emergence of such cricket narratives should be understood in relation to this sense of traumatic change and not merely to the growing popularity and significance of the sport itself. This is particularly evident in John Nyren and Charles Cowden-Clarke's *The Cricketers of My Time*. Though published in serial form in 1832, the book is a deeply nostalgic account of the heyday of the Hambledon cricket club in rural Hampshire during the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a series of 'scenes, of fifty years bygone ... painted in [Nyren's] memory'.⁸ Here, the rambunctious energies and apparent virility of late eighteenth-century rural cricket provide a point of contrast to the relatively temperate, effete and Europeanised present:

There was high feasting held on Broadhalfpenny during the solemnity of one of our grand matches. Oh! it was a heart-stirring sight to witness the multitude forming a complete and dense circle around that noble green. Half the county would be present, and all their hearts with us – Little Hambledon pitted against all England was a proud thought for the Hampshire men ... How those fine brawn-faced fellows of farmers would drink to our success! And then, what stuff they had to drink! – Punch! – not your new *Ponche à Romaine*; or *Ponche à la Groseille*; or your modern cat-lap milk-punch – punch be-devilled; but good, unsophisticated, John Bull stuff – stark! – that would stand on end – punch that would make a cat speak!⁹

Despite its resolutely pre-Victorian attitude to the pleasures of strong liquor, the Victorian middle class loved Nyren's book, as they did texts such as James Pycroft's *The Cricket Field* (1851) and, with its valedictory cricket match, Thomas Hughes's novel *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). In the wake of the Chartist agitations and the revolutionary fervour that had swept across Europe in the 1840s, Christian Socialists like Hughes and Charles Kingsley sought national symbols such as cricket that could

pacify a potentially revolutionary working class. Throughout the period the middle class, concerned that their increasing prosperity was accompanied by a loss of spiritual values, were particularly drawn to forms of literary ruralism, including cricket writing. By the later nineteenth century cricket writing closely articulated with what Alun Howkins has called the ‘discovery of rural England’.¹⁰ In the context of fears about racial degeneration and the decline of England’s pre-industrial structures, the popularity of cricket literature in the 1890s amongst middle-class readers echoed the broader revival of folk custom and culture typified by Cecil Sharpe’s folk-dance movement.¹¹ Although pastoralism had been a consistent feature of the English literary tradition, there was a marked proliferation of such discourse in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods. For the urban middle class, literary visions of the countryside seemed to offer escape from the tyranny of industrialism and the ideological tensions of modernity.¹² Cricket literature formed part of this broader cultural context because it was a now well-established literary medium through which reassuring images of the rural could be disseminated. Indeed, influential and popular ruralist publishing houses, such as *Country Life*, published cricket books.¹³

That the late-Victorian literary construction of Englishness was a heady blend of patriotism, pastoralism and romanticism is evidenced by the willingness of both ‘bardic’ poets such as Henry Newbolt and Alfred Austin, and ‘nature’ poets such as G. K. Chesterton and A. E. Housman, to eulogise cricket. Related to this widespread escape into the English countryside were other emerging literary trends. In H. G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds* (1898) – an example of the new genre of ‘invasion literature’ that reflected contemporary fears of national defilement and miscegenation – a character suggests that through playing cricket ‘we shall save the race’.¹⁴

Another version of this literary ruralism located the essence of Englishness in the country house. The late 1880s had been a period of considerable social unrest such as the Trafalgar Square Riots and widespread demonstrations against unemployment. Within this traumatic context the literary cult of the country house provided reassuring romantic images of the countryside for a middle-class urban readership. In this literature the country squire was invariably portrayed as the embodiment of Englishness and as the benevolent head of a harmonious quasi-feudal social order in which his elegant house functions as the architectural focus of this national imaginary.¹⁵ A contemporary fashion for country-house cricket among the socially privileged neatly dovetailed with this prevailing literary conceit. Whole weeks could be dedicated to this leisurely form of cricket and, although it was primarily a social occasion for the elite, estate workers and local villagers often took part in the matches. When

L. P. Hartley nostalgically portrayed an Edwardian country-house game in his novel *The Go-Between* (1953), both Lord Hugh Trimmingham ('a pretty bat') and his rival in love, the local farmer Ted Burgess, participate, necessarily on opposing sides.¹⁶ For the cricketer Albert Knight and his likely co-writer E. V. Lucas, the ease and luxuriance provided by country-house cricket not only contrasted with the sordid commercial realities of elite cricket, it pointed to nothing less than a Morrisian rural utopia: 'Country-house cricket reminds one of days spent in eating apples under an old tree, reading the *Earthly Paradise* of William Morris. It is the cricket of an Eden future when we shall saunter through the fields, "without tomorrow, without yesterday", nor scent laziness in ease, nor distrust good-humoured chaff as incompatible with seriousness.'¹⁷ In contrast to muscular Christian versions of the sport, Knight here magically projects cricket into a lost pre-industrial society, free from the earnest religious pieties and work ethic that underpinned the creation of modern industrial Britain, as well as its attendant social and political tensions.

Cricket pastoral in the inter-war years

The unprecedented trauma of the First World War, the spectre of the Bolshevik Revolution, the General Strike of 1926 and nationalist calls for independence in India and other parts of the British Empire meant that the England symbolised by the rural cricket field was seen as increasingly threatened. Furthermore, as the commercial and professional aspects of the game were consolidated, the sport called upon a loyal literary entourage to defend its integrity and to reinforce its anachronistically rural image. The intimate relationship between cricket and conservative literary figures was conspicuous in a number of literary cricket elevens such as J. C. Squire's 'The Invalids', famously portrayed in A. G. Macdonell's popular novel *England, Their England* (1933). Squire's team included noted writers such as Alec Waugh, Clifford Bax, Hugh de Selincourt and Edmund Blunden, who later, during the Second World War, wrote one of the most loving accounts of rural cricket, *Cricket Country*, one of many texts written during the conflict celebrating elements of the threatened national culture. The narrator of Somerset Maugham's *Cakes and Ale* wryly described the 1920s as 'the period when men of letters, to show their virility, drank beer and played cricket', and noted that the name 'Authors XI' frequently appeared in the fixture lists of a number of minor public schools and southern village sides.¹⁸ This retreat to the village green in order to recapture a sense of stable pre-war social and gender relations suggests deeply conservative currents within the literary culture of the period.

The inter-war literary structuring of cricket's symbolic geography produced a generic place that was imaginatively transportable to wholly alien socio-economic and geographical locations. As the following short poem by George Rostrevor-Hamilton suggests, cricket was represented as a hegemonic component of the national culture with important cross-class appeal, and the ability to transform imaginatively the most irretrievably urban and socially deprived of environments:

Where else, you ask, can England's game be seen
 Rooted so deep as on the village green?
 Here, in the slum, where doubtful sunlight falls
 To gild three stumps chalked on decaying walls.¹⁹

As 'A Country Vicar' put it, whether played at Lord's 'or on some rough corner of a patch of waste-land', cricket was always 'the same game'.²⁰ Despite its construction of distinct regional identities and senses of place, cricket discourse produced an image of temporal and spatial conformity in which the various manifestations of the sport were essentially the same.

This theme is given a distinctly imperial dimension in a speech written by J. M. Barrie. The speech was given at a dinner to mark the arrival in England of the Australian Test team in 1926 and was subsequently reprinted in *The Times*. It was conventional for major literary figures to speak at such events (as part of the elaborate ritualism of empire which surrounded colonial cricket tours) in order to validate cricket culturally and sanctify the bonds of empire it represented. As well as producing in *Peter Pan* (1902) the most famous narrative of perpetually arrested adolescence (a book that had profound resonance after the truncation of so many young lives in the war), Barrie frequently wrote on cricket and sought to enshrine the links between the sport and the literary field by organising a writers' cricket team known as the Allahakbarries which, before the war, had regularly included authors such as Arthur Conan Doyle and P. G. Wodehouse.²¹ The Australian players may have been surprised to learn from Barrie that 'the great glory of cricket does not lie in Test Matches, nor county championships, nor Sheffield Shields, but rather on village greens, the cradle of cricket'. Like many inter-war cricket writers, Barrie's speech positions the contemporary practice of Test cricket within a broader discourse of cultural decline and crisis by defining it as little more than a part of ephemeral modernity: 'As the years roll on they become of small account; something else soon takes its place, the very word may be forgotten.' Against this fallen image of impermanence, village cricket signifies sameness and continuity, not only through history, but across geographical space, a quality that endows this auratic English locale with an imperial dimension: 'but long, long afterwards, I think, your

far-off progeny will still of summer afternoons hear the crack of the bat and the local champion calling for his ale on the same old bumpy wickets.’ This generic location possesses not only an ability to transcend imperial space, but can enforce a diachronic conformity in which past and present seemingly merge into one. The aesthetic space of the rural cricket field can thus imaginatively obviate the violent separations of war: ‘It has been said of the unseen army of the dead, on their everlasting march, that when they are passing a rural cricket ground the Englishman falls out of the ranks for a moment to look over the gate and smile. The Englishman, yes, and the Australian.’²² Such synoptic imperial imagery had specific resonance at the time. In Australia, a series of economic and political factors, in conjunction with perceptions of the serious shortcomings of British leadership in the war (particularly at Gallipoli), were hastening and intensifying calls for the devolution of imperial power.²³ In its very denial, Barrie’s speech relates to this context: although it eschews the blatant empire-binding rhetoric of many late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century cricket books such as Pelham Warner’s *Imperial Cricket*, Barrie’s village green is nevertheless a symbol of an imperial culture whose past, present and future would be reassuringly the same.

The sheer weight of symbolic significance placed upon literary images of the rural cricket field meant that inter-war cricket writers became obsessed with certain prescribed formulas of representation. In a poem called ‘The Season Opens’, Edmund Blunden listed the necessary features of the cricket landscape:

A tower we must have, and a clock in the tower,
Looking over the tombs, the tithe barn, the bower;
The inn and the mill, the forge and the hall,
And the loamy sweet level that loves bat and ball.²⁴

The individual features of the cricket landscape are then detailed in four stanzas until the scene is transfigured into a place in which past and present merge into one:

Till the meadow is quick with the masters who were,
And he hears his own shouts when he first trotted there;
Long ago; all gone home now; but here they come all!
Surely these are the same, who now bring bat and ball?

Likewise, at the beginning of A. G. Macdonell’s fictional portrayal of a match played by J. C. Squire’s Invalids XI, the scene is set so as to reveal it as a construction by ironically exaggerating the details of the cricket landscape; the scene is described as ‘perfect to the last detail ... as if Mr Cochran

had ... brought Ye Olde Englyshe Village straight down by special train from the London Pavilion’:

It was a hot summer’s afternoon. There was no wind, and the smoke from the red-roofed cottages curled slowly up into the golden haze. The clock on the flint tower of the church struck the half-hour, and the vibrations spread slowly across the shimmering hedgerows ... Bees lazily drifted. White butterflies flapped their aimless way among the gardens. Delphiniums, larkspur, tiger-lilies, evening-primrose, monk’s-hood, sweet-peas, swaggered brilliantly above the box hedges, the wooden palings, and the rickety gates. The cricket field itself was a mass of daisies and buttercups and dandelions, tall grasses and purple vetches and thistle-down, and great clumps of dark-red sorrel, except, of course, for the oblong patch in the centre – mown, rolled, watered – a smooth, shining emerald of grass, the pride of Fordenden, the Wicket.²⁵

Macdonell’s novel ends with a dream-like evocation of ‘the muted voices of grazing sheep, and the merry click of bat upon ball, and the peaceful green fields of England, and the water-meads, and the bells of the Cathedral’. Intoxicated by the scene’s sheer Englishness, the narrator, Donald, goes off ‘to find some tea’.²⁶

The mythical image of the rural cricket field was by now so closely associated with Englishness that it could unite figures of such disparate political persuasions as George Orwell and the twice Conservative (and once National Government) Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. During the political traumas of the 1920s, Baldwin frequently used images of cricket to represent the ideals of his organic Conservatism: ‘Lord’s changes but Lord’s remains the same,’ he wrote, ‘how unchanging is each phase of the everchanging game!’²⁷ As President of the English Association, Baldwin was a firm advocate of the healing and class-binding capacities of both literature and cricket. Also active in the English Studies movement was George Sampson, an ‘immaterial communist’, who likewise wrote of cricket as emblematic of a national culture in which social tensions could be resolved: ‘You get real communism and “brotherhood of man” at a concert or a theatre or a cricket match. ... and that is the only kind of equality worth seeking for.’²⁸ By dint of its unimpeachable Englishness, cricket seems to have had a unique ability amongst sports to transcend party-political lines. J. C. Squire, who stood as a Labour candidate in the 1918 general election and as a Liberal in 1924, lauded cricket’s rural essence, claiming that ‘few men ... would not rather play on a field surrounded by ancient elms and rabbit-haunted bracken than on a better field with flat black lands or gasworks around’. He believed in the utopian idea of the cricket field as a space free of social tension because here ‘the distinctions in life are temporarily forgotten: for the time being we live in an ideal republic where Jack is as good as his master, but may

be a little better.²⁹ Even the more rebellious Siegfried Sassoon recalled a dream in which Blunden and he scored centuries together, wrote a poem celebrating the unchanging and ‘apolitical’ quality of Lord’s (‘though the Government has gone vermillion ... Lord’s will endure’) and produced one of the most idealised of inter-war village cricket narratives, ‘The Flower Show Match’ (1928).³⁰ The left-wing ex-Etonian George Orwell – who was to famously dub international sporting competition as ‘war minus the shooting’³¹ – retained an affection for cricket in its pristine village green form. He chastised communists for jibing at ‘Every English institution – tea, cricket, Wordsworth, Charlie Chaplin, kindness to animals’³² and, in his review of Edmund Blunden’s *Cricket Country*, defended the game against left-wing charges of snobbery in a traditional panegyric of amateur sporting values and village cricket’s social inclusiveness.³³ J. B. Priestley later provided a variation on the political symbolism of the cricket field in his anti-statist manifesto for Britain, *Out of the People*, a work written during the Second World War. Priestley used the image of village cricket (in which there are ‘more in the field than round it’)³⁴ as a metaphor of a more participatory and less centralised politics, an image that reflected his aversion to centralised state socialism.³⁵

Such political metaphors of village cricket had been elaborated in a deeply nostalgic form of cricket fiction that emerged in the aftermath of the First World War. Novels such as Hugh de Selincourt’s *The Cricket Match* (1924) and its sequel, *The Game of the Season* (1931), apotheosised the literary conventions of the rural cricket field, rendering it a site in which the ‘team’ signified organic social order under the benevolent authority of the local gentry:

And each man, as he came on to the ground, got slowly caught up in the spirit of the game, emerging, each in his own way, from the habits of worry and care; as each man was given the chance not too frequently offered in modern life of living for a time outside himself, with a common purpose, in which he took genuine interest; and nearly every man, each in his own way, availed himself of this great, good thing, unconsciously of course, for the most part, but none the less eagerly.³⁶

The ending of the novel is equally synoptic: ‘Night descended peacefully upon the village of Tillingfold. Rich and poor, old and young, were seeking sleep.’³⁷

Neville Cardus and the garden of England

Neville Cardus holds a unique place in the canon of English cricket literature and, although his role as professional cricket writer necessarily distanced

him from the cultural space occupied by J. C. Squire and his cricketo-literary cohorts, was a skilful and highly influential manipulator of the pastoral mythology of cricket. Like Mary Mitford in the 1820s, Cardus was conscious of the fictiveness of such imagery and, on a number of occasions, openly admitted that the formulaic village cricket green was an urban idealisation. At the same time he understood the salutary potential of such images and could rhapsodise about the aesthetic pleasures of the rural cricket scene as much as any author. Like so many of his inter-war literary contemporaries, Cardus's disaffection with modernity found imaginative resolution in a form of literary ruralism. For a commentator particularly despondent about the growth of professionalism in cricket and what he perceived as the mechanisation of first-class and Test cricket, such scenes provided a Platonic essence of the game against which the fallen present could be contrasted. In a passage from a piece called 'Cricket Fields and Cricketers' published in the early 1920s, Cardus described the style and ambience of cricket as played in different locations around the country. Though, like any organism, cricket responded to its environment, it was essentially rural:

One, indeed, has heard folk ask for winter cricket, to be played in some glass-domed 'Olympia' brilliant with electric light. The cricketer with soul knows better than this. He knows that whoever would appreciate cricket rightly must have a sense, as he sits in the sun (there can be no real cricket without sunshine), that he is simply attending to one part, and just one part, of the pageant of summer as it slowly goes along, and yet a part as true to summer as villages in the Cotswolds, stretches of gleaming meadow-land, and pools in the hills. Cricket in high summer is played with the mind of the born lover of it conscious the whole time that all this happy English life is around him – that cricket is but a corner in the teeming garden of the year. Pycroft in *The Cricket Field* writes of 'those sunny hours ... "when the valleys laugh and sing,"' and plainly the memories of them as he wrote his book were as the memories of some sweet distillation of cricket itself.³⁸

For Cardus, 'The real cricket that provides the continuity of English tradition is to be found on the village green where it can not be contaminated by professionalism and "imperialism".'³⁹

Cardus's anti-imperialist line is seemingly at odds with the major contribution he made to the literary construction of a late Victorian and Edwardian golden age of cricket. The golden age was a cricketing idyll situated between about 1890 and 1914, a pristine point of contrast to the inter-war practice of cricket and, by implication, to the politics, industrial processes and aesthetics of the contemporary national culture. Cardus's construction of the golden age presented a naturally hierarchical social order in which the aristocracy display their inherent superiority through elegant and effortless bodily

performance. The English countryside – or at least a highly cultivated version of it – was an important element of this temporal utopia:

During the golden age of English cricket, the public school flavour could be felt as strongly as in any West End club. When Spooner or K. L. Hutching batted on a lovely summer day you could witness the fine flowerings of all the elegant cultural processes that had gone to the making of these cricketers; you could see their innings as though against a backdrop of distant playing fields, far away from the reach of industry, pleasant lawns stretching to the chaste countryside, lawns well trimmed and conscious of the things that are not done.⁴⁰

Clearly Cardus was not only celebrating the bodily performance of pre-war batsmen such as Spooner and Hutching, but the economic conditions and social relations that apparently enabled such displays of aristocratic style to arise. This nostalgic social vision was also rendered by an aestheticisation of the amateur/professional divide that structured cricket's social relations until 1963. In creating a cast of pre-Great War professional cricketers, Cardus used the literary stereotype of the innocent countryman to endow them with a bucolic charm that highlights by antithesis the pedigree of the gentlemen amateurs. As well as providing humorous, homespun comments, they are presented as good honest rustics in the manner of the contemporary organicist writings of H. J. Massingham. In his deeply nostalgic essay 'Good Days' (1931), Cardus reveals himself as a shameless purveyor of a feudal vision of rural England. In this piece, Cardus introduced the figure of Old William (Bill Attewell), an ex-professional who was subsequently a cricket coach at Shrewsbury School where, for a time, Cardus worked as his assistant. Like Massingham's Samuel Rockall, Old William is organically embedded in a rural environment and thus beyond temporal change. Unlike Cardus's inter-war professionals, Old William's body does not disrupt the aesthetic ideals of cricket discourse, and can thus be seamlessly merged into the English rural landscape: 'he seemed as permanent at Shastbury as the ancient oak tree.' With this organic image connoting organic social order, his respectful comments, patronisingly rendered by Cardus, exemplify social deference and serve to underline the pedigree of Spooner and its relationship to the gentlemanly batting aesthetic: "It were a pleasure to bowl to Maister Spooner ... his batting were as nice as he were hisself." Compounded of the innocent swain with a home-spun, folkloric wisdom, and the salutary Wordsworthian archetype, Old William is resolutely pre-modern rather than upwardly mobile or acquisitive:

He was one of the old school of professional cricketers; I cannot see him in a Morris-Cowley, as any day I can see many contemporary Test match players.

And I cannot see him in suede shoes, or any sort of shoes. William wore enormous boots which has some sort of metal protection built into the edge of the heel. You could hear him coming up the street miles away.

Here Cardus displays a Kenneth Grahame-like hostility to the motor car as a symbol of modernity and conspicuous consumption, whilst Old William's footwear loudly announces his unambiguous class status and unimpeachable masculinity at a safe distance. Old William represents an ideal of a mythical economically and socially immobile social formation that in its political defence merely consented to, and complemented, the cultural authority of the public-school-educated elite: 'I am glad that he loved Shastbury and knew it was a beautiful place.'⁴¹ In these nostalgic evocations of cricket, Cardus was presenting a more desirable picture of an Englishness based upon both social cohesiveness and clearly demarcated inequality under aristocratic benevolence, a seductive vision for many of his contemporaries.

The Englishness of English cricket?

Cardus's highly influential construction of Englishness has continued to exert a cultural hold, as the many reprints and editions of his work testify. Other writers continue to evoke rural cricket as a symbol of the national culture. In a 2000 study of Englishness, *England: An Elegy*, by the philosopher Roger Scruton, cricket represents the expression of various supposedly natural English characteristics. His use of the past tense suggests the loss of the Englishness once symbolised by cricket on the village green:

The game of cricket was an eloquent symbol of this experience of membership: originally a village institution, which recruited villagers to a common loyalty, it displayed the reticent and understated character of the English ideal: white flannels too clean and pure to suggest physical exertion, long moments of silence and stillness, stifled murmurs of emotion should anything out of the ordinary occur and the occasional burst of subdued applause.⁴²

As Scruton himself acknowledges in a footnote, however, this portrayal of village cricket is based on descriptions taken from two literary texts written over one hundred years apart – Mitford's *Our Village* and Francis Brett Young's *Portrait of a Village* (1937), another text that emerged from a period of perceived traumatic social change during which the English rural way of life was seen as further threatened. Clearly Scruton's view of cricket is an intensely literary one. To remark upon this is not to deny the social importance of cricket clubs in village communities then or now, it is only to point out that the notion of village cricket as a symbol of Englishness relies on the existence of a convention of literary and artistic representation, one

that is often ideologically inflected. Though it is not surprising to find such a portrayal of cricket in the work of a writer such as Scruton, preoccupied with the need to eulogise a mythical construction of Englishness in the face of perceived challenges to it such as multi-racialism and European integration and expansion, such symbolic uses of cricket have been, and continue to be, widespread across the political spectrum. The former Conservative Prime minister, cricket author and former President of Surrey County Cricket Club, John Major, evoked images of shadowy village greens, warm beer and cricket as a desirable image of English society, even though he was shamelessly borrowing his imagery from George Orwell, one of the most influential literary figures on the political left during the middle decades of the twentieth century.⁴³ In the words of Mike Marqusee, ‘This is the myth at cricket’s heart, the myth of an enduring and natural social hierarchy, the myth of the village green.’⁴⁴

Such representations of the cricket field were always anachronistic, even in the 1820s, but they continue to have popular resonance and appeal. The England and Wales team currently enters the field at start of play during home Test matches to the strains of William Blake and Hubert Parry’s ‘Jerusalem’, nostalgically associating the game at its highest level with ‘England’s green and pleasant land’. At the same time, as other chapters in this volume show, cricket is now no more English than it is Australian, Pakistani or West Indian and is now fully implicated within the patterns of global economics. Anglocentric views of cricket seem hopelessly outdated, particularly given the plurality of voices that now surround the game as expressed through the new media in particular. Yet cricket will continue to perform cultural work in England and to yield meanings and invite interpretation. Because of its important role within the former British Empire, it is perhaps ideally placed to symbolise a more inclusive and less backward-looking sense of Englishness. The written word will play a major part in such a process.

NOTES

- 1 John Bale, *Landscapes of Modern Sport* (Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 153–65.
- 2 Thomas Henshaw, ed., *Etymologica lingua anglicanae, seu explication vocum anglicarum etymologica ex propriis fontibus* (London: T. Roycroft, 1671).
- 3 H. S. Altham and E. W. Swanton, *A History of Cricket* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1946), p. 19.
- 4 John Burnby, ‘The Kentish Cricketers (in 1773)’ in Leslie Frewin (ed.), *The Poetry of Cricket – An Anthology* (London: Macdonald, 1964), pp. 439–41.
- 5 See Robin Simon and Alistair Smart, *The Art of Cricket* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1983), pp. 16–17; Leigh Hunt, ‘Cricket and Exercise in General’ in *The Seer; or, Common-Places Refreshed* (London: Edward Moxon, 1840), pp. 34–36;

- William Hazlitt, 'Merry England' in A. R. Waller and A. Glover (eds.), *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt, Volume XII: Fugitive Writings* (London: J. M. Dent, 1904); Lord Byron, 'Childish Recollections' in Jerome J. McGann (ed.), *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), vol. I, p. 166; William Wordsworth, 'Composed in the Valley Near Dover, on the Day of Landing' in *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth* (London: Frederick Warne, 1885), p. 171.
- 6 Mary Russell Mitford, *Our Village* (London: Bracken Books, 1992), p. 131.
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