

“MORE MIGHTY THAN THE BAT, THE PEN ...”:  
CULTURE, HEGEMONY AND THE  
LITERATURISATION OF CRICKET

Anthony Bateman  
*University of Salford*

More mighty than the bat, the pen,  
And mightier still as we grow old,  
And hence I needs must scribble when  
I'd fain be bowling – or be bowled.  
Yet thoughts, whate'er the task, will stray,  
To work they never wholly yield;  
And mine, on every sunny day,  
Are in the field, are in the field!<sup>1</sup>

The quotation forming part of the title of this article is taken from ‘Alleviation’, a poem first published in 1898 in a collection of cricket verse and prose entitled *Willow and Leather*. Its author, E.V. Lucas, was one of several English cricket belletrists working at this time whose oeuvre nevertheless went well beyond the boundary of cricket to include biography, travel writing, articles on food and drink, arts criticism and fiction. In this modest octet Lucas wistfully contrasts his youthful cricketing exploits with the more mundane realities of his work as a professional writer. Typical of so many English cricket lyrics in its nostalgic evocation of youth, Lucas’s cricket field figures a lost past that is nevertheless somehow retrievable. In this sense it is not merely an imaginative refuge from the everyday demands of his literary work, but a metaphor of England itself, a generic space of memory, an always and everywhere available ‘spot of time’ that draws the reader into a shared discourse of English remembrance.

But equally significant is the opening line in which two images, the bat and the pen, through the logic of synecdoche, figure two cultural fields, those of cricket and literature, fields that have played particularly privileged and significant roles in the historical construction of Englishness. Taken, admittedly, somewhat out of context, this opening line hints at a fundamental question about the relationship between cricket and literature. Is there somehow a unique but unequal relationship between cricket and the literary field, a relationship in which the representation of a sporting practice has a peculiarly significant role in defining its cultural meaning? Indeed, is there truth in that irresistibly idiosyncratic historian Benny Green’s view that, ‘Not

<sup>1</sup> E.V. Lucas, *Cricket All His Life: Cricket Writings in Prose and Verse* (London, 1950), p.216.

only does cricket, more than any other game, inspire the urge to literary expression; it is almost as though the game itself would not exist at all until written about’?<sup>2</sup>

In order to scrutinise and develop Lucas and Green’s highly suggestive words this article will explore three aspects of the historical relationship between cricket and literature. In terms of chronology this will necessarily entail something of a ‘broad brush’ approach. Firstly, by examining some of the earliest reliable written references to cricket, it will suggest that cricket initially emerged into life as a national pastime in part through discourses of prohibition and censure. In this sense the emergence of cricket typified Michel Foucault’s stress on the role of repression in the creation of a proliferation of discourse. The article will then go on to show that from the middle of the eighteenth century, having emerged from obscurity to prominence through its discursive repression, cricket then began to be inscribed as a symbol of nation. Secondly, it will argue that from about 1820 cricket began to go through a process of literaturisation – a process of inscription, institutionalisation and retrospective discursive organisation that was a crucial element in what C.L.R. James and other historians have identified as the middle class appropriation of the sport. The article will argue that the valorised category of ‘Literature’ became a means of bestowing cultural and aesthetic status on cricket and that English cricket writing mirrored the institutionalised field of English Studies in its self-conscious construction of a canon. Thirdly, it will suggest that this retrospective organisation or ‘canonisation’ of cricket discourse draws our attention to the remarkably similar hegemonic functions that the two fields were constructed to perform within the national and imperial cultures at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

## I

As writers such as Keith Sandiford and Ian Baucom have shown, the printed word played a major part in cricket’s acculturation during the Victorian and Edwardian period.<sup>3</sup> In *The Long Revolution*, as established a cultural historian as Raymond Williams drew attention not only to the rapid growth of print culture in the nineteenth century, but to the way that the expansion of the sporting press was fed by the rapid increase in sports journalism.<sup>4</sup> As Baucom has pointed out, though thousands flocked to see W.G. Grace play, many

<sup>2</sup> Benny Green, *A History of Cricket* (London, 1988), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Keith A.P. Sandiford, ‘England’ in Brian Stoddart and Keith A.P. Sandiford eds. *The Imperial Game: Cricket, Culture and Society* (Manchester, 1998), pp.26-27; Ian Baucom, ‘Put a Little English On It: C.L.R. James and England’s Field of Play’, in *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity* (Princeton, 1999), pp. 145-155.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (London, 1961), p. 198.

more thousands read about him.<sup>5</sup> By the end of the 19th century, with cricket established as the pre-eminent national sport, the great Anglo- Indian batsman and popular cricket author, Prince Kumar Shri Ranjitsinhji, testified not only to the spectacular nature of the sport but also to the productive union of cricket and print. In his highly successful *Jubilee Book of Cricket* (1897) he wrote: 'There are very few newspaper readers who do not turn to the cricket column first when the morning journal comes; who do not buy a halfpenny evening paper to find out how many runs W.G. or Bobby Abel has made'.<sup>6</sup> Cricket was by now an intensely literary phenomenon. In a poem written after the publication of Ranjitsinhji's book Alfred Cochrane testified to its popularity and the status of its author as a living oriental trope:

To buy it all the people press  
With a despairing eagerness  
That borders on the tragic;  
All men peruse with sighs and vows,  
And Towel about their brows,  
This work of Eastern magic<sup>7</sup>

However, to chart the relationship between cricket and the printed word there is a need to historically backtrack from the hegemonic role of the sporting press in the late Victorian period to examine some of the earliest existing written references to the game. What is most striking for the literary historian is that the majority of these references relate to its unlawful status. As well as being a corrective to the misguided notion that cricket has always enjoyed an exalted status they show the game as almost emerging into life from discourses of prohibition and censure. For example, *The Malden Corporation Court Book* of 1562 contains a charge against John Porter alias Brown, and a servant, for 'playing an unlawful game called "clycett"'.<sup>8</sup> In 1622 an indictment by a Chichester churchwarden charged a group of men for playing on the following grounds: 'first, for it is contrarie to the 7<sup>th</sup> Article; second, for that they are used to break the Church window with the balls; and thirdly, for that little children had like to have their braynes beaten out with the cricket batt'.<sup>9</sup> In 1629, having been censured for playing 'at Crickets', the curate of Ruckinge in Kent unsuccessfully defended himself on the grounds that it was a game played by men of quality. But a Puritan minister, Thomas

<sup>5</sup> Baucom, op cit, pp. 152–153.

<sup>6</sup> K. S. Ranjitsinhji, *The Jubilee Book of Cricket*, (London, 1897), p. 458.

<sup>7</sup> Alfred Cochrane, 'Theory and Practice (On reading Prince Ranjitsinhji's book)' in Leslie Frewin, *The Poetry of Cricket*, (London, 1964), p.63.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Brookes, *English Cricket: the game and its players through the ages*, (Newton Abbot, 1978), p.16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p.21.

Wilson, thought cricket an activity wholly unsuited to the clergy and regarded Maidstone as 'very prophane town where Morrice-dancing, Cudgels, Stoolball, Crickets ...' were played 'openly and publickly on the Lord's Day'.<sup>10</sup> Cricket was here emerging in a written sense, not through the form of a celebratory discourse, but as the target of Puritan and sabbatarian ire. Even in the first reliable literary reference to cricket - in *The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence* (1658) by John Milton's nephew, Edward Philips - the game is represented as synonymous with brutality: 'Ay, but Richard, will you not think so hereafter? Will you not when you have me throw a stool at my head, and cry, "Would my eyes had been beaten out with a cricket ball [batt?], the day before I saw thee"'.<sup>11</sup>

With a relaxation of attitudes towards sports at the Restoration cricket began to emerge from its position of relative obscurity with the printed word beginning to define it, along with other folk games, as an element of the national culture. Edward Chamberlyne's *Anglia notitia*, a handbook on the social and political conditions of England, lists cricket as a pastime of 'Inhabitants' for the first time in the eighteenth edition of 1694: 'The natives will endure long and hard labour; insomuch, that after 12 hours hard work, they will go in the evening to foot-ball, stool-ball, cricket, prison-base, wrestling, cudgel-playing, or some such like vehement exercise, for their recreation'.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, newspaper notices of more organised and formal matches began to appear, testifying not only to the increasing acceptability and popularity of the sport and to the considerable sums of money often at stake, but to the role of the printed word in transforming cricket from a relatively obscure folk game into an organised cultural activity occupying a public space.

However, as has been well documented, the status of cricket in the eighteenth century remained a matter of some contestation. Cricket was continuing to gradually emerge as an element of the national culture in part through discourses of moral censure. Puritans in particular continued to condemn the game as an abomination with the aristocracy's increased involvement in cricket invoking the strongest wrath. In 1712 a tract entitled *The Devil and his Peers, or a Princely Way of Sabbath Breaking*, recounted 'a famous cricket match between the Duke of M ..., another Lord and two boys, for twenty guineas.' The pamphlet condemns gambling, Sabbath-breaking and electoral corruption.<sup>13</sup> Another Puritan tract of the same year was a fantastic cautionary tale warning young men of the dangers of Sunday cricket:

<sup>10</sup> Derek Birley, *A Social History of English Cricket*, (London, 1999), p.8.

<sup>11</sup> Brookes, op.cit, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> *Anglia notitia: or, the present state of England; with divers remarks upon the ancient state thereof*, (London, 1694).

<sup>13</sup> Brookes, op. cit, p.75.

Being a very dismal Account of four Young-Men, who made a Match to Play at Cricket, on Sunday the 6<sup>th</sup> of this Instant July 1712, in a meadow near maiden Head Thicket; and as they were at Play, there arose out of the Ground a Man in Black with a Cloven-Foot, which put them in a great Consternation; but as they stood in the Frighted Condition, the Devil flew up in the Air, in a Dark Cloud with Flashes of fire, and in his Room he left a very Beautiful Woman, and Robert Yates and Richard Moors hastily stepping up to her, being Charm’d with her Beauty went to kiss her, but in the Attempt they instantly fell down Dead.

The other two, Simon Jackson and George Grantham, seeing this Tragical Sight, ran home to Maiden-Head, where they now lye in a Distracted Condition.<sup>14</sup>

There were also economic reasons for condemning cricket. For some businessmen the well-publicised ‘great matches’ that were now attracting vast crowds were to be condemned for encouraging widespread absenteeism and providing the occasion for an unhealthy mingling of the social ranks. A contributor to the *Gentleman’s Magazine* in 1743 thought cricket ‘a very innocent, and wholesome exercise’ but its popularity was threatening family life and encouraging ‘a spirit of idleness at a juncture, when, with the utmost industry, our debts, taxes, and decay of trade, will scarcely allow us to get bread’.<sup>15</sup> In 1756 an article in *The Connoisseur* took a similarly dim view of gentlemanly participation in cricket and other sports:

The most striking instance of this low passion for drollery is Toby Bumper, a young fellow of family and fortune, and not without talents, who has taken more than ordinary pains to degrade himself ... He is frequently engaged in the Artillery-ground with Faulkner and Dingate at cricket, and is himself esteemed as good a bat as either of the Bennets.<sup>16</sup>

In his satirical poetic vision of cultural chaos, *The Dunciad* (1742), Alexander Pope lampooned the fact that members of the ruling class were prepared to associate themselves with a game of such low reputation:

The Judge to dance his brother Sergeant call;  
The Senator at Cricket urge the Ball;<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> In Michael Davie and Simon Davie, *The Faber Book of Cricket*, (London, 1987), p.260.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Of publick cricket-matches’, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 13, September 1743, pp.485-486.

<sup>16</sup> G. Colman and B. Thornton, *The connoisseur*, (London, 1757), p. 51.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad* Book iv, lines 591-592, in John Heath –Stubbs ed., *Selected Poems of Alexander Pope*, (London, 1964), p.111.

Between around 1650 and 1750 therefore, what was happening around cricket, to quote Foucault, was a sort of ‘discursive ferment’: a multiplicity of discourses emanating from various mechanisms and institutions such as the Church, the legal system, business interests and the expanding popular press were driving this once obscure folk game out of hiding and demanding that it lead a discursive existence. The once dubious status of cricket, its associations with violence and Sabbath-breaking, seems to have been nothing less than a Foucauldian ‘incitement to discourse’.<sup>18</sup> Even the early written ‘articles of agreement’ and laws of cricket (which began to appear from the 1730s) were a means of ensuring efficient gambling practices free from dispute. The result was to begin to standardise the way the sport was played and, although not the prime intention, ensure that it could be disseminated and practiced uniformly on a national basis.

Once this process of dissemination had begun to occur, and once cricket became the object of literary attention in the context of a widely expanding national print culture, the way was clear for it to be redefined in the interests of nationalism. Already in the 1740s the game was being explicitly treated as a symbol of British national identity in the first full-length poetic description of a cricket match written in English, James Love’s ‘Cricket, an heroic poem’. Framed within the conventions of a Homeric battle scene, cricket is legitimised as a suitably manly pursuit that is worthy of its status as a national pastime:

Hail Cricket! glorious, manly, *British* game!  
First of all Sports! be first alike in Fame!’.<sup>19</sup>

As the author’s emphasis suggests, here cricket embodies the peculiarly British qualities of manliness and athleticism - qualities that are equated with the nation’s political freedom and stand in opposition to, but are also threatened by, the supposedly emasculating influences of European culture:

Leave the dissolving Song, the baby Dance,  
To soothe the Slaves of *Italy* and *France*:  
While the firm Limb, and strong brac’d Nerve are thine.  
Scorn Eunuch Sports; to manlier Games incline;  
Feed on the Joys that Health and Vigour give;  
Where Freedom reigns, ‘tis worth the while to live.’<sup>19</sup>

It was cricket’s quintessential Englishness that Wordsworth evoked in his

<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Will To Knowledge, The History of Sexuality: Volume One*, (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 17-49.

<sup>19</sup> James Love, ‘Cricket – an heroic poem, with critical observations of Scriblerus Maximus’, in Frewin op cit, pp. 460-469.

sonnet of 1802 entitled 'composed in the valley near Dover, on the day of landing', one of a series of poems 'Dedicated to National Independence and Liberty' written after Wordsworth had renounced his early revolutionary views. Here a cricket match is one of a series of images figuring an idealised and comfortingly unchanging pastoral England that symbolises political freedom in contrast to abjected post- revolutionary France from which the disenchanted speaker has just returned:

Dear fellow Traveller! Here we are once more.  
The cock that crows, the smoke that curls, that sound  
Of bells, those boys that in yon meadow ground  
In white sleev'd shirts are playing by the score,  
And even this little River's gentle roar,  
All, all are English. Oft have I looked round  
With joy in Kent's green vales; but never found  
Myself so satisfied in heart before.  
Europe is yet in bounds; but let that pass  
Thought for another moment. Thou art free,  
My Country! And 'tis joy enough and pride  
For one hour's perfect bliss, to tread the grass  
Of England once again, and hear and see,  
With such a dear Companion at my side.<sup>20</sup>

The influence of the Romantic Movement of which Wordsworth was such a seminal figure created and fed an increased interest in folk customs and culture, and I suggest that this included cricket. Although C.L.R. James was no doubt correct in his quoted assertion that to the Victorians, cricket, like the poetry of Wordsworth, provided an antidote to the 'degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation',<sup>21</sup> it is important to recognise that for at least fifty years the game had been interpellated into a literary discourse that associated it with ideals of English rural life. For example, in a poem called 'The Kentish Cricketers' John Burnby had located the Kent versus Surrey match of 1773 in an Arcadian landscape of ineffable beauty with 'matchless cricketers' in 'milk-

<sup>20</sup> William Wordsworth, 'composed in the valley near Dover, on the day of landing', in Frewin, op.cit, p.11. That the poem refers specifically to cricket is verified in the journals of Wordsworth's sister, Dorothy: 'When within a mile of Dover, saw crowds of people at a Cricket-match, the numerous combatants dressed in "white-sleeved shirts", and it was in the very same field where, when we "trod the grass of England" once again, twenty years ago we had seen an Assemblage of Youths engaged in the same sport, so very like the present that all might have been the same!' See *The Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth, Volume 2*. E. de Selincourt ed., (London, 1941), p.8.

<sup>21</sup> C.L.R. James, 'Garfield Sobers', in Anna Grimshaw ed., *C.L.R. James Cricket*, (London, 1986), p.227.

white vestments' a seemingly organic part of the landscape.<sup>22</sup> Even when cricket was associated with the, as yet un-reformed, Public Schools, the literary strain was usually pastoral. Lord Byron, a keen Etonian cricketer, wrote of cricket as an integral element of the rural scene as well as being the occasion for ritualised male-bonding.<sup>23</sup> Although, as Michael Harris has shown, in the first half of the eighteenth century print culture played a major part in enabling cricket to become a commercialised activity closely associated with the elite groups of society and occupying the public spaces of the urban centres,<sup>24</sup> as the century wore on, at the 'higher' cultural end of the literary spectrum, cricket was being inscribed as something essentially anachronistic and rural. Cricket thus celebrated its past at the very time that it was inaugurated as a product of modernity. Whether we consider 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', or William Hazlitt's 'Merry England' in which cricket is celebrated as an element of a dying folk culture along with other practices and artefacts such as the Maypole, the game was being written into existence as a legacy of a near extinct folk culture, as uncontaminated by modernity, and hence as authentically English.<sup>25</sup>

With the countryside and the so-called 'organic communities' threatened by land enclosure and the migrations from country to town, a mode of popular literature was emerging which both lamented the passing of this way of life and sought to reaffirm the values of rural communities. Works such as Cobbet'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 emergence of such cricket narratives should therefore be understood in relation to this sense of social transformation and not merely to the growing popularity and significance of the sport itself. I go as far to say that a work such as John Nyren and Charles Cowden-Clarke's deeply nostalgic *The Cricketers of My Time* (1832) had, as its central problematic, the perceived disappearance of the organic community.

At the same time the literaturisation of cricket was beginning to occur on

<sup>22</sup> See John Burnby, 'The Kentish Cricketers (In 1773)' in Frewin, op.cit., pp. 439-441.

<sup>23</sup> See Lord Byron, 'Cricket at Harrow' in Frewin, op cit, p.107.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Harris, *Sport in the Newspapers before 1750: representations of cricket, class and commerce in the London press*. Media History 4(1): 19-28, June 1998. pp. 19-28.

<sup>25</sup> See Robin Simon and Alistair Smart, *The Art of Cricket*, (London, 1983), pp. 34f., 61 n 79, 16, 17 (66,67); Leigh Hunt, 'Cricket and Exercise in General', in *The Seer; or, Common-Places Refreshed*, (London, 1840), pp. 34-36; William Hazlitt, *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt*, (London, 1904) vol xii, 'Fugitive Writings'.



the pages of the novel, the most bourgeois of literary genres and, as Raymond Williams and others have shown, a form that development was intimately linked to constructions of national identity in the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup> In the novels of Charles Dickens, for example, cricket was quite frequently afforded an important symbolic and scene-setting function. Although Dickens' famous depiction of the Dingley Dell versus All Muggleton match in his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, has frequently been criticised for its technical inaccuracies, as David Smith has argued 'the narrative is a celebration of a free encounter, a celebration of enjoyment, in which rules are kept to a minimum'. As Smith has shown, in later novels such as *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Bleak House*, brief references to cricket, where the game 'has still something of the aura of a pre-industrial folk game', are emblematic of 'uncorrupted innocence or of a nostalgic past still just enduring'.<sup>27</sup>

So, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the marriage of cricket and print culture was interpellating the game into a discourse of English pastoral remembrance. At the time when print culture, as Anderson has shown, was creating a sense of national consciousness, cricket was writing itself into an element of the national culture.<sup>28</sup> Perhaps this is best exemplified by the immodest claim made by the editor of *Bells Life* in 1844:

I attribute the Extension of the Game of Cricket very much to the Paper of which I am the Editor. Having been the Editor Twenty Years, I can recollect when the Game of Cricket was not so popular as it is at the present Moment; but the Moment the Cricketers found themselves the Object of Attention almost every Village had its Cricket Green. The Record of their Prowess in Print created a Desire still more to extend their Exertions and their Fame. Cricket has become almost universal ...<sup>29</sup>

The essayist Charles Lamb may have ironically lamented the feminising influence of literature on young men (who were no longer 'play-goers, punch-drinkers and cricketers ... but Readers!'<sup>30</sup>) yet the printed word was clearly an agent in promoting the playing of cricket. Even the game's textual paraphernalia had a major influence on the spread of cricket. When, in the

<sup>26</sup> See for instance, Raymond Williams, *The English Novel From Dickens to Lawrence*, (London, 1970).

<sup>27</sup> David Smith, 'A Little More Play: Cricket in Dickens's Fiction', *Dickensian*, 86/1 (1990), pp. 41-52.

<sup>28</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London, 1991).

<sup>29</sup> See Hugh Cunningham, 'Class and Leisure in Mid-Victorian England', in Bernard Waites, Tony Bennett and Graham Martin eds., *Popular Culture: Past and Present*, (London, 1982), pp. 71-72.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in Eric Midwinter, *Quill on Willow: Cricket in Literature*, (Chichester, 2001), p.4.

late eighteenth century, pen on paper replaced the notch on wood as a means of scoring, henceforth the details of matches were more readily reproduced and disseminated. It was now more possible to follow and write about cricket over distances of space and time. The emergence of the coaching manual as a popular genre was also significant. William Lambert's *Instructions and Rules For Playing The Noble Game Of Cricket* (1816) had sold 300,000 copies by 1865.<sup>31</sup> Not only did such texts regulate the way cricket was played nationally; to play cricket correctly according to the technical example of these books was to adopt certain bodily postures and certain economies of movement that were becoming characteristic of a decidedly bourgeois ideology of the body. With the emergence of national discourses enabled by the growth of print culture, to play cricket on a village green was no longer to merely partake in a localised practice, but to be part of a highly ritualised element of the national culture.

## II

By the 1840s, an incipient process of literaturisation occurring not only in the emerging genre of specialist cricket writing, but in journals, novels and poetry was inscribing upon cricket a set of meanings that associated it with ideals of English rurality at odds with the harsher realities of modernity. This concept of literaturisation has been borrowed and adapted from Steve Redhead's study, *The Transformation of Soccer Culture*. Redhead has described a process by which members of the 'literati' (most prominently Nick Hornby) have attempted to rescue football's reputation so damaged in Britain during the 1980s by factors such as hooliganism and the Heysel and Hillsborough Stadium disasters.<sup>32</sup> Although Redhead has outlined a post-modern phenomenon of cultural crossover, an interpenetration of commerce and culture by which literary treatment of soccer increases the sport's marketability to the middle class, there are some parallels here with the literaturisation of cricket that occurred during the nineteenth century. In the early decades of that century, cricket – a game that as we have seen, still had something of an image problem due to its associations with gambling and even violence – began to reinvent itself, and this process of reinvention occurred to a significant extent on the printed page. To read cricket literature, therefore, is to be reminded that many forms of print culture played crucial roles in the construction of Andersonian 'imagined realities'. Through its representation on the printed page, cricket was rearticulated, redefined and reinscribed according to the cultural and ideological needs of the middle class. Thus cricket writing became a means of representing a distinctively bourgeois

<sup>31</sup> See Rayvern-Allen, op cit., p.23.

<sup>32</sup> Steve Redhead, *Post-Fandom and The Millennial Blues: The Transformation of Soccer Culture* (London, 1997), pp.88-92.

sense of national community and provided an important means by which the interests of this powerful section of society were universalised as the interests of the society as a whole. As Kevin Davey has noted, representations of sport have had a 'complex evolution and relation to national identifications'.<sup>33</sup>

Space does not allow for a full discussion of the intensification of cricket's literaturisation that occurred from about 1860 onwards, but one important aspect of this process was the way in which cricket then began to construct its own discursive history: a process that had a distinctively literary aspect to it. As Christopher Brookes, Derek Birley and others have argued, the traditional historiography of cricket sought to bestow on the game impeccable Anglo-Saxon credentials and ancient pedigree. In the process it has almost willfully made the mistake of conflating various folk games with modern cricket.<sup>34</sup> It has also attempted to prove the game's ancient lineage by reference to various rather spurious written and visual sources supposedly referring to cricket. One notable example of this was in H.S. Altham's 1926 *History of Cricket* when the word 'creag' is taken from a Royal wardrobe account from 1300 and, through a process of rather desperate philological ingenuity, is shown to have referred to cricket, thus giving the game ancient pedigree and long ties to royalty.<sup>35</sup>

But the need for cricket to construct its own discursive history also took a more specifically literary form. For example, writing in 1912, Andrew Lang argued that cricket was played as far back as 100 B.C. basing this on evidence supposedly provided by the ancient Irish epics and romances, works identified by Lang as the oldest in Western Literature. According to Lang, cricket was played by the ancestors of Cuchulain, and by the Dalraid Scots from northern Ireland who invaded and annexed Argyll in about 500. A.D.<sup>36</sup> While Lang's idiosyncratic belief in the Celtic origin of cricket was at odds with most nineteenth and early twentieth century versions of the game's history, he thus afforded cricket heroic status and a mythological past. As the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski would point out, the use of myth is significant because it strengthens a sense of cricket's tradition, endowing it with value and prestige by tracing it back to a higher and better reality of initial events.<sup>37</sup>

The interest in cricket of many figures involved in literary production is often evidenced by the creation of such mythologies based on the spurious interpretation of scattered and often ambiguous references to ball games in

<sup>33</sup> Kevin Davey, *English Imaginaries: Six Studies in Anglo-British Modernity*, (London, 1999), p.186.

<sup>34</sup> See Christopher Brookes, *English Cricket: The Game and its Players through the Ages*, (Newton Abbot, 1978); Derek Birley, *The Willow Wand: Some Cricket Myths Explored* (London, 1979) and *A Social History of English Cricket*, (London, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> See H.S. Altham, *A History of Cricket*, (London, 1946), pp. 18-19.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Lang, 'The History of Cricket', in Pelham Warner ed., *Imperial Cricket*, (London, 1912), p.54.

<sup>37</sup> Timothy Brennan,, 'The national longing for form', in Homi K. Bhabha ed., *Nation and Narration*, (London, 1990), pp.44-45.

English and European literature. There are many examples of these dubious discoveries of references to cricket in the literary canon from *Mockett's Journal* in 1836 proclaiming that Virgil had described a cricket match<sup>38</sup>, to the 'discovery' that Rabelais' Gargantua had played cricket<sup>39</sup>, to the claim that cricket appears in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and even before in a poem by Joseph of Exeter dating from 1180.<sup>40</sup> There are even a number of essays on the unlikely subject of Shakespeare and cricket.<sup>41</sup> Usually these claims are made to seem highly questionable when one consults the relevant text. Primitive bat and ball games perhaps, but not cricket. The point is, of course, that in seeking a spurious textual history to validate itself, cricket wrote itself into what Benedict Anderson has termed 'that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation'.<sup>42</sup> To give this sense of its own antiquity, cricket needed Chaucer and Joseph of Exeter just as the institutionalised field of English studies needed Chaucer and *Beowulf*.

The literaturisation of cricket was also an issue of cultural status and value. Cricket, more than any other sport, has very self-consciously sought literary authorisation. The game has featured (admittedly in some cases only very briefly) in the work of Dickens, Anthony Trollope, George Meredith, E.M. Forster and James Joyce, just to mention a few authors. Anthologies of cricket writing (of which there are many) are packed with the musings of canonical writers, thus they are a means by which the game is raised above the level of mere sport into the supposedly 'higher' domain of the literary and aesthetic. These essays and anthologies fulfil a self-serving function, embodying the supposedly special relationship between the fields of cricket and literature while reinforcing and perpetuating the relationship. When writers have in some way been actively involved in cricket, such as Lord Byron, John Keats, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or Samuel Beckett, these facts provide further material for literary musing. The fact that HG Wells' father was once a professional cricketer, or that Doyle's only first class wicket was that of W.G. Grace himself, have been used to draw the two fields together. This need to validate cricket by literary allusion has at times reached ridiculous proportions. Eric Midwinter has recently reminded us that when, in 1861, Wells's father took four wickets in as many balls, his second victim was one of Jane Austen's great nephews.<sup>43</sup>

Another closely related element of the process of literaturisation was the construction of a discourse that bestowed cultural and aesthetic status on the

<sup>38</sup> See David Rayvern-Allen, *Early Books on Cricket*, p.8.

<sup>39</sup> Edmund Blunden, *Cricket Country*, (London, 1945), pp. 161-171.

<sup>40</sup> *Bell's Life*, 29 September, 1850.

<sup>41</sup> See for example Charles Box, 'Shakespeare and Cricket: An Enforced Dissertation', in *The English Game of Cricket*, (London, 1877), pp. 467-474.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, op. cit., p.44.

<sup>43</sup> Eric Midwinter, op cit, p.45.

game simply through a remarkable density of literary allusion. This process reminds us that the aesthetic is often no more than a process of analogy, of what Pierre Bourdieu has described as '[a] play of academic or urbane references [that] has no other function than to bring the work into an interminable circuit of inter-legitimation'.<sup>44</sup> One of the texts that most fully embodies and exemplifies this is Edmund Blunden's often digressive and overwritten *Cricket Country*, one of a number of cricket books written during the Second World War celebrating an element of English culture in the cause of the war effort. In *Cricket Country* literary allusions and belletristic musings merge into a seamless unity with the author's cricket reflections to the extent that any boundary between the fields becomes almost totally blurred. For Blunden the pleasures of English cricket imitated those of English Literature.

No cricket writer utilised a Bourdieusian 'logic of distinction' in order to aesthetically validate the sport more than Neville Cardus. Writing in the inter-war period, a time when writers of both political left and right feared that a tide of imported American mass cultural forms would dilute or render extinct aesthetic standards, Cardus felt impelled to write cricket into the category of high art so that it could somehow resist the evils of commoditisation. Although most famous for his many references to classical music, Cardus also sought to aestheticise cricket by way of literary allusion. It is worth quoting at some length from his essay 'Walter Brearley' in which Cardus demonstrated - admittedly with a touch of typical irony - the idea that a particular individual cricketing style can be rendered by using an apposite literary style or mode:

The man who would write of great cricketers must look to his choice of language; his theme might call one day for prose and another for poetry, and for all sorts of prose and poetry. Dr Johnson himself could not have weighed words with a keener nicety than a discussion of, say, Grace's batsmanship demanded, but fugitive loveliness from a Herrick is needed to tell of the poised, fleeting charm of a Spooner. For an innings by a Joe Darling ... let us have a little of the rolling thunder of a page by Carlyle, with smoke in the track of the sentences. And if Ranji is your theme, call on the muse that sent Coleridge his visions of Kuble Khan ... In the making of a pen-picture of the imperial Maclaren a minor sort of Gibbon must unloose a majesty of cadence; flashes of Meredith epigram - or reflections of them - and nothing less are likely to reveal for us Macartney as he breaks shins over the wit of batsmanship; while a large Rabelasian vigour will blow through the book that tells the tale of Armstrong. And where is a better prose for Walter Brearley than that in Dickens which tells of the wind that roared 'Ho! 'Ho! over the countryside ...<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (London, 1984), p.53.

<sup>45</sup> Neville Cardus, 'Walter Brearley' in *Days in the Sun*, (London, 1924), pp. 223- 224.

In this virtuoso showpiece Cardus playfully suggests that the cricket writer needs to be thoroughly assimilated into the English literary tradition and fully versed with the models of the canonical writers. The ideal cricket writer (presumably like Cardus) is thus both immersed in a particular tradition and something of a literary chameleon, able to draw upon a suitable stylistic or generic model in order to satisfactorily convey a sense of an individual cricketing style. As an art form, cricket warrants the attention of the elevated activity of 'literature' and by explicit comparison with literature gains further aesthetic credibility. Significantly, all the cricketers referred to in the passage are from the pre-war 'Golden Age' pantheon while, with the exception of Rabelais, the corresponding authors are all well-established figures in the English literary canon.

Though Cardus's literaturisation of cricket was to an extent a product of the inter-war period, a mediation of a widely held perception of cultural crisis, as has been suggested, the aesthetic elevation of cricket by literary allusion has a much longer history. Significantly, in the middle of the nineteenth century, writers such as John Mitford, James Pycroft, and Charles Box began to consciously construct a canon of cricket writing and this is a process that has long continued. Cricket's self-image has seemed to demand a body of canonical texts just as the Christian Church venerated its scriptures and history in order to justify its continued existence. The canon's associated meta-discourse includes essays on 'cricket literature', on 'cricket in literature', on 'cricket poetry' and essays on particular cricket writers.<sup>46</sup> To read such essays is to detect the construction of a 'Great Tradition' from Nyren (who is perhaps cricket's real Chaucer) to Cardus (whose centrality in the canon makes him something of a Shakespeare figure) underpinned by the quasi-religious authority of *Wisden* (which is often referred to as 'The Cricketer's Bible'). C.L.R. James (Milton, perhaps) remains an awkward and hence somewhat marginalised figure, greatly admired for his knowledge of cricket and the quality of his writing, but whose politics remain something of an embarrassment.<sup>47</sup>

Given the construction of a canon there is often a strong sense of cricket writers yearning to be part of an established tradition and hence self-consciously positioning themselves in a sort of apostolic line. Hence Lucas undertook literary pilgrimages to Hambledon, walking on the hallowed turf

<sup>46</sup> See for example, 'The Cricket Matches of Fiction', 'The Poets of Cricket' and 'Cricket Books' in E.B.V. Christian, *At the Sign of the Wicket: Essays on the Glorious Game* (Bristol, 1895); Edmund Blunden, 'Our Authors' in *Cricket Country*, pp. 103-115; 'The Pleasures of Reading *Wisden*' and 'Cricket and Literature' in Rowland Ryder, *Cricket Calling* (London, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> I have developed the idea of a canon of cricket writing from an idea of Maurice Bottomley in 'Days in the Sun': Cricket, Literature and the Construction of Englishness' (Paper delivered to 'Anglo-Saxon Attitudes' conference, Salford University, 1999).

with Nyren's book in hand just as Hillaire Belloc undertook pilgrimages to parts of Southern England in search of the true meaning of Englishness and a rooted sense of identity.<sup>48</sup> Titles of several cricket books have also enforced a sense of tradition and of writers positioning themselves in a line of literary succession. Some publications have flaunted their literariness by employing a title relating to the broader literary culture such as Jack Fingleton's account of the 1947 Australian tour of England, *Brightly Fades the Don* parodying Sohkolhov. However, more common are allusions to the tradition of cricket literature, E.W. Swanton's *The Cricketers of My Time* being the most recent example. Likewise G.D. Martineau's *The Field is Full of Shades* recalls Francis Thompson's elegiac and ghostly poem 'At Lords' and Dudley Carew's dark novel about the life of a professional cricketer, *The Son of Grief*, and his collection of essays, *To the Wicket*, echo a reference to the game in another poem of English elegiac memorial, A.E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*:

Now in Maytime to the wicket  
Out I march with bat and pad:  
See the son of grief at cricket  
Trying to be glad.<sup>49</sup>

However, this is not to suggest that cricket's literary canon is a totally exclusive enterprise. Many anthologies have reflected and produced cricket's national popular status by including, along with the work of canonical writers, examples of a large amount of cricket songs and doggerel verse, much of which expresses popular patriotic sentiment (Albert Craig, 'The Bard of the Oval', here emerges as cricket's William McGonagall). Cricket's 'literaturisation' was therefore a means by which the game was incorporated into the categories of both elite and popular culture.

### III

In a recent book on the subject Eric Midwinter has correctly shown that both cricket and literature were deeply woven into the fabric of English society during the Victorian period.<sup>50</sup> However, perhaps the significance of these two privileged and valorised elements of the national culture lies in the hegemonic work that both were intended to achieve. Both cricket and English Studies were crucial institutional manifestations of an attempt to create a new collectivist idea of Englishness. Both were invested with the ability to represent a sense of ritual community; both were elements of what Brian Doyle has defined as 'the collectivist social outlook which would be immune equally

<sup>48</sup> Lucas, op.cit., p.58.

<sup>49</sup> A.E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad* (1896), (Ludlow, 1987).

<sup>50</sup> Midwinter, op cit. ch. 6.

from the mechanical vulgarities of statism and the revolutionary demands of socialism'.<sup>51</sup> In the late Victorian period English Literature and English cricket were constructed as two of the main cultural practices able to bear this hegemonic burden. It is significant, therefore, that English as an academic subject was first institutionalised not in the Universities, but in the Working Men's Colleges and Mechanics Institutes and that some of its earliest proponents such as Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes were equally active in propagating the cultural work of cricket and other sports in these same institutions. There was also a strongly nationalistic element in these enterprises based on the 'Englishness' of both cultural practices. It is no coincidence that when the English Association was formed in 1907 to advance the teaching of literature within the national culture, one of its main figures was Sir Henry Newbolt, jingoist celebrant of cricket as the symbol of public school imperial masculinity.

In the late Victorian period discursive constructions of the two fields thus show a remarkable degree of similarity. Had critics of the cult of athleticism such as Matthew Arnold and his followers been prepared to stoop low enough to read some of the cricket books that since the 1860s were being published in abundance, they would have found many of their own ideological pieties given eloquent expression. Just as a Victorian handbook for English teachers constructs the subject as a 'humanizing pursuit' that would counter ideological extremism, a pursuit able to 'promote sympathy and fellow feeling amongst all classes',<sup>52</sup> so Andrew Lang wrote cricket into part of this collectivist social outlook:

Cricket is a very humanising game. It appeals to the emotions of local patriotism and pride. It is eminently unselfish; the love of it never leaves us, and binds all the brethren together, whatever their politics and rank may be.<sup>53</sup>

Like Literature for Arnold, cricket was constructed as an antidote to ideological dogma, embodying timeless and universal truths that somehow transcended the sordid demands of politics. Just as a Victorian promoter of English Studies argued the subject opened 'a serene and luminous region of truth where all may meet and expatiate in common', above the 'smoke and stir, the din and turmoil of man's lower life of care and business and debate'<sup>54</sup>, for A.E. Knight, 'the camaraderie and good-fellowship of the cricket field, the tendency to forget social or class distinctions, and to ascend beyond diffracted rays to the primal light shed by the united love of the game' allowed him to

<sup>51</sup> Brian Doyle, *English and Englishness*, (London, 1989), p.19.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (London, 1983), p.25.

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Introduction' in Richard Daft, *Kings of Cricket*, (Bristol, 1893), pp. 14-15.

<sup>54</sup> Eagleton, *op cit*, p.25.



inscribe upon cricket an equally hegemonic function.<sup>55</sup>

It is in these Victorian constructions of English and cricket as hegemonic cultural practices where the real significance of a canon of cricket writing emerges. In commemorating a line of development and consecrating certain representative writers as models, certain approved ways of writing about the sport were given a quasi-institutionalised status, and by implication, other ways of writing, other inscriptions of meaning on the sport were excluded, discredited or marginalized. As Andrew Sanders has written, 'the trouble with canons is that they not only become hallowed by tradition, they also enforce tradition'.<sup>56</sup> As the history of cricket informs us, there is nothing inherently 'moral', 'humanising' or even 'manly' about the sport. These meanings, as Bourdieu would remind us, are the product of discourses surrounding the sport, discourses that are fully bound up with the struggle for social power.<sup>57</sup> As cricket was constructed as a symbol of Anglo-British national identity and burdened with a specific cultural task, there was a need to construct a canon of writing and a literary tradition that would fix the game's meaning and thus enable it to fulfil this particular hegemonic role.

Finally, with the risk of sounding hopelessly textualist, the fact that print culture has played such a significant part in the inscription of meaning upon cricket allows for the possibility that the sport can again be rewritten to mean something quite different from that which the Victorian middle class intended. To a degree, since C.L.R. James this has already happened, particularly in Britain's former colonies. In his essay 'Playing with Modernity', Arjun Appadurai has shown how various factors, including print culture and vernacular radio commentary, de-victorianised and decolonised Indian cricket, freeing the sport from its links to Englishness.<sup>58</sup> In the West Indies too, a fine tradition of both oral and written cricket verse has emerged in which metaphors of cricket explore new and sometimes problematic ideas of national and regional identities.<sup>59</sup> According to J. Neville Turner, in Australia a less nostalgic and more demotic tradition of specialist cricket writing developed (perhaps in contra-distinction to English models), a tradition that reached a Golden Age in the last decade of the twentieth century.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> A.E. Knight, *The Compleat Cricketer* in Benny Green ed., *The Cricketer's Archive* (London, 1977).

<sup>56</sup> Andrew Sanders, 'Poet's Corner: The Development of a Canon of English Literature', in *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*, (Oxford, 1994), pp. 1-15.

<sup>57</sup> See Bourdieu, op cit, pp. 208-225.

<sup>58</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'Playing with Modernity: The Decolonization of Indian Cricket', in Carol A. Breckenridge ed., *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, (Minneapolis, 1995), pp. 23-49.

<sup>59</sup> For instance, Faustin Charles, 'Cricket's in My Blood', 'Viv' and 'Greenidge' in *Days and Nights in the Magic Forest*, (London, 1986), pp. 41-44.

<sup>60</sup> J. Neville Turner, 'The Golden Age of Australian Cricket Writing' in *Crickets Lore* Vol 4, issue 8, pp.30-34.

In that textual embodiment of the intimate links between cricket and English Literature, *Cricket Country*, Edmund Blunden sought to petrify cricket's literary canon by calling for the establishment of a 'Poet's Corner' at Lords adorned with busts of Nyren, Cowden-Clarke and Mary Mitford.<sup>61</sup> Yet the constructedness of canons implies a degree of malleability. Hence in recent years the English literary canon has been challenged and reconfigured, particularly by feminist and post-colonial scholars. The consciously more modern and internationalist anthology of cricket writing recently collected by the Indian historian, Ramachandra Guha, points to the possibility of a similar reconstruction of the cricket canon. Alongside many established English writers, Guha's anthology includes examples of the work of Australian, Indian and West Indian authors including Jack Fingleton, Ray Robinson, Sujit Mukherjee and C.L.R. James, as well as the Anglo-American Marxist, Mike Marqusee, whose work represents the most radical challenge to traditional cricket historiography and literature since James.<sup>62</sup> Another welcome recent publication is a collection of the work of Chris Searle, a writer acutely sensitive to issues of class, race and gender within cricket.<sup>63</sup> It is not clear, however, if the self-professed 'New Cricket Writing' represents a meaningful challenge to conventional English belletrism or is merely the literary wing of the Barmy Army.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, perhaps the printed word will effect a change in the meaning of English cricket, rewriting the deeply nostalgic cricket field of Lucas's poem into the symbol of a new, less backward-looking, more pluralistic sense of national identity.

<sup>61</sup> Blunden, *Cricket Country*, p.116.

<sup>62</sup> Ramachandra Guha ed., *The Picador Book of Cricket Writing*, (London, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> Chris Searle, *Pitch of Life: Writings on Cricket*, (Manchester, 2001).

<sup>64</sup> See Alistair McLellan ed., *Nothing Sacred: The New Cricket Culture*, (London, 1996).