

LITERATURE, POLITICS,  
AND THE ENGLISH  
AVANT-GARDE

*Nation and Empire, 1901–1918*

PAUL PEPPIS



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CHAPTER I :

*Conjuring new character: The English Review,  
Wyndham Lewis, and the reconstruction of Englishness*

He was extraordinary in appearance . . . He seemed to be Russian. He was very dark in the shadows of the staircase. He wore an immense steeple-crowned hat. Long black locks fell from it. His coat was one of those Russian looking coats that have no revers. He had also an ample black cape of the type that villains in transpositional melodrama throw over their shoulders when they say “Ha-ha!” He said not a word.

I exclaimed:

“I don’t want any Tzar’s diaries. I don’t want any Russian revelations. I don’t want to see, hear or smell any Slavs.” All the while I was pushing him down the stairs. He said nothing. His dark eyes rolled. He established himself immovably against the banisters and began fumbling in the pockets of his cape. He produced crumpled papers in rolls. He fumbled in the pockets of his strange coat. He produced crumpled papers in rolls. He produced them from all over his person – from inside his waistcoat, from against his skin beneath his brown jersey . . . All the time he said no word. I have never known any one else whose silence was a positive rather than a negative quality. At last he went slowly down those stairs. I had the impression that he was not any more Russian. He must be Guy Fawkes.

He had thrust all those rolls into my arms. I went up again into the dining-room and dropped the rolls before Marwood. He looked at one of them for no more than a second and said:

“We are saved.”

Ford Madox Ford, *Return to Yesterday* (1932), 389–90

Ford Madox Ford’s story of Wyndham Lewis’s theatrical arrival in 1909 at the offices of Ford’s illustrious literary magazine, *The English Review*, is one of the great origin legends of British modernism. Reading today any of the numerous published versions of Lewis’s sudden appearance on the Edwardian stage as a fully realized “avantgardiste,” we are meant to

recognize a number of portentous beginnings: of a single career, a literary movement, even a cultural epoch. In Ford's most elaborate retelling, this chapter's epigraph, the shocked Edwardian editor recognizes in the arrival of the alien and anarchistic personage on the stairway, the start of literary revolution in England.<sup>1</sup>

I begin with this tale of arrival not only because my book is concerned with the cultural events it announces – the careers of Ford and Lewis, the English avant-garde, British modernism – but also because this chapter examines the stories Lewis gave Ford on that apocryphal day and their role in fashioning the figure of the revolutionary, foreign-seeming avantgardiste who heralds the arrival of modernism in Britain. Since the book as a whole carries out a project of reconstruction and revision, the chapter works to excavate the myth, retrieve its sources, and to re-examine the event it narrates, the characters it portrays, the moment it reports. Because I am especially concerned to chart the (neglected) influences of nation, empire, and nationalism on the formulation of modernist politics, I will pay particular attention to the significance of Ford's representation of Lewis as a figure who appears a Russian anarchist but turns out to be a revolutionary English writer. As we will discover, the reasons behind that writer's particular appearance in the origin myth cast new – and distinctly nationalistic – light on the early formation of the avant-garde and modernism in England.

This chapter starts seeking those reasons by evoking the literary context where Lewis's earliest literary works originally appeared and found their meaning. Beginning with an analysis of Ford's *English Review*, it argues that the journal's voice, aesthetic ideals, and political commitments articulate the paradoxes of Edwardian liberalism. The *Review's* editorials reveal Ford advocating an ideal of critical "disinterestedness" that draws on Matthew Arnold's universalist conception of "culture" as a category transcending nationality and the practical sphere, but which Ford instead bases on the practical, nationalistic ambition of bolstering Britain's flagging international status.<sup>2</sup> The *Review's* travel literature is given particular attention because it makes especially clear the journal's participation in patriotic efforts to fix Englishness and better secure empire, because it is the genre in which Lewis first began fashioning his "modern" style and persona, and because it clarifies early avant-gardist involvements with Edwardian nationalism.

This chapter then turns to Lewis's *English Review* stories, the three travel tales that appear in the discovery myth on all those rolls of paper: "The 'Pole'" (May, 1909), "Some Innkeepers and Bestre" (June, 1909),

and “Les Saltimbanques” (August, 1909). Reading these stories in the context of the *Review* helps clarify Lewis’s early cultural interests and the ways they conditioned his initial literary efforts, as well as how those interests and efforts contributed to the early formulation of English modernism. Lewis’s travel stories fitfully imitate, attack, affirm, and revise the literary modes and political ideals being celebrated in Ford’s journal as cosmopolitan, civilized, and modern. They are also important literary origins for the general avant-garde project to reform English culture and character that is this book’s central concern, a project which would lead Lewis and his collaborators alternately to question and affirm period constructions of national character.

To track the development of Lewis’s cultural and political ambitions as his generation of artists and writers gained cultural stature, the chapter concludes by considering his neglected but illuminating comic polemic on sport and English character, “Our Wild Body,” published nine months after the *Review* tales in the more programmatically radical *New Age*. This (national) character sketch-cum-cultural manifesto confirms that by 1910 Lewis had begun extending the agenda latent in his travel stories into a broader project to revitalize English character. “Our Wild Body” spurs the over-civilized and repressed English to imitate the more spontaneous, more bodily “Latins” as a means of re(dis)covering their own primitive passions and attachments to the body, violence, and irrationality. While this vital-irrationalist scheme to untame Englishness opposes *The English Review*’s cosmopolitan imperialism in a number of ways, its implied aim of untaming English character, making it healthier, more bodily, more wild, is as patriotic as Ford’s, an affinity that reveals a common (Edwardian) politics which, we will see, will have a defining influence on modernist doctrine in England before the Great War.<sup>3</sup>

#### THE ENGLISH REVIEW AND THE PARADOXES OF EDWARDIAN LIBERALISM

[W]e need a national army, simply because we stand in a different plane of civilisation from almost all our neighbours, and, since we are more peace-loving, since we are more civilised, we must be prepared, for the sake of humanity to be able, not only to maintain ourselves but to maintain the integrity of the nations most allied to us in the love for peace and civilisation. That is . . . the duty of an Imperial race. (editorial, *The English Review* (April 1909): 144)

Ford's self-portrait in the origin myth as the prescient discoverer of the new English writer and the epochal shift he initiates conforms to expectations. We have come to think of him, to borrow Michael Levenson's phrase, as a crucial "link between two generations."<sup>4</sup> He appears most often as the author of an important Edwardian novel whose significance for the history of modernism derives more from his role in facilitating younger writers. After all, he discovered Lawrence, Lewis, and Pound, publishing their first works in *The English Review*. As a literary innovator, Ford seems to have been superseded by his protégés. Ford himself was the progenitor of the portrait. His autobiographical writings evoke the familiar figure. In a 1921 volume of memoirs, Ford describes *The English Review* as "an *aube de siècle* Yellow Book," a "movement-producer" aimed at promoting the art movements of the early twentieth century, just as Arthur Symonds's late-Victorian *Yellow Book*, had promoted the Decadent and Symbolist movements of the closing nineteenth.<sup>5</sup> In a 1932 autobiography, Ford justifies his overthrow by *les Jeunes* as a natural and necessary step in a Darwinian struggle of artistic evolution. "That is Nature asserting itself," he writes, "[i]n the end the young cockerels must bring down the father of their barnyard. Without that the arts must stand still."<sup>6</sup> There is certainly truth in this portrait. But it is keyed more to a sense of the position Ford has come to occupy in the history of modernism, than to his position during the Edwardian moment. In mid-1909, however, when Lewis submitted the manuscripts of three comic travel stories for publication in *The English Review*, the journal and its editor *did* occupy, if but for a brief moment, a position at the apex of English intellectual culture, and articulated the paradoxical political, social, and literary standards of liberal England under Edward VII.<sup>7</sup>

Ford's cultural ideals, as expressed in his *Review* editorials, are largely derived from Matthew Arnold's mid-Victorian model of literary liberalism. When Ford writes in an 1909 piece that "The English Review stands for peace, for . . . it is only in times of peace that the arts flourish,"<sup>8</sup> he places British "culture" above its politics and thus returns to an argument Arnold had made over forty years earlier. In the 1860s, Arnold had positioned himself as a moderate but skeptical liberal intellectual. He criticized the Liberal right, which supported imperialism and leaned toward the Tories, by attacking nationalism as provincialism and comparing English culture unfavorably to its classical precursors and continental (especially French) contemporaries; he criticized the Liberal left, which assailed imperialism and advocated



social and political reforms to improve the lot of the working classes, by attacking its efforts to inject criticism and art into the “practical” sphere, insisting on culture’s position above practical life.

Ford presents *The English Review* as an effort to resuscitate Arnold’s dream of an international literary culture detached from what the Victorian had called “the world of catchwords and party habits.”<sup>9</sup> “The English Review,” Ford’s opening editorial puts it, “sets boldly upon its front the words ‘No party bias’ . . . [W]e are here not to cry out ‘Go in this direction,’ but simply to point out where we stand.”<sup>10</sup> And by describing the *Review* as a literary “meeting-place” in England something like the “Academy . . . of the Immortal Forty” in France,<sup>11</sup> Ford implies that his journal will fill a cultural lacuna Arnold identified nearly half a century earlier. According to the Victorian, the “essential characteristics” of the English “spirit” have always impeded the formation in England of an institution like the French Academy.<sup>12</sup> He identified the English spirit’s chief characteristics as “energy and honesty” as opposed to the French spirit’s more “Athenian” characteristics of “[o]penness of mind and flexibility of intelligence.”<sup>13</sup> Because “[g]enius is mainly an affair of energy,” he explained, the energetic and honest English excel in “poetry and science,” two fields requiring the “free activity of genius.”<sup>14</sup> The French, on the other hand, excel in prose and support an academy because their “national bent” is “towards the things of the mind, towards culture, towards clearness, correctness, and propriety in thinking and speaking.”<sup>15</sup> The English spirit’s characteristic energy, in Arnold’s view, thwarts the development of such Athenian fruits of intelligence: “energy . . . above everything demands and insists upon . . . freedom; entire independence of all authority, prescription, and routine . . . [A] nation whose chief spiritual characteristic is energy, will not be very apt to set up, in intellectual matters, a fixed standard, an authority, like an academy.”<sup>16</sup>

Ford characterizes *The English Review* as the sort of elite literary institution his Victorian precursor claimed England could not maintain. Since the “English man of letters . . . has no Academy like that of the Immortal Forty,” Ford explains, “[i]t is with the attempt to form some such meeting-place that *The English Review* has set out upon its career.”<sup>17</sup> And when he asserts that the *Review* “set out to enjoin upon the Englishman a Critical Attitude,”<sup>18</sup> Ford resurrects Arnold’s ideal of the “critical spirit.” Defining criticism as “a *disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world*,”<sup>19</sup> the Victorian insisted that the English are temperamentally ill-suited to satisfy the

ideal. The “spirit” of England’s “practical race” deters England’s critics from achieving sufficient disinterestedness to “see . . . things as they are” and identify the best that is known and thought in the world.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it is because English criticism has “so little kept in the pure intellectual sphere, has so little detached itself from practice, has been so directly polemical and controversial, that it has so ill accomplished . . . its best spiritual work.”<sup>21</sup> The resulting “provinciality” leads England’s critics to mistake their nation for the world, studying only the best that had been known and thought at home, ignoring the rest of the best.<sup>22</sup> Nationalistic fervor, under this view, inhibits cultural progress: “all mere glorification by ourselves of ourselves or our literature . . . is both vulgar, and besides being vulgar, retarding.”<sup>23</sup> In response, the Victorian critic recommends a more internationalistic attitude: “[b]y the very nature of things, as England is not all the world, much of the best that is known and thought in the world cannot be of English growth, must be foreign . . . The English critic of literature, therefore, must dwell much on foreign thought.”<sup>24</sup> While taking care to note the improbability of realizing the ideal, Ford fashions his journal as the sort of disinterested and internationalistic literary institution Arnold had called for; as its editorials affirm, *The English Review* seeks to speak “from a standpoint . . . as aloof and impartial as is practicable to mortal man”<sup>25</sup> and to promote “a greater comprehension of international characteristics.”<sup>26</sup>

*The English Review* does not exactly fulfill Arnold’s critical and cultural ideals, however.<sup>27</sup> For although the *Review* advocated an ideal of cultural cosmopolitanism, publishing texts by a number of European authors, Ford also featured literature particularly motivated to advance English interests; and although Ford cast the *Review* as a politically disinterested journal, with “No party bias,” its non-literary second section, “The Month,” served primarily as a forum for discussion among the liberal intelligentsia of the moment – Fabians, social imperialists, moderate Labourites, New Liberals. Much of the opening issue (December 1908), for example, is devoted to “the problem of the poor”: Ford’s own editorial on “The Unemployed,” former Scottish Labour Party MP, socialist activist, and colonial adventurer, R. B. Cunningham Graham’s “Aspects of the Social Question,” and Georgian poet W. H. Davies’s “How It Feels to Be Out of Work.” Even Ford’s Tory co-editor Arthur Marwood contributed a rather socialistic polemic on how to better the lot of the poor, entitled “A Complete Actuarial Scheme for Insuring John Doe against All the Vicissitudes of Life.” And during Ford’s thirteen-month stint as editor, the *Review* featured works by a

number of celebrated left-wing intellectuals: former Fabian H. G. Wells's *Tono-Bungay*, a satiric novel assailing modern capitalism; Graham's travel tales and essay on social unrest in Spain (September 1909); Fabian leader Sydney Webb's article on "The Economic Aspects of Poor Law Reform" (October 1909); radical Liberal elder Sir Charles Dilke's "Foreign Affairs" piece on Anglo-Russian relations (October 1909); radical journalist Henry W. Nevinson's article in support of militant suffragettes (November 1909); and essays by the New Liberal economist and analyst of imperialism J. A. Hobson, including one on "The Extension of Liberalism" (November 1909).

The *Review's* appearance in 1908 as a politically liberal periodical reflects a resurgence of English liberalism following the Anglo-Boer war that swept the Liberal Party, after eleven years as the opposition, into governmental control in the victory of 1906. Under the leadership of the so-called New Liberals, men like H. H. Asquith and R. B. Haldane who favored a strong state and a strong empire, the Liberal government worked to defend the imperialist mission of the English nation, while extending the institutions of a progressive English state: they established a school meal program (1906) and a school medical service (1907), guaranteed miners an eight-hour day (1908), instituted an old-age pension system (1908), reformed the structure of the welfare bureaucracy (1909), and improved working conditions in factories (1909).<sup>28</sup> And because the Tory members of the House of Commons held only 157 seats to the Liberals' 377, Liberal control went relatively unchallenged, at least at first.

Frustrated by the Liberals' zeal yet unable to restrain their reforms in the House of Commons, the Tory leadership began encouraging the land-owning aristocrats in the House of Lords to thwart Liberal legislation. The Lords thus defeated an education bill and a plural voting bill (1906), a series of land reform bills (1907), and a new licensing bill (1908). The tension between Liberals and Lords intensified, coming to a head over Lloyd George's controversial budget bill of 1909. The Liberals' ensuing struggle to eliminate the Lords' veto power, mythologized in George Dangerfield's *Strange Death of Liberal England* (1935), provoked a constitutional crisis, led to two elections (in January and December, 1910), and lessened Liberal control of the Commons. But after two years of political strife, and in spite of greater constraints on their control of government, the Liberals managed to outmaneuver the Lords and restrict their veto power definitively.<sup>29</sup>

Historians have debated the significance of the Liberals' success in limiting Tory influence. R. K. Webb, a liberal himself, interprets the

achievement as the culminating event in England's "great Liberal reforms."<sup>30</sup> Though he explains that Liberals had begun "destroying" the "traditional political power of the landed aristocracy" as early as the Third Reform Act of 1884, Webb suggests that the defeat of the Lords' veto completed the process, which he describes admiringly as the "break with the assumptions and theory of English politics" since the seventeenth century.<sup>31</sup> Under the account of the Marxist Tom Nairn, in contrast, the Liberals' defeat of the Lords' veto is part of a less overt, more sinister, process. He contends that by the nineteenth century, England's ruling elites – the urban bourgeoisie and the land-owning aristocracy – had formed a "joint front . . . against the proletariat which arose in the industrial revolution."<sup>32</sup> This "patrician class" responded to the mounting demands of the increasingly politicized lower classes with a "social strategy of containment" in which superficial reforms were implemented to improve the lot of the poor and the workers.<sup>33</sup> But these reforms did not, in fact, substantially threaten the hidden alliance between agrarian aristocrats and urban elites that insured upper-class control of the state, and ultimately "prevented the 'second bourgeois revolution' in the British Isles."<sup>34</sup> "Patrician liberalism" had thus "defeated radical liberalism."<sup>35</sup> The Edwardian Liberal party's defeat of the Lords' veto, under Nairn's sort of account, only shifts power slightly between different segments of the "patrician elites," leaving the plight of the working class essentially unaffected.

Ford initiated *The English Review* at a moment when, in Webb's terms, the Liberal Party was striving to reshape the English state from an aristocratic oligarchy to a modern social democracy, but when, in Nairn's terms, the ruling classes were making political concessions to contain the working classes yet were concerned about the effects of those concessions. Politically, the *Review* reflects the paradox: it endorses many New Liberal reforms, but worries about their consequences. So while Ford devotes much of the opening issue to addressing "the problem of the poor," recommending in his editorial on unemployment a new book by the little-known provincial writer Stephen Reynolds because it makes a "serious" attempt to render the realities of "the life of the poor man,"<sup>36</sup> the editorial also warns ominously: "[T]he poor are breaking in on us everywhere. They break in on us as we drive through the streets. We see them in their knots, in their bands, at street corners; the parks are full of them, the public squares. We drive past these broken knots with a touch of fear. If the winter is very hard – they may crowd together. They may sack West London."<sup>37</sup> This nightmare of English elites overthrown by a politicized poor seems excessively alarmist at a moment when the

Liberal government was actively engaged in extending state institutions to improve the lot of the lower classes. The intensity of the concern animating Ford's vision suggests that the editorial expresses not just a commitment to improve the lot of the poor, but also anxiety about lower-class empowerment.

This ambivalence on the part of liberal intellectuals like Ford and his collaborators at *The English Review* helps illuminate the modernist discovery myth, in which an urbane cultural guardian attempts to repel an unexpected, inscrutable, and threatening Russian revolutionary. The fictionalized editor's rejection of the Lewis figure on national and racial grounds – “‘I don't want any Russian revelations [revolutions?]. I don't want to see, hear or smell any Slavs’” – presents in fictive form the Edwardian elite's worry that a violent political revolution, like that which had transpired in Russia in 1905 and 1906, might be pending in England. Along with many of his intellectual contemporaries, Ford knew and had supported Kropotkin, the exiled Russian prince-turned-anarchist who wrote and traveled widely to win support for the 1905 revolt among Europe's elites. But our reading of the discovery tale indicates that while Ford may have been willing to support a revolution in Russia, he was considerably less enthusiastic about the prospect of such a rebellion occurring at home.<sup>38</sup>

Indeed, *The English Review* portrayed Britain as threatened by the political radicalization not only of the English masses but also of its colonial subjects. Since the late-1800s westernized, educated colonial elites, inspired by European socialist movements, had been encouraging nationalistic resistance to European rule among their native masses. Upheavals in India, for example, provoked from Marwood a worried reconsideration of the English “endeavour” to “serve” India's “interests.”<sup>39</sup> “Our position in India concerns us seriously,” he explains, “because it is a great national responsibility, second only to our responsibility to England herself” (569). But despite a century of efforts, “sincere and intelligent we have always thought,” to fulfill that national responsibility, “we are compelled to ask ourselves whether India repudiates us” (569). This worry about possible Indian “repudiation” prompts a defensive expression of the enlightened liberal “intentions” animating British imperium: “[s]urely our intentions are good. Every Englishman, who thinks about India, wishes that the native may be well fed, cared for in sickness, and protected from oppression either of the private enemy or the public official” (570).

The *Review's* apprehensions about the politically organized subjects

at home and in the colonies were augmented by those concerning the "European Powers," especially Germany. Though Ford chastises the government for a too-panicky reaction to Germany's efforts to expand its navy, he concurs that increasing German militarization threatened Britain's national security and naval supremacy: "attempting . . . to attain to an absolutely impartial standpoint, to an attitude that is absolutely critical, we seem to see Great Britain drifting inevitably towards a war with Germany. There are a hundred factors that make for it; we can observe none which makes for peace."<sup>40</sup> The same editor who favors a program of domestic reform more radical than any Tory would advocate, responds to the perceived German threat in a manner similar to that of the Tories and liberal imperialists in the face of Boer resistance a decade earlier. He asserts defensively Britain's imperial superiority and the need to maintain its international dominance:

[A] strong, an invulnerable Great Britain is essential to the peace of the world and to the future of civilisation. We must be strong; we must be immensely strong; we must be invulnerable, so that we may be tranquilly confident. We must be tranquilly confident, so that we may have time to think of other things than war.<sup>41</sup>

*The English Review's* politics mirror the attitudes of the (New) Liberal government during this period of perceived internal unrest and external competition: domestically the *Review's* policies are more progressive and socialistic; internationally its policies are closer to those of the Tories, more conservative, patriotic, and imperialist. Most important in our context is not that Ford's allegedly non-partisan journal would so candidly defend British imperium, however, but that it would go on to use that defense to underwrite an Arnoldian doctrine of "culture" and critical "disinterestedness." The *Review's* ideal England is culturally urbane because it is imperially supreme: cultural excellence depends on and assists imperial dominion.

So while Ford presents *The English Review* as the sort of disinterested and internationalistic literary institution Arnold advocated, he "modernizes" the Victorian's universalist conception of "culture" as a category transcending nationality and the practical sphere. The *Review's* ideal of critical disinterestedness is based on considerably more nationalistic and practical concerns: Ford's notion of "culture" requires and, in his account, will preserve Britain's increasingly contested international supremacy. Arnold's program reflected Britain's situation in the

1860s, a time when the empire's status as world leader was generally perceived as uncontested, but when the English state was gripped by a series of violent political actions by the poor and working classes. The most celebrated of these were the so-called Sheffield Outrages of 1865–66, in which unionized cutlery workers in the North harassed non-union workers (sometimes violently), and the “Hyde Park Riots” of 1866, in which government efforts to block a mass demonstration in favor of expanded male suffrage provoked working-class and trade-unionist members of the Reform League to “riot” through Hyde Park and some of the surrounding upper-class neighborhoods.<sup>42</sup> The violent tactics of the Sheffield strikers and the London rioters were reported widely and provoked a strong backlash among the upper classes. Arnold, whose *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) was prompted in part by these protests, reacted primarily to the domestic threats he recognized around him: an anarchic lower class, a philistine and provincial middle class, the Church's decline and the loss of a moral center it provided. The liberal Victorian critic would combat such evidence of domestic “decay” by substituting culture for religion, locating order and morality in the cultural sphere, advocating educational reforms to elevate the masses, and placing criticism firmly above and beyond the practical realm from where it could best help improve English art and society.

In contrast, the (new) liberal Edwardian editor, perceiving his nation as threatened both internally and externally, responds in the paradoxical manner we have come to expect from a leader of the prewar intelligentsia: like a member of the intellectual elite concerned with cultural decline, Ford resists provincialism and disdains the practical realm; but like a member of the ruling elite concerned with imperial decline, he advocates military build-up and imagines victory over foreign competition.<sup>43</sup> *The English Review* articulates the paradoxes of Edwardian liberalism because it displays at once the ruling classes' ambivalent commitment to internal social reform, in which progressive ideals are restrained by elitist fears, and the intelligentsia's conflicted commitment to cultural disinterestedness, in which universalist ideals are put in the service of a nationalistic desire for international supremacy.<sup>44</sup>

The unexpected appearance of a revolutionary English writer in Ford's legend reflects both period anxieties about domestic unrest and foreign competition and period ambitions for national success. The figure who arrives in the nick of time, at a moment of crisis, bearing revolutionary writing that “saves” Ford, English culture, even the em-

pire, incarnates Ford's Edwardian hope that the young modernists he "discovered" would once more put English culture and Britain at the forefront of Europe. The legend expresses in its way the predicament of the Edwardian intelligentsia: the mythic modernist appears at once a dangerous foreign political revolutionary, who signals the intelligentsia's anxiety about domestic and colonial social revolt and foreign competition and contamination, and a revolutionary English writer, who heralds a needed cultural renaissance, embodying the intelligentsia's nationalistic hopes that English culture might be brinking on an epoch of unprecedented excellence.

#### RETRIEVING ENGLISHNESS; REVIVING EMPIRE

Ford's Arnoldian editorials on "The Functions of the Arts in the Republic" and "The Critical Attitude" cast the literary works featured in *The English Review* as products of a "certain school of Literature."<sup>45</sup> The writers composing this "school" practice in their own ways the brand of subjective realism Ford theorized in the *Review* and elsewhere termed "Impressionism."<sup>46</sup> Just as Flaubert had for the French, this "sober, sincere, conscientious, and scientific body of artists" will "crystallis[e] . . . modern life" for English readers.<sup>47</sup> Like the French novelist, the *Review's* writers are "intent merely to register – to *constater*."<sup>48</sup> Yet even as Ford evokes a "scientific" ideal of disinterested observation, he locates the value of the practice in the personality of the author. "The functions . . . of imaginative literature" are, he explains, "to record life in terms of the author."<sup>49</sup> The "actual and first desire" of the *constateur* of modern life "must always be the expression of himself [and] . . . of his view of life as it is."<sup>50</sup> Ford commends Henry James as such a disinterested, interesting writer. Most important for us, he grants this new school a *national* interest. Ford's writers register "the true characteristic of modern life" in order to (re)locate "England," to show it "where it stands" and "to what it tends."<sup>51</sup>

That Ford's new aesthetic reveals commitments to competing trends within Edwardian liberalism is consistent with *The English Review's* paradoxical construction of a cosmopolitan ideal of cultural disinterestedness on the grounds of an "immensely strong" empire. His stress on the centrality to the aesthetic of the individual author's personality resonates with old Liberal individualism, while his view that the aesthetic's goal is to orient England and the English resonates with New Liberal efforts to reconstruct Englishness and expand the state to meet the



competitive realities of twentieth-century life.<sup>52</sup> A consideration of the impressionistic travel stories Ford featured in *The English Review* during his tenure as editor clarifies the ways in which the literature of the *Review* participated in period efforts to construct a new Englishness based in the rural English past and use it to justify (an ailing) empire.<sup>53</sup>

The travel literature Ford featured in *The English Review* abides by his doctrine of subjective realism and the ideal of the *constateur* by rendering the subjectivity of a cosmopolitan tourist-naturalist/ethnographer who recounts his impressions as he travels to the margins of “civilization” – on the British Isles or the Continent – seeking places and peoples “primitive and undisturbed.”<sup>54</sup> Because the *Review*’s travel tales “express” their authors’ personalities and “view[s] of life,” they expose ambivalences common among liberal intellectuals. The *Review*’s typical tourist-narrator displays, in his idealizing descriptions of unsullied nature and his negative representations of modern life, what A. M. Quinton terms “a hostility to the style of life in an urban mass” of “industrial society.”<sup>55</sup> Yet when this narrator travels to the unsullied places of rural England (as in the stories of W. H. Hudson and J. W. Allen), his idealizing naturalism serves patriotically to locate an essential English place, the locus for a new Englishness. And when this narrator travels to the margins of civilization on the Continent (as in the stories of R. B. Cunninghame Graham and Norman Douglas), he responds equivocally to the foreign people he observes: even as he idealizes their innocence, lamenting the costs and complexities of modernity, he casts them as superstitious primitives, reaffirming (quietly) the nationalist type of the (liberal) Briton who, obeying what Ford terms “the duty . . . of an Imperial race,” presides benevolently over an enlightened empire, an empire of the Spirit. Consistent with the *Review*’s lurking nationalism, indeed, its travel tales finally use such encounters with the primitive as a kind of literary therapy to purge the narrator’s feelings of guilt and regret, re-enlivening commitment to British civilization.<sup>56</sup>

We can begin to chart the ideological work of the travel literature Ford selected for *The English Review* by considering *Review* stories by the celebrated naturalist W. H. Hudson. In a *Review* profile on Hudson, Ford portrays the writer as a naturalist version of the cosmopolitan *constateur* evoked in his “Functions of the Arts” editorials; a writer “who, having galloped with young gallantry through the thistle-down of early life on the pampas, comes with the fresh eyes of a stranger and the keen love of an exile into green and ancient lands, there to spend long hours in the delight of lying still, of gazing at common things, of giving himself

up utterly to the spirit of the place.”<sup>57</sup> But while Ford’s description works to portray Hudson as a naturalist devoted to delighting in “the Green Mansions of the world” (158), its eager allusion to the “green and ancient lands” where Hudson journeys in the pages of *The English Review*, quietly links naturalism to nationalism. Hudson’s pieces further articulate that conjunction. In these stories, “Stonehenge” (December 1908) and “Goldfinches at Ryme Intrinsica” (May 1909), Hudson’s narrator travels to the peripheries and primitive places of England seeking a purifying experience of the natural through the act of reflective observing. But by locating his celebratory encounters with nature in England, specifically the rural south or “South Country,” Hudson turns his naturalist *constateur* into cultural patriot, agent of the broader period project to fix Englishness. Alun Howkins has shown that Hudson contributed to the “discovery of Rural England,” helping to “create . . . the world of the South Country and fix . . . it as part of national ideology”;<sup>58</sup> our account establishes the part Ford’s *English Review* played in the project and elucidates the particular contribution of Hudson’s *Review* stories.

Early in “Stonehenge,” Hudson’s narrator recounts his responses as he first approaches the ancient stones on Salisbury plain. He is overwhelmed not by a sense of wonder at the monument as we might expect from Hudson’s title, but by the power of what lies beneath it – the English landscape:

Was *this* Stonehenge – this cluster of poor little grey stones, looking in the distance like a small flock of sheep or goats grazing on that immense down! How incredibly insignificant it appeared to me, dwarfed by its surroundings – woods and groves and farm-houses – and by that vast extent of rolling down country visible at that point.<sup>59</sup>

Here stretching out before him is an ideal England, a “construction” of “populated and cultivated landscapes”;<sup>60</sup> natural, orderly, simple. Here lives a hardworking people who still reverence ancient customs; for them “The Stones” still compel obeisance:

I gather from natives in the district that it is an old custom for people to go and watch for sunrise on the morning of June 21. A dozen or a score of natives, mostly old shepherds and labourers who lived near, would go and sit there for a few hours and after sunrise would trudge home . . . “How long has the custom existed?” I asked a field labourer. “From the time of the old people – the Druids,” he answered. (63)

Hudson’s narrator is strongly attracted to this image of dignified natives

assembling to pay respect at the altar of a druidic Sun-cult. He finds in it a kind of spiritual belief nearly displaced by industrial modernity.

But when he attempts to participate in the ancient custom (curious act for a naturalist), he is disgusted by the spectacle of "The Stones" overrun by the crass inhabitants of Victorian modernity:

Altogether about five to six hundred persons gathered at "The Stones," mostly young men on bicycles who came from all the Wiltshire towns within easy distance from Salisbury to Bath. I had a few good minutes at the ancient temple when the sight of the rude, upright stones looking black against the moonlit and star-sprinkled sky produced an expected feeling in me: but the mood could not last; the crowd was too big and noisy and the noises they made too suggestive of a Bank Holiday crowd at the Crystal Palace. (67)

This picture of an ancient and faithful Englishness under siege in the south country issues a quiet call to patriotic countrymen to return to this place, these ways, to come and reverse this defilement. Hudson's disillusioned evocation of a Bank Holiday crowd at the Crystal Palace on Salisbury plain underscores the ironic fact that this reverence for traditional rural England helps advance the interests of the modern British empire.

If Hudson's *Review* stories play a particularly important role in establishing the south country as a basis for modern English ideology, J. W. Allen's "The Back of Beyond" (March 1909), makes particularly clear the paradoxical configuration of the temporal narrative at the heart of that ideology.<sup>61</sup> Allen's story of a trip into the Black Mountains on the border between south Wales and the English counties of Hereford and Worcester, charts a course for Britain's future by way of a return to England's past. As Allen's narrator describes his journey through an unnamed "colliery village" we get a nearly official picture of the terrible effects of industrial modernity:

On each side was a row of houses of grey sandstone, of a dismal natural colour, begrimed and neglected. Broken windows, heaps of rubbish in filthy little yards, not a green thing growing, not a flower-pot . . . The people were as dirty as their dwellings. Clothes, hands and faces, no less than the houses, were begrimed with coal-dust . . . Now and again we caught the reek of smoke or of oil. And between the houses we had glimpses of scarred mountain-sides, blackened and desolate, heaped with coal-tips and dotted with smoking chimneys. (620)

Allen's narrator shares with Edwardian sociologists a sense that living and working conditions in industrial England are dehumanizing and intolerable;<sup>62</sup> he does not advocate social or economic reform to remedy

those conditions, however. Instead, Allen's narrator ascends to an older rural England; after "a long pull uphill . . . out of the city of furnaces" (622), he is transported ahead to the English past:

It was as though I had entered a new world, an older world. The road narrowed as my wheels advanced. It became a rough lane between low hedges. On my left were swift visions of land-locked, rock-guarded bays, of rugged limestone cliffs, of cove within cove, of delicate, lonely, curved stretches of sand, of glittering, tumbled water. On my right a heathery saddle-black, green with bracken and grey with great stones. I began to think of those squalid streets and that forest of chimneys as of something already clean passed away from the earth. (623)

He experiences this ancient English landscape as a spiritual cleansing: liberal guilt is purged as the dirty squalor of modern England and concerns about the industrial working-class and the urban poor "pass away." No liberal hand wringing is expressed in response to the squalor, no expansion of the liberal state advocated to eliminate it. Allen's narrator discovers an unsullied rural England:

Every half-mile deepened my sense of something primitive and undisturbed. I had entered a region as remote from the life of cities as the Happy Isles . . . The scattered farm-houses had an air of aloofness and self-sufficiency. All of stone, whitewashed, heavily thatched and gabled, they had been renewed from generation to generation and had never become modern. Ancestral dwellings, they vied in antiquity with our historic mansions but were more perfect in dignity, untouched by the vulgarity of conscious wealth. (632)

This "new world," this new England, is not, our narrator indicates, some utopian scheme of the liberal state, beyond reach. It is "an older world," an older England, that survives in secluded villages across a still "green and pleasant land." We have only to journey to these villages to find an ancient race of clean and self-sufficient men and women, paradigms for a new, older English race:

Go about among these people and you will soon learn to admire. You will admire the specklessness of their homes, with the old dressers and ancestral china that is not for sale. You will take pleasure in their old-world appliances, their cupboard-beds, their brass sugar-cutters, the pack-saddles that their grandfathers used. You will respect their independence, their plain simplicity, the excellence of their manners. You will see old men and women among them with blue eyes as lucid and clear as the eyes of a child. In time you may come to envy the laborious and frugal dignity of their lives. (622–23)

The narrator's journey the "back of beyond" mimics the paradoxical trajectory of new liberal imperialism: the future of the empire can be

insured by a return to England's past, to a new "older" Englishness grounded in rural places and "traditions." The independent, hardworking, clean, dignified Englishmen and women Allen's narrator discovers appear fit citizens for a world empire.

The terms of the *Review* travel narrative shift somewhat when the narrator goes to an idyllic place on the periphery of Europe. Here the idealization of (non-English) nature and natives is in tension with patriotic naturalism or the recovery of a rural population of "traditional" Englishmen. The remote places celebrated by R. B. Cunninghame Graham and Norman Douglas are not offered as the locus of a (nearly) lost but still retrievable English essence; the natives are not presented as paradigms of an ancient and industrious English race inviting emulation. But these continental outlands still prompt the narrator's disgust at industrial modernity, these natives still provoke his envy at the simplicity of their customs and lifestyles, these encounters still serve to purge disgust and envy. The stories are most important for us, however, because they present most clearly, through their representation of the relationship between the advanced traveler from the imperial center and the childlike natives of the periphery, how the travel stories Ford featured in *The English Review* use the primitive other to reaffirm British imperial privilege.

Philip Dodd reminds us that "the definition of the English is inseparable from that of the non-English," that "Englishness is not so much a category as a relationship."<sup>63</sup> The travel stories of Graham and Douglas show how *The English Review* represents Englishness as a conflicted relationship with primitive Europeans. Graham's story about a journey to an isolated republic in the Pyrenees, "Andorra" (January 1909), articulates this set of representational strategies and makes clear their role in underwriting British claims to empire.<sup>64</sup> Throughout the story, Graham's tourist-narrator swings between nostalgic yearning for intimacy with primitive Europe and a sense of imperial superiority to the people and customs he encounters. As he approaches the hidden republic from the mountains above, a sense of its mystical isolation overwhelms him: "Andorra yet survives and flourishes, one of the last of the innumerable small States that once were set as thick upon the map of Europe as stars in heaven on a clear winter's night."<sup>65</sup> His idealizing evocation of a lost Europe of liberty both confirms his anti-modernism and quietly conjures a vision of modern Europe as big and oppressive, consistent with the sometimes menacing Europe of the *Review's* editorials. An unpleasant encounter with the locals raises the narrator's

defenses, however, as he reasserts his status as a being more advanced and active, amused by the primitive and animalistic Andorrans: “the people have a look as of a Puritan bull-terrier, uncouth and awkward, but not encouraging, should any person happen to tread upon its tail” (206). The image of a British tourist attending an “uncouth and awkward” dog not only works to contain anxieties about Europe by representing Europeans as animals, but also exposes the racism at the heart of many Edwardian defenses of empire. Despite his candid assertion of (race) superiority, the narrator cannot shake feelings of wonder and desire in the face of this state of pre-modern peace:

A priest assured me that there is no written law in the community, but that in spite of this the folk are honest and God-fearing, and as there are no laws to break, they never break them, which piece of reasoning upon his part seemed to me quite conclusive, and taken into consideration with the fact that public functionaries have no fixed salaries, but serve their valley all for the honour and the glory of the thing, makes up a state of things almost ideal in this transitory world, that is if transitory can be applied to places like Andorra, which never can have suffered any change since God was God or the sun first commenced to shine upon the hills. (222)

The Edenic scene – an enduring world of perfect order, where the folk live harmoniously abiding by ancient codes of “honour and glory” – predictably provokes from the narrator regret about the costs of tourism and modernization: “[t]he greatest piece of fortune that has happened to this happy valley lost in the hills, is that up to the present time it has had no roads. Want of communication has kept out the tourist, under whose foot all ancient customs wither, as certainly as did the grass under the horse’s hoof of Attila” (206). In this overblown picture (penned by a tourist), tourists and travel writers are barbaric Huns, brutally overrunning the innocents’ ancient customs. Here Graham turns Andorra into a receptacle for his jaded tourist’s yearnings and regrets, his disillusionment about modernity.

Douglas’s “The Island of Typhoëus” (February 1909) articulates further the privilege that authorizes a damning analysis of modern tourism even as it exempts the tourist-author from participation in the trampling of “ancient customs.” Douglas’s narrator concludes his account of a trip to Ischia, an island off the coast of Naples, with an analysis of the “native” character that delineates the cultural gulf separating the citizen of the British empire from the native of the European periphery. In the voice of a worldly and intellectually advanced modern, Douglas describes the Ischians as pre-modern inno-

cents animated by “the simple desire for sunshine and family life, and a pantheism vague and charming, the impress of nature in her mildest moods upon the responsive human phantasy.”<sup>66</sup> Yet despite his tone of charmed yearning, the narrator pictures Ischian people as less evolved beings, subject to instinct, indulging pagan religious urges. This narrator may be disillusioned with aspects of industrial modernity, but he still embodies English qualities of intellectual and cultural advancement – sympathy for the less fortunate, critical detachment, an active will, a skeptical attitude toward religion – that are central to Ford’s editorial assertions that the English “stand in a different plane of civilisation” from their neighbors and thus have a “duty” to “maintain” their empire of “peace and civilisation.”

Accordingly, the *Review*’s tourist-narrator at the margins of Europe does not take the radical option of “going primitive”; he recognizes its dangers – the loss of moral compass and connection to civilization embodied by Conrad’s Kurtz – but also cannot evade his obligations as a member of an “Imperial race.” Thus, he uses a confrontation with the primitive other to re-establish equilibrium, reaffirm connection to imperial civilization, and reconstruct the figure of the enlightened Briton fit to preside over the world’s most advanced empire. These *Review* tales, like those of Hudson and Allen, are therapeutic: by encountering “primitive and undisturbed” places and peoples at the margins of Europe, the disillusioned (liberal) narrator from the imperial metropolis is not only able to vent doubts and regrets regarding modern civilization, but also ends up having relocated a sense of imperial entitlement through a relationship of sympathy for and superiority to the primitive European. Thus Graham’s “Andorra” ends with a moment of reverie in which the world-trotting British narrator rejoices as much in his voyeuristic visit to this outpost of pre-modern Europe as in his impending departure from it:

Next morning saw me early on the road, riding along and smoking, musing contentedly on this thing and on that, upon the fall of nations and of kings, creeds, principalities and powers, and why it is that fate had spared Andorra when it had eaten up Greece, Rome and Babylon, and also on the various ways in which men pass their lives struggling to do things quite impossible to do, when, after all, nothing is better than to jog along the road and to shout “Arre” loudly now and then when a mule lags behind. (222)

Despite expressing regrets about modernity’s complexities and costs, the travel tales in Ford’s *English Review* in the end reject neither empire nor “civilization.” Like Ford’s ambivalent editorials, they perform a