

JEFFREY HILL AND ANTHONY BATEMAN

## Introduction

... it was, after all – a little luck there, a stern battle there, in the sun or the foul light, going slow or flashing past – a glorious game.<sup>1</sup>

In an age of ‘globalisation’ – a concept made sense of for many people through sporting events – it is worth reminding ourselves that cricket is a world game. To be sure, its extent and impact is less than that of association football, but few other team sports can equal cricket’s global reach. Over the course of the twentieth century cricket spread across the globe and in the process the locus of power in the game shifted. When the English cricket mandarin Pelham Warner published *Imperial Cricket* in 1912 he described a game that had developed beyond rudimentary levels in only a handful of countries.<sup>2</sup> The hub was very definitely to be found in England, even if pre-eminence in playing the game had already passed to Australia. A hundred years later 104 countries are members of its governing body, the ICC. This organisation bears the same initials as those it had at the time of its formation in 1909, when they denoted the Imperial Cricket Conference, a triumvirate of England, Australia and South Africa. Its influence was limited; power in the game rested largely with MCC at Lord’s cricket ground, St John’s Wood, London. But in the early twenty-first century there is no sense of the ICC being either a product of empire or a mere talking shop. Its headquarters are in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (just next door to Abu Dhabi, where in 2010 the opening match of the English cricket season – for so long held at Lord’s – was staged, with floodlights and pink ball), and its officers wield much clout in the world game. Such a geographical shift denotes, of course, the increased influence in the game’s corridors of power of the countries of South Asia – India in particular. It signifies also a recognition of new economic potential. The passion for cricket in these parts presents commercial opportunities scarcely imagined in Pelham Warner’s time, and further opens up the possibility of cricket’s breaking out of its long-established colonial boundaries. We have seen in the very recent past that Afghanistan, notwithstanding its immensely troubled civil society, can put a very good international cricket team in the field. China, we are told, is on the brink of entering the cricket arena. And we might note that in one of

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the acclaimed literary works of 2008 – Joseph O’Neill’s novel *Netherland* – a principal theme is the dream of making cricket in America a serious rival to baseball.<sup>3</sup> ‘Think big’ is the motto of the character Chuck Ramkissoon, who is building a stadium in New York to become a world stage for televised international matches. In one leap, therefore, a second-class sport played by immigrants will outshine America’s traditional summer game. This, to be sure, is fiction but international cricket tournaments staged in Florida during 2010 suggest that the Ramkissoon dream is not entirely fanciful.

Such developments, which might suggest a form of ‘reverse colonialism’, are yet to be fully realised. The core of the game – the places where cricket has attained a state of organisation, support and playing proficiency that are deemed to represent its highest level – remains in that handful of former dominions and colonies of Great Britain where cricket was first implanted by ‘missionaries’ of various kinds through the agencies of colonial influence – the army, educational establishments, the civil administration, public works, commerce and religion.

It is within such a global and historical panorama that the *Cambridge Companion to Cricket* essays a scholarly discussion of the principal themes and issues that have emerged as the game has developed over the past two and a half centuries. A great deal of this development has been inscribed in literature. As the critic Benny Green once observed: ‘it is almost as though the game itself would not exist at all until written about.’<sup>4</sup> Since at least the early 1830s, with the appearance of John Nyren’s reminiscences of the champions of his Hambledon youth,<sup>5</sup> cricket and its players have been featured in writing. The game has generated a prodigious output, and thereby reached a wide audience in many forms: historical accounts (of which Nyren’s classic text was one of the first examples); stories of the game and its play in a legion of press reports; technical analyses in publications such as *MCC Cricket Coaching Book*; autobiographies of players and administrators; a rich factual and fictional tradition of self-consciously literary representations of cricket in verse, short stories and serialisations in magazines; and, perhaps most famously, in *Wisden*, the annual ‘almanack’ (note the now-archaic spelling) that since its inception in 1864 has been almost the defining text of cricket. In whichever form, this literature stands as a memorial to the game, its people and its places.

Much of this material has (in contrast to other games) acquired a ‘literary’ status; that is to say, cricket prose and verse has received critical praise for its aesthetic style, whether the subject matter be the great players or simply cross-bat village greeners. Cricket writing’s status owes something to its appearing to transcend mere sports reporting, a characteristic partly explained by the fact that the game has seized the imagination of

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those whose writing graces fields other than sport. The English poet and literary scholar Edmund Blunden (1896–1974) is a notable case in point. There is more than an authorial link between two of his most celebrated works: *Undertones of War* (1928), a contribution to that remarkable late-1920s upsurge of war literature, and *Cricket Country* (1944), a product of a different but still total conflict.<sup>6</sup> In spite of their very contrasting subjects and contexts both works express a love of nature and evoke the importance of human, especially male, comradeship. Blunden, whose academic career took him to Japan and China for long periods, retained a lasting feel for England. It is evinced poignantly in his memories of English soldiers in wartime, and of the English place-names they superimposed upon the French and Flemish originals as a way of re-creating pieces of England in a foreign land. The idea of a ‘deep’ England is there too in cricket. For Blunden the game is not one of great names, and only rarely of professional players. It is cricket played by ordinary folk in their own neighbourhoods – their ‘country’; Blunden’s use of that ancient term denoted lives and sport circumscribed by localities. How many athletic pursuits, we might wonder, have been appropriated by high literary culture in this way, to distil the essences that form a nation? Does cricket as a game possess some intrinsic quality that explains why writers are thus attracted to it? Or has cricket attained its special position as a consequence of having been appropriated by men of letters?

The answer is probably to be found in a combination of both: writing defines cricket as much as the game influences the writer. In one sense cricket writing’s artistic distinction has worked to privilege the game socially and politically in relation to other sports. At the same time it has served to endow it with a special ethos. If cricket is perceived as having an ‘essence’ it is because of the qualities writers have ascribed to it. When the ‘soul’ of cricket is spoken of, as many traditionalists have done in reflecting on recent radical changes in the nature of the game, it is to a large extent the heritage of literary representations of the game that they are calling upon for this idea. What is more, when the ‘soul’ of the game appears to have been sold in a Mephistophelean pact with commerce, something more than just a game appears to be at stake.

Some might plausibly object that cricket writing, for all its literariness, has often been one-dimensional: that the class, gender and ethnic assumptions ingrained in its texts conspire to make much of it a repository of conservative myths, perpetuating the memory of people, places and relationships that have long since ceased to have relevance to either the game or the society in which it functions. A striking example of this is the tendency to marginalise women’s cricket, in spite of the fact that it has been played at an

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international level since the 1930s. The televising in 2009 of the women's world cup, won by an excellent England team, might help to change perceptions of what constitutes 'cricket'. But old habits die hard, and there is little doubt that the act of writing about cricket has on many occasions been an opportunity to look back nostalgically at 'better days', to seek in a perceived past a relief from the economic and political pressures that bear down on us in the present. One feature of this mentality has been evident in the game's relationship with the 'outside' world; that is to say, the world outside cricket. In spite of cricket's own power structures and the political affiliations of many of its leading figures, the game has at crucial times been pressed into service to support the argument that 'sport and politics do not mix'. It was never more apparent than during the so-called 'D'Oliveira Affair' in the late 1960s.<sup>7</sup> Basil D'Oliveira, a non-white South African barred under apartheid laws from playing in the white cricket teams of that country, had been very successful in English county cricket after emigrating in 1960. The possibility that he might be chosen to tour South Africa as a member of the English team in 1968–69 provoked much backstairs manoeuvring by South African politicians seeking to prevent a selection that would embarrass the apartheid regime. MCC, the body responsible for the composition of the touring party, was caught between, on the one hand, choosing the players it deemed suitable for the tour and, on the other, not wishing to offend the South African cricket authorities, with whom it had had long and friendly relations. Its ambivalence on the matter made it seem that, in the words of the writer John Arlott, MCC was 'truckling to apartheid'.<sup>8</sup> The affair, partially resolved by the calling off of the tour, produced bitter controversy and led directly to the boycotting of sporting relations with South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. Voices at the time were nonetheless raised in favour of the status quo; they proposed that relations with South Africa should be maintained, and in so saying they drew upon long-held notions of cricket as a 'pure' game insulated from the grubby world of politics. Such a notion was by no means new. It had been fostered in the earlier part of the twentieth century in the writings of one of cricket's most renowned authors, Neville Cardus.<sup>9</sup> Combining cricket reporting for the Manchester *Guardian* with his role as the paper's music correspondent, Cardus endowed both subjects with an 'apolitical' spirit. It was an attitude reflected in most British newspapers of the time, where, as if to emphasise the separateness of sport from all things political, it was detached from the rest of the news and confined to the back pages.

In more recent times attitudes have changed, to an extent at least. A new strand of writing and thinking has emerged that offers a serious academic analysis of cricket. It is connected with the growth over the past thirty or

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so years of a distinct ‘sport history’ with vigorous groups of practitioners in many countries, and it has given us many fine studies of cricket. If we were to choose one outstanding example it might well be the late David Underdown’s *Start of Play*.<sup>10</sup> The book traces the origins and development of cricket in Kent, Sussex and Hampshire – the ‘cradle’ of the modern game – from the early-eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth. It shows how a game of the people – a ‘peasant’ game in Underdown’s term – was gradually appropriated by the upper classes and eventually developed into a commercial sport based in London. Underdown thus brings to bear on the game a social historian’s sense of place, of class relations and of change impelled by the lure of money and markets, forces often overlooked or suppressed in many non-academic studies of cricket. David Underdown, in fact, performs a masterclass in how to write good sport history. When we read this wonderful book we would do well to have at our elbow a copy of William Cobbett’s old classic *Rural Rides*.<sup>11</sup> Both writers, from different perspectives and separated by 150 years, are describing the passing of the same world.

Some forty years before Underdown’s book appeared, the Trinidadian writer and political activist C. L. R. James had marked out a new path in cricket writing. His book was appropriately entitled *Beyond a Boundary*.<sup>12</sup> It was the first, and for some time the only, book to take cricket away from the field of play, or more precisely, to place the field of play in a broader arena of political, economic and social influences. Sport historians are now so accustomed to such a methodology that it comes as something of a surprise to remember that its provenance is relatively recent. The Jamesian influence has been immense, notably in regions where cricket from an early stage was politicised because of its colonial and racial setting, and where in the course of time the game came to play a part in the process of decolonisation. Alongside the West Indies, such a characteristic has been present in the Indian subcontinent and South Africa, with variations on the theme in Australia and New Zealand. Hilary Beckles and Brian Stoddart’s study of cricket in the Caribbean<sup>13</sup> is a striking example of a work whose contributors carry strong traces of James’s method and philosophy. There is plenty of cricket in the book, but there is much else besides. In England and Australia the same influence has been rather less noticeable. Derek Birley<sup>14</sup> and Mike Marqusee<sup>15</sup> have provided radical and stimulating correctives to many of cricket history’s enduring myths, though in their work the influence of C. L. R. James, if present at all, is lightly worn. Where James’s shadow has most obviously been cast in Britain is over those who have worked in post-colonial studies, some of whom have transported their concepts and theories into the realm of sport. Claire Westall’s chapter in this volume offers a good example.

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Academic sport history, however, is a small room in the very large mansion of cricket writing. The genre continues to be shaped, as it always was, by popular demands. It underscores very clearly a commonly held view that sport is too enjoyable a business to be entrusted to academics. The thrills of the cricket field must be reproduced, as nearly as possible, on page and screen. Traditional written and electronic forms still capture the public's imagination, and are now being augmented by various aspects of new technology. The England–Australia Ashes series of 2005, and its sequel in 2009, revealed cricket's capacity to generate astonishing amounts of written and visual record in rapid time, while the success of the Indian Premier League illustrates the game's ability to be, through the medium of television, a 'global brand'. Millions of people worldwide now find in the cricket of the early twenty-first century an excitement and quality rarely seen in any sustained form in the past. A global awareness has helped cricket to refashion itself with the injection of ideas and methods taken from other sports and from the world of business. Improvements in fielding, for example, have come from studying baseball techniques; improvisation in batting and new bowling methods have been devised to meet the challenges of the short game; television presentation, the staid forms of which were jolted into new life by the coloured clothing and floodlight initiatives of Kerry Packer's World Series Cricket in the 1970s, has been further developed in Twenty20 cricket with stagecraft that owes much to American football; a keener business sense, involving sponsors, advertising and official suppliers, has been adopted by all the national governing bodies of cricket drawing on models previously developed in sport by organisations such as FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC); and all of these have served to broaden the audience, not only geographically but in age and gender terms as well. Go to any Twenty20 fixture on a weekday evening in a big English city and, given fair weather, there will be evidence of the transformations wrought in recent years; lots of children, many more women than ever before, groups of men in business suits who have stepped in from the office after work; loud music accompanying a boundary or the fall of a wicket; big-screen coverage of the play; beer and burgers. Such an event bears a close resemblance to American sporting occasions. But it is undeniably fun, and it is all over in three hours. The contrast with Neville Cardus's descriptions of so-called 'Roses' matches between Lancashire and Yorkshire in the 1920s – where the male community of spectators rasped stentorian instructions to the players to 'get thi'ead down' – could not be starker. The Twenty20 match is the apotheosis of commercialism in cricket.

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The game, of course, has always possessed a commercial potential. The iconic Victorian cricketer himself, W. G. Grace, was never slow to exploit it, especially to his own advantage, and for a time in the mid-nineteenth century the possibility existed that cricket might follow a business-orientated path similar to that of American baseball.<sup>16</sup> That it did not had something to do with W. G. committing his own towering presence to the amateur-led ‘county’ game, and something also to do with the gradual reformation of manners in cricket, which cultivated a distaste for the perceived evils of commercial sport. One of these was gambling, a habit that had been prominent in cricket during the phase of aristocratic dominance and patronage in the eighteenth century, when matches were often the subject of wagers between rival patrons. Betting became endemic in the game (as it did in other sports – notably professional pedestrianism, which the Amateur Athletics Association later sought to combat). It provoked a number of incidents in cricket where professional players were thought to have profited by ‘selling’ matches, and by 1817 the problem had reached a point at which MCC took the lead in causing bookmakers and gambling to be banned from cricket grounds. Although gambling in cricket was not entirely eliminated as a result of these measures, it seems to have been less of a problem in the hundred years following the 1850s. But with the ending of amateur hegemony it started to make a comeback. In the 1970s, rules were relaxed to allow betting at grounds, and the intensified commercialism that the game was experiencing by the end of the twentieth century attracted a new betting craze. It was at its height among the millions of cricket followers in South Asia. Paradoxically, at a time when their remuneration from cricket was greater than it had ever been, some professional players seemed more susceptible than ever to the temptation to increase their earnings through dishonest practices. Several cases of match-fixing, of which that of the South African captain Hansie Cronje achieved the highest profile, did much to damage the credibility of the game in the eyes of its followers, though it did not necessarily stop malpractice. Apart from the deliberate fixing of match results, cricket’s episodic structure provides further opportunities for corrupt behaviour through more subtle forms of ‘micro’ (or ‘spot’) fixing, in which players might conspire to affect certain passages of play (runs scored in a session, for example, or the number of no-balls delivered) in order to make money by betting in league with outside agents against the bookmakers’ odds. During the 2010 series against England, allegations of such spot fixing were levelled against a group of leading Pakistan cricketers. Seen in the context of similar contemporaneous incidents – the suspension, for example, of the chief executive of the Indian Premier League, Lalit Modi,

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over allegations of financial misdemeanours – such developments no doubt caused many ordinary cricket followers to question the probity of what they were witnessing on the field of play. It is vital in any sport, as the ICC's chief executive has recently noted, that the public has confidence in the players;<sup>17</sup> and as David Frith's chapter in the present volume shows, cricket, its image as a game of fair play notwithstanding, has not been immune from charges of corrupt practice.

For much of its development, however, English cricket had succeeded in avoiding damaging irregularities of this kind. The game was fashioned in a form that might be described as 'semi-commercial'. Indeed, one aspect (perhaps the paramount one) of this amateur-led trajectory proved inimical to full-scale commercialism: the aesthetic of cricket. Cricket was regarded as more than a game; it was felt to express a set of values about correct human behaviour. Unacceptable conduct was simply 'not cricket'. Within this code was a notion of style. Cricket should be played according to an orthodox technique that involved among other things the 'straight bat' and the approved 'sideways on' method of bowling, with the ball aimed on a sportsmanlike length on or just outside off-stump. Expert practitioners of these skills became the great sporting heroes of the early twentieth century 'golden age', when in England cricket was still known as the 'national game': A. C. MacLaren – 'the noblest Roman of them all'<sup>18</sup> – Victor Trumper, Jack Hobbs and the versatile C. B. Fry, who excelled in all sports and whose classical physique seemed an embodiment of the Edwardian love of ancient Greece. To reach Twenty20 from this worldview required more than the mere application of business methods; it has needed a revolution of the intellect, which happened for the most part in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Nonetheless, there are continuities. The sheer pleasure that was had in the spectacle of Trumper batting is not absent from the modern game; indeed, much of cricket's commercial appeal lies in anticipating the arrival at the crease of a batsman like Sachin Tendulkar, or in simply observing the magisterial Andrew Flintoff bestriding a cricket field. These two modern champions are cast in the mould of the greats of the 'golden age'. To be sure, style has been valued in all sports and has inspired great sports writing: Alan Ross on Stanley Matthews, Hugh McIlvanney on George Best, Norman Mailer on Muhammad Ali. But cricket's style icons probably outnumber those of other sports, and the game even in its commercialised present still retains a place for the panache that the old masters brought to the game.

The long history of recording and analysing the game, from which there has arisen a myriad of texts, makes up what we might call the 'discourse' of cricket: in other words, the 'language', broadly speaking, through which

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people are able to think and argue about, commemorate and remember the game. In short, cricket discourse constitutes the mental map by which we ‘know’ cricket. Thus, this volume’s specialist topics, whole and rounded in themselves, and which can be read in any order the reader might choose, nevertheless each relate to one or more of the big themes recurring throughout the volume:

- the heritage of cricket, articulated through its distinctive literary forms;
- newer representations of the game, especially through the medium of television;
- the increased commercialisation of cricket in the later twentieth century, and the various problems this has posed;
- the reactions that changed forms of play such as one-day and Twenty20 cricket have provoked;
- the worldwide development of the game, with particular emphasis on South Asia as well as the prospects for future growth in new areas such as China;
- the international politics of cricket and shifting balances of power within the game that make up the politics of international cricket;
- the place of cricket in the formation of regional, national, ethnic and other social identities.

The origins of cricket in southern England, together with the concentration of cricket publishing in much the same time and area, gave rise to an ‘Anglocentric’ vision of the game: the view from England, exemplified in Pelham Warner’s survey of cricket on the eve of the First World War. It caused many to believe that what was most important in the game emanated from England, and from Lord’s cricket ground in particular. Early on, however, a process of internationalisation began which created a challenge to the English hegemony, first on the field of play, then in the committee rooms and treasuries of cricket’s administrative structure, and subsequently in its sources of communication. This book grapples with that long, sometimes harmonious but often troublesome, process of change.

## NOTES

- 1 Edmund Blunden, *Cricket Country* (London: The Imprint Society, 1945 edn), p. 224.
- 2 Pelham Warner, *Imperial Cricket* (London: London and Counties Press Association, 1912).
- 3 Joseph O’Neill, *Netherland* (London: Fourth Estate, 2008).
- 4 Benny Green, *A History of Cricket* (London: Barrie and Jenkins, 1988), p. 14.

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- 5 John Nyren, *The Young Cricketer's Tutor, Comprising Full Directions for Playing ... Cricket (including 'The Cricketers of My Time, or recollections of the most famous old players')* (London: C. C. Clarke, 1833).
- 6 Edmund Blunden, *Undertones of War* (London: Richard Cobden-Sanderson, 1928); *Cricket Country*.
- 7 See, for example, Peter Osborne, *Basil D'Oliveira: Cricket and Conspiracy, the Untold Story* (London: Little, Brown, 2004).
- 8 Quoted in Tim Heald, *The Authorized Biography of the Incomparable Denis Compton* (London: Pavilion Books, 1996), p. 213.
- 9 See Anthony Bateman, *Cricket, Literature and Culture: Symbolising the Nation, Destabilising Empire* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), ch. 3.
- 10 David Underdown, *Start of Play: Cricket and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Allen Lane, 2000).
- 11 William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1893 edn).
- 12 C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (London: Hutchinson, 1963).
- 13 H. McD. Beckles and Brian Stoddart, *Liberation Cricket: West Indies Cricket Culture* (Manchester University Press, 1995).
- 14 Derek Birley, *Willow Wand: Some Cricket Myths Explored* (London: Queen Anne Press, 1979).
- 15 Mike Marqusee, *Anyone But England: Cricket and the National Malaise* (London: Verso, 1994).
- 16 Simon Rae, *W. G. Grace: A Life* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998).
- 17 See [www.cricinfo.com/england-v-pakistan-2010/content/current/story/475673.html](http://www.cricinfo.com/england-v-pakistan-2010/content/current/story/475673.html) (accessed 3 September 2010).
- 18 Neville Cardus, *Good Days* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949), p. 80.