

'THAT SUBTLE AND DIFFICULT THING: A NATIONAL SPIRIT': FORD, ANGLO-SAXONDOM AND 'THE GORGEOUSLY ENGLISH' GEORGE BORROW

Helen Southworth

Ford's references to the now largely overlooked eccentric Victorian travel writer, amateur ethnographer and gypsiologist George Borrow (1803-1881), author most famously of *Lavengro* and *The Bible in Spain*, are numerous. Ford refers to Borrow in his critical work and in his non-fiction writing about place and he also uses a scene from Borrow's *Lavengro* as the source for two early poems. He employed Borrow creatively and nostalgically in *The Cinque Ports* (1900) and in the Pre-Raphaelite inspired *Poems for Pictures* (1900) early on in his writing career, and then returned to Borrow's work from a stylistic perspective in his later critical writings, such as *Thus to Revisit* (1921). And in what constitutes the most detailed discussion of his predecessor's work, in 1913 Ford wrote a quite lengthy review of Clement Shorter's biography of the man he provocatively labels 'the gorgeously English [...] George Borrow'.¹

Ford read Borrow in the late nineteenth century; he tells us in his review of Shorter's *George Borrow and his Circle* that 'as a boy' he had '[Borrow's] the *Romany Rye* [*Lavengro*'s sequel] almost by heart' ('Mr. Clement Shorter' 678). Indeed Borrow was a popular figure among English writers, composers and artists at the turn of the century. At this time his books were taught in secondary schools and reprinted with regularity; thus Borrow frequently represents a childhood memory, revived in adulthood. The list of those, many modernists among them, who make reference to his life and work, sometimes cursory, sometimes detailed, includes Augustus John, Virginia Woolf, E. M. Forster, Wyndham Lewis, D. H. Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Paul Nash, and Ralph Vaughan Williams. Ford shared an interest in Borrow with some of the *English Review* travel writer contributors, such as Borrovian biographer Edward Thomas whose *The Heart of England* was published in the same year as Ford's

similarly titled *The Heart of the Country*, the second volume of *England and the English*.² It is possible that Ford's interest in Borrow was also spurred by his Pre-Raphaelite family ties. Ford's uncle by marriage, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, had Gypsies pose for his paintings. Ford's family lawyer, Theodore Watts-Dunton, was a friend of Borrow and the author of the immensely popular Gypsy novel *Aylwin* (1898). Ford at one point mocks Watts-Dunton for a contrived dedication to Gypsy lore with a reference to Isopel Berners, the love interest of Borrow's protagonist in *Lavengro*. Ford, forgetting that Isopel was a traveller but not a Gypsy, wrote that *Aylwin* 'was what his friends called bilge, and his innumeral poems seemed to be all devoted to proving that he had once been kissed by a Rommany lal ... a sort of watered-down Isopel Berners ...'.³

Borrow's idiosyncratic Englishness and his unorthodox approach to national identity appealed to Ford and his fellow modernists in the transitional years of pre-war England. Borrow's work sheds light on Ford's ideas about the relationships between town and country, and between nation and place. He associated Borrow with what he called 'Anglo-Saxondom': in *The March of Literature* Ford cites *The Bible in Spain*, Borrow's most popular book, as an example of the type of book in which 'Anglo-Saxondom particularly excels,' although it does not represent a peak at a period where 'great peaks,' he suggests, are few and far between.⁴ The bohemian, impressionistic quality of Borrow's work spoke to Ford as he set out to record what he called 'that subtle and difficult thing', the 'spirit' of the English, in works such as *The Cinque Ports* and *England and the English*.⁵ Borrow's 'foreignness', his Defoe-inspired, 'True-Born Englishman' emphasis on the mixedness of the English, represents a source for what Ian Baucom defines as Ford's place-based, rather than blood-linked, theories about national identity in his *England and the English*.⁶ Borrow cites both Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and his *Moll Flanders* in *Lavengro* and indeed describes his book as an autobiography in the style of *Robinson Crusoe*.⁷

Borrow's oeuvre consists of mostly semi-fictional travel writing, focused first predominantly on Spain (*The Zincali* and *The Bible in Spain*) and, after approximately 1850, on his native Britain (*Lavengro*, its sequel *The Romany Rye*, and *Wild Wales*). Credited by biographers with knowledge of between thirty and forty foreign languages, Borrow engaged in translation, from Danish and Welsh, and in amateur philology, such as his study of the Romani language

entitled *Romano Lavo-Lil*. He also collected and translated folk songs and poetry. As Ford himself notes, while Borrow frames his work as non-fictional ethnography and as autobiography, much of the content is factually dubious, which seems to have delighted Ford and, to a large extent, been the source of its value for him.⁸ While best known for his Gypsies, most notably Jasper Petulengro, and for Isopel Berners, with whom Lavengro lives for a time in Mumpers' Dingle, both featured in *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*, Borrow's works are populated by a wide variety of eccentrics, many of them of mixed or uncertain national origin, and the relationship between races is a central theme in his work. Although Borrow's narrators spend time in cities, they are drawn to the countryside and to the wild and sequestered places found there. Borrow, in his semi-fictional manifestation as Lavengro, highlights his mixed Cornish and Norman heritage; he traveled extensively, first in the employ of the Bible Society for which he circulated the scriptures, as his *The Bible in Spain* subtitle makes clear: *Or, the Journeys, Adventures, and Imprisonments of an Englishman in An Attempt to Circulate the Scriptures in the Peninsula*. Having relocated in England he nevertheless maintained his peripatetic ways. Borrow's work is 'perambulatory', he is a 'man of the road' according to biographer Michael Collie, in the sense that there is a picaresque, an unanchored, topsy-turvy (to borrow Leslie Stephen's term for Borrow's universe)⁹ quality to his work, one which, for Collie, translates into a patriotism free of 'the aspects of Empire that were a blight upon English life' (Collie 228). In this way, Borrow suggested an interesting precedent to writers and artists of Ford's generation as they negotiated questions of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, both in a general sense and in terms of writing.

The Cuckoo and the Gipsy, City and Country

Picking up on an oft cited passage, Ford prefaces his poem 'The Cuckoo and The Gipsy', originally published in the *Speaker* in 1898¹⁰ and then as 'The Gipsy and the Cuckoo' in *Poems for Pictures and for Notes of Music* in 1900, with an epigraph from chapter IX of Borrow's *Lavengro* sequel, *The Romany Rye*.¹¹ This passage is a popular one because it captures the tenor of Borrow's book as a whole in its sympathy for the freedoms available to the itinerant and in its celebration of roguishness. Ford chose one series of lines for the original publication and then substituted it with a second more concise version of the same lines in *Poems for Pictures*: the speakers' names

are erased in the second version. Both epigraphs are conversations between Gypsy Jasper Petulengro and the narrator, Lavengro, also called Romany Rye or Gypsy Gentleman. In the first of the two epigraphs, the Romany Rye questions Jasper about his life as a Gypsy. When Jasper says 'We are not miserable, brother', the Romany Rye asserts '[w]ell, then you ought to be, Jasper. Have you an inch of ground your own? Are you of the least use? Are you not spoken ill of by everybody? What is a gipsy?' Jasper then replies with a question about the identity of the bird 'yonder', to which the Romany Rye replies 'that's a cuckoo tolling, but what has the cuckoo to do with the matter?' The question is left open in anticipation of the poem. The second epigraph (which is a paraphrase) clarifies the connection further. The epigraph opens with Jasper's question about the bird, to which the Romany Rye replies simply 'that's a cuckoo'. Jasper then asks '[h]e's a roguish chaffing sort of bird, isn't he, brother?' When the Romany Rye agrees, Jasper continues with 'But you rather like him, brother? . . . Well, brother, and what's a gipsy?'¹²

The poem itself is a dialogue between two different but not inconsistent viewpoints, the Romany Rye's and the Gypsy's. Detailed further in the poem is the role of the Gypsy, and the cuckoo, in the maintenance of a traditional image of the countryside. Unlike the first epigraph, the speaker is not indicated in the poem. Jasper appears to be speaking, however, as the last line of the second stanza suggests: 'And the long white road more weary/ If we never came'. The third and last stanza changes form. Ford's poem closes on a series of questions challenging and rejecting an impulse, on the part of the non-Gypsy, to bring order to the natural disorder of the countryside: 'Would your May days seem more fair/ Were we chals deep-read in books,/ Were we cuckoos cawing rooks,/ All the brakes cathedral closes/ Where the very sunlight dozes,/ Were the sounds all organ tone and book and bell and prayer?' (*Selected Poems* 8).

When the poem first appeared it was accompanied by a 'dialogue pendant to [the poem]' entitled 'The Gipsy and the Townsman', suggesting the two should be read together. This connection is not made, however, in the first edition of *Poems for Pictures* or in the later *Collected Poems* (1936) where the two appear separately.¹³ In the second of the two poems, Ford moves further from Borrow as he imagines a single but lengthier exchange between the Gipsy and the Townsman (the country and the city), notably *not* here the Romany Rye. The townsman comments that while it is '[p]leasant

enough' (this repeated three times), to live outside presumably, in the summer time, in 'the seed-time', 'the hay-time', 'the grain-time', how, he asks, does the Gypsy fare during the winter, during the 'need-time-/ The grey-time-/ The rain-time-?' The Gypsy replies with a description of the countryside as bleak in the winter, but less so than the modern town: 'But there's smoke and wind and woe in the town/ Harder to bear/ There than here,/ On the saddest day of the weariest year' (*Selected Poems* 9).

Christina Rossetti's Pre-Raphaelite poetry likely influenced Ford's earlier poems, especially the love lyrics of *Poems for Pictures* alongside which these poems appeared.¹⁴ Suggesting further Pre-Raphaelite ties, among the other poems included in the volume are one 'suggested by' George Meredith's poem 'Phoebus with Admetus' and a song drama entitled 'King Cophetua's Wooing', based on Alfred Tennyson's *The Beggar Maid* (written in 1833, published in 1842), and Edward Burne-Jones' painting *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (1884). The first of the Borrow poems resembles Pre-Raphaelite poetry in the sense that it is nostalgic, suggested by another literary source, has a ballad-like dialogue form, and a romantic figure of sorts for a protagonist. The Gypsy focus and the shape (rhyme scheme, enjambment, internal rhyme, anaphora) and antiquated, pastoral tone of the poem is reminiscent of George Meredith's poems such as 'Juggling Jerry', focused on the Gypsy-like juggler (although the juggler asserts 'I, lass, have liv'd no gypsy, flaunting/ Finery while his poor helpmate grubs').¹⁵

'The Cuckoo and the Gipsy' is a nostalgic argument for preserving the countryside as it is and, in this way, it anticipates the nostalgia of *England and the English*, especially the second volume, *The Heart of the Country*. However, in his choice of Borrow, and of the Gypsy and cuckoo passage in particular, as a vehicle for a discussion of the relationship between the city and the countryside, Ford adds a twist to his nostalgia: the countryside is celebrated, but as a place that is unpredictable and untamed rather than as an entirely idyllic place.¹⁶ The second of the poems, with its invocation of the smoky town and the only barely less hostile countryside makes this rejection of the pastoral even clearer. It stands apart from the more traditional first poem in terms of its contemporary tone and anticipates Ford's less romantic portrait of the hardships of the country alongside his celebration thereof in *The Heart of the Country*. Supporting such a reading of these poems, Ford repeats this rejection of a sentimental

nostalgia for the countryside precisely in terms of Borrow in his later review of Shorter's biography, asserting that 'for, though the wind whispering in the sunlight through the yellow gorse is a pretty thing, it is very small baggage for life in the country, which is mainly composed of mud, rain, rheumatism, and indigestion' ('Mr. Clement Shorter' 678). With these poems, especially the second, Ford engages with the Gypsy poem genre, moving away from the romanticized view of the Gypsy found in Matthew Arnold's well known 'The Scholar-Gypsy' (1853), in which the reader is urged to 'fly' from 'this strange disease of modern life', and writing more in the vein of John Clare, who, as Deborah Epstein Nord has argued, viewed the Gypsies from both a pastoral *and* a political perspective.¹⁷

This move away from pastoral nostalgia also reflects Ford's contradictory feelings about the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and what he perceived as its failure to engage with the contemporary world. His own aim, as stated in the preface to his *Collected Poems* in which he reprinted both 'The Cuckoo and the Gipsy' and 'The Gipsy and the Townsman', was 'to register my own times in terms of my own time' (CP2, 327). In 'Modern Poetry' Ford is disparaging about the capacity of the work of 'Lord Tennyson, of Browning, of Swinburne, of Rossetti, or of the late Mr Meredith' to 'stand the test of time', but then goes on, capturing his ambivalent stance, to celebrate the ballad: '[b]allads and folk-songs are never Great Poetry, but what exquisite pleasure they can give us, and what a light they can throw upon the human heart!'¹⁸ This is consistent with what Paul Skinner describes as a 'lagg[ing] behind' of '[Ford's] poetic practice' in comparison to 'his [more forward-looking] critical pronouncements'. According to Skinner, despite his support of the modernist project in theory, in practice '[Ford's] own poems were 'longish things': he needed space, the rhythms of speech, the conversational sentence'.¹⁹

We might read the Borrow poems in terms of what Hugh Kenner describes, in his reading of the poems 'On Heaven' and 'The Starling',²⁰ as Ford's negotiation of a conventional framework with a contemporary idiom: 'words a person might say, not book-words, and sequences a person might speak',²¹ in terms of '[Ford's] allegiance [at once] to tradition and to experimentation'.²² Appropriately perhaps if we consider Meredith as source for the structure and tone of the Borrow poems, Ford considered Meredith as standing apart from the Pre-Raphaelites: he writes that Meredith, like Whistler, 'became early detached from the great swarm, to shine [a] solitary [planet] in the

sky'.²³ Kenner highlights the prose writer in Ford, suggesting of the poem 'The Starling' that 'events are imagined like incidents in a novel. Juxtaposed, they do not state the poem's revelation; rather they are an occasion on which to meditate; meditating on them, the poet arrives at a revelation which he then explicitly states. It isn't a profound revelation, but the revelations at which one arrives by thinking seldom are' (Kenner 177). In the case of 'The Cuckoo and the Gypsy', the scene is literally one from a prose work. The exchange between Jasper and the Romany Rye provides, as Kenner contends of the events in 'The Starling', 'an occasion for meditation', specifically here on a question central to Ford's work and one he revisits in his writing about England, that is the relationship of the country to the city.

England's Melting Pot

In the same year that the Borrowian poems were published in *Poems for Pictures*, Borrow also appeared in Ford's *The Cinque Ports* (1900), subtitled an 'historical and descriptive' work, a study of the Kentish and Sussex ports. The first of two references, in a footnote in Ford's section on Winchelsea, is to Borrow's mention of a Swiss pilgrim who 'managed to earn a precarious living [in Catholic countries] by posing as coming from the shrine [of St James of Compostella]'.²⁴ A discussion of the flourishing of Winchelsea as a port via which pilgrims accessed Spain en route to the shrine provokes this mention. Ford appears to be referring to the Swiss soap boiler, former Walloon, Benedict Mol in Borrow's *The Bible in Spain*, encountered several times by the narrator over the course of the work. Mol in fact, somewhat inconsistently with Ford's rendition of events, is going to St James of Compostela to find buried treasure, the existence of which he has learnt from a dying man.²⁵

The second mention of Borrow, a long quotation documenting the young Lavengro's reaction to bones in a Hythe crypt, falls in Ford's chapter on Hythe and Folkestone. Ford introduces the quotation, taken from Chapter Two of *Lavengro*, with an explanation of the contested origin of the bones as those of either victims of battles 'between Britons and Saxons, between Saxons and Danes, or between Hythe folk and the French' or, according to the 'more sceptical', of ordinary churchyard origin preserved in a Hythe crypt. He includes the extract in order to illustrate the power of the bones to stir the imagination (despite their uncertain origin). Thus, he cites Lavengro's

conclusion that '[o]ne enormous skull must have belonged to a giant, one of those red-haired warriors of whose strength and stature such wondrous tales are told in the ancient chronicles of the north'. Ford explains in an accompanying footnote that Borrow believed the bones were of Danish origin, a fact which so caught his imagination as a boy that it led him to approach a study of Danish lore with particular application.²⁶

Both of Ford's references to Borrow in *The Cinque Ports* are tied to the fantastical, magical quality of his predecessor's work and to his emphasis on eccentric figures. The origin of the Danish bones, and the idea of foreign invasion suggested thereby, which set the young Lavengro's imagination on fire while unverifiable, as Ford points out in *The Cinque Ports*, is nonetheless captivating enough to quote at length. The quixotic figure of Benedict Mol, only loosely tied to the point Ford makes, obviously also captures Ford's imagination to the point that he felt it merited inclusion.

In his preface, Ford describes his study, suggesting a tie to Borrow's picaresque, semi-fictional version of England, as 'neither archaeological nor topographical nor even archaeologico-topographical. It was to be *a piece of literature pure and simple*, an attempt, by means of suggestion, to interpret to the passing years the inward message of the Five Ports' (*CP* v-vi: my emphasis). Ford's aim, he says, is not accuracy, but suggestiveness – although a negative review of another work based on its inaccuracies determined him to verify all of his sources and to indicate those statements the truth of which he says seemed questionable.

The key to what Ford means by 'a piece of literature pure and simple' (and its relationship to Anglo-Saxondom) in *The Cinque Ports* might be found in yet another reference to Borrow in a chapter on 'Vers libre' in Ford's 'The Battle of the Poets' section of *Thus to Revisit: Some Reminiscences* (1921). Here Ford argues with diagrams that 'prose is a form as well adapted for the utterance of poetry as verse' and that if only the Anglo-Saxon could recognize this then 'Anglo-Saxondom would come into the comity of all nations' (*TR* 185). Ford asserts that:

[...] the factual-propagandist, or the factual-biographic, work of prose, even as the propagandist or tendential piece of verse, may pass over into the division of literature – by virtue perhaps of its very inaccuracy. I do not know how high the reader may be inclined to rate George Borrow. I do not really know how high I rate him myself; but rate him high or low, you cannot get away from the

conviction that most of his facts are nonsense, whether in the *Bible in Spain* or in *Lavengro* – and that when they are not nonsense they are mendacities. Yet these very nonsenses and mendacities give to his work such literary qualities as it has – for, however they may libel the Man in Black, they make you intimate with the true George Borrow. (TR 190-1)

And he returns to Borrow a little later in the same piece, again in indirect praise of a creativity to which he himself seems to have aspired in, for example, his much loved but much attacked memoir of Joseph Conrad:

[T]he question of Immortality, of Literary Permanence, of Genius – in short, of poetry! – this question is simply one of personality. This statement should, of course, be accepted with some caution and in a reasonable spirit. I do not mean to say that every imaginative writer, as soon as he takes pen in hand, should give himself license to exaggerate, as Borrow did, his momentary impatience or to avenge his personal dislikes. But I do mean to say that the Public of to-day *has to go to imaginative writers for its knowledge of life – for its civilization*. For this, recorded facts are of no avail. (TR 192-3: my emphasis)

While Borrow is not mentioned in Ford's three volume *England and the English: An Interpretation* (1907), Ford repeats in his introduction to the first volume his Borrowian formula from *The Cinque Ports*. This work will not be 'encyclopaedic, topographical or archaeological', rather he will try to "get the atmosphere" of Modern London'.²⁷ In this study of the English spirit, which Max Saunders describes as part fictional and part sociological, 'fall[ing] half-way between the novels of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, on the one hand, showing rural life being transformed by the spread of the Industrial Revolution; and, on the other, the pre-war preoccupation with "The Condition of England"', suggesting a tie to works such as Borrow's *Lavengro*, Ford is at pains to assert the autobiographical, personal quality of his account.²⁸ In the second part of the trilogy, *The Heart of the Country*, for example, Ford offers, as he did in *The Cinque Ports*, 'his personal view of his personal countryside' (EE, 109). He has read others' work on the countryside, but this account will be based on his own first hand knowledge of England and the English.

As in Borrow's *Lavengro* and his *The Bible in Spain*, the anecdote is central to Ford's portrait of the English in *England and the English*, as is the encounter between the narrator and his subject and the frequently conversational tone of the work. Like Borrow, Ford's

focus is the people. In *The Bible in Spain*, Borrow asserts that 'my favourite, I might say, my only study is man'.²⁹ In *The Heart of the Country* Ford, again suggesting ties to Borrow, turns to figures such as the tramp, in particular one named Carew, a figure Ford extols as 'the artist – the man who loves the road for his own sake: he has not any other ambitions than shade from the sun, long grass and eternal autumn weather', and to the peasant woman Meary who '[kept] all on goeing' in the face of life's harshest challenges.³⁰

Echoing the earlier Borrow poems, we find a discussion of the relationship between the town and the country and the somewhat nostalgic assertion of the utopian quality of the country, especially in the first two volumes focused respectively on the town, on London specifically, and then on the country. Up against 'the Tom Tiddler's Ground of the Town' (a reference to one of Dickens's 'Christmas Stories'), Ford sets the 'Islands of the Blest that lie somewhere in the Heart of the Country' (EE 113). Ford's defence of the countryside, 'the cottage as the heart of the country', the labourer as 'the final pillar of the state', is in the Borrowian tradition (EE 198). Significantly citing W. H. Davies's work on tramps, Edward Thomas's writing 'on the life of the countryside' and Ralph Vaughan Williams' music, all of which have ties to Borrow, as working to the same end as Ford, Saunders describes *The Heart of the Country* as 'an attempt to put the culture back in contact with the land, and to allow a middle-class urban audience a vicarious contact with rural life' (Saunders 220).

The most intriguing tie between Ford and Borrow in terms of *England and the English* is Ford's decidedly Borrowian emphasis on the mixedness, the inherent foreignness, of 'the English People': 'that great, migratory people who in the course of centuries have taken root in some small islands and produced, in Town and Country alike, *that subtle and difficult thing: a national spirit*'.³¹ The Borrowian influence is best seen in the third book, *The Spirit of the People*, where Ford substitutes a theory of race determined by place for one determined by blood. It is residence in England that makes one English, not one's blood, according to Ford. Ford describes himself as 'a quite ordinary man, with the common tastes and that mixture in about equal parts of English, Celtic and Teutonic bloods that goes to make up the usual Anglo-Saxon of these islands' (EE 232). Borrow's Lavengro likewise celebrates his own foreignness, his Cornish and Norman blood and his capacity to pass as a Gypsy, a Jew, an Englishman and an Irishman. 'There are no countries in the world', Borrow asserts in his preface to

Lavengro, 'less known by the British than these selfsame British Islands, or where more strange things are every day occurring, whether in road or street, house or dingle' (*Lavengro* xxiv). Thus, to Patrick Parrinder's list of writers of immigrant descent – he suggests Defoe and Benjamin Disraeli – as possible sources for Ford's 'non-fictional accounts of English history', including *England and the English*, we might add Borrow . . . (Parrinder 6).

A last possible tie between Ford and Borrow, and Borrow and Anglo-Saxondom, can be found in the work of the naturalist W. H. Hudson (1841-1922), another writer about place. Hudson, who was much admired and often mentioned by Ford, is frequently compared to Borrow. In *Portraits from Life*, Ford repeats what he characterizes as the popular view that Hudson's *Green Mansions* (1904) is 'Anglo-Saxondom's only rendering of hopeless, of aching passion [. . .] He made you see everything of which he wrote, and made you be present in every scene that he evolved' (*PL* 45, 48). According to Ford, '[Hudson's] *Green Mansions* is the only English novel of passion; the *Purple Land* is the only English novel of Romance [...] *Nature in Downland*, *Hampshire Days*, *Birds in a Village*, and the *Shepherd's Life* are the only English books about England. And you must remember that Mr. Hudson is an American of New England stock' (*TR* 70). Ford characterizes Hudson as possessing a unique 'selflessness' which 'gives to [his] work the power to suggest vast, very tranquil space and a man absolutely at home in it' (*TR* 71). He suggests that it is perhaps precisely the fact that Hudson, who was born in Argentina of American parents, and had been for a long time 'racial[ly] absen[t] from these Islands [the British Isles]' that enabled him to '[escape] the infection of the amateurish way we handle the language when we write' (*TR* 74). Like others from Latin America (such as Cunninghame Graham whose work Ford also published in the *English Review*), Ford suggests, Hudson 'use[s] words as clean tools, exactly, with decency and modesty'; he 'escape[s] our conventionally insular way of looking at a hill, a flower, a bird, an ivy leaf [...] he is a native of Argentina, and La Plata, and Patagonia and Hampshire and the Sussex downlands – wherever the grass grows' (*TR* 75). Ford describes Hudson as at once an insider and an outsider in England in terms which could equally be applied to Borrow: 'a gipsyish man who had been in foreign parts, but knew the pedigree of every shepherd's dog on the Plain and the head of game that every coppice carried [...]'.³²

‘The gorgeously English’ George Borrow

Ford’s review of Clement Shorter’s Borrow biography is appropriately perhaps, in terms of his and Shorter’s eccentric subject, ambiguous. Shorter doesn’t seem to like Borrow very much (he portrays him as ‘rather a sneak, rather a liar and rather a hypocrite’, according to Ford: ‘Mr. Clement Shorter’ 678) and Ford doesn’t seem to like Shorter very much either, his contact with the author’s work up to this point having consisted, he tells us early on, of ‘little green slips from a Press-cutting agency, [which] have contained contemptuous questionings as to who the devil I might be ...’.³³ Thus, Ford’s review of Shorter’s book while superficially positive has a hint of sarcasm to it, seen especially in his repeated parenthetical asides such as ‘or so Mr. Shorter tells us’. Ford is reluctant to comment on the quality of Borrow’s prose, which he says he read ‘with immense enthusiasm’ as a boy. However he does seem (despite his approval of Borrow’s mendacities elsewhere) to side with Shorter on the point that if we view, he says, ‘art as a means of conveying vicarious experience’, Borrow might have added to the quality of his work had he stayed just a little closer to the truth:

[I]f only Borrow could have given us his real life – coloured as to facts if it must be, but yet credibly and consistently coloured; if he had given us some of the failures of Long Melford (and God knows poor Borrow must have known enough of failure); if he had made Isopel Berners a little less than eleven feet high; if he had let Mr. Petulengro once make a mistake – and so on, we should have had in *Lavengro* a book of immeasurable value and of very little less entertainment.

‘[G]iven the proper environment’, Ford concludes, ‘Borrow might have been a greater Defoe – a Defoe with a touch of poetry’.

The ‘proper environment’, which for Ford consists here of a ‘cooperative’ community of writers, preferably one that is ‘cosmopolitan’, provides the frame of the review and it is in this regard that we get a clearer idea of Ford’s own opinion of Borrow and of how Borrow inspired him to think about Englishness and cosmopolitanism. One also gains a sense of Ford’s views on the importance of literary contacts or what he calls ‘group movements’. Opening the review with the contentious statement (made by a reader in response to an earlier piece) that “‘cosmopolitanism is the slayer of art’”, Ford muses on the subject of what he considers ‘the [positive] influence of foreign

work' 'even for very national writers', in which category he places 'the gorgeously English [...] George Borrow'. 'Even for very national writers', Ford insists, 'their art is an extraordinarily international affair. Where, for instance, would Borrow have been without his Spanish travel, his Welsh, Irish, Norse and gipsy studies (shallow as Mr. Shorter tells us they were) or his passion for the picturesque in the philology of fifty nations?' ('Mr. Clement Shorter' 678).

Despite this initial recognition of the important cosmopolitan quality of Borrow's work, over the course of the review Ford laments Borrow's comparative lack of cooperation and the reluctance of English writers in general, and he names Lamb, Fitzgerald and Stevenson, 'to meet, mix, and from day to day exchange views about their jobs'. In this way, he backhandedly undermines Shorter's focus on Borrow's so-called 'circle'. Offering a sense of his own prescription for the great 'English' 'novel' of the future, Ford, in closing, playfully imagines what might have happened to English literature had these writers opened their doors to the great French and Russian writers of their day:

Consider what might have resulted had Lamb really had to match his wits against Théophile Gautier instead of having to potter round so much with gentlemen whose ideals were hot buttered toast and clear fires. Or imagine what might have happened to Borrow if he had come into weekly contact with the Goncourts, Flaubert, Maupassant, Gautier again, and even with Sainte-Beuve and Turguenieff. He could not have lied to them; they would have found him out. He could not have bounced before them; he would have felt a fool. He might have told marvelous anecdotes of others which would have appeared in the journals of the Goncourts or of ce cher Maxime. He would have met equals in intellect, in force of character, and in the love of words and dislike for accepted ideas. ('Mr. Clement Shorter' 678)

And one can only imagine what might have happened if Borrow and Ford, themselves in many ways 'equals in intellect, in force of character, and in the love of words and dislike for accepted ideas', had had the opportunity to share a jug of ale at an inn or a pot of tea in Mumpers' Dingle in the company of Isopel Berners!

NOTES

I would like to thank Ann Soutter, Mike Skillman, Ce Rosenow, Caleb Southworth and Paul Skinner for their suggestions on this chapter.

- 1 'Ford, Literary Portraits – X.: Mr. Clement Shorter and "Borrow and His Circle"', *Outlook* (London) 32 (November 1913), 677-8 – henceforth 'Mr. Clement Shorter'; 677.
- 2 Thomas published *George Borrow: The Man and his Books*, in 1912 and includes a chapter on Borrow in his *A Literary Pilgrim in England* in 1917.
- 3 Ford, *Portraits from Life*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937 – henceforth *PL*; p. 196.
- 4 Ford, *The March of Literature*, New York, The Dial Press, 1938, p. 698
- 5 Ford, *England and the English: An Interpretation*, New York: McClure, Phillips & Co., 1912 – henceforth '*EE* (US edition)'; p. xviii.
- 6 See Ian Baucom, *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire and the Locations of Modernity*, Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999, pp. 17-20; see also Paul Peppis, *Literature, Politics and the English Avant Garde: Nation and Empire, 1901-1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000; and Patrick Parrinder, "'All that is Solid Melts into Air": Ford and the Spirit of Edwardian England' in *History and Representation in Ford Madox Ford's Writing*, ed. Joseph Wiesenfarth, Amsterdam and London: Rodopi, 2004 – henceforth 'Parrinder'; pp. 7-8.
- 7 Michael Collie, *George Borrow: Eccentric*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982 – henceforth 'Collie'; p. 17.
- 8 Ford, *Thus to Revisit: Some Reminiscences*, New York: Octagon Books Inc., 1966 – henceforth *TR*; pp. 190-93.
- 9 Leslie Stephen, 'Country Books', *Hours in a Library, Vol. III*, London: John Murray, 1919, p. 191.
- 10 Ford, 'The Cuckoo and the Gipsy', *Speaker*, 18 (August 20, 1898), 232.
- 11 George Borrow, *The Romany Rye*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1984, pp. 55-6. This same passage is included by E. V. Lucas in his anthology *The Open Road* and by renowned Romany scholar John Sampson in his gypsy anthology *Wind on the Heath*, and it is referred to by Sampson student Dora Yates.
- 12 Ford, *Selected Poems*, edited by Max Saunders, Manchester: Carcanet, 1997 – henceforth *Selected Poems*; p. 8.
- 13 Ford, *Collected Poems*, New York: Oxford UP, 1936 – henceforth *CP2*. Ford, *Poems for Pictures and for Notes of Music*, London: John MacQueen, 1900.
- 14 Pamela Bickley, 'Ford and Pre-Raphaelitism' in *Ford Madox Ford: A Reappraisal*, ed. Robert Hampson and Tony Davenport, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2002, p. 64.
- 15 George Meredith, 'Juggling Jerry', *Poems*, New York: Scribner, 1923, p. 171. In a 1909 obituary for Meredith, Ford identifies 'Love in the Valley' as a poem he particularly admired: *English Review*, 2 (June 1909), 409-10.
- 16 In 'Ford Among the Aliens', Andrzej Gasiorek argues that in *The Soul of London*, the first volume of *England and the English*, 'the very terms that Arnold construed as diametric opposites, seeing in "culture" a solution to "anarchy", are here superimposed, giving rise to a way of thinking and writing that sees a potential in the diversity that the great nineteenth century writer could only

disparage as chaos'. A similar argument might be made about the second volume of the trilogy in terms of Ford's portrayal of the countryside. *Ford Madox Ford and Englishness*, eds. Dennis Brown and Jenny Plastow, Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006, p. 76.

- 17 Deborah Epstein Nord, *Gypsies and the British Imagination 1807-1930*, New York: Columbia UP, 2006, p. 48.
- 18 Ford Madox Ford, *The Critical Attitude*, London, Duckworth, 1911, p. 183.
- 19 Paul Skinner, 'Poor Dan Robin: Ford Madox Ford's Poetry' in *Ford Madox Ford: A Reappraisal*, pp. 91, 84-5. For Skinner, 'the poems of the nineteen-tens are the most, and most fascinatingly, transitional, as Ford presents what were often, at that time, unfamiliar materials for poetry in an extensive variety of metrical forms' (p. 99).
- 20 Ford, 'On Heaven' (*On Heaven and Poems written on Active Service* 1918) and 'The Starling' (*High Germany* 1912).
- 21 Hugh Kenner, 'The Poetics of Speech' in Richard Cassell, editor, *Ford Madox Ford: Modern Judgements*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972 – henceforth 'Kenner'; p. 176.
- 22 Sondra J. Stang and Carl Smith, "'Music for a While": Ford's Compositions for Voice and Piano', *Contemporary Literature*, 30: 2 (Summer 1989), 216.
- 23 Ford, *Ancient Lights*, London: Chapman and Hall, 1911, p. 25.
- 24 Ford, *Cinque Ports*, Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1900 – henceforth *CP*; p. 72. This is Borrow's and Ford's spelling of Compostela.
- 25 Borrow, *The Bible in Spain*, London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1842 – henceforth *Bible in Spain*; p. 129.
- 26 *CP* 219-20. In George Borrow, *Lavengro: The Scholar, The Gypsy, The Priest*, New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1927 [1851] – henceforth *Lavengro*; p. 12.
- 27 Ford, *England and the English*, edited by Sara Haslam, Manchester: Carcanet, 2003 – henceforth *EE*; p. 3.
- 28 Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life*, Vol. 1, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996 – henceforth 'Saunders'; p. 220.
- 29 *Bible in Spain*, 48. Thanks to Ann Soutter for noting that this is from Pope's *An Essay on Man*: 'the proper study of mankind is man'.
- 30 *EE*, 132, 174. Perhaps a reference to the 'King of the Beggars', Bamfylde Moore Carew.
- 31 My emphasis. *EE* (US edition), p. xviii.
- 32 *PL* 53. Ford makes a similar argument about Conrad's advantage as an outsider in 'Mr. Joseph Conrad and Anglo-Saxondom' (*TR* 91-2).
- 33 'Mr. Clement Shorter' 677. Ford refers to Shorter's criticism of his work in a letter of 1910 to Edgar Jepson: *Letters of Ford Madox Ford*, edited by Richard M. Ludwig, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 45.