

# *H. V. Morton's Pilgrimages to Englishness*

Wren Sidhe Bath Spa University College

All the time the real adventures are on the way to anywhere, they are in our heads and hearts, they lurk at the edges of little English woods and lie in wait on those straight roads of England which, beginning with the tramp of legions, have borne the weight of history for two thousand crowded years.

I think too that any man has done well if, on his return from a journey, he can truthfully say :

'I have had an exciting time: I have met – myself!'

It seems strange that Morton, whose avowed intent is to respond to a call to find England, should find his search meaningful because ultimately he has encountered himself. Is it because the journey itself confers national identity on him? If his search inevitably ends with finding England in himself, this suggests that the masculine subject is the best representative of Englishness: for a man to search for England and then find himself suggests a clear identification of masculinity with Englishness, and vice versa. This article asks to what extent masculinity is coterminous with national identity. It also examines the ways in which Morton's discourse of the rural defined 'Englishness' as masculine and 'Nature' as feminine, in order to examine the hypothesis that such an interwar discourse of the rural located Englishness in a heterosexual bond between a masculine national subject and a feminine nature or landscape.

If part of the work undertaken by the act of banning 'poisonous' literature was to promote a literature concerning the clean and healthy fresh air of England, then the work of H. V. Morton constitutes an instance of just such

a literature. Morton was a popular journalist and travel writer who wrote what David Matless terms ‘motoring pastorals’.<sup>2</sup> One such motoring pastoral, *In Search of England*, was first published in the 1920s in the *Daily Express*. As a journalist, Morton covered important cultural events like the opening of the tomb of Tutankhamun, and he had a privileged invitation to join Churchill on his trip to try and persuade Roosevelt to join the Second World War.<sup>3</sup> He travelled widely in the Middle East, producing Christian travelogues such as *In the Steps of St. Paul*.<sup>4</sup> However, ironically, for someone who professed a deep love of England, he emigrated to South Africa after the Second World War and lived there until his death. Michael Bartholomew suggests ‘that Morton was among the most widely read inter-war writers, and therefore, was one of the more influential shapers of the English peoples’ image of themselves and their country.’<sup>5</sup> Testimony for this view lies in his sales figures. Although many publishers’ records were destroyed in the Blitz, making accurate records hard to come by, Bartholomew has estimated that by ‘1943 there were 29 editions of *In Search of England* and twelve of the companion volume *The Call of England* in circulation. All of his books went through edition after edition . . . one commentator asserts that over a million copies of *In Search of England* were sold in Britain alone.’<sup>6</sup> In the following investigation of the England that Morton describes, I am drawing on the work of Mary N. Layoun, whose analysis of narratives of nation posits that:

Narratives of nationalism propose a grammar of the nation. That is, they propose the correct and orderly placement and use of the constituent elements of the nation. And, not least of all, that grammar prescribes the proper definition and situation of gendered citizens . . .<sup>7</sup>

The ensuing exploration will show what Morton reveals about the grammar of the nation in the interwar period and the situated nature of its gendered citizens.

When Morton hears ‘the call of England’, or decides to go ‘in search of England’, his starting point is London. Setting off with belief that England is available to his gaze, and that ‘England is one of the easiest countries to see’,<sup>8</sup> he leaves behind the problematic capital city, which ‘no living man has seen’ because it has ‘ceased to be visible since Stuart days’.<sup>9</sup> The problem of locating Englishness in London for Morton is one of both sight and race. London cannot be seen in its entirety, but even if it could there is the tricky problem of the non-Anglo-Saxon inhabitants from the colonies, and the Jews. To find England, then, one has to leave this degenerate, industrial, and racially impure urban space. Travelling around London inevitably forces an acknowledgement of the presence of the Other, the colonised subjects of the British Empire present in the metropolis. Morton’s visit to Limehouse prompts these musings:

As I walked on through dark streets, it seemed impossible that the restaurant I had left, with its elegant women, its discreet string orchestra, its air of assured comfort and well-being, could exist in the same world with these gloomy avenues, like a slum in hell, through which shivering lascars shuffled, hugging the shadows, while Chinamen peered with mask faces and sharp eyes from dim doorways. . . . The squalor of Limehouse is that strange squalor of the East which seems to conceal vicious splendour. There is an air of something unrevealed in those narrow streets of shuttered houses, each one of which appears to be hugging its own dreadful little secret.<sup>10</sup>

Here, Englishness is located in class: a visible, white middle class which goes to restaurants. It is open, genteel, ordered, clean and comfortable: everything that the abject shadowy world of the Lascar and Chinaman is not. However, this Englishness is also emphatically masculine: women are peripheral. As decorative background objects, they passively form part of the cultural distinction – the discretion, comfort and elegance of the restaurant.

Unable to use his penetrative vision to reveal the secrets of Limehouse, Morton has to catch a bus 'back to England' from here, just as he does after a visit to Berwick Street, where '[i]f all the Jews in Berwick Street would wear long false beards one day, it would be possible to take a photograph which any short-sighted traveller would swear was Jerusalem.'<sup>11</sup> Similarly, a trip to Petticoat Lane, which is the East without flies or lepers, necessitates catching a 'penny omnibus back to England'.<sup>12</sup> Positioning his readers as sharing a 'common racial heritage',<sup>13</sup> Morton suggests that while the 'average city family has disappeared into racial anaemia',<sup>14</sup> racial survival dictates a return to the countryside in order to maintain England as 'a *virile* and progressive nation' [my italics].<sup>15</sup> However, the virility of the nation is firmly rooted in a feminised English soil. Arriving in Glastonbury, which Morton identifies as containing the roots of England, he sees 'the *pregnant* dust of Avalon' [my italics].<sup>16</sup> Unlike London, Morton's rural space is visible, ordered, knowable and racially pure. This allows the inscription of an homogeneous Englishness in the face of the problematically disordered and diseased capital city. Sitting on top of Pendle to 'survey' the view which encompasses both urban and rural England, Morton describes what he sees in terms (respectively) of invisibility/visibility and haziness/whiteness:

In the valley of smoke I could see little gasworks, little streets of houses, mills, high stacks, now and then a puff of smoke from the railway, sudden and white as a bursting shell, and reservoirs shining like silver spoons in the haze. A grim panorama of effect, made more effective by the shadowy high outline of the Pennines . . . Over these hills was another, fainter blanket of smoke which suggested the distant, invisible chimneys of Leeds, Halifax, Huddersfield, and Sheffield.

And the other side of this picture? To the left of me was old Lancashire – old England! The lovely green valley of the Ribble, bounded by the wild

fells of Lancashire and the blue moors of Yorkshire, lay comfortably, little field against little field, bridges, white threads that were roads, little white farms, church spires among trees.<sup>17</sup>

Racial categories, it appears, are being projected onto the landscape. The grim, shadowy, 'invisible' industrial landscape in which whiteness appears momentarily only to be then lost seems to speak to anxieties about racial degeneration in the cities. 'Old England', however, offers a purity of vision in which uncontaminated whiteness can be seen. Here, the presence of greenness and blueness do not contaminate the whiteness of the roads and farms: in this rural place, colour distinctions are firmly maintained. There is no blending or blurring of colour: blue does not blend into white and change it. Miscegenation is not a rural problem.

Identifying the myths of the origin of whiteness, Richard Dyer looks at those of Aryan and Caucasian mountain origins.<sup>18</sup> Both these sources of whiteness suggest that Europeans first came from high places. He argues that these places have certain virtues which could be seen to have formed the white character. They include a certain cleanliness of air in which all things are clearly able to be seen, a greater nearness to god, and the continual presence of the whiteness of snow. Morton's occupation of the high ground of Pendle can call upon such myths of origin. It gives him both the authority to speak from whiteness, a speaking position of privilege, and also having that authority to legitimate the landscape of 'old England' as white, whilst still maintaining his own whiteness as an invisible racial category. This white landscape Morton finds himself in, however, is devoid of people. When people enter Morton's rural landscapes they are always gendered, but unlike Englishmen, Englishwomen are in a difficult relation to Englishness.

In a rhetoric which valorises women for the reproduction of more national subjects, Morton simultaneously suggests that women cannot ever really be national subjects themselves. He finds himself thinking 'of great ladies lying in great beds with their heirs, while the genius of English history brooded happily upon the scene.'<sup>19</sup> These children, though, are not the possession of women, but of men, as Morton makes clear when he says, 'the first time a man sees a woman look at *his* child . . . something trembles inside him' [my italics].<sup>20</sup> In his gendered grammar of the nation, 'a lone man is transitory and a woman is permanent: she means a home and a whole lot more men': her womb guarantees the continuation of Englishness.<sup>21</sup> Women here are the conduit for nationhood, but only via the production of more men. They are further denied national identity by Morton's view of them as an international commodity that can be sold or traded. Although acknowledging racial differences between men of different nationalities, in Wales Morton concludes that 'Welshwomen are no different from the women of any other nationality'.<sup>22</sup> In Ireland, he muses that 'other nations commit murder for women, but the Irish commit murder for a potato patch'.<sup>23</sup> This slippage between

nation and men, such that 'nation' can stand in for men, reveals the masculinity of the nation. Conversely, the opposition between nation and women shows the exclusion of women from the nation. The idea of women as commodities can be seen also in his view of London, which is populated by markets 'where you could sell an elephant, a werewolf, or your second best aunt'.<sup>24</sup> The suburbs can be characterised by the way '[e]ach house contains the same lounge hall, the same Jacobean dining-room suite, the same (to all appearances) dear little wife who, now that the weather has changed, goes out shopping in a nutria coat.'<sup>25</sup>

This positioning of women as shoppers is no throwaway comment, but central to the formation of Morton's women. Shopping has two main implications for Englishwomen's subjectivity. Firstly, women do not really enjoy rural spaces:

Women don't like solitary places. While an old soldier can settle down and make himself at home almost anywhere, a woman grows restless and begins to sigh for shops and cinemas and crowds. It's only natural, after all . . .<sup>26</sup>

This desire to shop is, for Morton, troublingly paradoxical since 'to desire' implies a subjectivity, and it offends Morton's logic and sensibility so much that women must be both restrained and blamed. Secondly, women's uncontrolled shopping habits can be seen to bring ruin to Englishmen since their fashions change. Making men heroic and women absurd, he states that:

From the reign of Elizabeth to the middle of the last century the whalers of Hull faced the perils of the Arctic seas in order to corset the women of England and to uphold the dignity of the crinoline.<sup>27</sup>

However, just as the crinoline is no longer in use, so the whaling industry is in decline in Morton's time, but the actions of these heroic masculine Hull whalers in over-fishing the stock until they had destroyed the industry do not bring forth any cutting remarks. He is neither interested in the history of women whalers, nor in the varied uses to which whale products were put, and from which men also benefited. One might believe, from him, that the entire industry was organised around the production of the whale-bone corset. Women are also to blame for the decline of the jet-carving industry in Whitby, where in 1853 a thousand men were employed, but with the change of fashion, unless it 'revives jet – and it merits a revival – the working of it will become another of England's dead handicrafts.'<sup>28</sup> The Birmingham gold industry, too, has been '[s]lain by women all over the world'.<sup>29</sup> Morton ascribes enormous power here to women, but it is surely a distaste for what he views as their unregulated desires, and an implicit call to regulate women more thoroughly.

Rachel Bowlby, in her work on shopping and modernity, *Shopping with Freud*, examines the tensions in the production and reproduction of the subject as consumer. The consumer is necessarily 'feminised' in the process, since consumers are made passive in order to persuade them to consume. However, making a distinction between the classical and romantic consumer, Bowlby shows how masculinity can be recuperated from this feminisation. The classical and romantic modes correspond respectively to:

The mature, masculine saver determined to avoid a loss and the infantile, feminine spender, unregulated in her desires. In terms of the forms of advertising address, the first mode involves the suggestion of fears and needs. The buyer must identify himself as lacking and so purchase the product in order to put things right or protect what is vulnerable. The second mode is in the form of an invitation to pleasure or excess: to have or to be something more, something else, something new.<sup>30</sup>

Morton himself travels with a shopping-list mentality of places to visit, using his motor car, an item for which he has presumably been a shopper/consumer. The rise of the use of the motor car could be seen as having destroyed older crafts, such as that of the blacksmith, but this occasions no concern for Morton. The presence of the car in which he travels is naturalised, and is part of the logic of his gendered order in which women's shopping is dangerous and the implications of men's shopping are made invisible. Morton's car, in enabling him to visit rural places with ease, seems to make him more English.<sup>31</sup> His possession of a consumer item that will take him to 'England' clearly has more value than the possession of a nutria coat that will only take women out shopping again.

These points have certain implications for women in Morton's discursive formulation of Englishness. If authentic Englishness is to be found in the rural rather than the urban, to position women as naturally wanting the urban in order to be able to shop associates them with degeneracy, un-Englishness, and the possibility of miscegenation. Also, women's uncontrolled desires, manifested in their whimsical shopping habits which destroy men's jobs and the craft industries of 'old England', suggest a treacherousness to certain social ideals of Englishness, characterised as organic communities organised around craft production. Women's unregulated desires can lead to the destruction of Englishness rather than its production. In the annihilation of material products that are English, women are also destroying the immaterial, cultural notion of 'England' that these products signify.

Even so, it is in Morton's London that women are at their most uncontrollable and abject. Watching a street fight between a woman who has discovered her husband with another woman, instead of censuring the behaviour of the adulterous husband, he is prompted to muse:

An uncontrolled woman is as terrible as the spirit of vengeance. I watched her and wondered how many calm women boil like this yet never spill over, never show it, never allow themselves the luxury of this. How many gentle women have this tiger hidden in them?<sup>32</sup>

His answer seems to be, 'probably all women', and that it is only ownership and regulation by men that prevents the terrifying slide into non-feminine grotesqueness and vagrancy:

Dull, mercifully comatose, Nobody's Women drag themselves about the streets at night looking for a place to rest their unwanted bones. Sometimes you see them creeping like ghouls round the galvanised tins which the restaurants put outside in the streets in the small hours of the morning, digging into the foul rejections of other people's dinners with poor, claw-like fingers which once – who knows? – were lovely and white round the stem of a champagne glass.<sup>33</sup>

Nonetheless, Morton does not provide a counterpoint for 'Nobody's Women' by romanticising domestic ideology and positing an Englishwoman angel in the home. He appears to hate the housewife. Alison Light argues that the interwar period saw a redefinition of Englishness which entailed a rejection of the heroic imperial male and a view of Englishness as more feminine and therefore more domestic,<sup>34</sup> and Deirdre Beddoe suggests that 'the single most arresting feature of the interwar years was the strength of the notion that woman's place is in the home.'<sup>35</sup> Although Morton is travelling, staying in hotels, and not often meeting people in their own homes, this, on its own, would not explain the vehemence of his anti-housewife statements. Looking at the writings of Mrs Miniver in *The Times*, Light argues that Mrs Miniver's columns represented a strain of thought in English middle-class life which both suggested that 'it was private life that constituted the real and important life of the nation' and that Mrs Miniver made home look like a good space for women to be in.<sup>36</sup> Home is presented as woman's space, in which the Victorian paterfamilias no longer has authority. Morton's writing seems to respond to fears about the domestication of Englishness, and women's control of the home. It appears to be deeply concerned with the question of which places might accommodate an 'old soldier', and considers that if men cannot be at home in domestic space whether 'outdoors' might offer a location for masculinity. Morton's way of dealing with these shifting historical difficulties seems to be to show the dangers of uncontrolled women, to disallow women from his Englishness, and to show masculinity at its best in the countryside.

In contrast to Morton's women, his men are not in need of control and ownership because when a man is unowned, when '[n]o woman ruffles his smooth life', it is then that English masculine 'Good Form' can be achieved.<sup>37</sup> It is in a state of rural solitude that an Englishman becomes most heroic: 'How

much of Hamlet, how much of Quixote, how much of Robin Goodfellow is in him never appears until a man finds himself alone in the country.<sup>38</sup> However, within Morton's rhetoric, a man never does find himself alone in the country, because his masculinity is always counterpointed against a feminised, and often pregnant or maternal, natural landscape. This femininity, though, is more easily controllable than that of women since it can be landscaped or farmed, for example, without talking back.

Morton organises what he sees in his English travels into foundational categories of masculine and feminine, and cannot seem to envisage a non-heterosexualised space. His writings on 'cities' or 'cathedrals' thus frequently describe them as 'married' to each other, or bound together in some other heterosexual familial relationship. Land, too, or soil, can be pregnant with, or a mother to, Englishness. In a formulation which excludes women except as metaphor, Morton ends *In Search of England* with a description of his masculine love for England as soil, as a summation of his search for 'England'.

The rich earth had borne its children, and over the fields was that same smile which a man sees only on the face of a woman when she looks down at the child at her breast.

I went out into the churchyard where the green stones nodded together, and I took up a handful of earth and felt it crumble and run through my fingers, thinking that as long as one English field lies against another there is something left in the world for a man to love.<sup>39</sup>

Although Morton tries to heterosexualise Englishness, in this heterosexual love-scene between man and earth is a lesbian image in which one (feminine) English field lies against another one.

Dyer suggests that at the heart of white culture is an anxiety that 'white sex is queer sex.'<sup>40</sup> There are three sources for this anxiety. Firstly, the idea that sex is 'inherently perverse' for white people.<sup>41</sup> Imagined as they are as pure and transcendent of their bodies, to have sexual desires and act upon them endangers the purity of whiteness itself. Although the racial category of white relies on heterosexuality to ensure its reproduction, heterosexual sexual acts entail a loss of whiteness. Secondly, the worry that white sex is non-reproductive sex can link it to queer sex.<sup>42</sup> The third anxiety concerns the discursive linkage between whiteness and death. Dyer argues that:

White identity is founded on compelling paradoxes: a vividly corporeal cosmology that most values transcendence of the body; a notion of being at once a sort of race and the human race, an individual and a universal subject; a commitment to heterosexuality that, for whiteness to be affirmed, entails men fighting sexual desires and women having none; a stress on the display of spirit while maintaining a position of invisibility; in short a need always to be everything and nothing, literally overwhelmingly present and yet apparently absent, both alive and dead.<sup>43</sup>

This linkage of death and whiteness can be most easily seen in Western culture's veneration of the form of a dead white male body on a cross. This endlessly represented body of Christ is paradigmatic of the white male subject: more than body, it extends itself into spirit. Given that Morton's Englishness is also Christian, one might argue against the extent to which Benedict Anderson suggests that the nation comes to replace god in a secular society. After all, it is in a church graveyard that Morton takes up his handful of earth, and his travels assume that visiting cathedrals is more important than, for example, shops.

The origins of Morton's England lie within a religious history. In a suggestion 'that if a man were looking for the roots of England' he would find the roots of Church and State in Glastonbury, he talks of the pregnant dust there:<sup>44</sup>

I hear the click and thrust of the labourer's spade in the earth, and it seems to me as each spadeful of Glastonbury soil falls on the mound that a spadeful of English history is stirred; in the brown dust that flies over the trench I seem to see the faces of anchorites, saints, priests, and kings; and in this *pregnant dust* of Avalon is drawn two of the greatest epics that have come from the English mind: one is of the Holy Grail and the other of a wounded king [my italics].<sup>45</sup>

Having prefaced *The Call of England* with a quotation from G. K. Chesterton,

'An island like a little book  
Full of a hundred tales . . .'<sup>46</sup>

Morton deftly signals a relationship between the geographical nation space/place, writing and reading. If the island can be likened to a little book, so too can his book be likened to the island. Here one can see the links between literature and soil: literature comes out of the soil. So what the earth is pregnant with is English history, which is a history of men, and literary epics of the (male) English mind. Morton's Englishness certainly suggests that the Englishman reaches satisfaction in a bodily relationship to soil, running it through his fingers, or planting his feet in it, and this satisfaction can be seen to correspond to Dyer's argument about the sexuality of whiteness. The bodily satisfaction Morton derives from touching earth is not sexually orgasmic, but sublimated and transposed to the non-sexual. In this way, his whiteness is protected. Just as *In Search of England* ends with a final expression of an Englishman relating to English earth, so too does *The Call of England*:

And there will come a time in any tour of England when most men from a city will feel that no matter how life disappoints them there can always be one thing worth while at the end of the journey: the sight of the wind moving over their own wheat field; the moon rising over their own home; the

knowledge that they have fought their way back to the country and have planted their feet in the splendid sanity of English soil.<sup>47</sup>

The sanity of his feminine soil is in sharp contrast to the insanity of his shopaholic Englishwomen. The femininity of earth is under masculine control. The use of the word 'fought' here in relation to men returning to a rural space may suggest a certain nostalgia for the trenches of World War One, and a prior men's world that has been lost in the post-war domestication and feminisation of English culture and character. Just as man roots himself in soil, so too does soil root itself back into 'the hearts of men', making nationalism a warm thing in the face of internationalism, because, he asks, '[h]ow can we achieve a cold internationalism when to each one of us there is a little piece of the world so dear that we would not exchange the wide earth for it?'<sup>48</sup> Again, women are excluded from this version of national identity as a bonding of man and earth, because women are international commodities. However, the question still remains: if the soil is pregnant, who has impregnated her?

Clues can be found in Morton's view of the 'pregnant dust' containing a masculine history and an epic literature made from an English mind. Morton illustrates to an American tourist in a cathedral that men make history:

I tried to explain – leaving out all architecture – that these great churches are the urns which hold the ashes of England's history. The dim aisles are sacred to a Past which is the splendid mother of the Present, for in them are gathered the men whose lives shaped, through stress and storm, through the dense drive of arrows and the smoke of conflict, through a war of words, and through victories, and defeats and losses more magnificent than gains, the destiny of the English people.<sup>49</sup>

In Ireland, watching a 'sullen countryman with a pitchfork . . . a member of an inferior race', Morton makes clear that the lack of a true novel of Ireland, and a properly national writer, ensures that the man will never find a representational subjectivity that will enable him to become real.<sup>50</sup> Proper national literature lies in such books as Izaak Walton's *The Compleat Angler* and Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selbourne*, because, as 'unique creations of the English mind', both writers have managed to make small things important and have painted 'an intimate portrait of themselves.'<sup>51</sup> It is partly through this representation of themselves that their literature derives its national identity. Just as Morton travels in search of England and finds himself, so too do these male writers achieve a status within English literature through a portrayal of themselves. Masculinity's representation of itself is national in a way that representations of women are not. For Morton, Englishness also lies in the small rituals of daily life; so, for example, he believes that no other nation sets a table as well as the English. However, it is membership of a 'superior' race that enables men to represent themselves as national. Morton's Irishman will never quite

achieve it, because his formulation of the Irish is that, essentially and inherently inferior, they are unable to produce such a literature. The English, though, are priorly constituted to do such a thing.

If Englishmen make literature and history, and Englishness is formed out of an English masculine subject's relation to a feminine soil, it is no surprise that an historic English building which has become a girls' school can no longer be a primarily 'national shrine'. The presence of girls destroys that possibility, in a way that boys at Eton would not:

Only in England perhaps could Battle Abbey become a girls' school. Indeed it might seem to a foreigner one of the baffling inconsistencies of English life that the place where the future of England was changed should be devoted to the education of young ladies; for here, if anywhere, is a sacred national shrine. But when you approach the fine gateway of Battle Abbey it is soon made clear to you that Battle is a girls' school first and a national shrine a long way after.<sup>52</sup>

In Cornwall, however, in the margins of England, Morton seems to lose the grammar of the nation. In this strange liminal place, which is more like 'fairyland' than England, his act of writing takes on major and conscious importance. Here, the people, '[l]ike the Welsh . . . possess a fine Celtic fluency, so that their lies are more convincing than a Saxon truth.'<sup>53</sup> Unusually, he tells the reader, 'I am writing in the tiny bedroom of a cottage'.<sup>54</sup> Since Morton rarely draws attention to the fact of his writing, concentrating more on external descriptions of town and landscape, this focus on writing suggests that the mere act of writing can reconstitute him as an honest Englishman in face of a troubling, dreamy, lying, Celtic place which could destroy his Englishness. Indeed, all his journeys are concerned with finding meaning that the nation can provide. Here, the physical act of writing can be seen as such a journey and a symbol of the search for England.

Morton's journeys have to be understood as symbolic rather than actual, based as they are on a journey of the soul. *In Search of England* describes how, when faced with his own possible death as an exile in Palestine and experiencing a 'religious moment', he took a vow that if he survived he would go home in search of England.<sup>55</sup> His journeys then become meaning-creating experiences in the face of death where, for him, the nation can provide the meaning that death would destroy. As he journeys, he never again meets death in contemporary time on English soil. The only deaths encountered have happened in the past history of England, so his contemporary England exists in a timeless moment which cannot be destroyed. Although *I Saw Two Englands* deals with the differences between interwar England and an England about to go to war again, these differences are minor in the sense that internal change is part of the great continuity of England and Englishness. Any historical change takes place within the stability of the continuing reality of a

geographical place imagined as a nation. The fact that England can manifest itself as a discrete identifiable place through historical changes is paradoxically testimony to the fact of its timeless continuity. The Depression, for example, is not explicitly included in his narratives. Beyond that, we have to understand his narratives as mythical rather than actual accounts, given that some journeys are privileged as constituting 'A Journey', while others are not. The journey that Morton embarks on prior to the outbreak of World War Two, in order to glimpse what might be the second pre-war England of his generation, is to Kent and Sussex, places which he says he has missed out in his previous journeys. However, arriving in Canterbury, he tells the reader he stayed there three years before. So it would appear that if the journey has no existence in writing, it has no status as 'a journey'. This implies that the writing of the journey is deeply implicated in the secular pilgrimage to find 'England', just as the modern place of pilgrimage becomes Stratford-on-Avon, the birthplace of a writer, rather than a religious shrine such as Walsingham. In another timeless, ahistorical moment when Morton goes to Stratford 'on a real pilgrimage', it seems to him that this is a place 'where you will meet Shakespeare'.<sup>56</sup> In Morton's England, writers and writing have an important national status.

Victor Turner's anthropological work on pilgrimage, which Benedict Anderson draws on, offers a framework through which Morton's journeys can be understood.<sup>57</sup> Analysing the status of the pilgrimage, the pilgrim and the sense of 'communitas' which the journey produces, Turner identifies the pilgrim as being in a liminal space. Generally, pilgrimage is undertaken in performance of some previously made vow and the journey is undertaken voluntarily, often with some symbolic or ritual object.<sup>58</sup> The structure of pilgrimage is one in which the pilgrim leaves the familiar, moves through the unfamiliar, to return back to the familiar as a changed person. Indeed, Morton suggests that a good journey entails a man returning to say that he has met himself. This raises the question as to where he was whilst journeying if he was not meeting himself. Turner suggest that the pilgrim is in an ambiguous state, exiled from the familiar, and in transition between two social positions: that which s/he came from, and that to which s/he is going. This liminal space is potentially dangerous as the existence of the pilgrim calls into question the whole normative order and the pilgrim is, therefore, potentially polluting. The removal of the status normative order bestows allows the pilgrim, Morton, to be read as Everyman. This offers the masculine reader the possibility of imaginatively undertaking the same journey, and becoming part of the communitas, the friendship community in liminal space. However, the dangers liminality pose to established order must not be underestimated, Turner argues. Gender categories can be troubled. In liminal space, the non-human can be part of communitas, and this can be the earth/dirt with which the transitional person is often identified.<sup>59</sup> As the pilgrim 'approaches the holy of holies the symbols become denser, richer, more involuted – the landscape itself is coded into symbolic units packed

with cosmological and theological meaning' and the pilgrim will touch the holy objects there.<sup>60</sup> It is precisely this touching of holy English soil which ultimately Morton does, in acts which give ordered meaning both to himself and to the earth.

In Morton's texts, we catch him in the act of composing the nation in the face of anxieties about masculinity and femininity, Jews and colonial Others, the urban and the rural. One might think of these works as text-books with instructions for how to make the nation 'virile'. In his discursive formulation, this is achieved by already having a nation which has an important historical and literary past. By calling on this past, the nation can be made by national masculine men who plant their feet, or some other part of their anatomy, into a feminine soil, which is pregnant and maternal and which is the matrix of both the past and the future. In turn, this soil roots itself back in the hearts of men, and because the rural is privileged as the site of authentic Englishness, men become heroically and nationally masculine in this space. The soil is pregnant with English history and literature, which has been made by men forming the destiny of the English people. True warmth lies in this national bond between a masculine subject and a feminine soil. However, women are outside this pact of heterosexual Englishness, representing a 'cold internationalism'. As natural 'shoppers' they are linked into an un-English urban degeneracy, and also, as more internationalist than men, women are in a precarious relationship with Englishness. So, Morton's formulation of Englishness involves the articulation of two gendered and heterosexualized constitutive elements. In his grammar of the nation, the situated nature of English gender has determinative effects on the various national values men and women are accorded.

## Notes

This article was written with the support of an AHRB grant.

1 H. V. Morton, *The Call of England* (London, 1928; rpt., 1933), p. 3.

2 David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* (London, 1998), p. 63.

3 See H. V. Morton, *Atlantic Meeting: An Account of Mr. Churchill's Voyage in H. M. S. Prince of Wales in August 1941, and the Conference with President Roosevelt which resulted in the Atlantic Charter* (London, 1943).

4 H. V. Morton, *In the Steps of St. Paul* (London, 1936). See also *In the Steps of the Master* (London, 1934) and *Through the Lands of the Bible* (London, 1938).

5 Michael Bartholomew, 'H. V. Morton's English Utopia', in Christopher Lawrence and Anna-K. Mayer (eds), *Regenerating England: Science, Medicine and Culture in Inter-War Britain*, (Amsterdam, 2000), p. 28.

6 Bartholomew, 'English Utopia', p. 28.

7 Mary N. Layoun, 'A Guest at the Wedding: Honor, Memory, and (National) Desire in Michel Khleife's *Wedding in Galilee*', in Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon and Minoo Moallem (eds), *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms and the State*, (London, 1999), p. 93.

8 Morton, *The Call of England*, p. 203.

- 9 H. V. Morton, *In Search of England* (London, 1927; rpt., 1930), p. 5.
- 10 H. V. Morton, *H. V. Morton's London: Being The Heart of London, The Spell of London and The Nights of London in One Volume* (London, 1925 and 1926; rpt., 1941), p. 335.
- 11 Morton, *H. V. Morton's London*, p. 216.
- 12 Morton, *H. V. Morton's London*, p. 12.
- 13 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. viii.
- 14 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. x.
- 15 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. ix.
- 16 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 132.
- 17 Morton, *The Call of England*, p. 140.
- 18 Richard Dyer, *White* (London, 1997).
- 19 H. V. Morton, *I Saw Two Englands: The Record of a Journey Before the War, and After the Outbreak of War, in the Year 1939* (London, 1942), p. 20.
- 20 Morton, *H. V. Morton's London*, p. 64.
- 21 Morton, *H. V. Morton's London*, p. 50.
- 22 H. V. Morton, *In Search of Wales* (London, 1932; rpt., 1949), p. 87.
- 23 H. V. Morton, *In Search of Ireland* (London, 1930; rpt., 1961), p. 101.
- 24 Morton, *H. V. Morton's London*, p. 43.
- 25 Morton, *H. V. Morton's London*, p. 195.
- 26 H. V. Morton, *In Search of Scotland* (London, 1929; rpt., 1984), p. 222.
- 27 Morton, *The Call of England*, p. 20.
- 28 Morton, *The Call of England*, p. 85.
- 29 Morton, *The Call of England*, p. 196.
- 30 Rachel Bowlby, *Shopping with Freud* (London, 1993), p. 101.
- 31 For Forster's different view on the national value of the motor car, see Andrew Thacker, 'E. M. Forster and the Motor Car', *Literature and History*, 9:2 (2000), 37–52.
- 32 Morton, *H. V. Morton's London*, p. 169.
- 33 Morton, *H. V. Morton's London*, p. 232.
- 34 Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, 1991).
- 35 Deirdre Beddoe, *Back to Home and Duty: Women Between the Wars, 1918–1939* (London, 1989), p. 3.
- 36 Light, *Forever England*, p. 145.
- 37 Morton, *H. V. Morton's London*, p. 171.
- 38 Morton, *The Call of England*, p. 2.
- 39 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 280.
- 40 Dyer, *White*, p. 220.
- 41 Dyer, *White*, p. 220.
- 42 Morton was writing as worries about the degeneration and possible extinction of the 'white race' were debated. Other 'races', supposedly acting as their bodies dictated and unable to control their bodily desires, were seen to be overbreeding.
- 43 Dyer, *White*, p. 39.
- 44 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 131.
- 45 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 132.
- 46 Morton, *The Call of England*, title page.
- 47 Morton, *The Call of England*, p. 204.
- 48 Morton, *In Search of Ireland*, p. 266.
- 49 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 224.
- 50 Morton, *In Search of Ireland*, p. 126.
- 51 Morton, *I Saw Two Englands*, p. 143.

- 52 Morton, *I Saw Two Englands*, p. 98.  
53 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 76.  
54 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 77.  
55 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 3.  
56 Morton, *In Search of England*, p. 260.  
57 Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, 1967) and Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, 1974).  
58 Morton's car might be understood as such a ritual object.  
59 Turner also shows that liminality can also be symbolised as a grave which is also a womb. See *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, p. 259. This notion can help explain the force of the heterosexualising imperative found in Morton's writings. In order to use the journey as a meaning-creating experience, order has to be re-established, and the illogic and the disorder of the liminal banished, through the orderly writing of heterosexual subjects and the wrenching of earth out of its associations with dirt and death to become a meaningful, and productive, womb.  
60 Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors*, p. 210.

#### Address for Correspondence

Wren Sidhe, Department of English, Bath Spa University College, Newton St Loe, Bath BA2 9BN, UK. E-mail: w.sidhe@bathspa.ac.uk