

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

SAMPLE APPLICATION NARRATIVE

Summer Stipends

British Literature

National Endowment for the Humanities

Division of Research Programs

Excerpt from a Successful Application

This excerpt from a summer stipends application is provided as an example of a funded proposal. It will give you a sense of how a successful application may be crafted. It is not intended to serve as a model. Every application is different, depending on the requirements of the project, the stage of the research, the resources required, and the situation of the applicant. This sample includes only the narrative and the bibliography; it does not include the résumé or letters of recommendation.

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Project Title: Atlantic Modernism: Americanization and English Literature in the Early Twentieth Century

Project Director: Genevieve Abravanel, Franklin and Marshall College

Result: *Americanizing Britain: The Rise of Modernism in the Age of the Entertainment Empire*. Modernist Literature & Culture Series, Oxford University Press. (Forthcoming)

In John Osborne's landmark 1956 play, "Look Back in Anger," the disillusioned English shopkeeper, Jimmy, announces that all of England is living "in the American Age" and that the American influence is so entrenched and pervasive that he wouldn't be surprised if the new generation of English children turned out to "be Americans." Yet only a few decades earlier, at the beginning of the century, many in Britain believed their nation to be the dominant world power, the empire on which the sun never set, and a progressive society which its former colony, the United States, could only hope to emulate. What were the effects of this transition from the height of imperial confidence to Jimmy's bleak announcement? In "Atlantic Modernism: Americanization and English Literature in the Early Twentieth Century," I demonstrate how English anxieties over what Stuart Hall has called the Anglo-American "shift in fortunes" served to redefine the meaning of English literature by helping to produce the modern concepts of elite and popular culture.

While historians have documented this shift, and sociologist Giovanni Arrighi has identified it as the defining event of the twentieth century, literary critics have largely overlooked its importance. This oversight grows out of a long-standing disciplinary divide between modern British and American literary studies, decried by Joseph Roach in 1993 as "the deeply ingrained division within English studies between American literature, on the one hand, and English or British literature, on the other." For modern British literary studies in particular, the development of postcolonial studies has sharpened this divide. Despite the great value of colonial inquiry, its focus on imperial geographies has drawn scholarly attention away from the enormous impact of the United States on modern England. Moreover, while eighteenth-century literary studies has begun to adopt a consciously transatlantic approach to interpretations of both English and American literature, modernist and twentieth-century studies have generally limited their scope to the migrations of expatriate writers and the transatlantic reception of their works.

In contrast, I argue in "Atlantic Modernism" how a perceived shift in power, and consequent fears that England might become Americanized, gave rise to the modern English concepts of elite and popular culture. Matthew Arnold notwithstanding, these concepts of elite and popular culture, commonly dubbed highbrow and lowbrow, came into general circulation during the early twentieth century. While I am mindful that critics have recently examined the admixture of elite and popular elements in modernist literature, I want to focus on the development of the modern English concepts of high and low through the reactions against Americanization. As an interwar term for the standardization or "leveling-down" of English culture, Americanization followed from the influx of jazz, the Hollywood film, and the bestseller list. By examining the work of Nancy Cunard, Wyndham Lewis, and F.R. Leavis, among others, I contend that some in England were beginning to identify popular and working-class culture with the United States, leading to the conspicuous designation of the highbrow as English and the lowbrow as American. While modernist scholars generally present the high-low cultural divide as the effect of class, race, and gender differences, I believe this stratification of taste also rests upon English concerns with Americanization. In this conception, the deluge of mass forms from America sharply altered the meaning of the popular in modern England, transforming it from an older notion of folk culture tied to ethnic and regional identities into a transatlantic formation.

At the same time, I consider how these American influences led some writers to transfer national pride from British imperial ideologies of progress to a newly English faith in elite arts, literary education, and national tradition as protection against Americanization. By placing English modernism in a transatlantic frame, I am able to counter the common critical insistence on the internationalism of modernism with a picture of how English modernism's elitism, traditionalism, and nationalism grew out of its reaction to America. I suggest that the Americanization of

England not only created transatlantic exchange, but more compellingly, helped to produce the ideological fields of high and low within which modernist writing emerged.

In my first chapter, “Ameritopias: Transatlantic Fictions of England’s Future,” I look at a range of texts, including work by Rudyard Kipling, H.G. Wells, and Virginia Woolf, that imagine Americanized futures for England and the world. With the formation of the League of Nations in the aftermath of World War One, the United States offered new models of globalization to the English imagination. By the time of Huxley’s 1932 “*Brave New World*,” in which a futuristic England outlaws Shakespeare and deifies Henry Ford, it seemed that only a renewed attention to high culture could resist the impending Americanization of England. The varied texts in this chapter share a sense that the political and economic rise of the United States may threaten not only British political dominance but also the eminence of English literature at home and abroad.

From this overview, I move in my second chapter, “Jazz Valuations: Race, Nation, and Cultural Value in Interwar English Literature,” to one of the most controversial forms of popular culture to arrive in modern England. In his anti-jazz polemic, Bloomsbury critic Clive Bell responds to the arrival of jazz with the warning that the “traditional valuations” represented by such English high cultural icons as “*Lycidas*” and “*Baedeker*” would be lost to the jazz invasion. Evelyn Waugh parodies such fears in his 1928 “*Decline and Fall*,” in which a black American jazz musician placates a crowd of fusty English elites by telling them that he would “give all the jazz in the world for just one little stone from one of your cathedrals.” As a mobile, transnational form linked to black America, jazz threatened organic English ties to cathedrals and *Baedeker*, literature and the land. In this chapter, I juxtapose the condemnatory, anti-jazz fervor of Bell and Wyndham Lewis with the more figurative representation of jazz as the disruption of English nationalism in the work of Waugh, Elizabeth Bowen, and Virginia Woolf.

In “*English by Example: F.R. Leavis and the Americanization of Modern England*,” I move from mass culture to English high culture and its self-appointed guardian, F.R. Leavis. For Leavis, it is a short step from the Ford motorcar to the American Book of the Month club; both stand for the democratizing threat of modernization that can only be resisted by a return to what he dubs the “minority culture” of the English elite. While his critics have largely overlooked the importance of his abundant references to America, I argue that Leavis constructed his influential ideology of Englishness by defining it against the mass culture of the United States. Leavis’s foundational efforts to forge a literary canon, and to produce English studies as a discipline, are marked by their resistance to what he calls “Americanisation.” Most strikingly, in his co-authored 1933 “*Culture and Environment*,” Leavis produces a program for English school children that would educate them in Englishness not by exposing them to English writing, but by training them to repudiate forms of mass culture, such as jazz and the movies, associated with the United States.

It is an irony of the interwar years that an American, T.S. Eliot, became the most influential tastemaker in England. More surprising than Eliot’s didactic ambitions, however, was the way that English writers and critics actually listened, taking up Eliot’s call for innovation through continuity. In “*Make it Old: Inventing Englishness in ‘Four Quartets’*,” I demonstrate that Eliot was able to produce such a compelling theory of culture because he both recognized the increasingly transatlantic character of modern England and devoted himself to repudiating America, an effort marked by his adoption of British citizenship in 1927. In his 1948 “*Notes towards the Definition of Culture*,” Eliot identifies American cultural hegemony, heralded by “the celluloid film,” as the cause of the “disintegration” of traditional culture in England. Yet in his late poem sequence, “*Four Quartets*,” he presents a picture of a robust English past enabled by transatlantic continuity between England and colonial America. I suggest that an important, if largely undiscussed, aspect of Eliot’s attempt to renew English culture arises from the intimate

way in which he negotiates the threat of Americanization, imagining a return to transatlantic relations that predate the United States.

The above chapters have been completed in draft form. I have given two conference papers on separate sections of the chapter on jazz. An article drawn in part from the chapter on Leavis is under consideration at an academic journal. In August 2005 I was able to continue research for the final chapter, based in part on film criticism I secured in the modern English-language journal, "Close Up." I hope to use the grant award period, summer 2006, to return to "Close Up" and complete retrieval of material from this key publication.

Tentatively titled "England's Hollywood: Cinema and 'Close Up,'" the final chapter will consider the extent to which film criticism shares the nationalist preoccupations of such literary and cultural critics as Leavis, Eliot, and Bell. This chapter will bring together the arguments put forward in the previous chapters as film criticism both dealt with the most popular medium of the interwar years and attempted to distinguish art from entertainment. Film criticism thus had to develop unique tools for negotiating the high-low divide, a divide that was marked by the extraordinary dominance of Hollywood over English films. Edited by the modernist writers H.D. and Bryher, as well as the English director Kenneth Macpherson, "Close Up" is best poised to illuminate these concerns through its ties to modernism and its interest in the fate of English cinema as an art form. While scholarship on "Close Up," tends to celebrate the journal's "internationalism," many of its contributors reveal a strong desire to foster a tradition of English film criticism. One correspondent in "Close Up" announces the national urgency of developing English film criticism, for example, by comparing it to an imperial project: "An Empire's strength lies in its recruiting posters. And a country's films in their criticism." When Bryher warns that "the Hollywood code will dominate British pictures," she is calling for the reactionary production not only of a specifically English cinema, but also of the highbrow aesthetics that we now call modernism itself. Through an extended analysis of "Close Up," I hope to explore the implications of such attempts to define both the English film and the modernist experimental film against Hollywood.

In June and July 2006, I want to return to "Close Up" to examine the complete run of the journal, published monthly from 1927 to 1930 and quarterly from 1931 to 1933. While "Close Up" is not in my own college's library, it is easily available on microfilm at a nearby institution, Millersville University. I also plan to write the bulk of the chapter during this time. I intend to complete my writing and revisions of the entire manuscript during the academic year 2006-07 before submitting the project for the consideration of university presses.

Through this transatlantic project, I participate in the larger attempt of Atlantic studies to reconfigure knowledge in the humanities by suggesting that it is necessary to move beyond nation-based epistemologies and geographies in order to understand nationalist pressures upon the development of literary and artistic culture. In so doing, I hope to engage a broad audience, including scholars of modernism, cultural studies, twentieth-century British and American literary studies, Atlantic studies, and postcolonial studies.

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