

The Gentleman's War: The Ideology of Imperialism in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Great Boer War*

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Ideology pre-exists the text, but the ideology of the text defines, operates and constitutes that ideology in ways unpremeditated, so to speak, by ideology itself (Eagleton 1976:80).

In what appears to be a parenthetical observation in *Stillwell and the American Experience in China 1911-1945*, Barbara Tuchman comments, somewhat acerbically, on the British way of telling military history.

No nation has ever produced a military history of such verbal nobility as the British. Retreat and advance, win or lose, blunder or bravery, murderous folly or unyielding resolution, all emerge alike clothed in dignity and touched with glory Everyone is splendid: soldiers are staunch, commanders cool, the fighting magnificent. Whatever the fiasco, aplomb is unbroken. Mistakes, failures, stupidities, or other causes of disaster mysteriously vanish. Disasters are recorded with care and pride and become transmuted into things of beauty .. Other nations attempt but never quite achieve the same self-esteem (Fussell 1975:175, referring to Tuchman 1970:557).

While Tuchman's evaluation is a general one, relating to no specific time or stage, her insight is of particular interest to Paul Fussell who uses it to illustrate the link between the Romance form and the literature of the First World War. I am interested in this quote for the same reason as Fussell. However, I would argue that the link between Romance and military history is the explanation of Tuchman's observation and that this phenomenon is fundamental to the period of territorial expansion that took place in Britain in the nineteenth century. The British desire to glorify war may be a tendency

that goes back to Shakespeare's history plays, as Martin Green (1979) has suggested, but it seems clear that what was a 'tendency' has become an established form by the Victorian period. The linguistic elevation of warfare, Tuchman's 'verbal nobility', is therefore a significant part of the ideology of imperialism, especially as the use, or at any rate, the threat of the use of force, is one of the principal instruments of an expansionist foreign policy. The story of the way that force is employed, to use Said's (1994:7) words, in, 'actual contests over land and the land's people' is one of the more potent ways that the idea of empire can be disseminated to the culture. Thus the glorification of war is intrinsic to British imperialism for all kinds of reasons, not the least of which is that the ideology of imperialism demands that colonial wars be seen as part of the benevolent, chivalrous intent of imperialism. And the narrative of military history with its cloak of fact thrown over the story of male derring-do is the way that military might is connected to the imperial ethos.

Martin Green (1979:3) has conclusively shown how nineteenth century adventure stories acted as 'the energizing myth of English imperialism', and other critics have argued that the same dynamic exists in male juvenile literature; particularly in those boys papers and annuals which were so popular after the 1870s. The narrative of military history, although always imbued with the additional authority of fact is remarkably similar and nowhere is the similarity between the fiction of adventure and military history more clearly illustrated than in Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Great Boer War* (1900).

As Tuchman's comment makes clear, Doyle was not the first British historian to tell the story of war as heroic adventure. But Doyle is particularly interesting in this context for a number of reasons. First, he was a world famous writer of adventure stories before he turned to writing history. Second, he was an influential public commentator on the affairs of the day. Third, he was a notable amateur sportsman. As writer, commentator, explorer and inventor, Doyle was a substantial public figure who defined, for much of the British public, all that was best in the upper middle-class Victorian gentleman. Given his authorial and personal popularity it is no surprise that *The Great Boer War* was an immediate popular success selling 20,000 copies each year for the first two years and being reprinted sixteen times. Doyle's history was such a success that it outstripped what had been until then the best-selling history of the nineteenth century: Macaulay's *History of England*. In May 1902, as a result of this success, Doyle was knighted for 'service to the nation' showing that the government fully recognized Doyle's contribution to British interests abroad.

As a historian, Arthur Conan Doyle was wedded to the same narrative form that he had used so successfully as a novelist. He had long wanted to

emulate his favorite historian Macauley. His favourite fiction writer was Scott and Doyle thought that his own historical romances were his most serious work to date. So he would naturally use the romance form in his history of the Boer war, just as he had used derivations of the romance—what Frye (1957) terms ‘the low mimetic’—in all his adventure stories. The formula of the Romance in which the protagonist moves forward sequentially from adventure to adventure, meeting and overcoming various adversities and adversaries until he faces the ultimate test or ‘crucial struggle’ (Auerbach 1957:13) in which either the hero or the villain die, is, as Paul Fussell (1975) has noted, a form eminently suitable to the telling of the experience of war. But, there is another aspect of the romance form that is pertinent to wartime, to Doyle’s text and to this paper: the aristocratic values that the form endorses. The romance celebrates the aristocracy, thus it contains very few non-aristocratic characters, and sees tests of strength as tests of virtue which can only be passed by the truly noble. Auerbach (1957:107) on the subject of the aristocracy in Romance, says:

There are only two social strata: one is privileged and aloof, while the other, more numerous, is colorful but more usually comic and grotesque.

While Doyle’s division cannot be quite characterised by those words—the men are not ever grotesque and only occasionally comic—the division of the social strata into two is fundamental to his narrative.

The Boer War began on October 11, 1889 and officially ended in May 1902. Hostilities began at the end of a century of what had been a spectacularly successful British effort to acquire territory overseas; an effort that, since the middle of the 1880s, had been accelerated and intensified by the ambitions of the other European powers. The war with the Boers, coming after such a long period of expansionism and after what was seen as flagrant Boer provocation provided the perfect opportunity for a resurgence of national pride and imperial spirit. As L.S. Amery (1900:1) said in his introduction to *The Times History of the War in South Africa*:

The South African war has been the greatest political event in the history of the British Empire since the conclusion of the Napoleonic wars.

The Boer war galvanized the nation because it was the first time the entire British army had been deployed in eighty-four years and because as Churchill (1932:229) notes, ‘nearly fifty years had passed since Great Britain had been at war with any white people’.

It was also a war notable in terms of class participation since it was the colonial war where the largest number of volunteer units (as opposed to

the number of regular army units) were deployed. As the Boers were mounted guerrilla fighters (unlike the Zulus who had fought the British in South Africa from 1879-1887, on foot) the call for volunteers from the War Office was for mounted men only. The middle, upper-middle and gentry class, those who could already ride and shoot, were therefore disproportionately represented in this engagement. Keegan (1985) points out that the cavalry officers in the regular Army were always from the land owning class, or 'those who wished to buy their way into that class' (e.a.). He calls this set of class affiliations and values 'the voice of the paladins' and asserts that,

... it was the voice of vanished chivalry, as well as that of the surviving aristocracy whose voice over conservative institutions, among which armies stood foremost, remained unshaken by revolution and even by the rise of democracy (Keegan 1988:94).

The call to volunteers to serve in South Africa was therefore a call to the middle class to join the paladins; to associate themselves with aristocratic class affiliations and to participate as gentlemen in what was known as 'the gentleman's war'.

Young gentlemen who had graduated from the system of sports, games and physical fitness exercises which characterized British public schools in the nineteenth century saw war as a simple extension of that system; another one of the series of trials of strength which enabled them to become gentlemen. Certainly the officers on their way to South Africa treated the upcoming conflict as one in a series of sporting events. They were going 'for the fun of it' and they expected 'a fine fight' while at the same time, like the young Winston Churchill, they fully expected to be home 'in good time for the Derby' (Pakenham 1979:60). Doyle, a member of the upper middle class, also believed that sports and war are similar activities and in *The Great Boer War* he employs sporting metaphors and the language of games to make this point. In Doyle's text the specific battle plan and the war itself is often called 'the contest', or 'the game', as in:

It was his [General Buller's] game therefore, to keep his army intact, to abandon it was to give up the game altogether (Doyle 1903:160)

Boxing metaphors are applied to the soldiers, who are 'full of fight' (1903:150) and to the Boers who are to be 'hit squarely between the eyes' (1903:167). The British always show they have 'sporting spirit' (1903:199). For example, when a Boer gun is being moved the gun is likened to 'a hare' sprung from 'cover' and its repositioning is greeted by the British with,

'cheers and shouts and laughter' and 'a 'gone to ground' whoop' (1903:208). Frequently the sporting spirit is emphasized in anecdotal form:

The first few days of the siege [of Ladysmith] were clouded by the death of Lieutenant Egerton of the 'Powerful', one of the most promising officers in the navy. One leg and the other foot were carried off, as he lay upon the sandbag parapet watching the effect of our fire. 'There's an end of my cricket', said the gallant sportsman, and was carried to the rear with a cigar between his clenched teeth (1903:162).

Doyle's use of sporting metaphors makes it clear that this war is an extension of the sports played by the aristocracy: war is a game for those who make up, as Auerbach (1957:211) calls the participants in the jousts of medieval romances, 'the community of the elect'. The cultural codes implicit in the language invoke concepts of 'wealth', 'power' and 'prestige'. And they also, of course, invoke the concept of 'inaccessibility', for the soldiers, as well as the majority of Doyle's readers, do not shoot, fish, hunt or smoke cigars.

In the battle piece, which is the apogee of all military history, Doyle imbues the officers with more explicitly chivalric and heroic traits. As an illustrative, and rather lengthy, example of this I have picked one from the eight battles highlighted in Doyle's history: the battle of Spion Kop. Fought on January 24, 1900, this battle was the scene of some of the fiercest fighting of the entire war: it was also a terrible defeat for the British. The battle began at dawn and by the early afternoon of what was a hot summers day the situation for the British, trapped on the summit in shallow trenches and under heavy artillery bombardment, was tragic.

The sun, little past its midsummer zenith, blazed down on a scene of fantastic carnage. The cries and groans of the wounded and dying and the exhortations of Boer and Briton to their comrades, and all the sounds of human voices were lost in the din made by gun and rifle, by shattering explosives and bullets ricocheting among the rocks. The main trench was being choked with dead and wounded. Many of the survivors were utterly demoralized and cowered down not daring to raise their heads, while others crawled about in groups through the choking fumes and dust, hopelessly trying to find shelter on the slopes behind the trench as shell-fire incessantly raked them. To agony and terror were added the craving of thirst. No water had reached the firing line and men cried and screamed for it (Kruger 1960:185).

This account, by a South African historian in 1960 is almost identical to those given by Field Marshall Maurice (who wrote the 'official' British version of the Boer War in 1907) and by the modern historians Ransford (1969) and Barthorp (1984). The first hand accounts quoted by Pakenham in *The Boer War* serve to flesh out the details of the more general description.

The first, from Corporal Will McCarthy, who served with a Volunteer regiment:

I got into the Trenches, ... and laid down at the side of Bodies with heads, legs, or Arms, it was terrible I can tell you and it was enough to completely [sic] unnerve the bravest of men. But we had to stick it. I had been laying there I think about half an hour when Bang went a shell at my back wounding me ... I thought my back was blown in ... (Pakenham 1979:294)

The second is from Lieutenant Wood who served directly under Colonel Thorneycroft in the Mounted Infantry.

The most awful scene of carnage ... We had no guns, and the enemy's Long Toms swept the hill. Shells rained in among us. The most hideous sights were exhibited. Men blown to atoms, joints torn asunder. Headless bodies, trunks of bodies. Awful. Awful. You dared not lift your head above the Rock or you were shot dead at once. Everything was confusion officers were killed or mixed up in other regiments, the men had no one to rally them and became demoralized ... (Pakenham 1979).

In contrast to these accounts Doyle (1903:223) says:

Hour after hour of the unintermitting crash of the shells among the rocks and of the groans and screams of men torn and burst by the most horrible of all wounds had shaken the troops badly. Spectators from below who saw the shells pitching at the rate of seven a minute on to the crowded plateau marveled at the endurance which held the devoted men to their post. Men were wounded and wounded yet again and still went on fighting. Never since Inkerman had we had so grim a soldier's battle. The company officers were superb. Captain Muriel of the Middlesex was shot through the cheek while giving a cigarette to a wounded man, continued to lead his company and was shot again through the brain. Scott Moncrieff of the same regiment was only disabled by the fourth bullet which hit him. Young Murky of the Scottish Rifles, dripping from five wounds, still staggered about among his men. And the men were worthy of such officers 'No retreat! No retreat!' they yelled when some of the front line were driven in. In all regiments there were weaklings and hand-backs, and many a man was wandering down the reverse slopes when he should have been facing death upon the top, but as a body British troops have never stood firm through a more fiery ordeal than on that fatal hill.

Doyle's version is clearly more different from the others than they are from each other. The first hand accounts describe the horror in terms of the pieces of bodies that were strewn about, 'the sides of bodies with heads, legs or arms' and the 'headless bodies, trunks of bodies'. Both combatants emphasize, by the passivity of their positions as well as their words, the impossibility of movement in the middle of an artillery barrage—McCarthy:

'I had been laying there I think about half an hour' and Wood, 'You dared not lift your head above the Rock or you were shot dead at once'. On the nature of the courage displayed, McCarthy says, 'it was enough to completely unnerve the bravest of men' while in Wood's words: 'Everything was confusion ... officers were killed or mixed up in other regiments, the men had no one to rally them and became demoralized'.

Although Doyle begins with the same issue, dismemberment; 'the groans and screams of men torn and burst', he immediately alters the emphasis in the following sentence by connecting this slaughter to a sight which made the spectators marvel, i.e. 'the endurance which held the devoted men to their post'. The position of 'spectators'—indeed, their very narrative presence as watchers, makes the 'spectacle' a performance which frames and emphasizes the heroic. Further, in a textual sleight-of-hand, Doyle actually recomposes, recreates the dismembered corpses by the end of the passage: '*as a body* British troops have never stood firm through a more fiery ordeal'. By putting the men on their feet, Doyle denies the reality of men waiting or hiding in the trenches; Doyle's men are actively and devotedly in fighting position at their post.

Just as Doyle transforms pieces into a whole body he also transforms a wound from something to be avoided at all costs, (see McCarthy's description of his back being blown in) to a test of strength and courage. 'Men were wounded and wounded and wounded yet again and still went on fighting'. And in a further development, which follows Auerbach's formula perfectly, Doyle suggests that for the officers to be wounded was not just a test of strength but one of virtue also; Captain Muriel was shot through the cheek while giving a cigarette to a wounded man, Moncrieff was 'only disabled by the fourth bullet which hit him' and Murray 'dripping from wounds, still staggered about among his men'. In the face of the universal confusion and demoralization that Wood and McCarthy report, Doyle tells us that *the men*, being worthy of the example set by their 'superb' officers, yelled 'no retreat' 'no retreat', while only some 'weaklings and hang-backs' left the battle when they should have been fighting.

In the quoted passage, as throughout the entire book, the reader is asked to identify with the aristocratic officers. First of all only the officers are named, given an identity and second only the officers attain heroic stature through their individual acts of bravery. The men, known variously as 'soldiers', 'regulars', 'troops' or 'the ranks' are accorded the possibility of heroism only 'in a body' under their companies' name or number, such as, 'the Sussex and the City Imperial Volunteers were clinging to the enemy's left flank while the 11th Division was holding them in front (Doyle 1903: 389). As well as rising above the anonymity of numbers by being named, the officers are charged with being the social and moral arbiters of the cam-

paigns. At Diamond Hill, Doyle reports that:

... and the gallant Lord Airlie, as modest and brave a soldier as ever drew sword, was struck through the heart. 'Pray moderate your language' was his last characteristic remark, made to a battledrunken sergeant (Doyle 1903:388f)

When 'Plumer's men start grumbling about a long march, Plumer 'set an admirable example sending away his own horse and walking with his rear most soldiers' (1903:359). In a crucial battle, of course, the moral responsibility is all consuming. The officers must lead the way, rally, inspire and at all times be worthy of the trust reposed in them. Should the battle go badly then the officers have to do more than inspire, they have to act as spiritual guides:

Chisholm, Dick—Cunyngham, Downman, Wilford, Gunning, Sherston, Thackeray, Sitwell, Airlie—they have led their men to and through the gates of death (Doyle 1903:201)

As in medieval romance so in Doyle's narrative a victory means that the victor is morally superior. Conversely, a defeat or surrender means a moral failure; one that is primarily felt by and must be atoned for by the officers. After what appears to be an unavoidable capture of a small post: 'Haggard officers cracked their swordblades and cursed the day that they had been born' (1903:107). In a more dramatic example, when Colonel Scott had to abandon the defence of a small town called Vryburg '... in his humiliation and grief at his inability to preserve his post he blew out his brains upon the journey' (1903:110). Using this same reasoning, Doyle argues that when the Boers abandoned their capital at Bloemfontein this proves; 'that they were not in the better cause' (1903:352).

Doyle's officer heroes are a late nineteenth century version of the chivalric ideal. They are sportsmen and warriors; full of fun and full of courage, they combine a love of adventure for its own sake with Christian piety. Lord Airlie whose last request that a sergeant tone down what was, presumably, violent or blasphemous language is but one indication of the muscular Christian present in Doyle's warriors. The sports training of the playing fields of Eton must be set within the training provided by the Church of England in order for officers and gentlemen to become heroes, Doyle insists. The officers of *The Great Boer War* thus, join the nineteenth century debate on the nature of masculinity. 'Manliness' (which Doyle uses as the opposite not of feminacy but effeminacy), here shown to include courage, stoicism, good sportsmanship, selflessness and Christian rectitude, is vested/illustrated in the gentlemen, the 'men' can only aspire to manliness by

aspiring to the class which produces it; class affiliation/divisions are maintained while the desire to transcend them is simultaneously produced.

In spite of the gentle-knight demeanor of the officers *The Great Boer War* affirms that the heroism and the manliness of the officers can never be accessible to the men, or the majority of Doyle's many readers, just as the aristocratic sports used by the text are also inaccessible. The articulation of this in *The Great Boer War*, where wealth, power, privilege and inaccessibility are always linked together, both suggest that leadership can never be anything more than a dream to those of his readers who are not gentlemen while, at least for the duration of the reading, it gives them access to that dream and simultaneously promotes a desire for it. In another context I have argued that Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories were so successful precisely because they followed the established adventure story format. In retrospect I now believe that the appeal of those detective stories lies more in Holmes' aristocratic class affiliations and less in the adventures per se. The appeal to Holmes' many readers is similar to the appeal of *The Great Boer War*; that is, an identification with a superior aristocratic sportsman hero who is ready to expend all his skill and energy for love of 'the game' itself. Soldiers, officers and readers ultimately collaborate in his affirmation of aristocratic values; in an affirmation of a time and place where class divisions, rigidly enforced, actually facilitated social unity.

Doyle's recreation of feudalism, (a benevolent version of noblesse oblige) enforces class separation in the name of racial unity. Speaking of the formation of the Imperial Yeomanry:

This singular and formidable force was drawn from every part of England and Scotland, with a contingent of hardriding Irish foxhunters. Noblemen and grooms rode knee to knee in the ranks and the officers included many well-known country gentlemen and masters of hounds. Well horsed and well armed, a better force for the work in hand could not be imagined (Doyle 1903 155)

And, in a more pointed example, writing of the soldiers at the Battle of Colenso:

Northern Inniskilling and southern men of Connaught, orange and green, Protestant and Catholic, Celt and Saxon, their only rivalry now was who could shed his blood most freely for the common cause (Doyle 1903.140).

The common cause, to beat the Boers, can only be achieved if class positions are maintained and class responsibilities met.

Doyle's purpose however is not merely to tell the heroic militarist story of how Britain won the war. He intends to do something greater: to use the story to inform and energize the British into accepting their role as

imperial leader of Europe. Doyle begins with the premise that the Anglo-Celtic race (as an Anglo-Irishman Doyle rarely uses 'Anglo-Saxon') is inherently superior. And empire is the way that this superiority is exported to the rest of the world. In the case of the Boers who

were as near akin to us as any race which is not our own. They were of the same Frisian stock which peopled our own shores (1903:67).

Doyle argues that while the stock is the same the Boers stand for the older order of Dutch Puritanism and separatism while the British are the enlightened Protestants whose task is to govern all the races under imperial unification. To defeat the Boers is to emerge as the most powerful Protestant nation in the world and, in the terms defined by the text, such a victory means that Britain is also the most virtuous, the best nation in the world. The Anglo-Celtic, Protestant British virtues privileged by the text are shown best in direct comparison to the different order of Protestantism embodied in the Boers. 'The children of the veldt' as Doyle frequently calls them are first depicted as out of place in the modern world: strong but inflexible, religious but limited by zealotry, they belong in the seventeenth rather than the nineteenth century. Speaking of a break down in early negotiations between the two sides, Doyle (1903:23) explains:

Simply primitive men do not understand the way of our circulation officers, and they ascribe to duplicity what is really red tape and stupidity.

'Inflexible', 'rugged', 'unprogressive' and 'most conservative' are some of the qualities that Doyle (1903:1) assigns in the first few, introductory pages to 'the hard-bitten farmers with their ancient theology ...'.

As an enemy in battle, the Boers are the equal of the British for the adversary must be, as Holmes says to Watson in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a 'foeman worthy of our steel'. The demands of the fictive form mean that Holmes is seen to be the extraordinary man that he is, only when faced with Moriarty. Likewise, initially the Boers must equal or exceed the British in military skill. The Boers are therefore, 'one of the most rugged, virile, unconquerable races ever seen upon earth', well trained by 'a country which is eminently suited to the tactics of the huntsman, the marksman and the rider', these farmer-soldiers are 'the most formidable antagonist who ever crossed the path of Imperial Britain' (1903:11). Off the battle field, however, the struggle is between old-fashioned and modern and here the British are the decided victors. Given this structure, Doyle suggests that it is sad but necessary that the Boers be defeated, for just as the seventeenth century must give way to the twentieth, as the agrarian past must give way to the

machine age, so too Boer feudalism must give way to a more modern imperialism. This enlightened version of imperialism, indeed the modern world in its totality, is personified, by the British.

The struggle between the kinds of Protestantism that is the most important part of the struggle between the old and the new is a familiar one to Doyle's readers. An almost identical struggle forms a major part of Doyle's novel *Micah Clarke* (1889). In that novel, Micah's grim father, 'Ironside Joe', believes, like the Boers, in 'a dour, fatalistic Old Testament religion' (1903:11); while his son, 'Micah', exemplifies, like the British, the more moderate, flexible Protestant who is willing to compromise religious dogma for the good of the civil state. *The Great Boer War* assigns Britain the role of Micah, the one willing to compromise, while the Ironside Boers cling to their rigid moral positions. Young Micah will surely triumph to carry Protestantism into the future the novel concludes and Doyle's history concludes in the same way.

The British flag under our best administrators will mean clean government, honest laws, liberty and equality to all men. So long as it continues to do so, we shall hold South Africa (Doyle 1903:551).

Once the Boer War is posed in the same terms as *Micah Clarke* a British victory is inevitable because, as it is a generational conflict that is being resolved, the son will, must, succeed. The comforting end of all this is that the Anglo-Boer conflict can be portrayed as largely free of the bitterness that is usual between enemies who have gone to war; the Anglo-Boer relationship can survive in the same way that the relationship between fathers and sons survive:

... there is nothing more wonderful than the way in which these two sturdy and unemotional races clasped hands the instant the fight was done (Doyle 1903:549)

Further, the movement from old to young, from father to son from Old Testament to New is shown to be part of a natural order of change and progress. In this sense, the British victory is first assured and then sanctified as nature's way.

Doyle's carefully structured sub-text which claims that both parties, perhaps sadder but wiser, will survive with honor, helps explain the general Boer acclaim for *The Great Boer War*. His account is ultimately ideologically satisfying to both victor and vanquished. The Boers are portrayed as the true keepers of the faith; those who battle to maintain religious rigor in a corrupt, weak world, while the British can see themselves as the new Empire builders who fight for toleration and modernity.

Brantlinger (1988:133) has pointed out that all Empire builders think,

or pay lip service to the thought, that they are 'liberating its peoples supposedly from the darkness of bondage and superstition'. Doyle's discourse is interesting in this regard as it invokes a double liberation. As this was a 'white mans war', Doyle makes almost no reference to the black South Africans over whose land the armies marched and fought. Used only as defenseless victims of Boer intolerance, the black South African who was specifically excluded from combat in the war (although not from its results by virtue of his, supposed, unreliability, is rendered totally invisible in *The Great Boer War*. Chapter IV, titled 'The Eve of War' poses the question of the government of South Africa:

Should Dutch ideas or English ideas of government prevail throughout that huge country? The one means freedom for a single race the other means equal rights to all white men beneath one common law What it means for the colored races we must let history decide (Doyle 1903:67).

However, the abolition of slavery by the British in 1893/4 in the Cape had been one of the chief irritants to the Boers, leading, in part, to the Boer trek northwards, in 1836. So, *The Great Boer War* is able to claim that the Africans are to be liberated from the strict yoke of Boer domination, while the Boers are to be liberated from the yoke of their own zealotry.

British Imperialist goals in South Africa are thus linked to a re-education and absorption of a fellow Protestant nation. As Doyle (1903:513) says, rather hopefully, of the Boers in defeat;

But time and self-government, with the settled order and vested interests which will spring up under British rule, will all combine to make a party which will be averse from any violent separation from the Empire.

British nationalism, including the division between Scot, Celt and Anglo-Saxon, is to be subsumed within a larger imperialist entity which has the higher purpose of promoting good government and the rule of law overseas. Doyle's story concludes therefore by suggesting that the imperial ethos that raises Britain above petty national racial and class concerns is the same force that will enable Britain, in the name of modern, liberal Protestantism, to govern the world.

And of all gifts that God has given to Britain there is none to compare with those days of sorrow, for it was in them that the nation was assured of its unity and learned for all time that blood is stronger to bind than salt water is to part. The only difference in the point of view of the Briton from Britain and the Briton from the ends of the earth, was that the latter with the energy of youth was more whole-souled in the Imperial cause . . . On the plains of South Africa, in common danger and in common privation, the blood brotherhood of the Empire was sealed (Doyle 1903:51).

When an extremely popular writer of Doyle's stature writes a military history, the work is assured a huge national and international audience and the ideology of the text is widely disseminated. Doyle wrote on behalf of the landed-gentry but he wrote for the middle class. He thoroughly understood middle-class aspirations and he wrote for that section of it which, like himself, was literate, materially acquisitive, socially mobile and eager for acceptance into the gentry class. *The Great Boer War* acts as a channel for that eagerness which is then de-fused, satisfied, through an identification with the most heroic as well as the most conservative members of society. To return to Tuchman's comment, probably most British military history, works as a similar negotiation between the middle, upper-middle and aristocratic classes; class confrontation is de-fused by a narrative which employs a fictive form and the kind of language which, going back for several centuries, was used to perpetuate the ideals—gentility, heroism, social and moral responsibility, best exemplified by the aristocracy.

Doyle's narrative provides us with but one example of the mediation that such texts engage in when readers accept the values of the story and find satisfaction in the narrative outcome. The fictive form of the romance is itself a powerful piece of propaganda (see Green's 1979 *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*) but when taken in conjunction with the patina of fact that 'history' authorizes; the officially quoted numbers, tables of armaments, maps of terrain and troop movements, and, in Doyle's text, his even-handed, 'fair' approach to his subject, military history becomes one of the more powerful social mediators. Antonio Gramsci (1971) calls this process 'cultural consent', or perhaps more explicitly, an atmosphere where consent is likely to occur, which leads to social hegemony. Although 'consent' is too complex a process to reduce to a few sentences, the aspect which is pertinent to this essay involves an arbitration, a negotiation, between state institutions, like the army, whose domination is 'direct' and other segments of the society whose domination is 'voluntary'. Military history such as Doyle's, functions as an explanation of what the army has done and why, to the society that has to give its 'voluntary' consent not only to that particular instance of direct 'force' but also to the existence of a 'direct' domination that functions, presumably, in their interests.

The Army emerges from *The Great Boer War* sanctified as the locus of the new world order: the place where men can prove themselves manly, where leadership not soldiering is the prerequisite for victory and where the superiority of the Anglo-Celtic race is made manifest. His numerous readers who responded to this chivalric portrait of the Army in action must have an increased respect and admiration for the 'direct domination' of their soldiers. After four lives are lost trying to save a gun, Doyle says, addressing the reader directly:

A useless sacrifice you may say, but while the men who saw them die can tell such a story round the campfire the example of such deaths as these does more than clang of bugle or roll of drum to stir the warrior spirit of our race (1903:144).

This increased admiration is applied to the conduct of the troops in South Africa, to any other further uses of imperial force and to longer range issues such as increasing military size and expenditures.

On one level, *The Great Boer War* helped to structure the public debate about the Army. On another level it was part of the larger cultural movement where 'gentlemanly and chivalric values came to suffuse the middle class' (Mackenzie 1992:20). And Rich (1987:29) has pointed out in his article, 'The Quest for Englishness': the level of this suffusion

By the late 1890s, though, a number of liberal critics of imperialism such as J.A. Hobson and L.T. Hobhouse did become increasingly worried by the manner in which imperialism and jingoism had found a base in the 'villa toryism' of the suburban middle and lower middle class.

It seems to me that Doyle's text, surely one of the books most likely to be found in suburban villas, is an important channel for the displacement onto the middle-class of those values.

Initially, I had ended this paper with a short discussion about how Doyle's history, coming at the end of a period of aggressive Victorian imperialism served to reinvigorate and reaffirm, if only for a short time, the traditional relationships of power and authority on which the ideology of imperialism rests. However, I have had to reassess this in light of a study, quoted by John MacKenzie in his book *Propaganda and Empire: the Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960*. Speaking of The Board of Education's Handbook on the teaching of history in British elementary schools MacKenzie (1992:193) says:

A generation of imperial thinkers at the end of the century influenced manuals of teaching methods, Board of Education handbooks for teachers, and school texts which ... survived at least until the 1950s and 1960s

Arthur Conan Doyle's real legacy may be found not in the ideology of 1900 but much later in the twentieth century for on the select list of suggested works of value for teaching history was *The Great Boer War* (see Archer 1916:127).

In colonial and post-colonial studies a great deal of critical attention has been paid to narrative fiction, but very little has been paid to the narratives of warfare. Yet as Said (1994:xiii) points out; 'The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course ...'. The telling of the story of that battle is to sustain and shape the idea of what it means to have an empire. As I

hope I have made clear this kind of narrative is a powerful tool for both culture and imperialism.

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