# Restless Travellers

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# Quests for Identity across European and American Time and Space

Edited by

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# PREFACE

This volume is founded on the belief that a debt of gratitude is owed to the characters and authors who inspire our hope that individual rights and liberties emerge and acquire strength to resist irrational power and abusive authority wherever they have been exercised for too long. In the following chapters, we will accompany some young writers whose spirit and energy render them dauntless in the face of dire conflicts, many of which are not new and will still be there when age impairs the resolve to fight injustice in the name of high principles or in order to fulfil personal dreams. But age does not stop resolute travellers; it can actually improve inspiration and competence in many of them. Their knowledge of life, given by years of undertaking and frustration, increases their capability to describe reality and experience and to create both men and women of encouraging fiction. We must express our gratitude to them, and their endeavours should be acknowledged despite the notions and deeds which may not fit in our dim understanding of the world and choice of conduct.

# INTRODUCTION

For over a century, many have attempted, in their own fashions, to tackle Britain's imperial power with its aftermath, sequels and memories. Colonial heritage has caused haunting recollections; it has been addressed with calm, conscientious discussion and has engendered quite divergent feelings, which range from pride to resentment. Atrocious behaviour has not been forgotten while race prejudice persists, and decent people are still subjected to persecution in regimes whose rigidity seems impregnable. Novels portray men and women whose spirit rises against impositions and barriers. Authors lecture ardently, albeit sometimes feigning detachment, on the qualities they possess: there is valour and energy driving a few to defy authority, and there is discernment and eloquence to choose the best words and influence those willing to listen. Yet, since many are lacking in personal courage, the message soon vanishes and disgrace is perpetuated. Few content themselves with the hollow humanity and moderation shown to the meek with voices so feeble that they will never be heard.

In the fictional tradition of Britain and Empire, readers venture to enter exotic settings where romances of adventure and discovery thrive. They are allowed to dream about faraway places and imagine themselves there, spellbound by incredible sights. But we know that many of them would not be pleased to be caught outside, in the middle of the real thunderstorm, exposed to the strike of lighting. Sure of their loyalty to land, routine and household, only after duty do they accompany travelling narrators as their eyes alight on things never seen before. Thus, marvelling at the primitive purity of remote places becomes an easy exercise of cultural certainty and self-assertion where making an effort and trying to understand difference is not compulsory.

The seductive and agreeable powers of romance do not prevent readers from realising that imperial itineraries cannot avoid days of savagery and hatred on both sides of the encounter. When the strong desire to go to sea is indulged, when the borders of restraint and rules of civility are crossed, adventurers are expected to be truly resolute; we want to see bold hearts brave dangers and bear suffering. The hero's force of character and sober determination are expected to rise where most people would experience fear and a natural sense of dismay, as the powers of their mind so fail them

that the only remaining decision seems to be to commend themselves to God.

Narratives of imperial and postcolonial Britain tend to hinge upon fears and cravings which challenge composure, and the ensuing tensions are often unsuccessfully dealt with. In their loneliness, authors drift toward partially incomprehensible reflections, which should not deter readers from judging both appearance and humanity in the travellers. Dichotomies arise in them. Some appear to be dauntless but may be suppressing anxiety as they step in strange ground. And renegades may be confronted with gentlemen engaging in philanthropic pursuits. For those inclined to pay little respect to traditions and customs, the unconventional range of freedom is tempting, and actions resulting from it can unsettle some readers and intrigue others. If we adopt the strict attitude of the orthodox, we will not be able to place confidence on any of the restless travellers; we will find them haughty and defiant, driven by selfish purposes without justification. It is the author's ordeal to fight the initial rejection and to foster an inclination to side with them, with the small number who engage in honourable endeavours and prove tenacity and virtue in the pursuit of their vision.

In spite of the evolution of science (which apparently forces the human brain to develop), many persevere in the notion that the soul is immutable. And we see in some authors and characters that "the life of the spirit" defies alteration, whether caused by the progression of a new century or the long exposure to remote worlds and extraordinary incidents. Still the journey can fail to confirm the integrity of the traveller's spiritual heritage. If they reject the guidance of current rules, they may find exercising a power of their own conception irresistible. In a different moral tone, the few who trust romance and old-fashioned honour, and set themselves unattainable ideals, are bound to see their chivalry succumb in times of disillusion and bereavement. Their hopelessness and sense of defeat deepen as numberless ignorant dudes fail to adopt a decent vision and opt to indulge in ignominious habits, grabbing the impunity of distance as they deem themselves free from laws imposed upon them at home. The reader's sympathy may turn towards the travellers who take things seriously in spite of the masks and disguises worn by others in dubious undertakings. A few honest travellers will be found, some unable to bear the disgrace of a life on the verge of extinction, others eager to see a different soil and soothe their conscience.

In the second part of the volume, as they wander within North America, authors argue with characters unable to comprehend the whole journey and disposed to omit elements of their travelling experience. The

reader can observe writers carefully, as they attempt to answer questions that some of their characters fail to ask. They could be held in little esteem, but behind their hesitation there is some hope of epiphany that justifies treating them with respect. Few could blame them for their uncertainty as to their goal or destination, for it is not only the writers who realize there are moments of doubt and fear when you do not know which path to travel. For some, doubts originate with linage: mixed blood is where most of the trouble starts. They fear a reversion to barbarism and they are not sure that all the enlightenment of civilization is enough to suppress the primitive urges which proud, self-appointed, racial superiors claim to have overcome with stable intelligence. The resulting freedom of the soul enables them to indulge a romantic streak which is alien to men who still struggle with the pull of tribal instinct.

Along the chapters, readers will watch the steps of individuals driven by an internal need to quieten their fears or cope with their identity doubts. The novelist often shapes their resolve to abandon their native country or culture although full awareness of where they are heading does not usually exist. In most tales, the dramatic focus is purposefully directed towards those who, on the threshold of adult conscience, undertake the legitimate, albeit naïve, pursuit of happiness; they appear to be confident enough not to obey the standards set by controllers of the truth. Instead of promising to abide by the rules, some try to govern their actions independently and picture themselves performing deeds worthy of acclaim. But attention is not distracted by them, as authors tend to concentrate on the few not simple enough to rest on their laurels. They yield to the pressure of duty, duties of their own conception, and are always seeking new causes and challenges. Some of these travellers leave a home in ruins pretending to be affected by fate, stars or an essential drive. They seem not to be disquietened by the uncertainties of the journey.

In the Afro-American struggle for dignity, many are far from heroic, and readers find characters who become alarmed easily and will never reach the nerve of resolute travellers. Feelings of dread render them unable to make a bold exertion, break denigrating chains and steer a new course across the borders of freedom. Nevertheless, hope is on the presence of mind and grim determination with which others are endowed. Although they can be shown as recognisable figures of virtue and merit, writers do not ignore the radicals who bear animus against them. Discontented black men are accused of *bad* ideas, like the rejection of traditional beliefs and the proposal of changes dominant classes do not want to be troubled by. The attempt to face the barriers dividing two worlds or cultures is regarded as a threat to the old values supporting the nation. Disturbed by the

sternness of such accusations, travellers cannot have faith in themselves, and doubt that they can distinguish the right path to tread or what is worth fighting for.

In order to feel safer and avoid the risk of opposing established truths of their time, some travellers decide to stay at home and use memory, literature and imagination in their search for existential and ethnic answers. Memories of very old times can provide sources of inspiration; young men and women strain their eyes to distinguish masters and epitomes in the horizon of time, in their ancient heritage. Yet, not everybody in the household resists sinking under the influence of the present. They refuse to acknowledge the fact that maintaining familiarity with their ancestors' culture is enough to resist the appeal of modern vices.

Frustrated minorities tell stories of men unable to control human urges and despair and who fail to concentrate their mind and muscle on the end of the journey. They cannot reflect upon a fate they seem unable to defy, and they do not open and keep channels of respect and reciprocity because they do not know how long individual uncertainty will last. The lesson or instruction derived from their stories is aimed at readers unrelunctant to express sincere gratitude, but it is often disregarded by people who, as the dictum states, will forgive you anything except the help you give them.

# PART I:

# BRITAIN'S IMPERIAL AGE AND ITS CRITICS

# "DOWN AMONG THE CANNIBALS": EARLY ADVENTURERS IN NEW ZEALAND

CLAUDIA MARQUIS

"Aborigines are a mistake," said Marcus Clarke, the Australian journalist and novelist of the mid-nineteenth century, giving voice to both a particular and a general view. Like many other Victorians, eminent and not so eminent, he argued that the missionary desire to convert "aboriginals" to Christianity was a waste of time, because the "blackfellow" was so inferior that the Christian message would never be truly understood. He could, and did, go further. In response to the New Zealand wars of the 1860s, Clarke considered joining up to do actual rather than merely verbal battle against the Maoris, those "merciless savages." Colonization of New Zealand by the British, he wrote in 1869, was a "gross swindle," but once perpetrated it should be maintained: "To do this in peace, the Maoris must be exterminated. . . . To make treaties and talk bunkum is perfectly useless; they must be stamped out and utterly annihilated." All that was needed was "a sensible man with a genius for slaughter."[1]

Clarke was far from unique, if uncomfortably close to home. Like him, Robert Knox believed that the annexation of New Zealand was "organized hypocrisy." The claim that this initiative was necessary for the protection of the native peoples rested on "mock philanthropy," since the law of kind was all too clear: "What a field of extermination lies before the Saxon Celtic and Samartian races! The Saxon will not mingle with any dark race, nor will he allow him to hold an acre of land in the country occupied by him."[2] Dickens, likewise, thought such a great gulf separated the savages of Africa from "the civilized European" that it would be a manifest folly to expect to "railroad" them into civilization.[3] Again the limits of cultural legitimacy are secured by radical violence. Dickens's response to the Indian crisis of 1857 is recorded in a letter to Angela Burdett Coutts: If he were Commander in Chief in India, he would instantly set about the extermination of the Indian race—"with merciful swiftness of execution, to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the Earth."[4] In the 1840s, Governor Grey advocated amicable relations between Maoris and

settlers, for he envisaged a time when Maori would be "trained to become useful labourers for the colonists."[5] But radical violence was the more common position. "I must say," wrote a young English immigrant to New Zealand to a friend back home, "I believe in the extinction of races. . . . It seems to me in the order of God's providence that it should be so."[6]

Fiction not infrequently served as a vehicle for such views. Indeed, fiction not only gave voice to European attitudes towards the peoples whom Europe overwhelmed in its imperialistic drive, but it contributed to the ideological formation of an emerging colonial society like New Zealand as a state, possessed of a culture, laws and institutions. What interests me here is the marked interest shown by writers of fiction for European children in participating in this cultural enterprise. So, in *Among the Cannibals*, the second in his adventurous trilogy about the globe-circling family of Captain Grant, Jules Verne scarcely pauses for moral or philosophical reflection on his story's situation, except where reflection actually increases the pressure of apprehension and excitement that propels the narrative. His story, then, does require an apparently straightforward report on 'New Zealanders', Maoris, the savage native people, whom he described as "the most cruel, not to say the most gluttonous, of anthropophagi." New Zealand is a "perfidious country"; those who venture into this land, he warns, "don't come back."[7] From one point of view, it is precisely this threat of extreme personal peril in the encounter with the savage that generates the tension that gives the adventure story its impact; from another, it is precisely the adventure story that serves as an easy conduit from the corridors of European power to the European household's nursery, for the kind of attitude expressed here.

In Verne's story, Lord Glenarvan sails to the South Pacific in search of Captain Grant, who had vanished in this region some two years earlier, in the course of a self-appointed mission to found a new colony that "he would have given to Scotland"(184). Glenarvan is accompanied by his wife, his friend Paganel and several companions, among them the two children of Captain Grant, Mary and Robert. Paganel is of most immediate interest to us. By profession he is a geographer, the kind described by Swift: "Geographers in Afric-Maps /With Savage-Pictures fill their Gaps."[8] It is he who provides for his company and us—rather than for one of London's learned societies—the book's sustained, scientific account of 'New Zealanders', an account that largely goes unchallenged. He tells in graphic, stereotypical detail of the depravity and ferocity of the natives. Christianity should have eradicated the odious and barbarous habit of cannibalism, but, Paganel informs his party, only a few 'New Zealanders'

are Christian. Moreover, recent history has shown that all too often it is the very representative of Christianity who is the savage's preferred victim:

> Last year the Rev. Mr. Walkner was martyred with horrible cruelty. The Maorists hung him. Their wives tore out his eyes. They drank his blood and ate his brains. And this murder took place in 1864, at Opotiki, a few leagues from Auckland, under the very eyes of the English authorities. My friends, it needs centuries to change the nature of a race of them. What the Maoris have been they will remain yet for a long time. Their history is written in blood. (38)

Personal names, place names, and dates—verifiable data—match with sickened outrage to place Paganel's view beyond question. He does offer limited comfort; New Zealanders prefer to eat each other if possible:

> This flesh has the taste of pork, but with more flavour. The flesh of white men is less of a dainty, because the whites eat salt with their food; and that gives their flesh a particular flavour, not much liked by the epicures. (41)

At the end of their journey from Australia, Glenarvan and company are shipwrecked and washed ashore on the most perilous part of the North Island coast, only to be captured by a ferocious Maori tribe and subjected to atrocities by these "dark-skinned savages." The castaways conduct themselves with heroic fortitude in the face of this extreme danger, placing honour above life. Lord Glenarvan's reaction when Kara Tete, a Maori chief, lays claim to his wife by placing his hand on her shoulder is to shoot him, despite the odds against surviving such an act. The party escape sacrificial death for this killing (and a place on the menu) through a combination of Robert Grant's bravery and the superstitious practices of the Maori. Rescued by Robert, they take refuge in Kara Tete's burial cave, which is, of course, *tapu*, prohibited. For this second offence, the Maori expect vengeance, *utu*, at the hands of the god, so Paganel engineers a small volcanic eruption, thereby satisfying the superstitious natives that the gods have indeed exacted their revenge.

Adventure works at all points to promote one side by vilification of the other. New Zealand here proves to be what Africa had long been: a testing ground, a place where a heroic European spirit could be exercised. On the other hand, adventure makes its countervailing point with adolescent zest when, after their escape, Paganel and Major MacNab express their "sovereign contempt" for the natives: "They called the Maoris unpardonable brutes, stupid asses, idiots of the Pacific, savages of Bedlam" (136). Later, by happy chance, Captain Grant is found by the expedition, living on a

small deserted island, North of New Zealand. At this point, European civilization and fortitude are put on exemplary display, as Grant has managed to turn his island into a home that Crusoe would have envied.

In *Rule of Darkness*, P. Brantlinger makes an illuminating comment:

> The great explorers' writings are non-fictional quest romances in which the hero's struggle through enchanted or bedevilled lands toward a goal, ostensibly the discovery of the Nile's sources or the conversion of the cannibals. But that goal also turns out to include sheer survival and the return home, to the regions of light. These humble but heroic authors move from adventure to adventure against a dark, infernal backdrop where there are no other characters of equal stature—only bewitched or demonic savages. (Brantlinger, 180-81)

As a ripping adventure story, Verne's romance operates according to the narrative principles which Brantlinger identifies: characterization pits good against evil, it is episodic, and if there is a passage out, it must be to return home. What I should like to suggest, however, is that these generic practices do more than make a narrative structure available; genre works to add a certain force, its own particular charge of conviction, to the ideological message that the story bears.

The fantasy, the knot (as Lacan calls it) that seems to hold together the whole structure of nineteenth-century colonialist ideology is cannibalism, and it is precisely in books like Verne's that we properly meet it. As modern scholars are quick to point out, cannibalism is indeed much more frequently encountered in books by readers than by travellers in the flesh. This is not the place to explore this collective fantasy in depth, but surely it is worth observing its persistent force through the entire period of European expansion into other worlds, as a means of identifying the indigenous Other, not so much to justify as actually to call for European intervention.[9] Cannibalism represented to the European, as Brantlinger points out, the "nadir of savagery" (Brantlinger 190), more reprehensible and contemptible than slavery, to which it is obscurely bound. It is a most powerful slander against humanity, the most extreme form of the "law of custom" which a liberal like J. S. Mill believed it to be Empire's business to suppress. For the sixteenth-century Spanish empire, it was cause sufficient to invoke the law of just war in the invasion of America.[10] For the Victorians, three hundred years later, it did similar service, if not quite officially; cannibalism is in at the start of English interest in New Zealand, for instance, in the reports of Captain Cook.[11]

Cannibalism may be found in its most flagrant representations in fiction, perhaps, but its point, even in fiction like Verne's, is that it must

not be doubted. Here Paganel claims, on the strength of testimony by both missionaries (Kendall and Marsden) and explorers (D'Urville), that cannibalism among the Maoris is notorious. His comments are doubled by the narrator, who steps briefly out of the story to confirm that it has become as "chronic" in New Zealand as in Fiji: "Savages began by eating human flesh to satisfy their hunger, but priests afterwards made rules for and sanctified the monstrous custom. The meal has become a ceremony" (39).[12]

Two strains show in this. Firstly, there is the strain of nineteenth-century ethnography. Secondly, interpretation here determinedly vitiates the dignity and integrity of native religion, by identifying it with abhorrent practices that constitute it as a pious fraud, no less—spirituality is here just the flesh in fancy dress. This is most peculiar, of course, since we might say that Cannibalism's Other in these texts is Christianity, the religion of the tale-teller; and Christianity is rooted most profoundly in a paradoxical ideal of corporeal sacrifice. This Christianity, then, must find in savage religion a monstrous parody of itself that can only be acknowledged by exclusion, by abjection in this form. If one thinks back to the fate of Rev. Walkner, the feasting on his blood and brains, the parody seems clear. Later in Verne's story, theory turns to praxis and the castaways themselves become witnesses to cannibalism, and nearly its victims. The bodies of slaves were not protected by the taboo, like the corpse of their master. They belonged to the tribe. The sacrifice completed, the whole mass of natives, chiefs, warriors, old men, women and children, without distinction of age or sex, seized with a bestial fury, threw themselves upon the inanimate remains of the victims. In less time than it takes to write it, the still smoking bodies were torn to pieces, divided:

> … dismembered, cut not only into morsels, but into crumbs. Of the two hundred Maoris present at the sacrifice, each had a share of the human flesh. They disputed and fought over the least scrap. The drops of hot blood bespattered these horrible creatures. (105)

Cannibalism, then, proves a perverse epitome of carnality, flesh exceeding itself. But perhaps more striking than the sacrificial orgy is the graphic dismemberment of the bodies; if, by contrast, the mystical body of the Church is always One, its oneness is nevertheless effected by a like division of Christ's holy body. It is as if Christianity, with horror and fascination, looked into its soul and there found a mirror filled with images of broken bodies that, projected upon the Other, left it feeling whole.

I use the image of the mirror advisedly, since such treatment of the Other also invites interpretation by the kind of psychoanalytical hermeneutics

associated with Lacan. For him, images of dismemberment always have to do with the desperate formation of the ego in the imaginary, at the mirror-stage. The coherent image of the self formed at this point is bound up with a real experience of fragmentation, "le corps morcelé," as he calls it.[13] In these terms, fictions like Verne's, by the stereotypical, sensational horrors they create for us, represent exactly a perverse fantasy that relates most profoundly to cultural self-awareness and racial identification.

*Among the Cannibals* is a South Seas romance, even if New Zealand serves as Verne's heart of darkness, the antithesis of white civilization, its demons as yet un-exorcised by a higher moral power. Unlike Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Verne's romance never countenances any possibility that the brutal, repulsive face of the Other will take possession of the European soul; there is to be no betrayal of the civilized ideal. Darkness is figured in that face and, so figured, guarantees our place on top, in the light. Abdul Jan Mohammed calls this useful, radical opposition between native peoples and Europeans a "Manichean allegory—a field of diverse yet inter-changeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and Other, subject and object."[14] This Manichean opposition, so blatant in Verne's text, is present in a much more domesticated form in the other novels which I wish to discuss: *Waihoura*, by W. H. G. Kingston (who frequently translated Verne, especially in the *Boy's Own Paper*) and, more particularly, *Distant Homes; or the Graham Family in New Zealand*, written by Mrs. Aylmer.[15]

Like Verne's novel, these two stories combine fictive kinds, especially the traveller's tale—with its factual or fantastic report on exotic places and peoples—and the moral or evangelical story, which describes the triumph of virtue in a world of juvenile experience. Neither of these novels is written by an author whose acquaintance with New Zealand is more immediate than Verne's, yet both, for all their being bathed in a kind of romantic glow, are plainly more concerned with the real business of colonial life than he was. We might put that differently. In 1867, when Verne wrote his original story about Captain Grant and his children, New Zealand was scarcely the place of darkness he described, even granted a European definition of darkness and light and even taking into consideration the Maori wars that agitated Clarke from his trans-Tasman vantage point.

*Waihoura* and *Distant Homes*, written at much the same time, place their adventures in a land where the taming of the antipodean wilderness is well under way, a land in which the native threat is largely contained in fact, "the England of the South Seas." Civilization has conquered barbarism, and what these books reveal is that the ideological work must

continue. A novel such as *Distant Homes* may seem more confident of its humane values, and it is certainly less shrill. Yet, in a sense, European aggression is more complete than in Verne's adventure, for here we get no extraordinary 'Voyage Autour du Monde' but homes, however far away. Thus, adventure has given way to imperialism and, however imperfectly accomplished, the task which our heroes now face is that of productively assimilating the Other to oneself.

The basic plot of *Distant Homes* is both simple and comes to seem quite familiar by the time we meet it again in *Waihoura*. Presumably, it tells a hidden story: the influence of debates about the desirability of emigration as an answer to England's overcrowding. It is certainly true that New Zealand offers the blessing of an empty land. In *Waihoura*, Mr Pemberton comes to New Zealand with his family after losing his property in the West Indies; in *Distant Homes*, the Graham family migrates because they have suffered financial losses in England. Captain Graham presents New Zealand to his children as a new Eden, better still, a very English Eden, not merely ideal, but thoroughly domesticated. "In New Zealand everything is English," Anthony Trollope half complained when he visited this country in 1871; to disembark in Invercargill and try to secure decent accommodation was to find "all the feeling of mystery … gone." He asked to be shown some Maoris, presumably remembering the joke he repeats for us of hoping that "Bishop Selwyn might disagree with the cannibal who should eat him," only to learn that "they were very scarce in that part of the country."[16] It is not so different for the Graham family. Cannibalism is an issue, but Captain Graham assures his brood that it is a thing of the past. Unlike Paganel's North Island, but very like Trollope's Southland, Graham's Canterbury is fortunate in having "very few natives," all of whom are Christian, "in name at least." To go to Christchurch, with its bishop, clergy and college, is to find yourself at home: "A friend of mine who had been living out there for three years says there is no place like it, and that nobody going there would ever wish to live in England again" (6).

This tame description of their new South Pacific home leaves Tom, the most boisterous of the Graham children, somewhat disappointed, but its very tameness is ideologically potent. It is not exactly a matter of excluding the boy's adventure story from the domestic novel, but adventure certainly takes on a distinctly new form, in which the savage is no longer one's terrifying enemy, but rather the focus of an abundant desire to convert the whole world to belief in God—and God's image, one's European self! Cannibalism itself takes new forms. It is firstly now a figure, ready for laughter, for comparison and analogy, so that, for instance, Graham may describe his daughters as being "as wild as

natives," in need of "constant looking after." In doing this, he sets up that binary structure of polarities that organise in turn their developing history towards maturity in the Christian faith: savage is to Christian European as woman is to man and child is to adult. Cannibalism becomes a story merely, allowed enough space in the imagination to prop up colonialist ideology, but no longer encountered head on (as it were) within the fiction.

In *Distant Homes*, the cannibal Other is well and truly tamed, in fact, he becomes at most a nursery bogeyman. We gain a double assurance. Not only is the savage still the dialectical support for English sense of racial and cultural superiority, but the threat that he might pose is undone, cut down to infant size in, for instance, the rhyme with which Tom teases his sister Lucy:

> Hoky, Poky, Wankum Wun,
> How do you like your enemy done,
> Roast or boiled, or fried in the sun—
> The king of the Cannibal Islands. (3)

Verne's cannibals are now so toothless that Aps, the two year old, in a comic but all-too-telling displacement, has a "cannibal" for tea:

> "Aps wany Cannibal," exclaimed the two-year-old, looking earnestly in his mother's face. . . A general laugh followed the child's exclamation; but, nothing daunted, he repeated his question, and seemed almost inclined to refuse his slice of bread and jelly, until told by Tom it was a bit of Cannibal." (8)

The alienation which is powerfully figured in cannibalism, and upon which imperial ideology depends, might have been discovered again in the land wars of the 1860s to which, in fact, Mrs. Aylmer does make reference. Verne, after all, while he presented cannibalism principally as a religious monstrosity, also bound it to warfare, as a seasonally timetabled, agonistic encounter between tribes: to the victor went the bones. Aylmer, however, insists on marginalizing even armed hostilities, minimizing their seriousness, covering over their threat, by displacing war into talk of war. In effect, war is reduced to military diplomacy, and Graham's mission, now, is to ensure that local tribes do not join the larger disturbance. He had no cause for anxiety, since both chiefs who speak in response are emphatic in their appreciation of the boon of English domination:

> In speaking of the war, they both said it was wrong, and, if they fought, they would fight for the good English, and the more English that came the

> better, as they brought raiment and riches with them, and all the listeners expressed their approval. (172)

Who eats whom, we might ask, now that the savage is become merely the radically mistaken.

In *Waihoura*, this same cultural move is effected through the mission undertaken by Lucy Pemberton, daughter of the colonial family, who takes up Waihoura, the Maori girl whose complexion is both "fairer" than her companions' and not "disfigured" by tattoos:

> "Now that you are like us outside, you must become like us inside," said Lucy, employing a homely way of speaking such as her Maori friend was most likely to understand. "We pray to God, you must learn to pray to him" (46).

In due course, Waihoura is confirmed in European values and faith, almost, if never quite. In some sense it is absolutely her romance, so it is she who is awarded the marriage that brings the story to its good end, although this conclusion is reached with some difficulty: Rahana, the Maori chief whom she marries, must first defeat Hemipo, the tribal leader to whom she had been promised by her father. But the battle between these two is denied its customary conclusion: the cannibal feast. Rahana gives the defeated their lives and freedom in a show of Christian mercy, demanding only that Hemipo should submit to the colonialists' vision: "he must be their friend and ally, and abandoning the cruel customs of our people, learn the good religion" (127). The very language has turned white, and cannibalism is now an impossible story, even for the native Other.

In *The Conquest of America*, Todorov enquires into the impossible tangle of interests that constituted colonialism at that most notorious of its moments. He discovers an interest in the Other that cancels the Other's difference, whether by the kind of cultural superiority that accounts for Europe's fascination with cannibalism, or whether by the humane concern that knows culture to be monolithic, universal, whereby native otherness properly gets taken up into the European one. In the 1860s, the decade that saw publication of the three novels discussed here, the very point at which colonialism might be said to turn towards British imperialism, this angle on the Other may have changed—evolution comes into the account—but the larger story stays much the same. In effect, the thrust of colonialist ideology is to clear a space for the incomer. More importantly, perhaps, this ground-clearing enterprise also determines a future in which a hierarchised set of race relations somehow seems foundational to an

emerging new world nation. One way or another, New Zealand is the issue of European fantasy, and cannibalism is the most extravagant sign of this fraught inheritance.

Three novels are a small sample, but significant nevertheless. We find represented in them two distinct types of fiction, the boy’s adventure story and the moral tale, domestic and evangelizing, yet, as we have seen, in the end their business is common—to bolster colonialist confidence in its aims, justifying European intervention through the denigration and destruction of the culture and religion of the indigenous people. If the hugely important economic motive for colonialism is largely concealed or rendered benign, it is still there and, again, these books are implicated in the larger enterprise: all three, in exemplary fashion, were produced for a European market and in all three—if in rather different ways—it is the narrative of the tense encounter with the non-European Other that is the selling point. As Abdul Jan Mohammed says, “colonialist discourse ‘commodifies’ the native subject into a stereotyped object and uses him as a ‘resource’ for colonialist fiction.”[17] There is something profoundly disturbing when exploitation so doubles itself, but when it doubles into the nursery with its racy pleasures, as in our stories, offering profit to the children and earning one from them too, its complex interest in the more or less distant, savage Other stands revealed as the work of false consciousness that it is. It gives the innocence of childhood an all too proper shape, a radical virtue; and in that virtue, whatever way we look at it, innocence is lost. In this virtuous context, cannibalism props up colonialist ideology, ensuring that the identity of the modern New Zealander will be structured around an inherited fantasy, the clash of civilisations.

# ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE AND THE BOER WAR: A BRITISH CHIVALROUS GENTLEMAN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH ROMANCE AND HISTORY

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## Introduction

One of Arthur Conan Doyle's turn-of-the-century undertakings was to play his little part in the stage of Empire as a British private during some of the hard months of the Boer War (1899-1902). A study of this episode in the late Victorian popular writer's life can begin with a discussion of his views on the origins and cause of the armed conflict between imperial Britain and the South African Republics under her suzerainty. Doyle's interpretation of the war can help us explain both his public and his inner reasons to join up. This should be followed by a careful consideration of his experience of the realities of war and his ideas about the combatants. This study will draw upon and surely benefit from the fact that the weight of Doyle's idiosyncratic voice is clear not only in the fictional but also in the non-fictional writings that reflect his deliberate involvement in the war and his high conception of the British soldier.

At the turn of the century, Doyle was already a remarkable personality; and he tended to view himself as a man of solid identity. He was a good son who loved and respected his charismatic elderly mother (Mary Foley) and had almost forgotten his father, Charles Doyle (who had passed away in 1893 after years of alcohol abuse and infirmity). In his own home, Doyle was a faithful, diligent husband and a father responsible about his children. Yet the realm of his drives and endeavours was not domestic. He belonged to romance and adventure.

After taking a degree in Medicine from the University of Edinburgh in 1881, Doyle worked as a physician until 1891, when he decided to devote himself to literature. Combining his developing proficiency in the study of military history with his ability for popular fiction, he wrote *Micah Clarke* (1889), a novel of rebellion and war set in seventeenth century England,

*The White Company* (1891), a story of knights and archers in the Hundred Years War, and *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* (1895), humorous tales of adventure and daring set in the Napoleonic Wars. In Doyle's historical fiction, war and martial honour were major concerns. He was a chivalrous gentleman of steady loyalty to the traditional values and knightly tenets that had played a decisive role in his education under Mary Foley and would have a continuous influence on his mentality and conduct. At forty, Doyle still loved physical competition; he was a keen sportsman indeed who enjoyed the exertions and prowess of cricket, rugby and boxing. In spite of age, he could not abandon the challenges and thrills of travel and adventure: a few years earlier, he had been close to imperial conflict in the Sudan. So, at the end of the century, in the final days of the Victorian era, during the Boer War, Doyle was ready and willing to speak and act for the country; he intended to prove his worth as a defender of the British army and Empire under his vision of a great future for the Anglo-Celtic nations.

## Before the voyage

Doyle participated in the Boer war because he thought that it was a fair and rightful fight (and could prove it), and because he felt close and cared about the British soldier, whom he was certain that he knew well. Armed with moral conviction, he resolved to serve Britain supporting the troops who were already in South Africa and urging young men still idly at home to join the army. Doyle's reasons to play a part in the conflict reveal both a strong, straightforward personality and a set of values, ideas and beliefs which generates debate. Subject to a strict sense of honour, he had to take a firm position on this national crisis, in Britain's hour of need, when his fellow countrymen were suffering reverses in their war with the Boers. He truly felt that he must do his duty as a patriot and become a role model for younger Britons.

> I was afraid that you would be angry with me for volunteering. But I rather felt it was my duty. I wrote a letter to the Times advising the Government to call upon the riding shooting men —They did so— and of course I was honour-bound as I had suggested it, to be the first to volunteer. I learned patriotism from my mother, so you must not blame me.
>
> What I feel is that I have perhaps the strongest influence over young men, especially young athletic sporting men, of any one in England (bar Kipling). That being so it is really important that I should give them a lead. It is not merely my 40 year-old self—though I am as fit as ever I was, but it is the influence I have over these youngsters. (Letter to Mary Doyle, Dec. 1899, in *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*, 434.)

In spite of his age, Doyle still loved daring adventure and was keen on contact and collision sports. He played boxing and rugby energetically, as a noble, manly confrontation where bleeding noses and broken ribs were usual and acceptable. For a man thus accustomed to physical violence, war offered the ultimate test of skill, strength and stamina. Unencumbered by household duties, his masculine determination prevailed and he felt free to confront the challenge.

Doyle wished to support the British cause in South Africa as a private in uniform to get as close as possible to the actual fighting. With a degree of candid faith in gentlemanly conduct at war and sheer dauntlessness that can be found difficult to explain, he was looking forward to seeing action on the battlefield. He wanted to witness what he was imaginative enough to envisage as the epic encounter of two great contestants. There seems to be no deception in his lines of praise for most of the fighting men on both sides. In order to guard himself against feasible accusations of naivety, he did not allow his stance of honest admiration to make him blind to the vile combatants who spoil the honour and nobility of strife.

There were additional reasons for Doyle to go to South Africa. He was in need of a respite from problems at home: his wife had been ill for some years; he had fought for her health, but there was no remedy. Hers was a disease very unlike the ones against which he was to set his face in South Africa. And Doyle's incentives would be incomplete if we did not refer to his intention of being the first to write and publish a history of the war. It is rather obvious that his career as a writer was a serious, vital concern for a man who had decided not to live by practising the medical profession. A family whose comfort and status depended on him would have to repress any arguments against war and the paterfamilias' involvement, for the risk that he was certainly taking was small compared to his capacity to provide for them.

We may believe that, above personal and professional reasons, Doyle was eager to demonstrate his patriotism by fulfilling his duty both morally and physically, once his intellect had grasped the righteousness of the war. After the painful defeats and heavy losses of December 1899, Doyle knew that he would not be able to bear inactivity at home any longer. Always mindful of all sides of duty, he ensured his family's welfare and comfort (and postponed some fiction projects) before volunteering to join the army. Although rather fit and suitable in several respects, the forty-year-old tall, burly aspirant was too old to enlist as an infantryman. His resolution still unabated, he insisted in being useful and helping the nation's soldiers; and he eventually managed to do so by accepting a post of medical officer in a field hospital sponsored by his friend John Langman.

More than a century later, we endeavour to grasp how a late Victorian patriot's resolve to do his duty was strengthened. In 1900, Doyle went to South Africa to fulfil what he regarded as a moral and national duty. With the intention of being useful to Britain, he placed all his intellectual and professional support behind the nation's armed forces and his country. He believed that the Empire had embarked on a justified war against the rough rebellious Boers of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State, whose senior leaders had defied the British rule. He thought that it was a rightful fight: the kind of honourable enterprise in which loyal, valiant, strong men must participate. Those who had already volunteered, and were fighting bravely and dying in South Africa, deserved his support and commendation; the others needed, he thought, some encouragement from somebody like him. Aware that his popular fictional works had a considerable influence over the British youth, Doyle made his authoritative voice heard in this serious matter and urged brave, able-bodied men to step forward. To his mind, the war required volunteers born and raised in Britain rather than colonials.

> But how can we in honour permit our colonial fellow-civilians to fill the gap when none of our own civilians have gone to the front? Great Britain is full of men who can ride and shoot. … This war has at least taught the lesson that it only needs a brave man and a modern rifle to make a soldier. (Letter to *The Times*, 18th Dec. 1899, in *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*, 431)

After saying that Britain's young men must volunteer, Doyle felt a duty to set an example; he was *honour-bound* to serve his country as an icon of patriotic masculinity by joining the army himself and fighting the Boers.

We should add that Doyle was lured to the war by the spirit of chivalry and adventure which he had cultivated in his historical romances. And he wanted British youth to share his passion for fair, noble combat. With his fiction, he had been a contributor to the heroic culture through which the British masculinity of the late nineteenth century was taught and urged. In *The White Company* (1891), for example, he had presented involvement in war and chivalric undertaking as rites of passage into manhood. In South Africa, Doyle met young British soldiers whose sense of duty, honour and heroic self-fulfilment had been shaped by his stories of fighting men, men of courage and prowess who could be emulated.

Mary Foley disagreed with his son regarding the origins of the war and their views on its justification obviously differed. She could not share his confidence in the fairness of the British cause because all she saw was vile greed for gold and imperial arrogance. So, for her, Doyle's stand on the

war was a great mistake. Had he chosen to obey his mother, Doyle would not have abandoned his books for active participation in a war which was not as right as he thought. In fact, he managed to do both things: he was an active participant in the conflict, as active as he was allowed to be, and, while in South Africa, he never forgot that a part of his involvement would be *literary*, i.e. writing about the first British war of the new century.

Despite his mother's opposition, Doyle was eager to serve his country and prove his patriotism in a just war. And finally a task for him appeared, not in the front, but in one of the field hospitals: John Langman's arrived in Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, on 2nd April 1900.

Besides his desire to be regarded as an inspiring example by his young fellow countrymen and his willingness to use his physician's skills to heal those sick and wounded, Doyle went to South Africa for a taste of military adventure, hoping to view real action and combatants on the battlefield. After reading and writing about old, legendary and historical battles and warriors, he wished to see war and experience the excitement of fighting. In some of his novels he had praised the gallantry of fighting men; and his own sense of honour and chivalrous disposition originated in the ballads, chronicles and romances of mediaeval knights. At forty, he knew that this would be his last chance to emulate his brave and loyal ancestors.

However, Doyle was not constrained by old-fashioned ideas about the art of war and rejected outdated practices. He expected to see differences between the wars that he had studied and depicted in his historical novels and the wars of the new century. He was interested in the new science and technology of war (with their new tactics and weapons), but still held that the morality and chivalry of combatants were essential. In South Africa he would find out whether soldiers behaved as men of honour or degenerated into unrestrained ruffians, and whether the courteous and knightly respect for the enemy of the old days was still possible.

## What did Arthur Conan Doyle do in South Africa?

Doyle carried out his mission with exemplary diligence and stoicism. He worked as an army doctor and brought relief and comfort to sick and wounded troops. Most of the soldiers in the field hospital were victims of disease, rather than combat injuries. Doyle confronted pain and death far away from battlefields and deeds of arms; with dauntless commitment, he proved himself against dreadful situations where there was too much loss of life and human suffering and little heroic contentment.

Doyle went through the ordeal of fighting against a virulent epidemic of typhoid fever in a field hospital where it was impossible to maintain the

necessary sanitary conditions. The cruel enemy was not the Boer with his bullets and bombs, but a polluted river. Doyle fought "death in its vilest, filthiest form." In spite of "the horrible sights and sounds and smells" and the risk of falling victim to the disease, he stayed at his post, carrying out his task with grim determination; it was a stolid struggle that lacked all the heroic animation which he had hoped to experience in South Africa. And in spite of the medical staff's efforts, ill soldiers died at an appalling rate.

> Coffins were out of the question, and the men were lowered in their brown blankets into shallow graves at the average rate of sixty a day. (*Memories and Adventures*, 139)

Although Doyle realised that the physical and psychological injuries of war could be detrimental to the British troops' patriotic and martial spirit, he never ceased to believe in the strength of chivalrous romance to sustain the fighting man. With this faith he would insist in the bravery of soldiers, their commitment and resolution to fight for Britain's honour and justice, and their energy and courage to cope with the hard toil of war and the fear of death.

After the harsh enteric epidemic at Bloemfontein, Doyle could spend a few days with the troops as they advanced toward Pretoria. He saw how war was conducted by generals and how soldiers behaved in campaign, in the midst of an artillery engagement, for instance: he was with them under heavy shelling at Vet River… Twenty years later, his recollection of this cannon duel was still vivid, and he wrote a dramatic account of the episode for his *Memories and Adventures*, praising the nerve of the British troops under enemy fire.

> Another shell and another, and then a variety, for there comes a shell which breaks high up in the air—wheeeeee—tang—with a musical, resonant note, like the snapping a huge banjo-string, and a quarter of an acre of ground spurted into little dust-clouds under the shrapnel. The gunners take no interest in it. Percussion or shrapnel, fire what you will, you must knock the gun off its wheels or the man off his pins before you settle the Royal Field Artillery. (*Memories and Adventures*, 147)

Although in South Africa Doyle was close to some of the gruesome realities of war, he still wished to celebrate the gallantry and endurance of the British soldier, as he had done in his historical fiction. The Boer War did not alter his views; he retained his admiration for the "splendid stuff" of the fighting man and expressed his chivalrous regard for most soldiers and officers, either fellow countrymen or enemies. Reality did not prevent