

PAX BRITANNICA PROPAGANDA as seen in the works of G.A. Henty.

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Abstract: This paper intends to show the use of linguistic propaganda as used in literature for the young as a means of inculcating belief, loyalty and courage to the ideals of the British Empire before World War I. As Britain is generally believed to have been exemplary in its struggle towards equality and democracy, it may seem inappropriate to some to describe as “propaganda” the means that some of its writers used to inculcate these ideals. Yet today, as one looks back at the colonial past, it is apparent that there are many aspects which are abhorrent to the modern mind.

In this paper, two works of one author, G.A. Henty, - perhaps the most prolific writer of the Victorian age – have been selected, which deal with two very different regions of the British colonial world. The most famous in its time is entitled *With Clive in India* and it presents a picture of how non-European peoples were treated in the empire. In contrast with this, there is *With Wolfe in Canada* which deals with the struggle of Anglo-Saxons against the French of New France and to a lesser extent, the collaboration or hostility of First Peoples. Both novels are essentially concerned with the “Other” in colonial rule. As both novels were written essentially for young males, there is a constant emphasis on the courage of the male, and also on the purity and “natural” passivity of the female. The way that Henty presents his subject rhetorically is an interesting example of the apparent naturalness and subtleness of British colonialist propaganda.

Key Words: Pax Britannica, language propaganda, colonial attitudes, influencing of youth

At the outset it seems only fair to define two pivotal terms on which this paper is based, namely propaganda and Pax Britannica. Both are very slippery terms and I shall thus attempt to define them as I intend to use them in this paper.

Perhaps it is best to begin with *propaganda* as this is the concern of all of the papers at this symposium. There is a particularly clear article in the 15th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* which I shall here refer to. The word is of Latin origin and was first used in 1622 as the name of an organization of Roman Catholic cardinals formed to carry out missionary work. This was the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* or Congregation for Propagation of the Faith. The term *propaganda* therefore carries among Roman Catholics a highly respectable connotation. The unsavoury connotation of the word really begins with its use by totalitarian governments. This is spectacularly demonstrated by its use by both Bolsheviks and National Socialists about the time of the First World War. For Lenin, *propaganda* was the reasoned use of scientific and historical arguments to indoctrinate the educated. The Bolsheviks often joined *propaganda* with the word *agitation*, which was the use of slogans, parables and half-

truths to exploit the grievances of the uneducated. Thus, the communist created a new term *agitprop*, which was used until recently in the programmes of all communist countries.

The National Socialists in Germany also used the term *for themselves* in a positive sense in creating a “Ministry of Enlightenment and Propaganda” of which the goal was to spread mainly false or defamatory information which, during the war, became a major vehicle of defence of Hitler’s regime. There is also another use of the term used in French and called *propagande commerciale*, which in English is usually treated under headings such as “advertising” or “publicity” but will not concern us here.

“Propaganda” is not normally a term used along with “British” or “English”. This is because the values attributed to the British Empire and the British Commonwealth were normally considered by its subjects or later, by the citizens of independent countries, as universally valid. I therefore must qualify my use of the word propaganda in terms of our present post-modern world view. When we look back to the literature of the period, we are stuck by the outlandish terms – in our present vocabulary – to describe the colonial peoples. These are the peoples who until recently were dubbed “native” or “aboriginal” but at the time were often just “savages”. It is with the desire to understand our forbearers and educators that I should like to look particularly at the British Empire, in which I was born and grew up, and the era, which for many of us was one to be proud of – the *Pax Britannica*.

The term *pax Britannica* was modelled on the term *pax Romana* and this is usually understood as the period in the Roman Empire when peace prevailed from being subjected to the higher power of Rome. A similar peace might be supposed to have prevailed in the world from the time of Napoleon’s defeat at Waterloo until the First World War, and this has often been called the *pax Britannica*. This is the time when one might sing with confidence, “Rule Britannia, Britannia rule the waves” but, as with all jingoism, the idea must be swallowed with a great grain of salt. There were certainly wars raging on the Continent – the Franco-Prussian War – and in the British Empire itself there were terrible suppressions, such as the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the Louis Riel Rebellion in Canada, the Boer War in South Africa etc. John Keay in his recent *A History of India* (2000) notes that in the experience of most Indians the meaning was “Tax Britannica” alluding to the fact that the stability of British rule did not come cheap and that the massive deforestations in India 1780 might be called the “Axe Britannica (Keay 2000: 414-415).

The most eminent defender of the values of the British Empire and also the first Englishman to receive the Nobel Prize (1907) was Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936). His novel *Kim* (1901) is still read and the novel was a magnificent appeal to British Imperial values. An author less known today than Kipling is G.A. Henty (1832-1902), whose name was a household word at the end of the Victorian era. He wrote over 80 books, mainly adventure stories for boys, and in them Imperial values of daring, bravery (often called “pluck”) submission to discipline are highlighted. At the height of his fame over 200,000 titles a year were sold in Britain and another 50,000 in America. Henty was at first a journalist and was active in many of the events of the second half of the century. He accompanied Garibaldi on his invasion of the Tyrol in 1866, reported on the Franco-

Prussian War and nearly starved to death during the siege of Paris in 1870-71. He even accompanied the Prince of Wales on his tour to India in 1875.

Henty wrote books which dealt with the history and heroes of the Empire. In this undertaking, he endeavoured to be as close to facts as possible and thus his novels are a very good introduction to Imperial history. I have here selected two of them which were both very popular and still are in some circles because they deal with the two greatest lands of the Empire, the first Dominion – Canada - and its conquest in 1759 by James Wolfe (1727-59), and the “brightest star in the Imperial crown” – India, which was conquered from the French by Robert Clive (1725-74). Queen Victoria was proclaimed Empress of India in 1876 and it was only in 1947 that India attained dominion status and then became the first republic in the Commonwealth in 1950. His novel about India, *With Clive in India* (1884) was followed by *With Wolfe in Canada* (1887) three years later. Historically, both novels are contemporaneous in that they concern the period of the Seven Years War (1756-1763), at the outcome of which Britain gained Canada and India by the Treaty of Versailles of 1763.

I shall now first deal with the elements of propaganda in *With Clive in India*. The actual plot of the novel is simple. Charlie Marryat in order to earn his livelihood joins the East India Company and is sent to India as a clerk. He finds office life boring and eventually ends up fighting in the army for British interests under the command of Robert Clive. Having served faithfully and after many adventures, he returns home with his two loyal friends and servants and marries the girl from his youth and lives happily ever after.

The propagandistic message, aside from descriptive history, can be classified under certain headings which serve as *topoi* of colonialist and imperialist literature in general. To begin with there is a need for the justification of British or European rule over other peoples. Intimately connected with this is the classification of peoples. It goes without question that the colonising people come first followed by the “natives”. But of course this is too simplistic, especially for an empire which was to control one fourth of the world’s territory. The motherland itself was an amalgam of peoples, not only in respect to national origin but also as to social class. The “natives” or the “Others” were by no means unanimous in their opposition to colonial rule, a point all too frequently glossed over by present-day historians. It was however in the interests of the colonisers to exploit any divisions and to use any collaboration from the colonised peoples. In close juxtaposition with the justification of British rule, there was the need for an imperial dogma – points on which all people in this vast Empire could adhere to and believe in. These are essentially what might be called “Victorian values”. They had, at least on the surface, to be universal enough so as to embrace all the peoples of the Empire. There is thus even a touch of republicanism in the sense that all peoples are equal, regardless of their colour, and that climbing the social ladder is open to all – with the proviso that one receives an education and accepts Imperial doctrine.

Henty is typical of the male Victorian in his treatment of women. We must not however be too critical on this point as feminism was not of the same ideological significance as it is today. Aside from the irony of the fact that the “Great White Mother” was at the head of it all, empire building itself was a man’s world. The women in both *With Clive in*

India and *With Wolfe in Canada* never set foot out of the England, but keep the home fires burning. It was male bonding which made the Empire.

I should now like to give some examples of the above-mentioned commonplaces as seen in *With Clive in India*. One of the justifications of British rule in India is based on the fact that historically India has always been a land of the conquered. Charlie Marryat the hero of the novel learns that the inhabitants of Southern India, the Hindus had for centuries been ruled by foreign masters. The Indians, we are told, were used to foreign invasions since the time of Alexander the Great. They do not really care who rules over them as long as there is some kind of order:

The Mohammedans from the north had been their conquerors. The sole desire was for peace and protection and they (the Indians) therefore, ever inclined towards the side that seemed strongest. Their sympathies were no stronger with their Mohammedan rulers than with the French or English, and they only hoped that whatever power was strongest might conquer...(Henty 2006:66).

Added to this is the assumed incompetence of Indians governing Indians:

The Indian soldiers and inferior officers, knowing nothing of the treachery of their chiefs...(Henty 2006:186).

The classic work of British imperialism in India is of course Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* which appeared in 1902. This novel is meant for adults and is also a work of great poetic and philosophical depth. Nevertheless, there is a theme which connects it with *With Clive in India* and this, according to the critic Edward Said in his introduction to *Kim*, is "the one thing that remains constant, however, is the inferiority of the non-white (Said 1987:30).

In Henty, one finds this prejudice carried to an extreme. Not content with racially slanderous language such as his descriptions of Indians as, "niggers" and "looking for all the world like a monkey", the question of interracial marriage is proscribed. This book, appearing just fifteen years after the publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) takes quite literally a separation of the races. When the grave Scottish corporal suggest to the young Irishman, Tim Kelly, that he should learn the native language if he were to marry a native woman, he makes a "comical" outburst of protest which at the same time serves to show the lower status of the Irish in the Empire:

"The saints defend us!" Tim exclaimed; and what put such an idea in your head, Corporal? It's nayther more nor less than an insult to suppose that I, a dacent boy, and brought up under the teaching of Father O'Shea, should marry a hathen black woman...(Henty 2006:179)

It was just at this time that Prime Minister Gladstone had introduced a bill for Home Rule in Ireland, and which was defeated. In the character of Tim Kelly, a loyal servant and friend of Charlie Marryat, it would seem that Henty is trying to show us the innate ignorance of the Irish without British guidance and also the fact, that one of their

obstacles to progress is their Roman Catholic faith. The Scots, seen in the corporal are portrayed as gruff but intelligent, and of course, of solid Protestant faith. Naturally, the Indians in the world Empire are never completely dismissed. All peoples have their good points and their uses. Charlie, ever the conciliating and level-headed Englishman, remarks:

“They are wonderfully clever and ingenious...Look what rough tools that man is working with, and what delicate and intricate work he is turning out. If these fellows could but fight as well and they work, and were but united among themselves, not only would we be unable to set foot in India... but the emperor would be able to threaten Europe.”

The peoples of the Empire are united in harmony around the English. One character, Hossein, a Muslim, has rejected his own people, and seeing the light, becomes Charlie's servant. We are told that between Hossein and Tim Kelly there was “a sort of brotherly attachment, arising from their mutual love of their master” (Henty 2006:155) and if this sounds like a little, innocent Victorian male bonding any spurious suspicions are dispersed at the end of the book with a quite pleasant surprise. We learn suddenly that the racial bar has been lifted – in England – and that Hossein, “to the great amusement of his master and mistress” is going to marry Charlie's cook. We are told that the pretty cook “made no objection to his (Hossein's) swarthy hue” (Henty 2006:236).

If women come last in Henty, it is with good reason. They come only at the beginning and at the end of *With Clive in India* and also *With Wolfe in Canada*. Without question the most important woman is the widowed mother, who is always concerned about her son “out there”. In the end, however, the wandering son returns home a hero and marries a home-spun local girl and lives happily ever after. There are no women to divert him in his task of empire building overseas, and the role of women seems to be in the procreation of the race. As Elleke Boehmer in her *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature* remarks:

The British Empire, it is plain to see, was a man's world, much more emphatically so than was Victorian patriarchal society back in Britain. From the beginning of the Empire, the expanding colonies had offered the ‘mother country’ a practice and testing ground for its manhood (Boehmer 1995:74).

The establishment of a British presence in North America and particularly in Canada is the historical background for *With Wolfe in Canada*. Here the situation was quite different from that of India but, as we shall see, similar commonplaces occur. Quite quickly summarised, the plot is similar to *With Clive in India*. A young Englishman, James Walsham, of modest family and means is the hero of the tale. He is simple and plain-spoken and is particularly renowned for his courage, having rescued the lives of fishermen in the village during a storm at sea and particularly, in having protected a young girl, Aggie, from the brutal treatment of one, Richard Horton, a handsome lad but a bully and also a family member of the house the local squire. James eventually ends up in the American colonies and joins a battalion that is headed by Colonel George Washington, for whom he acts as a scout and aide-de-camp. Washington is engaged in fending off the French – allied with the redskins - who are intent on hemming in the Thirteen Colonies so that they can keep for themselves most of the land beyond the

Mississippi and of course Canada. After many heroic adventures, James Walsham eventually ends up at the siege of Quebec in 1759 and, having assisted Wolfe's army by finding a secret path up to the Plains of Abraham, is honoured by Wolfe as the latter lies dying. James then returns to England, marries Aggie, who is now a very attractive lady, and lives happily ever after. The rogue Richard Horton, was also at the siege of Quebec but betrayed the British army and is sentenced to death for treason. Our hero James pleads for him (he had intended for James to be killed) and secretly releases him. The scoundrel escapes to the American colonies, but sends a heartfelt and deeply repentant letter of thanks to James.

The elements of propaganda in *With Wolfe in Canada* are essentially those of discrediting the enemy. Strangely enough, the Americans are not considered enemies as the time of the novel is before the American Revolution. In fact, the young George Washington is painted in a very sympathetic light, but of course he is the offspring of a very old English family established in the colonies. The real enemy, of course, are the French and their allies, the native peoples of the Americas, always referred to as "redskins" or worse, "savages". The situation is quite different from India in that there was, and never had been, an established government in the Americas before the coming of the Europeans. Thus, the native peoples, after vicious battles, usually formed alliances with either the English or the French. The Mohawks tended to go with the English whereas the Hurons went with the French. Once an alliance had been formed, there was usually a loyalty to the nation in question and the redskins fought valiantly on one side or the other. They naturally picked up the cultural habits of their masters, but in most cases lived quite apart from them and continued their own lifestyle.

It should be pointed out also, that there is a distinct distinction made between the colonist, either English or French and the new arrivals from the old country. The former are often depicted as country bumpkins with very little education and this is shown in dialogues where Henty has them speak ungrammatically. But certainly, the worst of all are the Canadians, which in the novel is used exclusively for Frenchmen born in the new world, an obvious translation of *les canadiens*, by which term the Quebecois were normally known. They have a very close relation with the redskins and have picked up many of their "savage" customs. The connivance of the two is a constant theme of Henty:

...Canadians and Indians had left the scene of action, and had returned to the scene of the fight in the wood, to plunder and scalp the dead. (Henty: 2008:149).

The two are noted for sneak attacks, but are cowards when it comes to manly fighting. "The Canadians and the Indians, outnumbering their assailants greatly, fought for some time, but were finally defeated and fled (Henty 2008:149). Although they do not cook their enemies, they show no resistance to these practices done by the redskins:

At five in the morning the Indians entered the huts, dragged out the inmates, tomahawked and scalped them before the eyes of Whitworth, and in the presence of La Corne and other Canadian officers ... as well as a French guard stationed within forty feet of the spot....none of whom did anything to protect the wounded men (Henty 2008:223).

Wolfe made it abundantly clear that women and children were to be treated with honour. How different from the enemy:

Vaudreuil (governor of New France)...was himself was answerable for atrocities incomparably worse, and on a far larger scale, for he had, for year, sent his savages, red and white, along a frontier of 600miles, to waste, burn, and murder at will, and these, as he was perfectly aware, spared neither age nor sex. (Henty 2008:250).

We are told moreover that “the Canadians deserted in great numbers...” (Henty 2008:251)

As for the English born in the New World, i.e. in the Thirteen Colonies, we learn also that they have a more intimate relationship with the native peoples. Nat, for example, one of the scouts that James Walsham becomes friendly with in the colonies, explains to the latter all the lore that he has learnt from the redskins about tracking in the woods. But there is also a racial difference which the white man cannot hope to cross. Nat remarks:

For a white man, my eyes are good but they are not a patch on the redskin’s. I have lived among the woods since I was a boy; but even now, a redskin lad can pick up a trail and follow it when, look as I will, I can’t see as a blade of grass has been bruised. No; these things is partly natur and partly practice. Practice will do a lot for a white man; but it won’t take him up to redskin natur” (Henty: 2008:156).

It seems that this thinking is more in line with Herder, in that all peoples have their special qualities, and in this sense there is a Romantic admiration of the redskin. In contrast to this thinking is the spirit of tolerance and enlightenment proclaimed in idealist societies. This was particularly the case in the colony of Pennsylvania, where the Quaker Assembly refused to vote money for the unhappy colonists on the frontier. “They held it a sin to fight and above all to fight with Indians...” (Henty 2008:138). This type of pacifism is obviously not to the liking of Henty who is always ready for a battle and believes it is in the man’s character to fight. For him, the Quakers have adopted an unnatural view of life.

This stamp of character cannot be changed. This is particularly apparent in Henty’s treatment of women. They make no appearance in his works except at the beginning and the end. Aggie’s grandfather - her voice of wisdom – gives us a perfect vision of Victorian womanhood:

Men and boys have to work. They go about in ships, or as soldiers to fight for their country, just as I did. Girls and women have to stop at home, and keep house, and nurse babies, and that sort of thing. God made man to be hard and rough, and to work and go about. He made woman gentle and soft, to stop at home and make things comfortable (Henty 2008:26).

To conclude this presentation, I should like to look at some common points of the imperialist propaganda as applied by Henty towards India and Canada.

It should be pointed out that historically-speaking, Henty is rendering a helpful service to educators. For the most part, his material is accurate and informative and his young readers should gain a better understanding of history through his works. Added to the

real facts and events, he has the amazing talent of stimulating young minds with stirring adventures and of highlighting real heroes such as Clive and Wolfe, who enter into his own fictitious characters, such as Charlie Marryat and James Walsham.

The propagandistic element is revealed chiefly in his treatment of the enemy. The arch-enemy of both novels, because they are based on the Seven Years War are the French. As we have seen, the French are divided between the French from France and the Canadians. The former are not the most courageous but on the whole are reasonable and polite whereas the latter, the French Canadians, have mixed too much with the natives and thus have become more primitive. The lesson is thus obvious, that interbreeding leads to weakness. On the other hand, there is also the hint that the French character is itself more like that of the natives, and it is this fact which attracts the two peoples, or as Henty would say, races. France is in all respects considered a rather benign coloniser and it is just this element which is its defect.

There can be no doubt that, had they been able to look into the future, every Indian on the continent would have joined the French in their effort to crush the English colonies. Had France remained master of America the Indians might, even now, be roaming free and unmolested on the lands of their fathers. France is not a colonising nation. She would have traded with the Indians, would have endeavoured to Christianise them, and would have left them their land and freedom, well satisfied with the fact that the flag of France should wave over so vast an extent of country; but England conquering the soil, her armies of emigrants pressed west, and the red man is fast becoming extinct on the continent of which he was once the lord. (Henty 2008:125).

Although this statement may appear most enlightened by our standards today, we may be sure that, from a Darwinian point of view, it is a sign of weakness. The French, do not have the stamina to found an empire. Moreover, Henty in his treatment of the redskin has inverted the Rousseau's myth of the "noble savage" and has rather portrayed them as the "ignoble savage".

One final point might be the reception of both novels. *With Clive in India* was perhaps the most successful and this might be based on the fact that it was meant for reading in the "White Commonwealth" i.e. the U.K., Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Indian children would obviously have little to identify with in Clive. Quite to the contrary, he could easily be interpreted as the destroyer of a remarkable civilisation. *With Wolfe in Canada* however the situation was entirely different. Many young English boys would be fascinated with the "redskins" as they would be later with a whole series of literature of cowboys and Indians. Henty's novels thus generated an interest and enthusiasm in the new lands of the empire at a time when many British families were seriously considering the prospects of emigration to Canada. This aspect was greatly encouraged by the British Government. The newly founded Dominion of Canada (1867) was in fact to be a model of Anglo-Saxon democracy – including French Canadians – in British North America.

Pax Britannica Propaganda had thus, as most propaganda, a negative aspect, but there was also a positive side. It was certainly negative initially in its regard to non-Anglo-Saxon peoples, who had to be subdued for the imperial order to prevail. Later, however, this attitude gradually changed, as it had to in an Empire and Commonwealth of

universal magnitude. There was an evolution in thinking. Present-day views on the role of colonialism are quite varied, but this is a question for another symposium. I think that we will all agree that propaganda plays an important role in the lives of us all, especially when we are young...and tender. I still remember very vividly its effects on my own life. On entering my first elementary school, *Strathcona*, there was a large picture of Queen Victoria on one side of the entrance hall and on the other side an equally large one of the “Death of Wolfe” – both pictures have always been in my mind. Our first “song” was *God Save the King* and all young Canadians at the time knew the national air, the *Maple Leaf for Ever*, which old-timers will remember began:

In days of yore from Britain’s shore, Wolfe the dauntless hero came....

Neither pictures nor air have ever left me, and I look back with great nostalgia and, yes, pride. My only personal struggle is still the question, “Was it Propaganda or Truth?”

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