

ACTION MAN: ENGLISHNESS IN MACMILLAN'S *ENGLISH MEN OF ACTION* SERIES

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A nation does not express itself through its culture: it is culture that produces "the nation". What is produced is not an identity or a single consciousness—nor necessarily a representation at all—but hierarchically organized values, dispositions, and differences. (Donald 32)

During the last two decades of the nineteenth century the major English publishing houses churned out an enormous number of biographies of statesmen, soldiers, sailors, adventurers and missionaries. While many of these biographies were stand-alone publications, many were published as companion volumes in various biography series. In addition to Macmillan's *English Men of Action* series, which is my interest here, other well-known series included *Twelve English Statesmen* (also Macmillan), *English Worthies* (Longman), *Heroes of the Nations* (Nelson) and *Rulers of India* (Clarendon). In other words, dozens upon dozens of British political and military figures, all neatly packaged in recognisable and well-regulated bundles.

It would be tempting to see this output simply as an expression of the resurgent imperialist nationalism of the time. The celebration of the Imperial spirit certainly runs through all these publishing enterprises, as does a specific set of values articulated as the manifestation of national identity, of "Englishness": manliness, courage, humility and fairness. Indeed, as John MacKenzie has pointed out, "hero publishing," with its strong links to the evangelical movement, was just one layer of popular publishing—along with adventure tales, romances and juvenile periodicals—which disseminated imperialist ideology in the late nineteenth century (203-15). While it is true that these publishing ventures fed a significant public demand (their commercial success also explains their popularity with publishers and writers), it does not necessarily follow that the demand was only for the celebration of empire—after all, the *Dictionary of National Biography* and Macmillan's *English Men of Letters* hardly fit that category—and we would do well to take Paul Rich's observation that while imperialism "came to define a considerable variety of English national ideals from the 1880s onwards, it was by no means a complete or all-embracing phenomenon" (25).

I want to offer a different kind of explanation for the plethora of biographies, one that focuses less on the *celebration* of the national identity of a great Imperial state and more on the *quest* for a national identity. According to my explanation, the *English Men of Action* series, while replete with imperialist ideology, can be viewed as part of a complex and wide-ranging negotiation of quite distinct ideals and values in which Englishness is more ambiguous and over determined than one might at first expect. This will be shown by demonstrating how certain "hierarchically organised values, dispositions, and differences," as James Donald puts it, construct Englishness in the series.

In *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* Anthony Smith has argued that the transformation of social structures and moral certainties by the processes of modernisation create perceived social and moral crises, one consequence of which is a search for identity and direction.¹ The language of crisis is a convenient one for historians because at least some groups can always be found to experience any given historical moment as a moment of crisis. Nevertheless, it is clear that by the 1860s and 1870s the themes of national fragmentation, moral and social collapse and anxiety about the future were increasingly coming to dominate the cultural landscape. As the social and cultural consequences of mid-century commercial and industrial expansion intersected with economic downturn, “England” and “Englishness” came to act as unifying tropes, codes for dealing intellectually and emotionally with the felt crises of the time. The analysis of these problems, the grounds by which they were understood and the proposed solutions, all depended in part on the sense of an England lost, the kind of an England desired. Understood this way, the employment of Englishness was less the recourse to a given and more the staking of a claim in a contested domain in which several quite distinct versions of the national identity emerged, operated and struggled for supremacy.

This is not to say that there were no versions of the national identity at work in mid-century. But, generally speaking, they are better seen as a state identity, or at least a national identity built upon a fairly specific set of politico-legal values: freedom, liberty and tolerance. This was essentially a liberal version of Englishness in which 1688 was the defining moment. It certainly *had* had a radical edge—the notion of the “freeborn Englishman,” as E.P. Thompson has demonstrated. But that radicalism had lost its edge with the failure of the Chartist movement, and by the middle of the nineteenth century Englishness as liberty and freedom—though still retaining a political dimension which had as its corollary the notion of civic virtue—was firmly attached to commerce, enterprise and the cause of free trade. As Robert Colls puts it, the originating moment of Englishness had been moved back from 1688 to 1588 (44-45). John Lucas has provided a fascinating account of the gradual fusion of patriotism with commercial self-interest from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, and while there were opposing versions of Englishness (provided in part by the Tory conservatism of the pastoral ideal) its association with commercial freedom was paramount by the 1850s.

Such an image of the national identity seemed unable to deal with the rapid and fundamental structural and social shifts that were occurring in the third quarter of the century. As Smith has shown, one common response of intellectuals dealing with “felt crises” of this kind takes the form of a desire to re-create or recapture the ideals or features of a golden past. The ideal of the chivalric code, the fascination with medievalism, the notion of “Merrie England,” and the glorification of Tudor England all attest to this desire. Each of these had its own specific register, of course, and each carried distinct ideological freight. The ideal of chivalry has been well documented (Girouard), and its function as a critique of commercial self-interest explicitly drawn out by Lucas who notes of Tennyson, for instance, that he “sought in ‘chivalric manliness’ an antidote to the selfish aggressions of the 1840s and 50s” (189). “Merrie England,” too, as Rich shows, offered a clear moral critique of industrialism. The valorisation of Tudor England, on the other hand, and the subsequent craze for mock Tudor houses,

¹ See, especially, chapter 8.

took as its defining feature the boldness and nerve of Elizabethan expansion (Colls 44), and was much more in tune with the emerging glorification of empire.

The return to an idealised past is just one possible response to a sense of crisis in the present. A different but related kind of response to the increasing theme of England's fragmentation was to mythologise a rural England of the more recent past. Although concerned more with the early twentieth century, Judy Giles and Tom Middleton point out that "rural England is central to any account of Englishness and yet the rural England which so many writers evoked had either disappeared in the first wave of industrialisation in the nineteenth century or was being changed beyond recognition through the introduction of electricity, the impact of the wireless, increased mechanisation of agriculture, and the expansion of public transport and car ownership" (73). But the myth was both compelling and pervasive, picking up on a pastoral tradition that, as Lucas shows, had provided a potent version of Englishness since the early eighteenth century. In the late nineteenth century it took a variety of forms, from the idealisation of rural work in the guise of the sturdy English yeoman, through assertions about organic communities, to pictures of cottage gardens, rambling roses and the thatched cottages of the South Downs.² The key point is that, regardless of the particular form taken, these quite specific local and contingent rural images were offered as metaphors for the essence of England untouched by an urban life described more and more in terms of decay and degeneration.

It is not surprising that the common feature of all these idealisations of the countryside was an emphasis on health and wholeness; the rural ideal was, in part, another means by which the increasingly pervasive discourse of "contamination" was articulated in the second half of the century. At the most obvious level of physical well-being, the cholera epidemics of the 1830s and 1840s created the conditions for this discourse. But the fear of physical contamination was soon extended to cultural contamination (sensation fiction of the 1860s; French realism; the new journalism) and political contamination (the effects of the extension of the franchise). The most hysterical expressions were articulated in the intersecting realms of morality and race as the findings of the social explorers were popularised and recycled. And, of course, one of the great ironies of empire was that it threatened to swamp what it meant to be a British citizen by including supposedly inferior colonial races as members.³ A visible reminder of the last point was the sheer number of colonial subjects, Asian sailors in particular, who took up residence in the East End of London. We can see the East End as the site, not just of the degradation of the English race, but of the colonial East in the heart of the nation, and we can read the establishment of Settlement Houses and the London City Mission (aimed at the English lower classes) and the Strangers' Home for Asiatics, Africans and South Sea Islanders (founded in 1857) as attempts at moral and cultural prophylaxis.

The discourse of contamination does not exist by itself. It requires a corresponding discourse of purity. The rural myth and those of Elizabethan England and "Merrie England" all fed into this discourse, but its penetration throughout the culture can be seen even in the field of language itself where, as Tony Crowley shows, the development and acceptance of concepts such as received standard English (in

² See Gervais (chapter 1) and Hawkins, for useful discussion of this.

³ See Lindeborg, especially, 383.

pronunciation) and standard literary English through societies such as the Early English Text Society (EETS) and later the Society for Pure English hinged precisely on an opposition between purity and contamination. Its pertinence to questions of national identity can be seen in this quotation from Professor Selley's comments in the 1868 Report of the EETS: "Classical studies may make a man intellectual, but the study of the native literature has a moral effect as well. *It is the true ground and foundation of patriotism*. . . . Not dilettante Antiquarianism, but duty to England is the motive of the Society's workers" (Crowley 123).

It was at the level of race, though, that the discourse of purity took its most virulent form. Propelled by the idea of the *distinctiveness* of races, this discourse was concerned to establish unique racial grounds for the English. In the case of Britain's colonial subjects in India, Asia, Africa and Australasia, the results were often catastrophic. But racial purity was an issue closer to home as well. Whereas earlier in the century the "genius" of the British was constructed in part through the fusion of their Celtic, Saxon and Norman heritage, by the 1860s the tendency was to distinguish the Celtic and Saxon "types," a distinction that came to dominate cultural debate in the following decades.

In a very real sense, it was not that there were clear and unambiguous understandings of English national identity that were in danger of being contaminated, but that vague and inarticulated fears *required* an essence, a purity around which they could cohere as expressions of Otherness. So, for example, even in the case of British citizenship, a distinction could be made between a British identity (belonging to and being a member of the Imperial state) and an English identity (a set of ideal moral and social characteristics and behaviours). As we will see, certain non-English members of the British state, in particular the Scots and Irish, could be invested with Englishness (*English Men of Letters* and *English Men of Action* included Scottish and Irish writers, soldiers and sailors). But generally speaking, Englishness was an essence, a way of distinguishing the core group from others, though of such value that it would serve as an example for those others who also constituted the British state.

This exemplary function of Englishness came to be articulated through a particular concept, that of "character," which became the shorthand term for a limited and limiting set of idealised and overlapping behaviours, traits or features. To have "character" was to *be* English, so any version of Englishness wanting validation necessarily arrogated to itself the formation, development or expression of character. Stefan Collini has usefully mapped out some of the contours of the idea of character in the second half of the nineteenth century. In his view the concept was essentially a mid-Victorian development of which two "preconditions" were Evangelical Christianity and "a reaction against the alleged vices and indulgences of the territorial aristocracy, especially in their metropolitan form" (105-06). The first of these provided a link between economic activity and moral worth, while the second helped break the link between moral worth and social position and in so doing provided critiques of the politics of deference. Instead, assertiveness was valorised: a "manliness" that was to become especially dominant later in the century. Much as we would have suspected, Collini's list of the "basic core of values invoked by the evaluative sense of character" includes self-restraint, perseverance, strenuous effort, courage in the face of adversity and duty (100).

Where Collini's account is particularly useful for our purposes is in his suggestion that the idea of character was "an ideal peculiarly suited to a future of unknown circumstances":

This applied with felt power to economic life as the individual member of the middle and working classes might experience it; it was part of the anxiety of those contemplating an extension of the franchise, as all the catchphrases about "shooting Niagara" and "a leap in the dark" remind us; and it seemed to be almost a defining characteristic of the many forms of colonial experience towards which so much of late nineteenth-century character-training was directed. In travelling to these unknown futures, well-maintained habits and a breakdown-free will were essential. (113-14)

This accords with Smith's argument that versions of the national identity are generated as responses to anxieties and felt crises. To have "character" was to be able to shore oneself up against the unknown and the feared, so it comes as no surprise to see the resonances between the idea of character and the articulations of Englishness. This is particularly the case by late century when the character who was most frequently put forward as representing "character" was the Imperial hero:

Typically a soldier or explorer [who] knew, and in some cases courted, an isolation that was at once more obvious and more exotic [than the mid-Victorian moral hero]. Lost, beyond the reach of courier or telegraph; up country, days from the nearest white man; surrounded, the last officer still on his feet—in these situations the measure of a man (the **maleness** was **more** emphatic than ever) lay in not "cracking" under the **pressure**. (Collini 116)

Collini's point is well taken, but the Imperial hero was not the only late nineteenth-century moral hero imbued with the qualities of character. And "manliness," as we can see in the writing of Arthur Quiller-Couch and other anti-imperial liberal journalists at the turn of the century, did not necessarily imply imperialism. Nevertheless, the general association of character with action and work, "doing" rather than "thinking," gave to quite competing ideas of Englishness a "practical" grain that was carried through into at least the middle of the twentieth century.⁴

If Englishness was in part the articulation of particular character types exhibiting "character," the attractions of biography as a cultural form become apparent. There are several reasons for this. Victorian biography characteristically offered to its readers the exemplary life, and its instructional design was well established (we need only think of Samuel Smiles's use of biographical sketches in his arguments celebrating individual achievement and striving). By the late nineteenth century exemplary lives were frequently those that were able to cope under extreme or adverse conditions in the sense outlined by Collini above (the heroes of *English Men of Action* fall into this category). Biography, then, had a conventional authority, the authority of the "moral exemplum."

⁴ See Stapleton, especially 116-19.

But, as David Amigoni argues, it came to have a discursive authority too. Amigoni locates this authority in the influence of positivism on an intellectual formation including J.R. Seeley, Frederic Harrison and John Morley, and argues that “the ‘biography of the statesman’ became the strategic tool of an intellectual formation which was committed to the reconstruction of public opinion through history as a discipline” (92). A biography, in other words, was not only an exemplary narrative, but a “true” or “objective” narrative whose truth and objectivity enhanced its exemplary status. It had an institutional authority—particularly acute in the case of biography series—simply by virtue of its eminence in the publishing industry. How, then, does a series like *English Men of Action* utilise this authority in the production of Englishness? And to pick up on Donald’s epigraph to this article, how is the Englishness, which is articulated and contested within the series, generated from the “hierarchically organised values, dispositions, and differences” that structure the volumes which comprise it?

The series began in February 1889 with the following announcement: “Messrs Macmillan & Co have to announce the publication of a series of biographies under this title [*English Men of Action*]. It will be confined to subjects of the British Crown who have in any capacity, at home or abroad, by land or sea, been conspicuous for their actions in its services.” The books were to appear at monthly intervals and, as sixteen of them did come out in 1889 and 1890, that schedule must by and large have been met. Only Hannay’s *Rodney* (1891) and Morris’s *Montrose* (1892) were late, and the publication of six more volumes in 1895 suggests that the series must have been successful enough for Macmillan to continue with the formula after such a gap. Given that each volume was priced at 2/6, regular monthly purchase of the volumes would have required at least a lower middle-class income, although purchase for school prizes and school text-books would have been in keeping with contemporary practice. There is no evidence on the print runs, but many of the volumes were reprinted up to seven and eight times between first publication and 1914, with Butler’s *Charles George Gordon* (1889) being reprinted in 1889, 1891, 1892, 1893, 1897, 1898, 1899, 1901, 1907, 1911, 1913 (twice), and again in 1919 and 1920. In this context it is not unreasonable to conclude that the series reached a significant readership over two generations at least.

Altogether, twenty-four books by twenty writers were published, with three more commissioned but not published. The subjects of these biographies run from Henry V and Warwick the King-maker in the fifteenth century, through Drake in the sixteenth, Montrose and Dampier in the seventeenth, Clive and Captain Cook in the eighteenth, to Livingstone and General Gordon in the nineteenth century (see full list at end of article). A similar sample of the authors reveals them to be an interesting mix as well. They include some literary figures still reasonably familiar today such as Walter Besant, Archibald Forbes and Thomas Hughes. As for the others, most have sunk without trace, but even so it is clear that they were relatively important, well-known and culturally productive figures of their time, often being the authors of other naval or military histories.

David Hannay, for instance, author of the volume on Admiral Rodney, wrote many introductions to the novels of Captain Marryat as well as *Admiral Blake* for Longman’s *English Worthies* series (General Editor, Andrew Lang). William Clark Russell, who did the volume on Dampier, wrote the introductions to several of Melville’s novels and many of Marryat’s novels as well as dozens of sea-faring romances. Sir Rennell Rodd, author of *Sir Walter Raleigh*, was also a poet who

published collections such as *Ballads of the Fleet and Other Poems*. Other authors in the series were principally soldiers or administrators who played integral parts in the execution of empire. Sir Charles Wilson, who wrote the volume on Clive, was an explorer who wrote on the Middle-East, especially Palestine. He also annotated various texts for the Library of the Palestine Pilgrim's Text Society. Like Sir William Butler, who wrote the volumes on Napier and Gordon, Wilson was a member of the expeditionary force sent to relieve Gordon at Khartoum. Finally, Sir Richard Temple, author of *Lord Lawrence*, was a Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in the 1870s, a Conservative Member of Parliament from 1886 to 1892, and editor of various papers of Middle-East and Indian explorers as well as writing several books on India. These examples suggest the tenor of the series.

It is unclear who was responsible for conceiving *English Men of Action*. We know that the General Editor was Mowbray Morris and there is evidence in the correspondence of Sir Julian Corbett (who wrote *Monk and Drake*) to Frederick Macmillan to suggest that it was Morris and not Macmillan who initiated contact with prospective authors. On the other hand, Morris's role seems to have been less public and possibly less central than that of John Morley's in the *English Men of Letters* series; Morley's general editorship was prominently advertised and his name closely associated with that series. We do know from Thomas Hughes's letters to Macmillan that the firm commissioned him in 1887 to initiate the series with his biography of Livingstone, but unfortunately there is nothing to indicate if it was Morris or Macmillan himself who thought up the series. (Because of sickness, Hughes was unable to manage it in time, and the series began in February 1889 with Sir William Butler's *Gordon*, another figure in the forefront of the public mind at the time.) It is not even clear if all the volumes were commissioned. Certainly there was at least one author—Arthur Conan Doyle—who offered a volume, though in his case the offer was not taken up. In any event, authorship in the series was worthwhile: payment for each volume seems to have been a flat £100, which was quite good money for books of this kind, though we get some sense of perspective when we read William Clark Russell writing to Macmillan asking him to include the £100 owed for *Dampier* with the £600 payment for his novel *Marooned*.

Any analysis of *English Men of Action* must begin with its existence as a series, and the obvious thing a series does is to provide the opportunity for establishing continuity. In the case of a biography series whose subjects lived at different periods over several centuries, any continuity would be with the past and would most likely comprise a potential tradition of subject-types. As we will see, many of the qualities of the contemporary subjects are similar to those of centuries past. But other connections are made more explicitly. Here is Mowbray Morris, for example, writing on James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, a Scot who fought for the King in the Civil War: "His walls were hung with his bows, just as today the successful cricketers and oarsmen of Oxford and Cambridge arrange round their rooms the instruments of their triumphs" (8). This not only binds past to present, but Scotland to England: the Scots as a kind of proto-English, we could say. In fact, the slippage between England ("English Men of Action") and Britain ("the British Crown") in the Macmillan's introductory announcement is borne out in the subjects of the biographies themselves where several Scots and Irish are magically transformed into Englishmen. In this lexicon the identification of Britain with England serves to remind us of the ways in which the seat

of political and cultural power (England; the present) can invest its local and contingent values with the spirit of universality (Britain; continuity with the past). Yet even here there is not complete uniformity in the series. In his biography of Gordon (a Scot) Sir William Butler (an Irishman) utilises the familiar binary of Celt and Saxon, but re-works it to attribute wit, good humour and an absence of hatred to the former, and affectation of wisdom and “the truly Saxon element of hate” to the latter (83).

We can also say that a biography series—by virtue of its sheer size—has the potential to *authorise* a certain view of biographical writing. For example, the extracts from reviews of all the previous books in the series included at the end of each volume, stress readability through “breezy” or “vigorous” style, and “temperate judgement” (“a singularly vivid and careful word-picture” seems to bring the two together). So vividness and excitement have to sit side by side with care, fairness and temperate judgement. This hints precisely at the mix of “action” and “manliness” yoked together in *Men of Action*. More than anything else, though, truth (meaning “balanced judgement”) is the principal concern. In part this is a matter of sources: the authority of positivism that Amigoni sees developing in biography in the 1870s and 1880s. Alfred Church, for instance, sets his careful reconstruction of the life of Henry V (“now let us examine the facts” [10]) against the foil of Shakespeare’s play, and Charles Oman uses “original authorities” (2) to “trace out with accuracy” (1) the career and character of the Earl of Warwick. Such scholarship is not easy given the romance of these men of action: Julian Corbett notes that in the case of Drake, “even now the most chastened explorer of pay-sheets and reports cannot save his imagination from the taint of the same irrational exultation that possessed the Admiral’s contemporaries” (1).

The opposition between realism and romance implied here is spelt out even more clearly by William Stebbing writing on the Earl of Peterborough (who fought in the Spanish wars of the early eighteenth century): “There are men who enter the region of legend while they are yet living and he was one of them. . . . The world has long made up its mind that all connected with him must be licensed as romance and nobody has ever dared or cared to treat him and his achievements as entirely serious. He has long been measured by a special standard applicable to heroes of historical novels” (225-26). That romance presents a problem in these “heroic” biographies comes as no surprise given the debates about realism and romance in fiction the 1880s. What is interesting is that the arguments in favour of romance in fiction stress the importance of the “ideal” (especially the ideal character) which correlates with Victorian biography’s emphasis on the exemplary life, yet these biographies typically warn against the dangers of romance in biography. Even Hughes, who portrays his Livingstone in almost Christ-like terms, comments that “happily for us all, no character is without its weak side” (3), although in Livingstone’s case this amounts to no more than a spot of youthful graffiti. It seems, in fact, that there are two kinds of authority at work in these biographies. The first is the authority of *method* (objectivity), the second the authority of certain *ends* (shared values) that fit with an ideal of moral training. Wherever it is located, there is throughout the series an articulation of authority with the judgements and opinions that shape and colour the narratives of the various individual subjects.

Because of their conjunction in a series, the effect is to authorise this set of *individual* histories as exemplary moments in a longer *national* history represented as a sequence of exciting wars against the French, the Spanish and various African, Indian and Afghan Others. Two points can be drawn from this. The first is that England is

invariably associated with the forces of modernisation. This takes different forms: in *Henry V* it is the efficiency of the English archers and new techniques of war against the chivalry of the French; in *Drake* it is English Protestantism and “adventurous commerce” (9) against Spain and Catholicism (both associated with the Middle Ages); in *Gordon* it is democracy, energy and kind-heartedness against despotism (the Turks), stasis (China) and cruelty (the Moghuls). If at times the forces of modernisation are represented positively as commerce, expansion and empire, the obverse is also present in the series. In *Warwick*, for example, England in the fifteenth century suffers from “demoralisation,” a “terrible decay in private morals” (8) and a “steady deterioration” (5) while in *Gordon* there is “evidence of deterioration” in the second half of the nineteenth century (21). In both cases the decay is associated with greed, commerce at its most self-interested, and misplaced national pride, although the causes are differently understood. Whatever the causes, it is clear from these and other volumes in the series that putting personal interest before national interest inevitably brings deleterious consequences to both the moral and political fabric of England. It is precisely their commitment to the national interest that characterises the English men of action lionised in the series, and while such an emphasis on national interests is sometimes couched in imperialist terms, it also forms the basis for a critique of imperialism, particularly in the two biographies by Sir William Butler.

The second point to be drawn from the series as a national history of exciting wars is that readers could have the lessons of history with the excitement of Rider Haggard. What we need to query, of course, is the nature of these lessons of history. Protestations about “truth” notwithstanding, these are still partially adventure stories full of the presence of the exotic and the thrill of the quest. The pathos of the death-bed scenes, too, are fairly typical in this respect. Here is Forbes on Colin Campbell:

The end of the old warrior came at last somewhat suddenly. Derangement of the heart had been discovered. . . . Almost to the last his memory would revert to the Highland soldiers who were always so eager to follow where he led. . . . After several rallies [and several more sentences like this], it became evident about noon of the 14th of August that Lord Clyde was sinking fast; and half an hour later, while his sister, General and Mrs Eyre, and his faithful soldier-servant White knelt around him, the veteran of many battles calmly passed to his rest. (220-21)

These narratives do, however, differ from the Adventure romance in important ways. Many of them have chapters or part-chapters after the death scene where the lessons are drawn explicitly. Thomas Hughes, for instance, specifically links Livingstone’s missionary work to the development of trade and the creation of plantations, and thus to employment for the natives, thereby helping to thwart the Arab slave-traders (201-02). In a very different vein the death of Napier allows Sir William Butler to observe that “the life of a dead hero may be said to mark for statesmen and rulers the rocks and shallows of their system of government” (212). Furthermore these narratives also differ from the Adventure romance in their treatment of the relations between hero and Other. It is not just that the Other is dominated—that typically happens in Adventures—but that the *raw power* which lies behind domination is actually foregrounded in the

biographical narrative, and is sometimes as much the subject matter of the narrative as the life itself. This is an important distinction. The *Men of Action* biographies are not simply saying that England is powerful and not to be messed with, though they do indeed say that. More significantly, they are fundamentally concerned with the way power is handled.

This is where “character” as the crucial element of Englishness comes into play. The qualities that are valued, the quintessentially “English” core values that characterise these men of action, emerge from the series as the preferred poles in a range of binaries. So, for example, practical common sense is set against rules and regulations; advancement by worth is set against privilege; plainness is equated with honesty, both of which are set against artifice and duplicity; directness of purpose is set against inaction; and action is set against thought. This is not to attribute consistency to the series as a whole. Apart from variations in usage, the binaries themselves are occasionally subverted. Although action tends to be associated with direct experience and is therefore set against the mistakes caused by theory, many of these men of action are lauded for their reading. And in the case of Gordon, there is quite a complicated process where reading books is less valuable than reading nature, but both contribute to the element of “thinking” (40) which is held to be necessary for the “fighting” man (85).

However they are constructed, these qualities help delineate the core character of the English man of action. Does he also have “character” in the sense adumbrated by Collini? Collini, we recall, offered self-reliance, perseverance, strenuous effort, courage in the face of adversity, and duty as his core of qualities associated with the term “character.” We find these qualities liberally sprinkled throughout the series. Drake, for example, has “fierce self-reliance” (128) and “restless energy” (193); Gordon has “wonderful energy” (85) and knows “the value of following up until the end [is] gained” (79). Loyalty, public service and duty provide a further cluster of core qualities. Even the aristocratic Admiral Rodney exhibits them:

Personally, Rodney was a very complete example of that aristocracy which governed England through the eighteenth century—with much selfishness and much corruption, no doubt, yet in the main with a high spirit, with foresight, with statesmanship, and with glory. It would be absurd to say that he was indifferent to place or money. He desired them both. . . . But the great redeeming quality in Rodney and in all that aristocratic class to which he belonged was this, that they did combine with their self-seeking a very high public spirit. They would intrigue for place, and would in matters of detail allow the interest of ‘the connection’ to go before the good of the State; but when they spoke for their country to the foreigner, then they thought only of the greatness of England. (221-22)

To the extent that qualities of this kind transcend time and class, they are presented as universal values and take on a particular exemplary weight. Their applicability to empire is clear enough, but the list needs extending, and the extended list qualifies the thrust of Collini’s analysis. So, for example, “humanity” is characteristic of Drake, Napier, Livingstone, Campbell and Gordon. Although used in slightly different ways, it is probably close to our use of the word “compassion.”

Moderation and balance are also held in high esteem in many of the volumes, as is purity of life, while tolerance is especially characteristic of Butler's heroes. While these are values that imperial administrators should have, they are clearly not of a piece with the imperial hero portrayed by Henty, Haggard and others, from which Collini's list is constructed.

The volumes in *English Men of Action*, then, have more than a simple and consistent set of qualities that characterises the Englishness of their subjects. Perhaps the key inconsistency is one that Collini notes of the imperial hero: that between loyalty and independence. Forbes's Colin Campbell, who might disagree with Lord Canning but, "disciplined soldier as he was, bowed to the superior authority" (174), typifies the motif of loyalty that runs throughout the series. But so does Butler's Gordon who was "not at all given to bow down before the outer signs and tokens of authority" (11). This is a crucial problem for the writers in the series because to take it seriously is to make manifest a deep conflict between the ideals of Englishness and the realities of the English (or, more accurately, British) State. Accordingly, it is seldom addressed directly. One exception occurs in *Gordon* where Gordon's "spirit of hatred against authority *wrongly used*" (13; my emphasis) allows the critique to proceed, not so much against the State in itself, but against the agents of the State, the petty officials whose greed, ambition and prejudice bring about the moral and political failings of empire.

Power and the misuse of power are thus the hidden heart of this series. The ideal relations of power, in which independence and loyalty can both exist, require mutual respect and honour. This is true not only for the English; those Others who exhibit independence (such as the Sikhs in Forbes's account of Campbell and certain Afghan groups in Butler's account of Napier) are also accorded respect and honour.

In this context the binding element between superior and subordinate is something usually called love. The subordinate is not deferential to the superior officer, does not fawn on him, but obeys him because he loves him. Many of the volumes in the series make this claim, and at least two (*Napier* and *Gordon*) even suggest that a similar relationship exists between these Men of Action and the populace of the colonial country. Of course, this love has to be earned, and this is typically portrayed through the courage of the Man of Action in sharing the dangers. Sympathy, too, is a necessary element on the part of the superior, and often the "simple but direct speech of the soldier" is said to go straight to the heart of his men. We could say that the Man of Action is both them and not them. That is, he is *exemplary*, precisely because he is *like* them but *beyond* them.

In conclusion we could say of the series that it not only spells out a set of exemplary core values but also exhibits a kind of secondary value (which I have extracted as "love") in which the *process* of following the example, or at least of wanting to be like the example, is figured. If this is the case, then even if the core values are ambiguous in their articulation of Englishness, the *Men of Action* series—and possibly others like it—is a valuable site for training readers to *desire* to follow the examples offered them. In that sense its role in the construction and reproduction of Englishness is both subtle and powerful.

English Men of Action Series

In order of publication; all published in London by Macmillan.

1889

Sir William Butler, *General Gordon*
Rev. Alfred J. Church, *Henry the Fifth*
Thomas Hughes, *David Livingstone*
Sir Richard Temple, *Lord Lawrence*
George Hooper, *Wellington*
Charles Oman, *Warwick, the King-Make*
Henry Duff Traill, *Strafford*
Sir Julian Corbett, *Monk (1889)*
William Clark Russell, *Dampier*
Sir Alfred Lyall, *Warren Hastings*

1890

Sir Charles Wilson, *Clive*
Walter Besant, *Captain Cook*
Sir William Butler, *Sir Charles Napier*
Archibald Forbes, *Havelock*
Sir Julian Corbett, *Drake*
William Stebbing, *Peterborough*

1891

David Hannay, *Rodney*

1892

Mowbray Morris, *Montrose*

1895

Archibald Forbes, *Colin Campbell, Lord Clyde*
Sir John Fortesque, *Dundonald*
Sir J.K. Laughton, *Nelson*
Sir Rennell Rodd, *Sir Walter Raleigh*
A.G. Bradley, *Captain John Smith*
A.G. Bradley, *Wolfe*

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