

**PARANOIA, POWER, AND MALE IDENTITY
IN JOHN BUCHAN'S LITERARY WAR**

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores some of the intersections between paranoia, power, and male identity in the first three Hannay novels – *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), *Greenmantle* (1916), and *Mr. Standfast* (1919) – of John Buchan (1875-1940), and the close links between these intersections and the rhetoric and discourses surrounding World War One. It opens by arguing that Buchan's 'Literary War' can itself be thought of as a kind of 'paranoid imaginary' in which cultural fears (particularly fears relating to decadence and degeneration) are projected outwards to return in the romantic guise of hostile foreigners intent on destroying England, and in which the image of the 'strong' masculine self is promoted as a means of protecting the nation. Chapter One argues that *The Thirty-Nine Steps* functions as an extension of the invasion novel tradition in which a model of masculinity derived from the imperial pioneer is offered as such a gesture of self-defence. Chapter Two looks to *Greenmantle*'s problematization of the strong masculine self along two axes of interference: homosexuality and homoerotic desire, and empowered femininity. Chapter Three argues that *Mr. Standfast* brings the Literary War to a close with an image of male power underpinned by the imagery and colours of chivalry. The thesis concludes with a short discussion of some of the innate problems and nuances of Buchan's recourse to the paranoid imaginary.

For my parents, who have never questioned and always supported,

and for Alice, in whom everything I desire now converges.

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Abbreviations

Works by John Buchan

- G* *Greenmantle* (1916), ed. Kate Macdonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
- MHD* *Memory Hold-the-Door* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940)
- MS* *Mr. Standfast* (1919), ed. William Buchan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)
- TN* *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), ed. John Keegan (London: Penguin, 2004)

Works by others

- PN* Sigmund Freud, ‘Psycho-Analytic Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey *et al.*, 24 Vols. (1953-1974; London: Vintage, 2001) xii. pp. 3-82
- RS* Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), ed. David Trotter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- WWC* Saki, *When William Came* (1913; London: John Lane, 1926)

Emphases are as in the original, unless otherwise stated.

0. Introduction

Action was his prime interest, and men in action his absorbing study – most of all, men in heroic action.

Catherine Carswell¹

...it was the men who interested me most.

Richard Hannay²

The nature of male identity was always a key interest of John Buchan (1875-1940). In books as varied as his romances (a category including historical fictions, spy thrillers, and adventure stories), biographies, memoirs, and political treatises, it is the world of men and the types of identities available to or constructed by that world, from the late-Victorian to the inter-war periods, to which he persistently returns. This is especially true of the Richard Hannay sequence, a five novel series starting with *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) and ending with *The Island of Sheep* (1936).³ Taken together, these texts offer a wide-ranging investigation into the impact of twentieth-century modernity on Victorian conceptions of gentlemanliness and heroism, and, in particular, they explore the development of the male secret agent figure from the gentleman amateur as that figure was finding an institutional identity of his own in the form of the British Secret Service.⁴ The second and third of Hannay's adventures – *Greenmantle* (1916) and *Mr. Standfast* (1919) – explore this transitional process through a self-contained narrative arc, which ultimately pits Hannay against his most memorable opponent, the devilish Graf Otto von Schwabing, against the political, cultural, and technological shifts of World War One. Buchan's Literary War, as I will label it in later chapters, is clearly concerned with the pressures placed upon men and masculinities, and the diversified kinds of gendered results of those pressures, during the lived experience (Front Line or otherwise) of combat. Whereas it has become a commonplace to speak of Buchan as the progenitor of the modern spy thriller, too rarely is it acknowledged that he was writing about the War, and the ideological and psychological metamorphoses of the men fighting in it, even as its world-shattering events took place.⁵

¹ Susan Tweedsmuir *et al.*, *John Buchan by his Wife and Friends* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947) p. 164.

² MS 29.

³ Miles Donald, 'John Buchan: The Reader's Trap', in Clive Bloom (ed.), *Spy Thrillers: From Buchan to le Carré* (London: Macmillan, 1990) pp. 59-72, at p. 69.

⁴ David A. T. Stafford, 'Spies and Gentleman: The Birth of the British Spy Novel, 1893-1914', *Victorian Studies* 24:4 (Summer 1981): 489-509.

⁵ Christopher Hitchens, 'Great Scot: Between Kipling and Fleming stands John Buchan, the Father of the Modern Spy Thriller', *Atlantic Monthly* 293:2 (March 2004): 104-107.

Buchan's account of male identity cannot be separated from his exploration of the role of power in the formation of a national identity strong enough to protect itself from outside dangers, and the representation of men and male subjectivities in which that nationhood finds its most immediate human line of defence. Underlying his plots of espionage and intrigue is a careful analysis of the varied kinds of power required by the men called upon to safeguard the nation during a period of extended crisis and change: power as knowledge (the power to locate, read, and scrutinize an array of contrasting kinds of data); power as forgiveness (the power to see humanity even in human monstrosity); power as compassion (the power to help those unable to help themselves); and power as intrepidity (the power to overcome overwhelming odds despite the shortcomings of the self). Throughout, the notion of a strong *male* self (be it a strength of aptitude, patriarchy, or righteousness) remains a key concept. If, as John Lash puts it, the heroic male is 'deeply implicated in problems of power', then the Hannay stories certainly prove no exception: they are stories of heroes grappling with grotesque, insufferable opponents, and, equally, measured sermons in which power and its varied benefits and misapplications are subject to extensive and lasting critique.¹ Moreover, underlying these representations of different types of power is a treatment of power as it informs questions of gender: how power, for Buchan, is in the first instance a specifically *male* agency opposed to female vulnerability and feminine degeneracy, and yet – if we read his fiction with due care – a sign of the discursively-constructed nature of gender identity itself.

Given Buchan's interest in the nature of power, it remains puzzling that one of the clearest instances of the representation and investigation of power in his work, the so-called paranoid 'lineaments' or 'underpinnings' of his spy thrillers, has received scant attention from literary critics. While scholars have long observed the 'paranoiac aura' of the spy novel, rarely have they attempted to explore the precise relationship between paranoia and power as evinced by the world of amateur espionage, plotting, and international conspiracy presented in Buchan's Hannay stories.² Likewise, given that paranoia is the most political of suspicious beliefs, 'in the broad sense of centring on power relationships', it is perplexing as to why the intersections between paranoia and gender (itself a hugely overdetermined political category) in Buchan's texts have

¹ John Lash, *The Hero: Manhood and Power* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1995) p. 6.

² John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg, *The Spy Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) p. 55

not received more scrutiny.¹ One consequence of these critical gaps is that the links between paranoia and Buchan's account of heroism in the Hannay novels have gone unexplored. Although paranoia is routinely taken as a key determining factor in the construction of identity in Buchan's novels, the question of how this influences their portrayals of male identity and masculinity has barely been touched upon. Moreover, whether or not there is something problematic about a sequence of books ostensibly concerned with promoting a conservative ethos of male heroism and simultaneously articulating fears of geo-political retrenchment during a period of international crisis remains to be properly scrutinized.

A drawback of most accounts of the paranoid contours of Buchan's writing is an inattention to the semantic fluidity and subtlety of the term 'paranoia' itself. Critics all too frequently label the Hannay stories as 'paranoid' without stopping to explain precisely in what sense it is being defined or, rarer still, to ponder the appropriateness of a term whose psychiatric meaning is highly specific and not inevitably transferable between disciplines. What does it mean to describe the adventures of Richard Hannay as 'paranoid'? Can they properly be defined as such? If so, how? Moreover, what are the ethical consequences of using the term 'paranoia' in this context? Alan Munton has rightly suggested that there are not just methodological obstacles in drawing on a clinical diagnosis (paranoid personality disorder) for literary analysis but a series of moral consequences as well. As he puts it, the belief that a literary critic can make 'a medical diagnosis of a text or a person' is seriously problematic.² Although I have no interest in the mental health of Buchan himself, I think that placing his fiction in some sort of relation to paranoia (both as a variety of individual psychosis and of collective anxiety) can be a profitable, indeed, *necessary* move because it is only in relation to paranoia that Buchan's analysis of power and masculinity comes most fully into view. From this perspective, I contend, it is easier to account for the ways in which Buchan elaborates a notion of male subjectivity in the Hannay stories that is both anti-feminist and politically conservative, and which, finally, is less unassailable as an articulation of ideology than has been traditionally supposed.

¹ Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) p. 17.

² Alan Munton, 'Mad and Bad: Lewis, Psychosis and the Culture of Psychiatry', *Wyndham Lewis Annual* 8 (2001): 77-83, at 83.

Power and Paranoia

'Paranoia' can be a misleading term. In psychiatric usage it refers to a mental disorder characterized by 'a pattern of pervasive distrust and suspiciousness of others such that their motives are interpreted as malevolent'.¹ Those afflicted by this disorder exhibit a variety of symptoms: they presuppose that others will cheat or injure them, even if no supporting evidence of such intent exists; they doubt the loyalty and honesty of loved ones, family, and friends; they become withdrawn, unwilling to confide in associates; they read shameful and ominous meanings into benign observations and events; they persist in bearing grudges, refusing to forgive previous insults or rebuffs; they become overly defensive; and they often show signs of intense jealousy, suspecting spouses or sexual partners of infidelity and betrayal.² Such illness can be intensely distressing for both the afflicted and those caring for and supporting them, and in many instances can lead to hospitalization, infirmity, and extensive therapeutic treatment. Elsewhere, it is more commonly regarded not as a particular set of psychological preconditions but as a general orientation towards the world marked by scepticism, isolation, guardedness, distrust, anxiety, and fear of persecution and conspiracy, all of which have little or no justifiable grounding. In the former, paranoia is a diagnostic and psychopathological entity of medical provenance. In the latter, paranoia is a broad outlook impinging on various human activities, one that is particularly noticeable in the spheres of politics, espionage, and detection, but which, ultimately, cannot be recuperated into any single discursive field.³

Freud understood paranoia as a defensive neurosis that shields the ego from an unbearable, disintegrating sense of self by 'projecting' or impelling painful emotions onto the external world so as to eliminate chaos from subjective reality, a theory he outlined in his reading of Daniel Paul Schreber's *Memoirs of my Nervous Illness* (1903). Schreber's disorder took the form of delusions in which he was tormented by the imminence of Armageddon, his own mortality, and the conscious horror that he was literally being emasculated (transformed into a woman). Over time, Schreber's delusions evolved into a paranoid framework that rationalized them as the end-

¹ *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 4th edn. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994) p. 634.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 634-635.

³ For a more extended discussion of the term 'paranoia' and its various associations than I have space for here, see Daniel Freeman and Philippa A. Garety, *Paranoia: The Psychology of Persecutory Delusions* (London: Routledge, 2004).

products of a conspiracy set in motion by his physician, in whom Schreber saw converging a plot designed to use his body for the purposes of sexual abuse and, moreover, to annihilate Being. This conviction, in turn, became a redemptionist fantasy in which God would impregnate Schreber in order to deliver mankind from sin, thus restoring its lost state of Edenic innocence. As Freud explains, Schreber ‘took up a feminine attitude towards God’ (*PN* 32) enabling him to become His wife, and through which his physician’s conspiratorial intentions could be prevented. For Freud, this secondary and emancipatory period of Schreber’s paranoia both made acceptable his metamorphosis and reinstated his sense of self-esteem and importance: ‘emasculated was now no longer a disgrace’, Freud writes, ‘it became “consonant with the Order of Things”, it took its place in a great cosmic chain of events, and was instrumental in the re-creation of humanity after its extinction’. The tension between ‘shameful’ feminization and persecution was thus resolved: Schreber’s ego ‘found compensation in his megalomania, while his feminine wishful phantasy [*sic*] made its way through and became acceptable’ (*PN* 48).

Despite its difficulties, Schreber’s illness clearly signifies a restitutive process in which he progressed from meaninglessness to a special kind of grandeur enabling him to save the universe, one that, as Robert Robins and Jerrold Post rightly contend, reveals the close link between paranoia and the distribution of power between the Self and the Other.¹ In their view, the paranoiac’s feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, and vulnerability ‘may translate into the sensation of powerlessness, an intolerable feeling that must be defended against’.² For Schreber, this weakness could be overcome only by imagining himself as an emissary of the celestial. Finding himself at the focal point of a hostile conspiracy designed to eradicate not only himself but humanity at large, Schreber’s paranoia modulated into a delusion of grandeur in which he became the saviour of man, God’s chosen instrument for the re-population, regeneration, and purging of the world. He and he alone could liberate humanity from total catastrophe, proof that ‘the individual who returns from the edge of psychological disintegration experiences a purification, an ecstatic new world. In a state of euphoria, the patient has reconstituted himself through a grand scheme that centres on him’.³ Beneath these psychological moves is a twofold development: a recuperation of a sense of

¹ Robert S. Robins and Jerrold M. Post, *Political Paranoia: The Psychopolitics of Hatred* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997) p. 81.

² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

significance which is worthy of an externally-imposed system of persecution, and the acquisition of an imaginary uniqueness in which the paranoiac is bestowed with powers unavailable to others, and which only he can wield with any semblance of purpose or value. Above all, as Freud observes, paranoia is a *constructive* disorder, in which grandeur and centrality give to the paranoiac a restored world: ‘the paranoid [*sic*] builds it again, not more splendid, it is true, but at least so that he can once more live in it. He builds it up by the work of his delusions. *The delusional formation, which we take to be the pathological product, is in reality an attempt at recovery, a process of reconstruction*’ (PN 70-71).

Paranoia and Buchan

On the evidence of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, it is clear that Richard Hannay experiences a comparable – if highly attenuated – series of mental realignments to those suffered by Schreber. Having spent the majority of the narrative verifying the likelihood of and politics behind an imminent German invasion of England, Hannay agitatedly reflects: ‘I felt the sense of danger, and impending calamity, and I had the curious feeling, too, that I alone could avert it, alone could grapple with it’ (TN 87). From this perspective, it is clear that Hannay’s initial amazement at the forces arrayed against him gives way to an immovable conviction in his own omnipotence: despite the aid and support of the British administration, it is he and exclusively *he* who can save England. David Trotter has recently argued that this parallel between Schreber and Hannay, a parallel he identifies as two identical cases of ‘compulsive thinking’, evidences the paranoid underpinnings of not just Buchan’s writing but of Edwardian spy fiction more widely. For Trotter, Edwardian spy novels offer an account of paranoid heroes endowed with a unique variety of professional expertise – the capacity to read the visible world for signs of an invisible but comprehensive design, a ‘skill’ that originates in the paranoid mindset – which enable them to regenerate both themselves and a complacent ruling élite through the acquisition of the power or necessary capacities to thwart conspiracy. Thus, Trotter claims, books such as *The Thirty-Nine Steps* implicitly demonstrate that ‘psychosis may under certain circumstances prove a progressive force.’ As he claims,

what differentiates Hannay from the regular, ‘sane’ heroic protagonist is that ‘he has gone mad, to the lasting benefit of a grateful nation.’¹

This argument is part of a much wider discussion regarding the links between paranoia, professionalization, and literary abstractionism, the underpinnings of which have not gone unquestioned.² However, even on its own terms, Trotter’s reading of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is problematic. One wonders, for example, what clinicians and doctors would make of the belief that psychosis could under particular circumstances prove a *beneficial* force. Trotter’s use of the term ‘psychosis’ itself may in this respect be too clever for its own good, for although it enables him to make the quite accurate suggestion that spy fiction valorizes a suspiciousness which will prevent national catastrophe, it also implicitly glorifies mental illness for the sake of literary-critical swank. To equate Hannay’s mental processes (that is, the paranoid world-view of a fictional character) with the delusions of Schreber is to risk trivializing the latter’s suffering by association: although there are clear links and connections between the two figures, there is a tendency on Trotter’s part to organize Hannay and Schreber into a state of identity which falsifies. Equally falsifying is Trotter’s suggestion that, in becoming paranoid, gentleman amateurs such as Hannay ‘are amateurs no longer’ because they are now endowed with an expertise that ‘distinguishes them both from the public at large, which can just about be forgiven its amateurism concerning affairs of state, and from the ... administrative élite, which had thought itself thoroughly professional but turned out to be merely bureaucratic.’³ Notwithstanding the rather curious claim that paranoia could in any sense be ‘professional’, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in any case quite explicitly rejects professionalism as the route to national salvation, articulating instead in its closing pages a view of the hero as *amateur* spy for whom luck and providence (key terms in Buchan), not the expertise of a James Bond or a George Smiley, ultimately win through.

The central problem with Trotter’s argument as it pertains to *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is that Hannay himself is only paranoid in the loosest sense. Whereas Schreber’s paranoia led to further illness, and, in the end, insanity and death, Hannay’s ‘paranoia’ culminates in a concluding, revelatory moment of truth. The conspiracy in which he

¹ David Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism: Literary Experiment, Psychosis, and the Professionalization of English Society* (Oxford: University Press, 2001) p. 142-145.

² See Andrzej Gasiorek, Rev. of Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism*, in *Modern Language Review* 99:2 (April 2004): 474-476.

³ Trotter, *Paranoid Modernism*, p. 144.

finds himself embroiled, far from representing a delusional reality, does in fact exist (and is in due course prevented). Quite in what sense Hannay could thus be *clinically* paranoid, as Trotter seems to suggest, remains difficult to say. Just because Hannay *seems* paranoid does not imply that the ever-elusive ‘they’ are not out to get him, as it were. His process of regeneration, to borrow Trotter’s phrasing, is not the misleading reconstruction and re-empowerment of ‘true’ paranoia, but, rather, the consequences of *transcending* paranoia in his skirmishes against his and England’s opponents. It is undeniable that *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, as Jerry Palmer argues, is underpinned by ‘a paranoid representation of the world’, but this representation is less a matter of the individual psychopathology of Richard Hannay than of the status of the textuality within which he exists.¹ That is, I claim, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* can only be seen as paranoid in the sense that the novel itself is a kind of paranoid imaginary in which cultural fears (particularly fears relating to decadence and degeneration) are projected outwards to return as hostile foreigners bent on annihilating imperial England, an England as convinced of its own grandiose centrality as of the chinks and weak-spots in its frankly impressive armour.

Buchan himself was no stranger to such fears. For instance, upon taking up his first proper residence in London in 1900, he characterized the city as ‘flat, dingy and inhospitable’ (*MHD* 88), a critique that would prove somewhat representative of his account of English society during the Edwardian period more generally: ‘the historic etiquette was breaking down; in every walk money seemed to count for more; there was a vulgar display of wealth, and a *rastaquouère* craze for luxury. I began to have an ugly fear that the Empire might decay at the heart’ (*MHD* 127-128). Indeed, in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* it is precisely the heart of Britain’s Empire – that is, the urban space of London – which most obviously symbolizes national rot and decline. That Hannay is a colonial outsider (more specifically, a mining engineer from Rhodesia) places him as the perfect ‘exterior’ commentator in this regard. From the moment of his arrival in London he begins to register disgust: ‘the weather made me sick’, he observes, ‘the talk of the ordinary Englishman made me sick, I couldn’t get enough exercise, and the amusements of London seemed as flat as soda-water that has been standing in the sun’. Although in his absence he had come to regard England as ‘a sort of Arabian Nights’, his homecoming confirms the ‘Old Country’ as a site of the abject and the

¹ Jerry Palmer, *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978) p. 86.

alienated (*TN* 7). But if London is a place of putrefaction, then it is also a place which drains the vitality of those inhabiting it. Thus Hannay: ‘here was I, thirty-seven years old, sound in wind and limb, with enough money to have a good time, yawning my head off all day. I had just about settled to clear out and get back to the veld, for I was the best bored man in the United Kingdom’ (*TN* 7-8). In Hannay’s instance, boredom signifies a meaningless urban life, an estrangement in which the metropole functions as the vehicle of futility and disaffection: ‘I returned from the City about three o’clock on that May afternoon pretty well disgusted with life. I had been three months in the Old Country, and was fed up with it’ (*TN* 7).

As we shall see, anxieties concerning various kinds of perceived socio-cultural degeneration are a marked feature of Buchan’s Literary War. However, if it is correct to characterize Buchan’s writing as preoccupied with internal fears that are reflected outwards through paranoia to return in the guise of hostile spies and foreign invaders, then it is equally correct that, in this respect, romance fictions such as *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Greenmantle*, and *Mr. Standfast* are engaged in a critique of a wide assortment of modern and modernizing processes, including: the re-organization of the balance of power between the European industrial nations; a gradual shift from unofficial, *ad hoc* espionage activities to institutionalized forms of global surveillance and intelligence-gathering; and the rise of mechanized warfare, bringing with it unexpected threats to human teleologies and disturbingly innovative means of injury, mutilation, and death. From this perspective, which understands Buchan as an interested, *engaged* writer, it makes little sense to speak of his Literary War as superficially or trivially ‘popular’. Although this view has been a tenacious one, helped no end both by Buchan’s own dismissal of his espionage romances as trifles written for his personal amusement, plus their extraordinarily long-lasting prominence, the Hannay novels are in a very immediate sense incisive explorations of the politically, culturally, technologically, and, indeed, *psychologically* modern. As Michael Denning rightly argues of the spy thriller genre more generally, Buchan’s writing quite clearly provides an account not just of the development of the imperial romance from the late-nineteenth century adventure stories of Rider Haggard and Stevenson, but, revealingly, of the domestic

and international problems experienced by the English centre from which British imperialism issued forth and by which its global strength was determined.¹

Buchan's writings should be seen as part of the same spectrum of imaginative engagement with the nature of twentieth-century modernity as that traditionally felt to include the fictions of such formalist aestheticians as Joseph Conrad or Ford Madox Ford. Buchan's texts are not *modernist*, certainly, but they are certainly *modern*, and they deal with the same political and cultural problems explored by novels such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* or Ford's *Parade's End*, albeit through narrative forms which are far less open-ended, far less inconclusive. Peter Keating's phrase, 'a woven tapestry of interests', is a good metaphor in this regard for describing the polyvalence of a literary sphere which, following the radical transitions in the literary marketplace and the culture of the popular classes between, roughly speaking, the 1880s and the 1920s, makes any clear-cut distinction or separation between 'high' and 'low' forms of literary production difficult to sustain.² Indeed, Buchan himself was aware of the manner in which so-called 'popular' fiction could not easily be dissociated from its ostensibly more 'engaged' counterparts. For him, a popular mode such as romance was easily as suited for investigating the problems and issues of modernity as the self-reflexive inquisitions of a literary modernism. As he writes in the dedicatory pages to *Greenmantle*: 'let no man or woman call its events improbable. The war has driven that word from our vocabulary, and melodrama has become the prosiest realism. Things unimagined before happen daily to our friends by sea and land' (G 3).

My thesis looks at Buchan's writing as a species of *engaged* writing, that is, as a mode of romance in which the transformation in imperialist culture wrought by England's awareness of its radical contingency in turn-of-the-century continental politics, and its part in the period's manoeuvres for imperial hegemony between the European industrial nations, is managed and resolved through stories of conspiracy, intrigue, and espionage. What I want to suggest is that if Buchan's writing represents or stands for a paranoid imaginary in which fears of cultural weakness return from without, it also offers a riposte to those fears in the form of a promotion of a 'strong'

¹ Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987) p. 39.

² 'A Woven Tapestry of Interests' is the title of Chapter Six in Keating's *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel, 1875-1914* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1989). For more on these transitions than I have space for here, see, among many others: Paul Delany, *Literature, Money and the Market* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002); Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

male identity (troped throughout as a metonymic proxy for the empowered imperial nation) capable of withstanding and in most cases overcoming external threats to its purity and agency. At the same I want to emphasize the historical rootedness of this promotion of masculinity, particularly with regard to Buchan's telling exploration of World War One on both the national psyche and those charged with defending it. While Buchan's writing has usually been pigeonholed as offering an account of maleness typically indistinguishable from its nineteenth century antecedents, his Literary War is unarguably an account of the ways in which that maleness was influenced and altered by the events of 1914-1918, an account signalled as much by its depictions of battle and combat as by its drawing upon those discursive structures which were especially prevalent during those years: pluck, comradeship, chivalry. If the Hannay stories are concerned with a masculinity deployed as a counter to paranoid fears of invasion and conquest, then they are only so in relation to a wartime mentality in which men and the world of male bonding acquired an unprecedented level of visibility.¹

My argument is split into three chapters. The first, 'Protecting the Empire: *The Thirty-Nine Steps*', explores the links between Hannay's first adventure and the genre of the invasion novel. I contend that the text's account of masculinity is both a reply to Edwardian fears and anxieties relating to imperial weakness, which were explicitly coded in gendered terms as an emasculation of imperial identity, and an account of a maleness which would soon be of decisive importance in the trench landscapes and battlefields of the Great War. The second chapter, 'Male Solidarity and the Dreadful Feminine: *Greenmantle*', investigates how *Greenmantle* implicitly suggests that the typology of masculinity established in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* needs to be protected from degenerative feminine, feminized, and homosexual threats. Here, the world of all-male solidarity as characterized by the kinship and comradeship of Front Line experience is shown to be under fire from forces attempting to intervene into its unity and thus compromise its effectiveness. By looking at the ways in which the text explicitly and implicitly rejects these forces – which is once more characterized as a metonymic defence of the imperial nation – I will show the ways in which Hannay's second adventure is linked to the ideological credos of male community at work during the Great War. The third, 'The Chivalric Self: *Mr. Standfast*', looks at how

¹ See Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

Hannay's third adventure provides an account of a weary, war-broken society in need of re-vitalization, a re-invigoration the text signals through a deployment of an empowered male identity inseparable from the wartime resurgence of chivalry and courtly logic. My thesis concludes with a short coda in which I reflect on what I take to be some of the revealing nuances of Buchan's double-recourse to the paranoid and the male heroic.

1. Protecting the Homeland: *The Thirty-Nine Steps*

Confined to his bed due to gastrointestinal illness during the closing winter months of 1914, Buchan exhausted his stock of dime novels, and, as he put it, was driven to pen one for his own pleasure. ‘I have amused myself in bed writing a shocker of the style of *The Power House*, only more so’, he wrote to his publisher George Blackwood. ‘It has amused me to write, but whether it will amuse you to read is another matter’.¹ The shocker in question was *The Thirty-Nine Steps*; as Buchan himself described it, that ‘romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible’ (*TN* 3). The story introduces Richard Hannay, a British expatriate and Rhodesian mining engineer recently returned to London, who is approached by a man called Scudder who secretly informs him of a plot to assassinate the Greek Premier, Constantine Karolides. When Scudder is murdered in Hannay’s apartment, he flees to the Scottish hillside in both a desperate attempt to evade Scudder’s assailants – as he recognizes, ‘I would be the next to go. It might be that very night, or next day, or the day after, but my number was up all right’ (*TN* 19) – and the British authorities, who are now chasing him in a frenzied double pursuit. Equipped only with Scudder’s notebook (which contains a mysterious reference to the titular ‘thirty-nine steps’), Hannay must use his wits to survive a determined police hunt and an enemy bent on silencing him no matter the cost. Eventually he reaches and confides in Sir Walter Bullivant, Permanent Secretary at the Foreign Office, proves his innocence, and joins forces with the establishment to solve the riddle of the Sphinx-like thirty-nine steps and thwart his opponent’s plans. In the novel’s famous closing scenes Hannay is brought up against the mysterious Black Stone gang, the German anarchist originators of the Karolides plot and, ultimately, Hannay’s enemy in *Mr. Standfast*. Encircled, the Black Stone announces victory only for the police web to swiftly close in on them. ‘Three weeks later, as all the world knows’, Hannay states, ‘we went to war. I joined the New Army the first week, and owing to my Matabele experience got a captain’s commission straight off. But I had done my best service, I think, before I put on khaki’ (*TN* 113).

For all its apparent pre-War trappings, it is a point infrequently acknowledged that *The Thirty-Nine Steps* was not only written but is also *narrated* from a post-1914

¹ Cited in Andrew Lownie, *John Buchan: The Presbyterian Cavalier* (1995; London: Pimlico, 2002) p. 119.

perspective in which European conflict is taken as an historically-inevitable truth. The point is made several times throughout the text, not least in its concluding sentences. The principal thing Hannay discovers during his reading of Scudder's notebook is that 'it was no question of preventing a war. That was coming, as sure as Christmas: had been arranged, said Scudder, ever since February 1912. Karolides was going to be the occasion' (*TN* 39). As this suggests, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is not just concerned with the *threat* of war but is already implicated in its discursive contours. Equally so, it is clear that *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is a backward-looking text, one that engages with the threat of war and violence as signalled by the late-Victorian invasion scare novel and its metamorphosis during the Edwardian period into what literary historians now label the early spy thriller. What I want to suggest in this chapter is that it is more profitable to view *The Thirty-Nine Steps* as a radically Janus-faced text, one in which defensive rhetoric is not only a recapitulation of the earlier models of spy novelists such as E. Phillips Oppenheim or Erskine Childers, but, moreover, is itself a *production* of a war which has plunged European civilization into chaos. What I find interesting about *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is its articulation of a strong masculine self capable of protecting the British Empire from exterior threats, a self which is clearly a response to the fears of the Edwardian alarmists who gendered imperial weakness in feminine terms, and a gesture towards the kind of manliness required to endure the hardships of the already-present events of the First World War: virile, aggressive, dependable, gregarious. My chapter is split into two sections. First, a discussion of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*'s links with the invasion novel tradition, followed by an examination of the ways in which this tradition fed into and informed Edwardian fears of racial weakness and decline coded as a parallel weakness in male identity. Second, an account of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*'s response to these fears, both in terms of its elaboration of a strong, *powerful* male self and the manner in which this self might itself already be thought part of Buchan's response to the Great War's impact upon society and those called upon to defend it.

Invasion Novels / Novel Invasions

The most elementary anxiety in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, the one which shapes all of its subsequent iterations, is the question of national defence. Archibald Hurd had asserted in 1910 that England's best protective measure against German expansionism was a navy of sufficient strength that it could defend the outermost provinces of the British

Empire as efficiently as London, ‘the Empire’s nerve centre’.¹ It is clear that, in part at least, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* puts forward a comparable view. Despite Scudder’s warning that ‘there was a big subterranean movement going on, engineered by very dangerous people’ to kill Karolides and thus ‘get Russia and Germany at loggerheads (*TN* 10), Hannay ultimately comes to discover that Scudder had told him ‘a pack of lies’ (*TN* 38). Although Karolides will nonetheless be killed, the conspiracy’s true objective is to enable Germany to acquire a statement of the disposition of the British Home Fleet so that England’s shoreline can be ‘silently ringed with mines’ and a submarine put in the path of every unknowing British battleship (*TN* 39-40). England’s complacent belief in its own invulnerability thus hangs on the slim thread of Hannay’s success: ‘the land was so deep in peace that I could scarcely believe that somewhere behind me were those who sought my life; ay, and that in a month’s time, unless I had the almightyest of luck, these round country faces would be pinched and staring, and men would be lying dead in English fields’ (*TN* 40). Hannay’s find is only further reinforced by the naïve objections of Sir Harry Bullivant, the ‘radical candidate’, who dismisses the ‘German menace’ as a Rightist smokescreen designed ‘to cheat the poor of their rights and keep back the great flood of social reform’, and campaigns for a reduction of the British Navy as proof of England’s ‘good faith’ (*TN* 45) in the perilous waters of Anglo-German relations.

In this sense, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* bears the influence of that great *ur-text* of the invasion novel genre, George Chesney’s *The Battle of Dorking* (1871). In contrast to the imperialism of a Trevelyan or a Ruskin, Chesney was concerned to assess the relationship between Britain and the Continent following Prussia’s sudden victories against France, the creation of the Second Reich, and the emergence of Germany as Europe’s dominant political and military power. Although Ruskin was conscious that his dreams of British brilliance were imperilled by ‘the cruel and clamorous jealousies of the nations’, it was Chesney who put this warning in the most unambiguous terms.² Chesney could not trust an imperialism which paid no heed to homeland troubles, in particular: Fenianism, poverty, mass immigration, high birth rates, uninhibited urban development, and Britain’s over-reliance upon foreign markets to support domestic industry. Moreover, Chesney was appalled at the state of Britain’s national defence

¹ Archibald Hurd, ‘England’s Peril: Invasion or Starvation – II’, *Fortnightly Review* (new series) 87 (January-June 1910): 862-873, at 873.

² John Ruskin, ‘Inaugural Lecture’, in *Lectures on Art*, 5th edn. (London: George Allen, 1890) p. 36.

policy, which, in his opinion, was not only undermined by poor maintenance and low expenditure, but, additionally, by meagre conscription quotients and unsatisfactory training for army regulars and volunteers. In *The Battle of Dorking*, encouraged by a German annexation of Holland and Denmark, Britain's complacent ignorance of these problems leads to a premature declaration of war against an enemy whose might it is unable to withstand. With its navies scattered and its armies unprepared, England is invaded and subjugated by the German war machine. As Chesney's narrator laments: 'our handful of regular troops was sacrificed almost to a man in a vain conflict with numbers; our volunteers and militia, with officers who did not know their work, without ammunition of equipment, or staff to superintend, starving in the midst of plenty, we had soon become a helpless mob, fighting desperately here and there, but with whom, as a manoeuvring army, the disciplined invaders did just what they pleased. Happy those whose bones whitened the fields of Surrey; they at least were spared the disgrace we lived to endure'.¹

Chesney's example began an entire tradition of late-Victorian and Edwardian invasion novels obsessed with Germany's expansionist ambitions, and which included texts such as, among a host of others, Louis Tracy's *The Final War* (1896) and *The Invaders* (1901), Headon Hill's *The Spies of the Wight* (1899), and Walter Wood's *The Enemy in our Midst* (1903). These texts were seen by some as fuelling Anglo-German hostilities after what had been a prolonged period of relative collaboration. Charles Lowe argued in a 1910 article that 'among all the causes contributing to the continuance of a state of bad blood between England and Germany, perhaps the most potent is the baleful industry of those unscrupulous writers who are for ever asserting that the Germans are only waiting for a fitting opportunity to attack us in our island home and burst us up'.² Suspicions were no less evident outside of the literary sphere. Although Germany and England had been on good terms since the mid-1800s, Kaiser Wilhelm II's accession to the throne in 1888, Chancellor Bismarck's resignation in 1890, and Admiral Tirpitz's promotion to State Secretary in the Navy Office in 1897 inaugurated a new era of maritime rivalry and contention that was only exacerbated

¹ George Chesney, *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1871) p. 61.

² Charles Lowe, 'About German Spies', *Contemporary Review* 97 (January 1910): 42-57, at 42.

by the infamous Krüger Dispatch of 1896.¹ These tensions, in turn, produced one of Edwardian xenophobia's most conspicuous and self-fulfilling mechanisms, what David French calls 'the myth of the evil and ubiquitous German spy'.² If a German invasion of England was to be successful, it was commonly assumed that preparatory measures would need to be put in place by an *avant-garde* of spies already infiltrated and naturalized into English society, a belief nowhere more noticeable than in the espionage fictions of E. Phillips Oppenheim and William Le Queux. As a final point, the creation of England's first counter-espionage unit, what we would now call the Security Service, between 1907 and 1910 marked the institutionalizing and, thus, legitimating of a suspiciousness in which England had become little more than a target of German *Weltpolitik*.³

Chesney was also particularly concerned with an urban decadence metonymic of national degeneration. John Ruskin had argued in 1870 that a British globalism was possible only insofar as the English were 'still undegenerate in race; a race mingled of the best northern blood'.⁴ In *The Battle of Dorking*, by contrast, it is a decline already underway that facilitates the collapse of the British Empire. 'The rich were idle and luxurious, the poor grudged the cost of defence. Politics had become a mere bidding for radical votes, and those who should have led the nation stooped rather to pander to the selfishness of the day, and humoured the popular cry which denounced those who would secure the defence of the nation by enforced arming of its manhood, as interfering with the liberties of the people'.⁵ For Chesney, as Brian Nellist rightly points out, free-trade capitalism 'only encouraged an illusion of constant growth which in turn encouraged waste'.⁶ In the same way, like a bacterial infection the English capital has grown into and taken over the countryside as far as Croydon and Wimbledon, and Chesney suggests that soon Kingston and Reigate will be built into

¹ Jörg Duppler, 'Rivals at Sea: British-German Naval Policies before World War I', in Manfred Görtemaker (ed.), *Britain and Germany in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berg, 2006) pp. 13-29, at pp. 13-14.

² David French, 'Spy Fever in Britain, 1900-1915', *Historical Journal* 21:2 (June 1978): 355-370, at 355.

³ Nicholas Hiley has written informative histories of these events. See his 'The Failure of British Espionage against Germany, 1907-1914', *Historical Journal* 26:4 (December 1983): 867-889, and 'The Failure of British Counter-Espionage against Germany, 1907-1914', *Historical Journal* 28:4 (December 1985): 835-862.

⁴ Ruskin, 'Inaugural Lecture', p. 35.

⁵ Chesney, *The Battle of Dorking*, p. 64.

⁶ Brian Nellist, 'Imagining the Future: Predictive Fiction in the Nineteenth Century', in David Seed (ed.), *Anticipations: Essays on Early Science Fiction and its Precursors* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995) pp. 111-136, at p. 119.

its sprawling illimitability. Overpopulation has led to pauperism, overburdened households, and a surge in emigrating professionals. ‘We thought we could go on building and multiplying for ever’, the narrator recalls.¹ From this point of view, Chesney’s tale is an invasion story in a quite alternative sense, for in playing on the double meaning of ‘invasion’ as the spread of pathogenic micro-organisms, he implies that the real site of invasion in this text is not the Home County landscape but English racial consciousness itself, whereupon the markings of a rotting and morally decadent culture blister and burst through.

The Edwardian period witnessed an intensification of these concerns. Arthur Balfour, for instance, criticized what he saw as a profligacy ‘which is to societies of men what senility is to man, and is often, like senility, the precursor and the cause of final dissolution’.² Elliott Evans Mills drew on the language of Social Darwinism to pronounce that England was ‘too effete and nerve-ridden to guide the destinies of the world’, and, desperately lacking in ‘men with a genius for duty, with seasoned bodies and masterful minds, who would not permit the nation to slumber amid the deafening armament of Europe’, could not avoid its own ruin in accordance with ‘God’s law concerning the survival of the fittest’.³ Military personnel were equally disturbed. Statistics from the Boer War (1899-1902) seemed to indicate a deficient physicality in British recruits and volunteers that contrasted with their European counterparts, while, as Michael Paris rightly points out, ‘what amounted to paranoia was manifested in a growing interest in some form of compulsory military service, demands for official investigations into the possibility of invasion, and the formation of pressure groups campaigning for ever greater military expenditure’.⁴ Perhaps the oddest symptom of these fears came with the formation of a government-sponsored ‘Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration’ in 1904, which was created to assess the causes of a racial decline felt everywhere from the physical standards of Army recruits to the living conditions of industrial cities.⁵

¹ Chesney, *The Battle of Dorking*, p. 4.

² Arthur Balfour, ‘Decadence: Henry Sidgwick Memorial Lecture’ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1908) pp. 6-7.

³ [Elliott Evans Mills], *The Decline and Fall of the British Empire* (Oxford: Alden and Co., [1905]) pp. 2, 35. For a good account of Social Darwinism during the Edwardian period, see James Joll, ‘1914: The Unspoken Assumptions’, in H. W. Koch (ed.), *The Origins of the First World War: Great Power Rivalry and German War Aims* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1972) pp. 307-328.

⁴ Michael Paris, *Warrior Nation: Images of War in British Popular Culture, 1850-2000* (London: Reaktion, 2000) p. 86.

⁵ Samuel Hynes, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968) p. 23.

For my purposes, what is revealing about these anxieties is the extent to which they were shown in gendered terms as an emasculation of imperial identity. Chesney had foreshadowed this to some degree in speaking of a ‘manhood dishonoured’ that brought on national catastrophe, but it was in the rhetoric of Edwardian alarmism and popular fiction that it developed most fully.¹ 1902 saw the sociologist B. S. Rountree asking of the British medical profession ‘is it, or is it not true that the whole labouring population of the land are at present living under conditions which make it impossible that they should rear the next generation to be sufficiently virile to supply more than two out of five men effective for the purposes of either peace or war?’.² Similarly, Evans Mills reaffirmed the views of Edward Gibbon in arguing that losing out in the survival of the fittest imperial nations was the same as a loss of ‘faith and pristine virility’, and he claimed that the weakened ‘health and physique of the English’, their lack of ‘men with vigorous bodies’, was a primary cause of national rot.³ Balfour put the matter succinctly: ‘what grounds are there for supposing that we can escape the fate to which other races have had to submit? If for periods which, measured on the historic scale, are of great duration, communities which have advanced to a certain point appear able to advance no further; if civilisations wear out, and races become effete, why should we expect to progress indefinitely, why for us alone is the doom of man to be reversed?’.⁴

Saki’s *When William Came* (1913), in giving full expression to these dangers, imagines the total failure of containment. Its story of the domination of England by Germany is at once a narrative of military defeat and a damning critique of a once “virile, highly civilized nation with an age-long tradition of mastery behind it” (WWC 36) now defined by effeminacy, anaemic indifference, intellectual ennui, and powerlessness. England’s defeat is so total that Saki devotes no textual space to its telling: as one character puts it, “there was no time for the heroism and the devotion which a drawn-out struggle, however, hopeless, can produce; the war was over almost as soon as it had begun” (WWC 32). Looking back to Chesney, with Saki the story of the invasion novel comes full circle, but with a crucial difference: *The Battle of Dorking* envisages a defeat that, with hindsight, could have been prevented, whereas

¹ Chesney, *The Battle of Dorking*, p. 3.

² Cited in Hynes, *Edwardian Turn of Mind*, p. 22.

³ [Mills], *Decline and Fall*, pp. 35, 9, 24. For more on the links between Gibbon and British rhetorics of decline during this period, see Frank M. Turner, ‘British Politics and the Demise of the Roman Republic: 1700-1939’, *Historical Journal* 29:3 (September 1986): 577-599.

⁴ Balfour, ‘Decadence: Henry Sidgwick Memorial Lecture’, pp. 42-43 – my emphasis.

Saki depicts an already emasculated society for which defeat was inevitable. Still, in its closing pages the novel does offer a glimmer of hope, however slight. In a final gesture of faith it slyly hints at a future in which England's young – who, as the text puts it, had already 'barred the door' (WWC 246) – will claim back the country just as their pathetic forefathers cannot: 'under the trees, well at the back of the crowd, a young man stood watching the long stretch of road along which the Scouts should come. ... Shame, the choking, searing shame of self-reproach that cannot be reasoned away, was dominant in his heart. *He* had laid down his arms – there were others who had never hoisted the flag of surrender. He had given up the fight and joined the ranks of the hopelessly subservient; in thousands of English homes throughout the land there were young hearts that had not forgotten, had not compounded, would not yield' (WWC 245-246).

Masculinity on the Metropolitan Frontier

The Thirty-Nine Steps clearly looks to a robust, virile male subjectivity as the sentinel of British imperial hegemony. If *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is symptomatic of a cultural paranoia in which anxieties regarding England's apparent weaknesses are externalized in the form of German belligerents, then it is also indicative of a world of male action, endeavour, and solidarity that provides the kind of empowered selfhood necessary for conquering its conspiratorial foes. The novel signifies its exclusively male frame of reference in a number of ways, most visibly through the omission of any major female characters and by foregrounding Hannay's institutional connections and encounters. References to his professional status as a South African mining engineer (*TN* 7), his intelligence work during the Boer War at Delagoa Bay (*TN* 26), his bachelorhood, and his participation in London's Clubland (*TN* 8) confirm his world as one demarcated by the competitive structures of male attachment, fellowship, rivalry, and, as we shall see, desire. Indeed, Clubland itself implies a number of other institutional linkages, most obviously the totemic frameworks of the public school system and what Buchan himself identified as the 'great and loyal brotherhood' (*MHD* 90) of jurisprudence.¹ Even within the novel's intertextual references to Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle (*TN* 34) there is the suggestion of a kind of metafictional self-gendering relative to

¹ Richard Usborne, *Clubland Heroes: A Nostalgic Study of Some Recurrent Characters in the Romantic Fiction of Dornford Yates, John Buchan and Sapper*, 2nd ed. (1953; London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1974) pp. 4-5.

what Lyn Pykett designates as ‘a masculinist aesthetic of the adventure story, centring on action rather than reflection and introspection, and on codes of male honour, which were to serve as bulwarks against degenerative feminization’.¹

Indeed, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* parallels texts such as *She* or *The Lost World* in other ways. For instance, the frontier is a key Buchan motif. On the one hand it stands as a sign of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*’s radical defamiliarization of metropolitan space: in this way Buchan moves the dividing line between imperial civilization and barbarism from the outer unmapped reaches into England itself. In essence, the metropole *is* the frontier. England is wild country, a savage wilderness. On the other hand, it represents the site upon which male power is reinscribed in the guise of the dauntless fieldsman, a pioneer or hunter whose resourcefulness and ingenuity provides the capacities with which anarchy can be forestalled. Hannay is repeatedly shown to embody what John M. MacKenzie refers to as the ‘frontier stereotype’, in whom reside the most virile attributes of the imperial male self: courage, individualism, endurance, sportsmanship, creativity, a mastery of environmental signs, and a knowledge of natural history.² It is clear that Hannay’s victory is facilitated only by his familiarity with what he calls ‘savage thinking’ (*TN* 50), the skills acquired during time well spent in South Africa that gave him ‘eyes like a hawk’ (*TN* 31). Likewise, his perception of his escapades as a ‘game’, and the respect this encourages for his enemies as worthy opponents (like lions in the savanna), set him as the quintessential sportsman, the hunter whose power derives from the inside knowledge of rules now fully mastered. Most significant is Hannay’s gift for disguise, his ability to blend into the natural world either by hiding in its brushland or imitating its local inhabitants. As Hannay himself says: ‘if a man could get into perfectly different surroundings from those in which he had been first observed, and – this is the important part – really play up to those surroundings and behave as if he had never been out of them, he would puzzle the cleverest detectives on earth’ (*TN* 105).³

¹ Lyn Pykett, *Engendering Fictions: The English Novel in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Arnold, 1995) p. 67.

² John M. MacKenzie, ‘The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype in Late Victorian and Edwardian Times’, in J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (eds.), *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987) pp. 176-198, at pp. 177, 179.

³ For a more eloquent historicization of Hannay’s ‘skills’ than I have room for here, see Adrian Wisnicki, ‘Reformulating the Empire’s Hero: Rhodesian Gold, Boer Veld-Craft, and the Displaced Scotsman in John Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps*’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 8:1 (Spring 2007): 43 paras. 1st September 2007

But Hannay's skills are only important in relation to the man from whom they were imparted: Peter Pienaar, the Boer tracker, 'the best scout [Hannay] ever knew' (*TN* 104). In many respects, Pienaar is Baden-Powell's scout in its ideal form, a ghost, untraceable and undetectable except by those already inculcated into his worldview of tracking, pursuit, and concealment. However, if the relationship between Hannay and Pienaar is one that affirms Hannay's individualism, an individualism obtained through the 'veldcraft' (*TN* 21) of Boer resistance and tracking, it also confirms Hannay's self as one informed by the male bond of friendship. It is telling that Hannay's success is only capable of being achieved under the guidance of Pienaar's teachings. All the way through the narrative, whenever Hannay is in peril his mind instinctively wanders to Pienaar's example, the example of 'a wise old bird' (*TN* 105), as Hannay puts it. And yet, as becomes clear in *Greenmantle* and *Mr. Standfast* especially, this relationship is also quite clearly more than the mere bond of student to teacher. In Hannay's words: 'the recollection of Pienaar's talk gave me the first real comfort I had had that day' (*TN* 105). Pienaar functions as a source of strength for Hannay, both literally, in the sense of providing a set of physical and intellectual examples to overcome adversity, and in the more immaterial sense of embodying a cornerstone upon which he can draw for solace and aid. With Pienaar always to hand, in memory if not in person, Hannay is truly invincible.

The view implied throughout *The Thirty-Nine Steps* but only finally confirmed in *Mr. Standfast* is that friendship represents a bond between men that functions as a reinvigorating relation. Musing on his misfortune in comparison to that of his friends, Hannay perceives: 'I considered that they were the kind of fellows who did their jobs without complaining. The result was that when I got up to go on I had recovered a manlier temper. I wasn't going to shame my friends or pick and choose my duty' (*MS* 14). If Buchan was typically Aristotelian in his view of friendship, championing it not only as a primary bond of collective existence but, moreover, as a virtue, a conduit for the right and good, then it is clear in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* at least that he looked to friendship for an image of intimacy and mutual-support that was re-vitalizing and re-fortifying.¹ It is telling that at the moment of the Black Stone's imminent triumph –

<http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v008/8.1wisniki.html>.

¹ Nowhere is Buchan's view of friendship more perfectly captured than in *These for Remembrance* (1919), the privately-printed volume Buchan produced to honour the wartime passing of Thomas Nelson, Auberon Herbert, Basil Blackwood, Raymond Asquith, Cecil Rawling, and Jack Stuart-

that is, when Hannay confronts them only to be faced by the disabling scene of three Englishmen innocently playing lawn tennis – Hannay brings Pienaar to mind and all comes out well. Put differently, at Hannay’s moment of weakness, the memory of his friend *restores his power*, his capacity to function and to defeat evil. Hannay recalls Pienaar’s theory of concealment (quoted above) – ‘What if they were playing Peter’s game? A fool tries to look different: a clever man looks the same and *is* different’ (*TN* 105) – and is immediately authorized, immediately able to see through the trickery of his antagonists: ‘the three faces seemed to change before my eyes and reveal their secrets. The young one was the murderer. Now I saw cruelty and ruthlessness, where before I had only seen good-humour. His knife, I made certain, had skewered Scudder to the floor’ (*TN* 111). Faced with disaster, the bond between men represented by friendship regenerates and empowers.

That this sentiment should be expressed in a text written during the war, those days, in Buchan’s words, ‘when the wildest fictions [were] so much less improbable than the facts’ (*TN* 3), is revealing. Although Samuel Hynes’s understanding of the book’s subject matter – ‘How England Got There’ – has been an influential one, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is just as much a statement of Where England Was in the first few months of the War.¹ On this view, its signalling of the value of friendship and male kinship is highly significant, as it of course refers not only to a *textual* representation of individual intimacy but also, extra-textually, to one of the fundamental organizing structures of the lived experience of combat. Friendship thus operates in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* not only as a means of protecting the imperial centre from outside threats – however powerfully it does so – but also as an implicit testimony to its value during the onset of World War. Just how Buchan represents this bond in further instalments of his Literary War is a key part of my thesis. In my next chapter I want to argue that friendship – and, in more general terms, the comradeship of Front Line experience – functions as a defensive partition against various feminine identities that would seek to undo its structures of attachment and thus weaken the manliness it reinforces. If it is from within a strong male identity that the paranoid fear of invasion can be kept at

Wortley. Its preface, addressed to Buchan’s children, concludes with these lines: ‘I do not believe that the relation between human beings called friendship can be rated too high. You will grow up to have friends of whom you will think the world, and you may prize them the more if you know what manner of men were some of those with whose friendship I was blessed’. *These for Remembrance* (1919), introd. Peter Vansittart (London: Buchan & Enright, 1987) unpaginated.

¹ Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (1990; London: Pimlico, 1992) p. 45.

bay, then friendship, as we shall see, is a central means of ensuring the success of that endeavour.

2. Male Solidarity and the Dreadful Feminine: *Greenmantle*

1916 marks the entrance into Buchan's Literary War of the Great War proper. By this point Buchan had finished fourteen volumes (50,000 words apiece) of the *Nelson's History of the Great War*, begun in late 1914 and running to 24 volumes by 1919.¹ He had also been recruited, along with Arthur Conan Doyle, Ford Madox Ford, Thomas Hardy, H. G. Wells, and others into C. F. G. Masterman's propaganda unit, for which he produced *Britain's War by Land* (1915), *The Achievement of France* (1915), *The Battle of Jutland* (1916), and *The Battle of the Somme, First Phase* (1916), and he was also working for the General Headquarters Staff under Field Marshal Haig, the War Office, and the Foreign Office.² *Greenmantle* bears the marks of its author's extensive involvement in and writing on the War: as Kate Macdonald rightly contends, it is a 'singular war novel' that highlights and explores the political background of Turkey's links with Germany, closing with a thinly-romanticized account of the recently-fought historical Battle of Erzerum on the Turkish-Russian border.³ Hannay begins the novel in Hampshire, a Major convalescing with his chum Sandy Arbuthnot after Loos, as he himself proudly states: 'for more than a year I had been a busy battalion officer, with no other thought than to hammer a lot of raw stuff into good soldiers. I had succeeded pretty well, and there was no prouder man on earth than Richard Hannay when he took his Lennox Highlanders over the parapets on that glorious and bloody 25th day of September' (*G* 7). Early reviews praised its easy bringing-together of historical details and romantic adventure, what Janet Adam Smith calls 'war as many fighting men felt somehow it ought to be: an affair of dash and personal heroism, of fast movement and great spaces ... of situations where a handful of men could alter the course of a battle. It was war without the mud, the lice, the boredom, the anonymity, the unimaginative strategy and mass casualties of the frontal assault.' As she observes, one of Buchan's 'motives in embarking on *Greenmantle* was simply to entertain the troops.'⁴

¹ For a good account of Buchan's activities as a chronicler of the War, see Keith Grieves, 'Nelson's History of the War: John Buchan as a Contemporary Military Historian, 1915-1922', *Journal of Contemporary History* 28:3 (July 1993): 533-551.

² Lownie, *John Buchan: The Presbyterian Cavalier*, pp. 123-127. For information on Buchan and Masterman, see Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: Literature as Propaganda, 1914-1918 and After* (London: Batsford, 1989).

³ Kate Macdonald, 'Introduction' to John Buchan, *Greenmantle* (1916), ed. Kate Macdonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) vii-viii.

⁴ Janet Adam Smith, *John Buchan: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985) pp. 208, 207.

The plot of the novel can quickly be summarized. Having received a summons from Sir Walter Bullivant, Permanent Secretary to the War Office, and his ally against the Black Stone in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, Hannay is offered a dangerous mission to go undercover through Europe and establish the origins of a German plot to incite the Muslim world to Jihad against the Allied powers. Although Bullivant is sceptical as to the extent of Germany's influence in the Middle East, his fear is that the Kaiser and his minions have discovered some means to inflame Islam against Christianity: ““they are not fools”, he says, ““however much we try to persuade ourselves of the contrary. But supposing they had got some tremendous sacred sanction – some holy thing, some book or gospel or some new prophet from the desert, something which would cast over the whole ugly mechanism of German war the glamour of the old torrential raids which crumpled the Byzantine Empire and shook the walls of Vienna?”” (G 12). Hannay has only three clues upon which to proceed: the words ‘Kasredin’, ‘cancer’, and ‘v. I.’. Aided by the combined efforts of Arbuthnot, the American agent John S. Blenkiron, and the Boer scout Peter Pienaar, Hannay travels eastbound.¹ It transpires that Germany plans to facilitate the return of the Mohammedan prophet Greenmantle, a man with sufficient influence throughout Islam to bring its ““fighting creed”” (G 12) to the West. Hannay’s travels bring him up against the contemptuous Turkish officer Rasta Bey, the fearsomely intelligent and imposing Ulric von Stumm, and the exotic, enigmatic *femme fatale* Hilda von Einem. When Greenmantle suddenly dies, Einem attempts to replace him with Arbuthnot (with whom she has fallen in love). But, in a great *coup*, Arbuthnot turns the tables on his German antagonists by switching sides at a crucial moment in the skirmish for the citadel of Kara Gubek, shortly before the triumphant Russian cavalry charge and Allied victory.

Greenmantle is underpinned by a tension between a liberal pluralism and a noxious monism. Arbuthnot discovers that Germany’s interest in Islam is little more than a pursuit of its ideology of asceticism and oneness, an ideology Germany aims to pervert in accordance with its own propagandist rhetoric by twisting Greenmantle’s sacred ““creed of space and simplicity for the furtherance of the last word in human degeneracy”” (G 183). Germany, represented here as a ‘monstrous bloody Juggernaut that was crushing the life out of the little heroic nations’ (G 117), a ruthless industrial machine intolerant of difference and diversity, intends to ‘degrade’ and ‘simplify’ the

¹ Further references here to this group will be to ‘Hannay & Co.’.

world by reducing “civilisation to a featureless monotony” in order to preside over “the inanimate corpse of the world” (*G* 184). This conflict between the plurality of other nations and Germany’s singular expansionism is troped at the level of character through the contest between Hannay, Arbuthnot, Blenkiron and Pienaar, and their German antagonists: Stumm and most obviously Einem, whose very name is itself suggestive of a reductive uniqueness and uniformity. Collectively, Hannay and his associates represent the national identities of England, America, and the Transvaal opposed to Teutonic sameness and homogeneity. Nothing signals this menace more noticeably in the text than Einem’s terrifying reputation as the female incarnation of Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* (*G* 184), the unequalled, God-like messiah of whom Buchan observed: ‘for the truly great, the Superman, power is the only quest, and to attain it all things are permissible’.¹

There are strong echoes here of that most celebrated of late-nineteenth century invasion novels, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897).² Namely, the opposition between the cosmopolitan vampire hunters (the Englishmen Arthur Holmwood and Jown Seward, the American Quincey Morris, and the Dutchman Abraham Van Helsing) and Dracula himself, the ruthless individualist whose ultimate goal is to repopulate the world in his own monstrous self-image. As Jonathan Harker eventually comes to realize: ‘this was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps, for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-demons to batten on the helpless.’³ *Greenmantle* depicts Dracula’s plans to ‘colonize’ humanity as a vicious reductionism in which the varied miscellany of other nations are regularized by the nightmarish symmetries of German *Machtpolitik*, a contrivance Buchan himself saw elsewhere in the contest of late-nineteenth century Prussianism: ‘swollen with complacency and drunk with success the exponents of Germanism came to set themselves above the human family, to regard their divine mission as freeing them from all obligations of morality and law, to demand that their altar-fires should be fed with the rights and ideals of every other

¹ John Buchan, *Nelson’s History of the War*, Vol. 1 (London: Nelson, 1915) p. 25.

² For two readings of Stoker as an invasion novelist, see: Stephen D. Arata, ‘The Occidental Tourist: *Dracula* and the Anxiety of Reverse Colonization’, *Victorian Studies* 33 (Summer 1990): 621-625; R. J. Dingley, ‘Count Dracula and the Martians’, in Kath Filmer (ed.), *The Victorian Fantasists: Essays on Culture, Society, and Belief in the Mythopoeic Fiction of the Victorian Age* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991) pp. 13-24.

³ Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (1897), eds. Nina Auerbach and David J. Skal (New York: Norton, 1997) pp. 53-54.

people, to claim for themselves the only freedom, and to seek to make all nations dependent upon their good pleasure.’¹

Einem represents this apocalyptic monism in physical, female form. Indeed, as the story progresses it becomes evident that she is the dark puppet master behind the Greenmantle plot, and the ‘v. I.’ of Hannay’s clues: “‘the most dangerous woman on earth’” (*G* 163), as Blenkiron puts it. In this way, *Greenmantle* quite clearly stages an empowered female individualism as a threat to empire: if Einem succeeds in bringing Greenmantle to his people, England will fall. Thus Sandy: “‘the woman has immense power. The Germans have trusted her with their trump card, and she’s going to play it for all she is worth. There’s no crime that will stand in her way. She has set the ball rolling, and if need be she’ll cut all her prophets’ throats and run the show herself’” (*G* 185). Far more than any other character in the novel, Einem is singled out as *the* threat to the English cause: ‘suddenly the game I was playing became invested with a tremendous solemnity’, says Hannay. ‘My old antagonists, Stumm and Rasta and the whole German Empire, seemed to shrink into the background, leaving only the slim woman with her inscrutable smile and devouring eyes’ (*G* 173). Unique in her lofty feminine greatness, she is something from beyond the earthly realm, a demon. In the words of Arbuthnot: “‘her life is an infernal game of chess, and she plays with souls for pawns. She is evil – evil – evil’” (*G* 223).

Einem’s threat is closely followed by that of Stumm, the German tyrant with the ‘funny pyramidal head’ (*G* 67). Unlike the Lady of the Mantilla, Stumm is entirely orthodox: he is the caricatural, Germanophobic norm, as stereotypical as the Teutons in the propaganda postcards of Alberto Martini or Henri Zislin, or the alarmist fictions of William Le Queux.² ‘He was a perfect mountain of a fellow, six and a half feet if he was an inch, with shoulders on him like a shorthorn bull. He was in uniform, and the black-and-white ribbon of the Iron Cross showed at a buttonhole. His tunic was all wrinkled and strained as if it could scarcely contain his huge chest, and mighty hands were clasped over his stomach’ (*G* 50). Stumm’s threat is more insidious. Despite the muscle and the brawn, Stumm’s menace lies not in brute physicality but in frippery, in feminine elegance and ornateness. While masquerading as Cornelius Brandt, a Boer

¹ John Buchan, *The Clearing House: A Survey of One Man’s Mind*, ed. Susan Tweedsmuir (1946; London: House of Stratus, 2001) p. 195.

² For a different reading of Stumm’s ‘ordinariness’ from mine, see David Trotter, ‘The Politics of Adventure in the Early British Spy Novel’, in Wesley K. Wark, *Spy Fiction, Spy Films, and Real Intelligence* (London: Frank Cass, 1991) pp. 30-54.

sympathetic to Germany, Hannay is taken by Stumm to his castle. Although Hannay at first mistakes Stumm's private quarters for 'a woman's drawing-room', the truth is far more distressing: 'there had never been a woman's hand in that place. It was the room of a man who had a passion for frippery, who had a perverted taste for soft delicate things. It was the complement to his bluff brutality' (G 79). Stumm is the feminized man versus Einem's masculinized woman. For Hannay, both represent a puissant but inadmissible effeminacy, two dark beacons of feminine individualism which must be destroyed.

Greenmantle vilifies an empowered femininity by representing it as a danger to the limits of knowledge: if Einem and Stumm threaten as manifestations of sexual aberrance, then they do so only insofar as they bring into question the parameters of epistemological certainty.¹ Hannay's mission is quite obviously a quest to sift through and identify certain kinds of information (clues, leads, maps, bodily gestures) which will ultimately lead to victory. As Bullivant puts it in his initial meeting with Hannay: "once we know what is the menace we can meet it. As long as we are in the dark it works unchecked and we may be too late" (G 14). During Hannay's brief residence in Berlin, again undercover as Brandt in partnership with Stumm, he observes: 'we had a glimpse of the squat building which house the General Staff and took off our hats to it. Then we stared at the Marinamt, and I wondered what plots were hatching there behind old Tirpitz's whiskers' (G 49). Both Einem and Stumm deter Hannay's efforts to read and decode reality. While Blenkiron is convinced that Einem's threat lies principally in madness and abomination, only Hannay recognizes her as from a location beyond the empirical realm: "'mad and bad,' Blenkiron had called her, 'but principally bad.' I did not think they were the proper terms, for they belonged to the narrow world of our common experience. This was something beyond and above it, as a cyclone or an earthquake is outside the decent routine of nature' (G 173).² Likewise, of Stumm Hannay says: 'he was a new thing in my experience and I didn't like it' (G 79). Like Dracula or Mr. Hyde, both Einem and Stumm endanger the international scene because they violate accepted categories of cognition and understanding.³

¹ This is as much a generic move as it is a matter of theme. For more on the epistemological investigations of the early spy novel, see Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London: Verso, 1993) pp. 114-115.

² As Blenkiron puts it, Einem is "'a very different proposition'" (G 149, emphasis mine).

³ For a good reading of *fin de siècle* 'monsters' as the arch-violators of epistemology, especially the positivist criminologies of Max Nordau and Cesare Lombroso, see Daniel Thomas Moore,

Greenmantle's 'othering' of the arcane and the feminine is clearly signalled as part of the perforce masculinist ideological frameworks of male experience during the Great War. Indeed, from its dedicatory page onwards the world of male brotherhood, intimacy, and fellowship as known to Hannay from his ongoing service in Kitchener's Army constitutes the text's primary locus of meaning.¹ From this perspective, Einem and Stumm's violation of Hannay's own categories of intellection – his experience – can be thought of as violations of the values and prejudices afforded to him from the all-male intersubjectivities of military kinship and solidarity. Radically individualistic, Einem and Stumm threaten the unity and thus the potency of the homosocial spaces of male soldiering and coalition via two axes of interference: 'degenerative', 'perverted' femininity as indicated by Stumm's queerness, and virulent sexual desire as instanced by Einem's lustng after Arbuthnot. In the case of Stumm, his homosexuality operates as a threat to the deeply homophobic value systems of the military hierarchy, systems that, in a post-1918 context, would list 'feminine characteristics among the "stigmata of degeneration" that made a man unfit for military service'.² In the case of Einem, her desire threatens to break up the tightly-knit *esprit de corps* of Hannay & Co., apportioned here as a metonymic substitution for the military itself and thus one which needs to be similarly protected from hazards to its effectiveness. If *The Thirty-Nine Steps* depicts the symbolic feminization or emasculation of the nation as a collective complacency resulting in an inability to protect itself from exterior threats, then *Greenmantle* understands the weakening of the homosocial military space as an epicenism produced by female and feminine invaders which, for the sake of national longevity during wartime, must be ostracized if not annihilated.

Keeping Stumm

Like Ian Hay's bestseller *The First Hundred Thousand* (1916), *Greenmantle* imagines the experience of male unity and closeness, brotherhood and camaraderie, of relaxed comradeship and lasting friendship offered by Kitchener's volunteers as conducive to a heroism capable of both defeating evil and surviving the isolation and the anxieties

¹ 'Degeneration, Bourgeois Cultural Logic, and the Fictions of Empire at the Victorian Fin de Siècle', unpublished M.Phil. Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2004.

¹ *The Thirty-Nine Steps* concludes with Hannay joining up on a captain's commission due to his experience in the First Matabele War (TN 113). By the time of *Greenmantle* he is a battalion commander-in-waiting (G 9).

² Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: The Free Press, 1990) p. 13.

of clandestinity.¹ At the same time, it is clear from Hannay's own descriptions of his craving for the comradeship of his fellow soldiers that the experience of being forced into the self-reliance of espionage is difficult to bear, as his initial expectations of the Greenmantle adventure amply attest: 'I was happy in my soldiering; above all, happy in the company of my brother officers. I was asked to go off into the enemy's lands on a quest for which I believed I was manifestly unfitted – a business of lonely days and nights, of nerve-wracking strain, of deadly peril shrouding me like a garment' (*G* 14). No image in the text brings out Hannay's desire for the revivifying homosociality of the military world than that afforded by his striking response to the sound of artillery bombardment at the Battle of Erzerum.² Crazed into an almost catatonic reverie by the overwhelming power of the guns, Hannay notes: 'I remembered how I had first heard it on the ridge before Laventie. Then I had been half afraid, half solemnised, but every nerve had been quickened. Then it had been the new thing in my life that held me breathless with anticipation; now it was the old thing, the thing I had shared with so many good fellows, my proper work, and the only task for a man. At the sound of the guns I felt that I was moving in natural air once more. I felt that I was coming home' (*G* 205-206).

It is hard to deny the homoerotic undertones at work in this passage. Hannay's 'intoxication' (*G* 210) by artillery cannons (their raw destructive power equalled only by their phallic, erectile uprightness) installs in him a longing for a world of male-to-male bonding signified as both a domain of conflict and of seductive domesticity, of homely comfort and amatory fraternization, what Hannay himself suggestively refers to as 'the warm joy of comradeship' (*G* 270). Likewise, Hannay's descriptions of his friendship with Pienaar are redolent of an intimacy that functions both as a bulwark against a hostile world and as a conduit for inadmissible erotic desire. If Pienaar is the man that instructed Hannay in all he ever knew of veld-craft (*G* 36) – as *The Thirty-Nine Steps* carefully proves – then doubly so he is also an object of Hannay's ardour and esteem, of whom he observes in a moment of isolation: 'only when I was to be

¹ In this sense, *Greenmantle* parallels, and intensifies through the heroic mode, Hay's 'selling' of the military way of life to a reading public largely ignorant of its operational frameworks. For more on this point see Claud Cockburn, *Bestseller: The Books that Everyone Read, 1900-1939* (1972; London: Penguin, 1975) p. 92.

² Buchan had maintained a faith in the revivifying potential of male homosociality ever since his days as an undergraduate at Brasenose College, Oxford. He writes approvingly in his own history of the college of its 'vigorous corporate spirit', adding that 'the life within her walls is manly and wholesome'. *Brasenose College* (London: F. E. Robinson, 1898) p. 76.

deprived of it did I realise how much his company had meant to me. I was absolutely alone now, and I didn't like it' (*G* 72). Indeed, what Gertrude Himmelfarb refers to as Buchan's 'curious blurring of sexual lines' is most evident in Hannay's descriptions of Pienaar, in whom feminine grace appeals and excites more than masculine pluck and wild independence: 'he was a man of about five foot ten, very thin and active, and as strong as a buffalo. He had pale blue eyes, a face as gentle as a girl's, and a soft sleepy voice' (*G* 37).¹

Stumm problematizes Hannay's recourse to the homoerotic. While Hannay is repulsed by his 'queer other side' (*G* 79), and is indeed nearly unmanned by Stumm's ape-like embrace when he attacks him in the latter's unwholesomely decadent private quarters, Stumm proves to be almost irresistibly attractive. As Hannay affirms: 'there would be no mercy from Stumm. That large man was beginning to fascinate me, even though I hated him'. Although Hannay insists that Stumm is 'an incarnation of all that makes Germany detested' he nonetheless admits that, despite his aversions, he could not 'help admiring him' (*G* 66-67). Stumm's attractiveness is all the more troubling in that it signifies a degenerate identity or 'evil' (*G* 79) which was during that historical moment being ruthlessly expunged from the ranks of the British army: 'no aspect of human sexuality', notes George Robb, 'aroused greater anxiety during the war than homosexuality'.² While the official rhetoric of comradeship encouraged an intimacy and communion between soldiers that eventuated in new forms of male bonding and closeness, homosexuality itself – where discovered – was singled out as a perversion of military value systems, incurring merciless punishment and terroristic levels of distrust.³ Stumm is thus doubly threatening. On the one hand, in what Maria Ng has perceptively described as a scene of sublimated rape, he is capable of quite literally emasculating Hannay through an implied but finally deferred act of anal penetration.⁴ On the other, he represents a depravity 'not unknown in the German army' (*G* 79) but also, as Hannay's desire shows, always potentially present in the rank and file of its British and ostensibly 'purer' counterpart.

Hannay's revulsion at Stumm's sexual alterity is a form of what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has termed 'homosexual panic'. For Sedgwick, homosexual panic denotes

¹ Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Moral Imagination: From Edmund Burke to Lionel Trilling* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006) p. 136.

² George Robb, *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) p. 56.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴ Maria Noëlle Ng rightly interprets this scene as one of sublimated rape. 'Warriors in Flight: John Buchan's War Novels', *Canadian Literature* 179 (Winter 2003): 188-192.

'the most private, psychologized form in which many twentieth-century western men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail'.¹ Put differently, homosexual panic represents a defence mechanism against the recognition and experience of homoerotic desire, of 'crossing over' into the 'forbidden' regions of homosocial functioning. Faced with the possibility of their own deviance, men turn to the oppressive structures of homophobia and sexual prejudice in order to purify and cleanse their own imminent, transgressive wants and needs so as to conform with the dominant (that is, patriarchal) account of homosociality. As Craig Smith memorably puts it, the defenders of King, Country, and Empire found one sure way of disproving deviant appearances: 'kill the object of desire'.² In the example of Stumm, Hannay's panic takes the form of an unexpected, uncontrollable urge to lash out and attack his antagonist (*G* 82). It is all the more telling that this encounter takes place in Stumm's boudoir (read: his inner genital 'space'), a site of such exotic otherness and outlandish sensuality that Hannay is almost dumbfounded in its presence. From this perspective, Hannay's panic denotes a stifling of deviance at its source: Hannay punches Stumm on the chin, leaves him out cold, and quietly exits and locks the door, thus figuratively entrapping the 'darkest' of perils in its origin point, unseen and unheard (*G* 83).

Stumm objectifies that awful sense of want and desire which Hannay and the homosocial, military sphere he represents cannot possibly admit, a silence indicated in the first instance by his wonderfully appropriate surname. For David Daniell, 'stumm' represents a dumbness or inability to tell creatively, a simplicity that sharply contrasts with Hannay's ingenuity, skill, and expertise.³ However, looked at from the angle of sexual deviance 'stumm' can be more suggestively read as a literal 'keeping schtum' or silencing of an effeminacy which threatens to contaminate and thus subvert that to which it is both literally and metaphorically opposed. From Hannay's point of view it could not be more fitting that Stumm dies beneath a 'sea' of Cossack horse-riders. As Hannay describes it: 'for a second to that wild crowd Stumm was the enemy, and they had strength enough to crush him. The wave flowed round and then across him. I saw the butt ends of rifles crash on his head and shoulders, and the next second the stream had passed over his body' (*G* 270). Although Hannay describes Stumm's demise as

¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) p. 89.

² Craig Smith, 'Every Man Must Kill the Thing He Loves: Empire, Homoerotics, and Nationalism in John Buchan's *Prester John*', *Novel* 28:2 (Winter 1995): 173-200, at 184.

³ David Daniell, *The Interpreter's House: A Critical Assessment of John Buchan* (London: Nelson, 1975) p. 136.

‘God’s judgment on the man who had set himself above his kind’ (G 270), it is also quite clearly indicative of a *textual* judgment on male perversion itself. For Hannay, what could be more appropriate an end for the man who nearly raped him than to be crushed and trampled beneath more men than he himself can handle?

The Unbearable Femme Fatale

It is revealing that both Stumm and Einem die on the battlefield, that ‘quintessentially male arena’ in which, to Hannay at least, the equilibrium between a virile masculinity and a disenfranchised feminine Other is restored.¹ A conspicuous reference to Einem as ‘uncanny’ (G 255) confirms her as what Freud called a ‘species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar’, and through which the fearful subject experiences a return of repressed fears regarding castration, the loss of his own virility and power.² Although Hannay looks upon women as an entirely unknowable breed of humanity – ‘women had never much come my way, and I knew about as much of their ways as I knew about the Chinese language’ (G 170) – he nonetheless acknowledges Einem’s disturbing familiarity: ‘I see I have written that I knew nothing about women. But every man has in his bones a consciousness of sex. I was shy and perturbed, but horribly fascinated [by her]’ (G 172). Einem is an image of male power reflected back in monstrous form, the familiar self transmogrified into feminine difference whose unbearable gaze threatens to mutilate (read: symbolically ‘castrate’) those upon whom it is brought to bear: ‘her cool eyes searched me, but not in suspicion’, Hannay states. ‘She was sizing me up as a man. I cannot describe that calm appraising look. ... This woman’s eyes were weighing me, not for any special duty, but for my essential qualities. I felt that I was under the scrutiny of one who was a connoisseur in human nature. ... To be valued coldly by those eyes was an offence to my manhood, and I felt antagonism rising within me’ (G 171-172).³

Greenmantle depicts the ‘war’ between Einem and Hannay & Co. as a stand-in for the international conflict between England and Germany: ‘I had got out of the way of regarding the thing as a struggle between armies and nations’, Hannay says. ‘I hardly bothered to think where my sympathies lay. First and foremost it was a contest

¹ David Glover and Cora Kaplan, *Genders* (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 56.

² Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock (London: Penguin, 2003) p. 124.

³ Again, Hannay notes: ‘her strange potent eyes fell on my face. They were like a burning searchlight which showed up every cranny and crack of the soul. I felt it was going to be horribly difficult to act a part under that compelling gaze. She could not mesmerise me, but she could strip me of my fancy dress and set me naked in the masquerade’ (G 178).

between the four of us and a crazy woman, and this personal antagonism made the strife of armies only a dimly-felt background' (G 191). Indeed, *Greenmantle* depicts the personal engagement between Einem and Hannay and his associates as something far and away more difficult to bear than traditional combat: 'we were to be tied to the chariot-wheels of this fury, and started on an enterprise compared to which fighting against our friends at Kut seemed tame and reasonable' (G 180). Whereas Stumm is a threat to the military fraternity as a male penetrator, Einem threatens as a penetrator of the male group of friends, a predicament played out between herself and Arbuthnot. Although the latter enters into Einem's confidence as a substitute for the true Islamic prophet (who, we learn, has died from cancer), it becomes clear that Einem's interest in Arbuthnot goes well beyond political manoeuvring. 'I think', he says, 'that she has got some kind of crazy liking for me' (G 224). Einem's tool against Hannay & Co. is *sex*, an erotic hankering for Arbuthnot that has the power not only to drain his life-energy but also divide and thus cripple the homosocial group of male friends resisting the German peril.¹ And even in the final moments of Erzerum, Einem remains intent on turning Arbuthnot over to her side by using her feminine wiles. As Hannay says: 'I do not know what she said, but from her tone, and above all from her eyes, I judged that she was pleading – pleading for his return, for his partnership in her great adventure; pleading, for all I knew, for his love' (G 255).

Hannay envisages the victory of himself and his comrades (and so of England) as a rejection of the female from male homosocial space, a victory he brings about, as Allan Hepburn rightly argues, by turning the tide against Einem 'as a pawn of his own cunning'.² In this regard, Hannay's professed ignorance of the ways of women comes in handy, as it enables him to resist Einem's foxy, mesmeric inveiglements as a man entirely unaccustomed to male-female relations.³ As Hannay declares: 'all my life I had lived with men only, and rather a rough crowd at that. When I made my pile and came home I looked to see a little society, but I had first the business of the Black Stone on my hands, and then the war, so my education languished. I had never been in

¹ In what is perhaps another throwback to Stoker's *Dracula*, Einem literally (vampirically?) drains Arbuthnot of his life-force: 'he looked like some acolyte – a weary acolyte, for there was no spring in his walk of nerve in his carriage. He dropped numbly on the divan and laid his head in his hands. The lantern showed his haggard eyes with dark lines beneath them' (G 222). For more on Einem's lustng after Arbuthnot see Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) pp. 64-65.

² Allan Hepburn, *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) p. 198.

³ See also Hannay's comments in *Mr. Standfast*: 'you can't live my kind of life for forty years wholly among men and be of any use at pretty speeches to women' (MS 189).

a motorcar with a lady before, and I felt like a fish on a dry sandbank' (*G* 170-171). During his first encounter with her Hannay notes that 'suddenly I began to realise that this woman was trying to cast some spell over me. The eyes grew large and luminous, and I was conscious for just an instant of some will battling to subject mine' (*G* 172). Though enticed by her 'pale bright eyes' (*G* 172), he resists. During the closing battle scene of the novel, in which Einem approaches Hannay & Co. under a white banner of truce, Hannay's refusal to bow to her will sends her into a rage: 'never in my life had I been so pleased', Hannay states. 'I had got my revenge at last. This woman had singled me out above the others as the object of her wrath, and I almost loved her for it' (*G* 256-257). Maddened, she retreats back to her own lines only to be killed by a stray Russian mortar shell (*G* 258).

Like Hannay's disgust at Stumm's feminine 'degeneracy', his hoodwinking of Einem to her end is finally not separable from the homoerotic. In this sense Hannay's ambiguous resistance to her enticements is telling: while for all intents and purposes a *total* resistance (that is, Hannay never falls for her mesmeric gaze), he cannot help but desire her. 'I had never before thought of her as beautiful. ... But as she stood with heightened colour, her eyes like stars, her poise like a wild bird's, I had to confess that she had her own loveliness. ... I considered that there might be merits in the prospect of riding by her side into Jerusalem' (*G* 255). What I would suggest is that Hannay's plying of Einem works to locate her in a homosocial economy in which the female is merely the third term in a triadic scheme based on the maintenance and protection of male bonds (in this case, male friendship).¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has used this notion of triangulated longing to argue for a correspondence between what she terms male 'homosocial desire' and the patriarchal 'control over the means of production and reproduction of goods, persons, and meanings' informing bourgeois capitalism. Sedgwick contends that in any patriarchal society or community 'there is a special relationship between male homosocial (*including* homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power'.² That is to say, in male-dominated societies (such as the world of empire, or of espionage and war) the homosocial links between men that delimit those societies, and, in so doing, oppress and contain the role of women within them, in turn both enable and concurrently

¹ For a more general account of this view as applied to women in spy fiction, see Brenda R. Silver, 'Woman as Agent: The Case of le Carré's *Little Drummer Girl*', *Contemporary Literature* 28:1 (Spring 1987): 14-40.

² Sedgwick, *Between Men*, pp. 22, 25 – original emphasis.

forbid male homoerotic desire and longing to produce ‘more opportunities to produce and to exclude and control others necessary for production’, especially women.¹

In the case of the Hannay-Einem-Arbuthnot triad, Hannay’s manipulation of Einem leads to a re-affirmation and homoerotic intensification of the male bond as it exists in friendship. Einem’s wrath spurs Arbuthnot on to uncover his true identity as a British Officer, and, more unbearably, as Hannay’s *friend*. This proves the killing blow: ‘what she had thought of his origin God knows’, Hannay states, ‘but she had never dreamed of this. Her eyes grew larger and more lustrous, her lips parted as if to speak, but her voice failed her’ (*G* 256). In the face of male unity, Einem’s resolve fails: ‘her steely restraint broke. It was like a dam giving before a pent-up mass of icy water. She tore off one of her gauntlets and hurled it in [Arbuthnot’s face]. Implacable hate looked out of her eyes’ (*G* 257-258). But if a regenerated male friendship enables Einem’s demise, it also facilitates Allied victory. That Arbuthnot stays the course is both a testament to the strength of friendship in the face of adversity and a choice that permits him to shepherd the Allied advance into Erzerum as Greenmantle himself, the prophet bringing destruction not to the West but turned against the German-Turkish defence forces. As Hannay concludes: ‘then I knew that the prophecy had been true, and that their prophet had not failed them. The long-looked for revelation had come. Greenmantle had appeared at last to an awaiting people’ (*G* 272). Thus the novel ends on an image of male power as reverent as it is redolent of male worship and longing.

¹ Smith, ‘Every Man Must Kill the Thing He Loves’, 183.

3. The Chivalric Self: *Mr. Standfast*

On hearing of the death of his close friend Aubrey Herbert in 1923 – incidentally, the real-life inspiration for *Greenmantle*'s Sandy Arbuthnot – Buchan described him as ‘the most delightful and brilliant survivor from the days of chivalry’.¹ Buchan’s use of language here is typical. Indeed, throughout his life, novels, and non-fictional writing the imagery and philosophy of the chivalric code is a constant feature. It should come as little surprise that, for Buchan, the Great War signified a break or fissure between two historical eras, an interzone or ‘elemental region of death and hazard and sacrifice where fortitude was to be tested in the ancient way’, a sub-stratal space in which the chivalric might resurface.² *Mr. Standfast* ought to be viewed in this context. A far less optimistic text than *Greenmantle*, it nonetheless provides an account of heroic English victory in which the knightly ethos slays the German dragon. In the same way as texts such as Arthur Machen’s *The Bowmen and Other Legends of the War* (1915) or Henry Newbolt’s *Book of the Happy Warrior* (1917), Hannay’s third adventure claims that in chivalry lies the ideological, spiritual, and ethical auspices to put right a world torn apart by war.³ Borrowing from John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), *Mr. Standfast* likens the final stages of the War to Christian’s journey into the ‘desired country’, from the City of Destruction (a battle-scarred Europe) to the Celestial City (the Armistice).⁴ Whereas *Greenmantle* begins to hint at the idea of a chivalric ‘quest’ upon which the Four Missionaries (that is, Hannay & Co.)⁵ find themselves battling the Boche enemy, *Mr. Standfast* clearly allegorizes Hannay’s victory over the evil conspiracies of Moxon Ivery (who, we come to learn, is none other than Graf Otto von Schwabing, the leader of the deadly Black Stone gang in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*) as a bringing of holy Light to hellish, Satanic Darkness.

¹ Tweedsmuir et al., *John Buchan by his Wife and Friends*, p. 99.

² John Buchan, *These for Remembrance* (1919), introd. Peter Vansittart (London: Buchan & Enright, 1987) p. 13. See also his commentary in *Memory Hold-the-Door*: ‘I realised that we were at the point of contact of a world vanishing and a world arriving, and that such a situation was apt to crush those who had to meet it. A new world would have to be made, and who would be left to make it?’ (*MHD* 166).

³ Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) pp. 284-286.

⁴ For a more comprehensive treatment of the allegorical content of *Mr. Standfast* than I have space for here, see Jeremy Idle, ‘The Pilgrim’s Plane-Crash: Buchan, Bunyan, and Canonicity’, *Literature and Theology* 13:3 (September 1999): 249-258.

⁵ Note the titles of Chapters 2 and 12 of *Greenmantle*: ‘The Gathering of the Missionaries’, ‘Four Missionaries see Light in their Mission’.

What I want to suggest in this chapter is that *Mr. Standfast* looks to chivalry for an image of manliness capable of defying the pressures of war and so of ensuring English supremacy. If Buchan's Literary War functions as a paranoid imaginary in which fears of weakness 'return' as the German war machine, then *Mr. Standfast* can be seen as providing an argument that claims the chivalric code as a way of securing a masculinity stout-hearted, unyielding, and *powerful* enough to rise to the challenge. From its title onwards, the text refers to the image of the 'right good Pilgrim' and the 'honest Man upon the Road' – as found in courtly ideals and medieval romance – as a protective measure both against male fragility and national vulnerability.¹ However, as with the 'blind spots' of *Greenmantle*, I am also interested in the ways in which *Mr. Standfast* problematizes its own signalling of the chivalric. Therefore my chapter is split into two sections. Having first sketched out the themes against which the text's use of the chivalric is directed, I investigate *Mr. Standfast*'s most ostensibly 'knightly' central character – Launcelot Wake – by contending that he is a far more ambivalent character than he is usually taken to be, and in fact complicates the text's deployment of the chivalric ethos. As in previous chapters, Hannay's role as first-person narrator is a key factor here. Second, I investigate the character of Peter Pienaar, contending that in him *Mr. Standfast* reveals its proper subject matter: that is, the knightly pilgrim willing to sacrifice himself not only for his adopted country but also for the sake of fraternal devotion and love. From this perspective, chivalry stands not just as an ideological pathway that can ensure a military victory but also as a heroic affirmation of communal manliness.

Mr. Standfast is easily the most patriotic episode in Buchan's Literary War. As the *British Weekly* commented: '*Mr. Standfast* is a first rate novel of adventure, and a delicately woven love romance. It is also a peerless tribute to the British Army'.² Like *Greenmantle* it is filled with minutia regarding the activities of Kitchener's conscripts and volunteers in the European theatre, and culminates in another historic engagement – The Battle of Amiens (1918) – which prompted the Hundred Days Offensive and, in time, the cessation of Anglo-German hostilities.³ Again, like its predecessor, this web of historical detail provides the backcloth against which much smaller, interpersonal

¹ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), ed. W. R. Owens (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) p. 279.

² Quoted in Paul Webb, *A Buchan Companion: A Guide to the Novels and Short Stories* (Stroud: Alan Sutton, 1994) p. 78.

³ James McWilliams and James R. Steel, *Amiens: Dawn of Victory* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2000).

conflicts are played out. Hannay is dispatched on a mission to foil the activities of a secret conglomerate of German spies who have infiltrated Britain using the pretence of pacifism as their camouflage. Hannay's old friend Blenkiron discovers that behind this spy-ring lies the dastardly Moxon Ivery, whose objective, it transpires, is to bring a shipment of anthrax germs to the Western Front for use against the British forces. In addition to Blenkiron, Hannay is aided in his quest by Mary Lamington (the English secret agent who later becomes his wife), Peter Pienaar (the Boer scout now turned RAF pilot), and Launcelot Wake (an intellectual and Conscientious Objector who finds glory and death on the battlefields of France). When Ivery is finally caught and imprisoned, Hannay designs for him an unusual end: he is to be released in No Man's Land and allowed to return to the German trench-line. Like Hilda von Einem, Ivery is mowed down by his own forces. As William Buchan notes, this act 'is surprisingly brutal and probably illegal, yet entirely appropriate. This single outburst of savagery must arise from John Buchan's profound disgust at what he felt the Germans had done to destroy, almost beyond recovery, the kindness and sanity of his world'.¹

Change is a key motif in *Mr. Standfast*: change in historical bearings; change in self-knowledge; change in physical form, even.² *Greenmantle* had shown a world in literal *crisis*, the beginnings of the long, hard struggle ahead inscribed into the taut, emaciated features of Bullivant, and felt in confused, purposeless London streets. *Mr. Standfast* depicts a civilization buckling under the strain of war: ““the whole earth’s war-weary, and we’ve about reached the danger point”” (*MS* 49), Blenkiron notes. A German air raid brings the fighting decisively and horrifyingly into the imperial homeland. In the words of Hannay: ‘bombs dropping in central London seemed a grotesque indecency. I hated to see plump citizens with wild eyes, and nursemaids with scared children, and miserable women scuttling like rabbits in a warren’ (*MS* 145-146). To boot, whereas Hannay and his crew were once invulnerable defenders of the realm, the loss of Peter Pienaar’s left leg in an aerial skirmish underscores their dramatic weakness during an era of mechanized combat. No figure represents what

¹ ‘Introduction’ to John Buchan, *Mr. Standfast* (1919), ed. William Buchan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) xix.

² Although I will not be discussing him here, Moxon Ivery’s threat is his ability to change his form, to shapeshift, as Bullivant claims: ““you realized that we fear Ivery, and you knew enough about him to see his fiendish cleverness. Well, you have the two men combined in one man. Ivery was the best brain Macgillivray and I ever encountered, the most cunning and patient long-sighted. Combine him with the other, the chameleon who can blend himself with his environment, and has as many personalities as there are types and traits on the earth. What kind of enemy is that to have to fight?”” (*MS* 159).

Buchan himself called the ‘too tragic realities’ (*MHD* 195) of war more poignantly than the broken, isolated, shell-shocked Blaikie, the young soldier hospitalized by shellfire. Expressionless, vacant, insane, and only able to communicate in ‘the careful speech of a drunken man’ (*MS* 10), Blaikie offers a disturbing contrast to Hannay’s relatively anodyne intelligence-gathering job in the Cotswolds: ‘the thought of him’, Hannay remembers, ‘depressed me horribly. Here was I condemned to some rotten buffoonery in inglorious safety, while the salt of the earth like Blaikie was paying the ghastliest price’ (*MS* 11). As David Stafford rightly claims, *Mr. Standfast* is ‘a lament for [Buchan’s] dead companions, for his own youth, and for an entire generation’.¹

Mr. Standfast represents the survival of the nation as a calling-to-arms of those grown weary, spent, or embittered. Biggleswick, a Garden City in the Cotswolds, thus serves as the focal point of those disenchanted with the war and its casualties, English and German. That Hannay’s quest begins there signifies his katabatic going-down into the underworld of a community indifferent to his patriotic values and ideals. Hannay’s antipathy to its decadent isolationism is put well during his residence at Fosse Manor. Although, in time, he comes to admire its modest beauty, initially he can only register apprehension: ‘everything in that place was strained and uneasy and abnormal – the candle shades on the table, the mass of faked china fruit in the centre dish, the gaudy hangings and the nightmarish walls’ (*MS* 17). A sly reference to Gogol’s *Dead Souls* – mistakenly identified as *Leprous Souls* by a local gossip (*MS* 18) – intimates that the city is perhaps less radically chic than it thinks itself to be. Disguised as his old alias Cornelius Brand (not Brandt, second time around), Hannay lodges with the Jimsons, a socks-and-sandals couple whose cosy bliss is equalled only by their divorce from the truths of an endangered world: “it is glorious to feel that you are living among the eager vital people who are at the head of all the newest movements”, Mrs. Jimson says with relish, ‘and that the intellectual history of England is being made in our studies and gardens. The war to us seems a remote and secondary affair’ (*MS* 26). Although Hannay admits some liking for the city’s residents – ‘I found it impossible to be angry with them for long, they were so babyishly innocent (*MS* 31) – always at the back of his mind is an image of them as the holier-than-thou, the spiritually vain and proud.

Launcelot Wake is the most obvious representative of a culture indifferent to or disapproving of the heroic paragons of the British Army and the magnitude of its

¹ David Stafford, *The Silent Game: The Real World of Imaginary Spies* (London: Viking, 1988) p. 67.

sacrifices on the Front. As a Fabian, to Hannay ‘he had every kind of idiotic criticism – incompetence, faintheartedness, corruption. Where he got the stuff I can’t imagine, for the most grousing Tommy … never put together such balderdash. Worst of all, he asked me to agree with him’ (*MS* 19). Worse still, Wake embodies a weakened male self whose deathly complexion, unburdened lifestyle, and anti-militarist ethics stand in stark contrast to Hannay’s virile pugnacity and patriotic rectitude: ‘he was a tallish, lean fellow of round about thirty years, wearing grey flannels and shoes dusty from the country roads. His thin face was sallow as if from living indoors, and he had rather more hair on his head than most of us’ (*MS* 16). However, the relationship between Wake and Hannay is more complex than it at first appears, as Hannay indicates: ‘he was a perfectly honest crank, but not a fanatic, for he wasn’t sure of himself. … If you had told me about such a fellow a week before [coming to Biggleswick] I should have been sick at the thought of him. But now I didn’t dislike him. I was bored by him and I was also tremendously sorry for him’ (*MS* 19). The story of Wake’s transformation from sallow aesthete to warrior-hero functions in two ways. First, it signifies a change in himself that represents a regeneration of a culture grown tired and ‘gone soft’ by depicting an invigorated manliness as the route to English victory. Second, and more tellingly, it represents a shift in Hannay’s own perceptions. If Wake first resembles to Hannay the marker of an unacceptable objectionism, then his joining up as a member of the Red Cross transforms him into a figure of desire. “‘D’you know, Wake, I wish I had you in my brigade””, Hannay confesses. “‘Trained or untrained, you’re a dashed stout-hearted fellow”” (*MS* 173).

Lancelot Awakened?

Carruthers, the decadent, effete English protagonist of Erskine Childers’s *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), faces a game of sleuth-craft against German would-be invaders in which his growth from weakling to gentleman spy is manifested as the kindling of his chivalric spirit. As he says on the verge of his sea-bound adventures: ‘Romance … handed me the cup of sparkling wine and bade me drink and be merry’ (*RS* 81). As his journey more and more takes on the characteristics of the medieval quest – ‘Romance beckoned’ (*RS* 239) – so too do he and his companion Davies begin to encompass the temperament of medieval paladins: ‘if it imparted into our adventure a strain of crazy chivalry more suited to knights-errant of the middle ages than to sober modern youths

– well, thank Heaven’ (*RS* 171).¹ At the opening of the narrative Carruthers is weak-willed, solipsistic, bourgeois, cynical, dandified, and miserable. By its end, his travels with Davies along the Frisian coast and his pluck in single-handedly scuppering the Kaiser’s plans have regenerated him back into the ideal form of an aggressive, virile, phallic male. Those sections of the narrative in which Carruthers prepares himself for action by swimming and washing are telling in this sense. ‘I stumbled up the ladder’, he enunciates, ‘dived overboard, and buried bad dreams, stiffness, frowziness, and tormented nerves in the loveliest fiord of the lovely Baltic. A short and furious swim and I was back again. … As I plied the towel, I knew that I had left in those limpid depths yet another crust of discontent and self-conceit’ (*RS* 28). In the same way as Rupert Brooke’s ‘swimmers into cleanliness leaping’, Carruthers literally casts off his bodily enfeeblements into the sea.² As the narrative returns again and again to this cleansing process, so too does Carruthers’s own power and knightly influence grow. What becomes apparent is that his regeneration is both a sanctioning of an imperial ideal of masculine physicality, and a banishment of unwanted elements. Through the revivifying practices of seawater bathing, espionage, and gallantry, utter catastrophe is averted by the re-masculinized desk jockey turned frontiersman and hero.

Through the character of Wake, *Mr. Standfast* transplants the metamorphosis of Carruthers from pre-war Europe into the internecine destructiveness of World War One. Wake’s development from ‘the anaemic intellectual of Biggleswick’ (*MS* 112) to – Hannay’s words – “‘a hero’” (*MS* 260) and military contributor who “‘got the hang of this rough-and-tumble fighting as if he had been born for it’” (*MS* 308) is depicted as the rebirth of an invigorating chivalric sensibility already latent within him. While he remains a Conscientious Objector, ‘mud to the waist, and his hands all blistered and cut with unaccustomed labour’ (*MS* 172), his ‘gallantry’ (*MS* 307) in the field marks him out as more of a man than the soldiers around him. As Hannay observes:

I had another man who wasn’t what you might call normal, and that was Wake. He was the opposite of shell-shocked, if you understand me. He had never been properly under fire before, and he didn’t give a straw for it. … The natural thing is to be always a little scared, like me, but by an effort of the will and attention to work to

¹ For more on this aspect of the text, see Joseph A. Kestner, *The Edwardian Detective, 1901-1915* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) pp. 72-73.

² Rupert Brooke, ‘Peace’ (1914), in *The Poetical Works of Rupert Brooke*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes, 2nd edn. (1946; London: Faber, 1970) p. 19.

contrive to forget it. But wake apparently never gave it a thought. ... He wasn't foolhardy, only indifferent. I would have been happier if he had been a little rattled. (MS 306-307)

That Wake dies in Hannay's arms, mortally wounded by shrapnel to the groin as he runs across German fire to call for Allied reinforcements, reveals him as of the utmost in courageousness, intrepidity, and devotion (MS 317). And so he succumbs as a man, a defender of the realm: Lancelot awakened.

Wake is usually seen as a sympathetic depiction of the Conscientious Objector figure. A kind of popularized Lytton Strachey, Wake's volunteering for war service as a non-combatant has been read as the genesis of a heroic individualism that facilitates Allied success in northern France.¹ In this way, so the argument runs, Buchan clearly rejects the popular conception of Objectors as feminized men – or, more gravely, as *un-men*, as subhuman – and goes against the notion that soldiering ‘represented the only way to be truly male’.² Thus interpreted, Wake’s sacrifice can be understood as a valediction of a humanitarian pacifism still capable of positively contributing to the war effort without necessarily rendering its ideologues and practitioners unnerved or pansified. However, this is too tidy a view. Despite apparent evidence to the contrary, *Mr. Standfast* does not present Wake unproblematically. Consider his motivations. At the moment of his death Wake feebly protests: ““funny thing life. A year ago I was preaching peace. ... I’m still preaching it. ... I’m not sorry” (MS 317). When Hannay asks him as to why he ultimately decided to volunteer, Wake replies: ““don’t flatter yourself you’ve made a convert. I think as I always thought. ... it wasn’t a matter of principle. One kind of work’s as good as another, and I’m a better clerk than a navvy. With me it was self-indulgence: I wanted fresh air and exercise” (MS 172). And there is also the matter of Mary Lamington, for the love of whom both Wake and Hannay are competing: when Hannay emerges victorious in this particular battle, it is implied that Wake’s loss does not instill in him a noble desire to lay down his own life for the benefit of others, but, as the long quotation in my previous paragraph implies, a total

¹ Deak Nabers, ‘Spies Like Us: John Buchan and the Great War Spy Craze’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 2:1 (Spring 2001): 28 paras. 30th August 2007
<<http://muse.jhu.edu/login?url=/journals/cch/v002/2.1nabers.html>>.

² Lois Bibbings, ‘Images of Manliness: The Portrayal of Soldiers and Conscientious Objectors in the Great War’, *Social Legal Studies* 12:3 (September 2003): 335-358, at 342, 337.

indifference to his own inviolability.¹ Combined, these statements paint a different picture of the ‘usual’ Wake: a stubborn narcissist, sacrificing himself out of self-pity and disinterest rather than altruistic benevolence, opposed to Hannay’s politics even unto his own death.²

Moreover, there is some indication that the representation of Wake’s character is simply a product of Hannay’s desire to incorporate (and thus in some measure *block out*) a dissident voice into the terms of a chivalric value system that is not only a sign of manliness but also, for Hannay, a prerequisite of Allied success. The implication underpinning *Mr. Standfast* is that without chivalry (that is, without the knightly creed of self-sacrifice, tolerance, courtliness, etc) it is not an established certainty that good will in fact triumph over evil, that the dragon’s fire may not be extinguished. It seems revealing that in the very moment when Hannay addresses Wake as a hero (that is, as the consummation of the chivalric ideological hierarchy) Wake is permitted no textual response in Hannay’s narration of events:

I untied the rope and Wake dropped like a log on the ground. ‘Leave me,’ he groaned, ‘I’m fairly done. I’ll come on … later.’ And he shut his eyes. My watch told me that it was after five o’clock.

‘Get on my back,’ I said. ‘I won’t part from you till I’ve found a cottage. You’re a hero. You’ve brought me over those damned mountains in a blizzard, and that’s what no other man in England would have done. Get up.’

He obeyed, for he was too far gone to argue. (*MS 260*)

There is no indication of selflessness here on Wake’s part, only in Hannay’s fixing of him into the part of benignant. Hannay sees him *as he wants him to be*. The idea that Wake has volunteered out of anything other than the chivalric calling is unpalatable to Hannay – indeed, it is revealing in his conversations with Wake that he can never quite pin his colours down, never quite identify his cause. And that is because it is outside

¹ Note Hannay’s rather ambiguous description of Wake: ““the man was abased with humility”” (*MS 221*).

² Again, note Wake’s confession to Hannay: ““I hate more than I love. All we humanitarians and pacifists have hatred as our mainspring. Odd, isn’t it, for people who preach brotherly love? But it’s the truth. We’re full of hate towards everything that doesn’t square in with our ideas, everything that jars on our *ladylike* nerves. … We’ve no cause – only negatives, and that means hatred, and self-torture, and a beastly jaundice of soul”” (*MS 221*, my emphasis).

of Hannay's field of acceptance: the feminized/degenerate man, surely, cannot be a contributor, only a disappointment, a burden?¹

Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that narrative forms frequently obfuscate their own 'repressive strategies and practices'.² *Mr. Standfast* seems a case in point. If, as Ilana R. Bet-El rightly argues, 'the knightly ethos served not only to create military legend, but also to promote middle-class ideals of masculinity, within all ranks of society, as derivatives of heroic endeavour, duty, patriotism, physical strength, and strict morality', then it is difficult to see how Wake (who quite clearly problematizes this schema) conforms other than through Hannay's 'pigeonholing' tactics.³ If the text articulates a view of a strong, chivalric masculinity that has the power to prevent against dangers to England's survival, then Hannay's need to look upon Wake in a way that makes him fit in with that view (even though, as he himself admits, his own desire to fight is anything but noble) reveals the extent to which Hannay himself fears its obsolescence or inapplicability. Buchan himself wrote of what he called England's 'national gift of meiosis', the Englisher's 'power of domesticating the strange and the terrible and making portents homely' (*MHD* 168-169). From this perspective, Hannay truly could not be more one-dimensionally 'English'. Faced with the unknown and the strange (in the form of Wake's egotism) Hannay makes portents homely, acceptable. Like Stumm and Einem, it is perhaps appropriate that Wake dies so that his difference – that is, his *weakness*, his *lack of power* – can, finally, be contained.

Peter Pienaar's Passion

Throughout *Mr. Standfast* it is implied that Allied victory is possible only insofar as it will entail the sacrifice of Hannay's oldest friend and mentor: Peter Pienaar. An early reference to him as a 'Christian martyr' (*MS* 14) followed by references to his own death in his letters to Hannay, plus Mary Lamington's suspicion that the adventures of Good will require a 'sacrifice to be made ... the best of us' (*MS* 218), mark him out as a necessary, inevitable casualty of war. And perish he does, immolating himself in an

¹ As Wake himself points out, after Hannay asserts that he wished he could have had him in his battalion a year previously: "“no, you don’t”, Wake replies. ‘I’d only have been a nuisance. I’ve been a Fabian since Oxford, but you’re a better socialist than me. I’m a rancid individualist’” (*MS* 222).

² Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for “Indian” Pasts?', *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992): 1-26, at 23.

³ Ilana R. Bet-El, 'Men and Soldiers: British Conscripts, Concepts of Masculinity, and the Great War', in Billie Melman (ed.), *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930* (New York: Routledge, 1998) pp. 73-94, at 79.

aerial collision with a spotter plane piloted by the German air ace Lensch (a thinly-disguised Baron von Richthofen) before he can exploit intelligence regarding a weak point in the Allied line (*MS* 330). Like Christ sacrificing himself on the cross for the profit of humankind, Pienaar's renunciation of his own existence – for the immediate benefit of his friends under attack on the Front Line and for the British forces more generally – is a divinely-sanctioned feat of love for others: “[Pienaar] says God has some work for him to do” (*MS* 322), says Archie Margolin, a fellow soldier. Peter's sacrifice bears the hallmarks of J. R. R. Tolkien's concept of the *eu-catastrophe*, that moment of sudden fortune appearing from despair in which sacrifice results in well-being for all.¹ Unlike the infernal Moxon Ivery, the man “as cruel as a snake and as deep as hell” (*MS* 45), as Blenkiron describes him, an angelic Pienaar lays down his life for the greater good, becoming in the process not Mr. Standfast – as he himself figures – but, as Hannay sees, Mr. Valiant-for-Truth: ‘I am going to my Fathers, and tho with great Difficulty I am got hither, yet now I do not repent me of all the Trouble I have been at to arrive where I am. *My Sword*, I give to him that shall succeed me in my Pilgrimage, and my *Courage* and *Skill*, to him that can get it’.²

René Girard's idea of sacrifice as a violence deployed to achieve social order – as he put it, ‘a collective action of the entire community, which purifies itself of its own disorder through the unanimous immolation of a victim’³ – has recently been used by Allen Frantzen to uncover a tension in chivalric logic between ‘sacrifice’ and what he calls ‘antisacrifice’, two ritualistic responses to violence that encapsulate a third, ‘self-sacrifice’. Self-sacrifice conflates ‘prowess and piety’ by obscuring the lines between sacrifice, a call for ‘the taking of one life to avenge the loss of another and thus for perpetuating cyclical violence’, and antisacrifice, which ‘opposes the taking of life and seeks to bring the cycle of violence to a halt’.⁴ As Frantzen notes, during the Great War chivalry was not laid to rest but accommodated to the realities of mechanized combat, a process in which ‘modern soldiers, like medieval knights, saw themselves as executioners avenging insults to sacred beliefs and institutions’ but also one that produced an image of themselves ‘as sacrificial victims’, individuals

¹ J. R. R. Tolkien, ‘On Fairy-Stories’ (1939/1947) in *Tree and Leaf* (1964; London: HarperCollins: 2001) pp. 1-82.

² Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, p. 288.

³ René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: Crossroad, 1996) p. 11.

⁴ Allen J. Frantzen, *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) p. 3.

sent out to die for their native country and its values, prejudices, and beliefs.¹ Self-sacrifice – Frantzen’s ‘bloody good’ – emerges here as an indeterminate, equivocal reply to the sacrificial drive that combines the sacrificial will to revenge and the antisacrificial notion of forgiveness, Christ’s divine benevolence. As Frantzen claims, noting the similarities between the medieval war and its early-twentieth century equivalent: ‘self-sacrifice is not antisacrificial, for once the knight dies and receives his bed in paradise, those who survive him must go on to fight, and some of them would go on fighting to avenge the death of their friend. Knights were honour bound to perpetuate the mechanism of sacrifice, not because their king or land summoned them but because they were true to ties that bound all knights, living and dead, as brothers’.²

Pienaar’s death is a form of self-sacrifice, clearly admixing both the sacrificial urge to avenge the killing of others and the antisacrificial incentive in which, through taking his own life, the War may be brought that fraction closer to its end. Unlike the self-sacrifice of Wake, which, as we have seen, problematizes the chivalric, Pienaar’s gloriously affirms it in an act of munificence that both symbolically re-masculinizes himself from invalid to heroic champion and, it is suggested, those for whom his act of self-renunciation is intended: his friends, comrades, and fellows on the Front. It is clear that Pienaar’s literal and symbolic journey upwards into the sky is both meant to be understood as an escape from earthly pressures and concerns that facilitate a quasi-divine transcendence, and as an individual regeneration of Pienaar himself from the man with a ‘withered leg’ (*MS* 291) – crippled in an earlier confrontation with Lensch – to heaven-bound warrior. John Galsworthy wrote of dismemberment in *The Queen’s Gift Book* (1915) – to which Buchan was a contributor – that ‘it is the spirit of a man that suffers when he can no longer express the bounding energy within him’.³ Indeed, as Joanna Bourke has demonstrated, dismemberment was one of the primary causes of male anxiety and self-doubt both during and after the war, prompting not only reflection from those so injured as to the manliness and vigour of themselves but also from society at large, the responses of which ranged from the sympathetic and

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

² *Ibid.*, p. 94.

³ *The Queen’s Gift Book: In aid of Queen Mary’s Convalescent Auxiliary Hospitals for Soldiers and Sailors who have lost their limbs in the War*, introd. John Galsworthy (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1915) p. 7.

understanding to the sickeningly indifferent.¹ Although Pienaar regains much of his strength in the aftermath of his disablement, he remains a ‘grizzled cripple’ (*MS* 227), depressed by his affliction and unsure of both his physical and psychological status as a man: ‘many a great yarn we spun in the long evenings’, remarks Hannay of time shared with Pienaar during the latter’s recuperation, ‘but I always went to bed with a sore heart. The longing in his eyes was too urgent, longing not for old days or far countries, but for the health and strength which had once been his pride’ (*MS* 229). Stripped of his virility (castrated?) by this disadvantage, he falls into decrepitude: ‘he was so frail and so poor’, Hannay observes, ‘for he had never had anything in the world but his bodily fitness, and he had lost that now. And remember he had lost it after some months of glittering happiness, for in the air he had found the element for which he had been born’ (*MS* 230).

Turning to religion, Pienaar finds a way both to stave off his depression and a pathway to individual and collective regeneration through a symbolic re-manning of himself that takes the form of a noble self-abnegation and a righteous and humbling asseveration of brotherly love. As Hannay tellingly reveals, ‘I tell you I was humbled out of all my pride by the sight of Peter, so uncomplaining and gentle and wise. The Almighty Himself couldn’t have made a prig out of him’ (*MS* 231). Just as Pienaar’s stoicism prompts Hannay to keep himself at a renewed level of bodily fitness (*MS* 232), so too does it give back to Pienaar a kind of mental fitness or capacity enabling him to bear what is otherwise presented as an uncoupling of his sense of manliness and self-regard. For Pienaar, the performance of self-sacrifice comes to represent a route to wholeness and completeness, a rejoicing of himself with God that will both release him from his suffering and give back to him the spirit of masculine strength lost in dismemberment: ‘Peter, I could see, had the notion that his time here wouldn’t be very long, and he liked to think that when he got his release he would find once more the old rapture’ (*MS* 231). Conceived as both self-overcoming and a giving so that others might live on, Pienaar’s self-sacrifice denotes a means of individual re-constitution consummated in death.

And yet, Pienaar’s self-sacrifice does bear a much wider significance. Pienaar himself spurs Hannay into a manlier frame of mind, but his self-sacrifice is also quite clearly meant to represent a kind of national invigoration in which a besieged, assailed

¹ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (London: Reaktion, 1996) pp. 31-75.

Englishness is liberated – and, thus, re-empowered – by personal loss. If Pienaar's struggles with Lensch indicate a confrontation between ace pilots they also signify the larger contest between nations: ‘there were plenty of fellows who saw the campaign as a struggle not between Hun and Briton’, as Hannay mentions, ‘but between Lensch and Pienaar’ (*MS* 13). Adrian Caesar rightly argues that ‘self-sacrifice, the infliction and endurance of pain were necessary to the “salvation” of the Empire’.¹ In the case of *Mr. Standfast* we can see how self-sacrifice ensures the salvation not only of a continent plagued by warmongering and death, but also of a weakened, war-weary nation. Re-strengthened by Pienaar’s giving of himself unto death, victory looms. As Hannay bemoans after witnessing his friend die:

After that it was all a dream. I found myself being embraced by a French General of Division, and saw the first companies of the cheerful blue-coats for whom I had longed. ... I knew that now there were warders at the gate, and I believed that by the grace of God that gate was barred for ever. (*MS* 330)

In death Pienaar finds the means to revitalize both himself and that which he defends, a vitiated nation lacking in virility but ultimately restored to ‘manliness’ through the necessary loss of one of its adopted sons.

¹ Adrian Caesar, *Taking it Like a Man: Suffering, Sexuality and the Great War Poets – Brooke, Sassoon, Owen, Graves* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) p. 5.

4. Coda: Buchan and the Paranoid Imaginary

Joseph Campbell pointed out long ago that the structure of separation-initiation-return which informs the ‘monomyth’ (a Joycean term) of the mythological adventure of the hero cannot be separated from the question of power. As he declares: ‘a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man’.¹ The monomyths of Buchan’s Literary War – which, for all their variations, certainly hold to this account – exhibit a comparable fixation with the issue of power, a fixation that is itself part of an investigation into the nature of male identity during the Great War. In *The Thirty-Nine Steps* a masculinity derived from the model of the imperial pioneer is promulgated as a means of defending imperial space from external threats, a sense of manliness upheld by the sense of comradeship between Hannay and Pienaar that acquires renewed significance in its Front Line manifestations. The Front Line is one of the key images in *Greenmantle*, where, as we have seen, it is suggested that a male identity capable of protecting the Empire must in itself be protected from hazards to its unity and identity *as masculine*, hazards coded here as feminine and feminized. In this text the solidarity offered by all-male friendship and comradeship is offered as a vehicle for such protection. *Mr. Standfast*, in a sense, brings the issue full circle: here, once again, we behold a weakened society sorely in need of defence from the looming spectre of German victory, only it is the imagery and ideology of chivalry – not that of the Frontier – which is offered as a means of safeguarding England. In all of these cases it is *power* that matters – the power to be *able* to protect, power to lead, power to heal and to prevail. Power as a plucky individualism (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*); as a specifically male solidarity, unified and sovereign (*Greenmantle*); as an enlivened male self of the gallant, knightly order (*Mr. Standfast*).

For Hannay, what is ultimately most threatened by the events of Great War is nothing less than the ‘heart’ of the nation itself, what he calls ‘the priceless heritage which is England’ (MS 28). Nowhere is this more evident than in his remarks of the Cotswolds countryside:

¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949; London: Fontana, 1993) p. 30.

I had a vision of what I had been fighting for, what we all were fighting for. It was peace, deep and holy and ancient, peace older than the oldest wars, peace which would endure when all our swords were hammered into ploughshares. It was more; for in that hour England first took hold of me. Before my country had been South Africa, and when I thought of home it had been the wide sun-steeped spaces of the veld or some scented glen of the Berg. But now I realized that I had a new home. ... I saw not only victory after war, but a new and happier world after victory, when I should inherit something of this English peace and wrap myself in it till the end of my days. (*MS 15*)

Alun Howkins has claimed that one of the most enduring images relating to this kind of English landscape is that ‘purity, decency, goodness, honesty, even “reality” itself are closely identified with the rural south.’¹ For Hannay, the English countryside is a rural space which cannot be separated from the best of England’s *men*: as he puts it, ‘the freedom of an acre of her soil was cheaply bought by the blood of the best of us’ (*MS 15*). On this view, it is only a male self capable of enduring the hardships present during that era – trench warfare, international intrigue, mechanized combat – which is both worthy of and fitting for the defence of the nation.

This promotion of a strong male self – which, as we have seen, is not entirely unproblematic or straightforward – occurs within what I termed in my introduction as a paranoid imaginary. Put differently, Buchan’s articulation of a maleness that might function as a bulwark against exterior menaces to the nation (plus interior threats, if one considers the introductory presentation of Launcelot Wake) is eventuated within a literary medium that is itself a reaction to paranoid fears of invasion and conspiracy, fears which are in turn based upon anxieties relating to imperial degeneration, decline and fall. In addition to his novels, a paranoia of this nature is discernible in Buchan’s non-fictional War studies. ‘The years of war’, Buchan writes, ‘were like a trough into which I found myself flung, in company with several million others. Life seemed to stand uneasily still, and in no direction was there any prospect’ (*MHD* 165). While the emphasis here is in the life-sapping purposelessness and ethical opacity of conflict on this scale, Buchan’s deliberate choice of syntax is revealing. For in carefully depicting himself as an object dislocated (‘flung’) against his will into a war over which he has no control he also draws attention to his own lack of intending selfhood, to the lack of

¹ Alun Howkins, ‘The Discovery of Rural England’, in Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (eds.), *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880-1920* (London: Croom Helm, 1986) pp. 62-88, at p. 63.

a self-agency responsible for that very dislocation. Two consequences follow on from this strategy. On the one hand, it reduces individuals to vehicles of sourceless affect, thus reinforcing Buchan's impression of the soldier as a 'minor cog' in the 'operations of a huge impersonal machine which seemed to move with little intelligent purpose' (*MHD* 165). On the other, it implies the terrible possibility of a dark puppet-master surreptitiously plying the strings of war; an unseen, unnameable conspirator, a 'secret agent' (in the literal sense of that phrase) directly influencing the capricious fortunes of civilization itself. Buchan's war novels extend this paranoid view of reality into the imaginative domain. There, the causes of war are products of the conspiratorial self, the hidden toucher or pusher of Andrew Lumley's famous speech from *The Power-House* (1913): ““you think a wall as solid as the earth separates civilization from barbarism. I tell you the division is a thread, a sheet of glass. A touch here, a push there, and you bring back the reign of Saturn.””¹

What is revealing about Buchan's fictional exploration of this kind of paranoid outlook, as I have claimed throughout, is that it cannot be separated from his view of the war as a 'great test of manhood', a gendered space in which male identity itself is challenged and, ultimately, reinscribed.² In Buchan's Literary War paranoia and male identity are interdependent structures which cannot properly be viewed in isolation from one another. More precisely, male identity at this historical moment, and in these texts, is revealed as a *product* of a paranoia that works always to guard an exclusively male space from external threats to its own sense of purpose, influence, and power. In this regard it is revealing that Freud's reading of Schreber's paranoia is itself a theory of male subjectivity, in this case one in which paranoia signifies a defense mechanism against homosexual desire. Although Freud ultimately explained Schreber's illness as a manifestation of 'an infantile conflict with the father whom he loved' (*PN* 55) – a conflict signalled through the appearance of God in Schreber's delusions – throughout his analysis it is repeatedly emphasized that the exciting determinant of illness 'was an outburst of homosexual libido; the object of this libido was probably from the very first [Schreber's] doctor, Flechsig; and his struggles against the libidinal impulse produced the conflict which gave rise to the symptoms' (*PN* 43). Paranoia can thus in certain cases be seen quite literally as the end-product of repressed homosexuality, a spilling forth of buried, inadmissible desire in which the object of want is transformed

¹ John Buchan, *The Power-House* (1913; Thirsk: House of Stratus, 2003) p. 26.

² Buchan, *These for Remembrance*, p. 17.

into an oppressive persecutor. In Buchan's paranoid imaginary it is clear that male identity is inseparable from the homoerotic: in the first instance as reflected back in the guise of monstrous, devilish, queer monomaniacs (Stumm in particular), but also, and perhaps more revealingly, as the defamiliarization of heterosexual coupling into homosexual want. Nowhere is this more evident than in Hannay's telling descriptions of his future wife, Mary Lamington: 'she smiled demurely as she arranged the tea-things, and I thought I had never seen eyes at once so merry and so grave. I stared at her as she walked across the lawn, and I remember noticing that she moved with the free grace of an athletic boy' (*MS* 11).¹

Miles Donald has argued that there are 'no points for recognising the obvious – Buchan's is a man's world'.² However, as the above quotations indicate, the very 'obviousness' of Buchan's treatment of that world might in itself be of interest. It is a telling fact that in most readings of Buchan's account of male identity the homoerotic component of his Literary War is conveniently elided. Moreover, whether or not his use of the heroic masculine mode in a series of texts whose signifying horizons are largely determined by their paranoid underpinnings (in other words, by their status as a sequence of paranoid imaginaries) is a *problematic* usage has gone unquestioned. In this regard it is worth recalling that the reconstitutive properties of paranoia – that is, the attributes of centrality and grandiosity which enable the paranoiac to function in social existence – are not true, are illusory. From a clinical point of view, what this suggests is that if the paranoid mentality is disrupted then the whole house of cards comes crashing down, often leading to further illness and, in some instances, suicidal depression: Freud's delusional formation is disrupted, removing the support of fantasy and bringing about complete internal collapse. As Robins and Post state, paranoia is 'self-validating', but this self-validation is obtained at the cost of reality.³ Paranoia, in other words, functions as a kind of deflecting strategy in which, as Freud notes, 'what was abolished internally returns from without' (*PN* 71) by means of a falsifying but still constructive and salubrious process. The primary inducement of illness is not directly confronted as such but rather dispersed outwards through the mechanism of projection to return in a radically incommensurable form, which is both contestable and 'othered' but, ultimately, merely an extension of the self and its shortcomings.

¹ See also *MS* 158, 163, and 201.

² Miles Donald, 'John Buchan: The Reader's Trap', in Clive Bloom (ed.), *Spy Thrillers: From Buchan to le Carré* (London: Macmillan, 1990) pp. 59–72, at 69.

³ Robins and Post, *Political Paranoia*, p. 14.

For Buchan, what this seems to imply is that although texts such as *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and its sequels promote a robust male heroism as a protective measure against external threats, it is in some sense – consciously intended or otherwise – a parlous, inconclusive promotive act. That is, Buchan's use of the paranoid imaginary renders the male heroic mode as self-validating only in that it occurs within a structure which is in the first place inauthentic and thus somewhat quixotic.

Of course, *within* that structure, and in a very real and vital sense, Buchan's Literary War is quite clearly about the unprecedentedly destructive contest between the English and German nations between 1914 and 1918, a conflict signalled in these texts by much smaller, representative encounters between highly emblematic groups and individuals, and, as I have already shown, through direct recourse to the historic engagements and discursive structures of the First World War. However, it is worth observing, as I have indicated throughout this thesis, that Buchan's exploration of the War, though packaged in an ostensibly 'popular' and thus seemingly unproblematic mode of writing, and underpinned by a predominantly conservative, patriotic politics, is still characterized by an assortment of revealing ideological blind spots and textual antinomies. As has been noted of other non-modernist, 'popular' writers of Buchan's generation (such as Grant Allen, Bram Stoker, and H. Rider Haggard, among many others) for all the seeming superficialities of his texts, it is still possible to locate beneath them an underlying set of difficulties and paradoxes.¹ From this perspective, we can observe Buchan's treatment of male identity as a complex, contradictory engagement with its role in an early twentieth-century modernity characterized by an unprecedented level of kaleidoscopic destructiveness. Even so, it is worth recalling that Buchan himself, in a further added complication, acknowledged that the project of describing the fortunes of male identity during the Great War in fictional, romantic terms was a project nearing its own obsolescence: 'some day, when the full history is written – sober history with ample documents – the poor romancer will give up business and fall to reading Miss Austen in a hermitage' (G 3).

¹ These complexities, as they exist across the entire range of Buchan's *oeuvre*, will be addressed in Kate Macdonald (ed.), *John Buchan Revisioned: Beyond The Thirty-Nine Steps* (forthcoming).

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