JOHN BUCHAN’S UNCOLLECTED JOURNALISM
A CRITICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION

ROGER JOHN CLARKE

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THESIS ABSTRACT

John Buchan (1875-1940) has a literary reputation as a minor novelist, based mainly on his success as a popular fiction writer, the inventor of the spy thriller in his best-known novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915). Although there has been considerably increased scholarly interest in his work in recent years, the perception that he is mainly a genre writer persists and has limited the success of attempts to move his literary reputation towards the academic mainstream. Other areas of his writing have received some recognition, but his uncollected journalism has remained a neglected aspect of his work, largely overlooked even by Buchan specialists.

This thesis brings an academic focus to Buchan’s uncollected journalism for the first time. It breaks new ground by examining the style, structure, and content of his articles and reviews, and argues that Buchan should be considered as an essayist of elegance and authority, an astute literary critic attuned to contemporary trends, and a wide-ranging cultural commentator on his times.

The thesis shows that Buchan’s uncollected journalism, in its volume and range, provides a major field for the additional research which is clearly required if Buchan’s literary reputation is to be further enhanced. It aims to make a significant contribution by opening up this area of his work to future study in two entirely new ways. First, it contains an extensive catalogue of his uncollected journalism, over a thousand items in total, with each article categorised and summarised as an aid to future researchers, features which have never before been available. The catalogue also contains a hundred articles and reviews which have not been included in any previous bibliography. Secondly, it provides a selection of annotated articles which could form the basis of the first critical edition of Buchan’s essays to be issued in order to promote further recognition of this aspect of his writing.
CONTENTS

PART I
INTRODUCTION............................................................................................................. 1
CHAPTER ONE: REVIEW OF BUCHAN SCHOLARSHIP.............................................. 6
CHAPTER TWO: BUCHAN THE ESSAYIST................................................................. 17
CHAPTER THREE: BUCHAN THE LITERARY CRITIC............................................... 36
CHAPTER FOUR: BUCHAN THE CULTURAL COMMENTATOR.................................. 74
CHAPTER FIVE: THEMES AND SOURCES............................................................... 109
CONCLUSION........................................................................................................... 140
BIBLIOGRAPHY........................................................................................................ 142

PART II
CATALOGUE OF BUCHAN’S UNCOLLECTED JOURNALISM
Volume One
INTRODUCTION............................................................................................................. 1
A: LITERATURE AND BOOKS.................................................................................. 11
B: POETRY AND VERSE........................................................................................... 30
C: BIOGRAPHY, MEMOIRS, AND LETTERS......................................................... 62
D: HISTORY............................................................................................................... 99
E: RELIGION............................................................................................................. 126
F: PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE............................................................................. 130
G: POLITICS AND SOCIETY.................................................................................... 146
Volume Two

H: IMPERIAL AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS ................................................................. 178

I: WAR, MILITARY, AND NAVAL AFFAIRS ..................................................... 229

J: ECONOMICS, BUSINESS, AND TRADE UNIONS ...................................... 262

K: EDUCATION ........................................................................................................ 272

L: THE LAW AND LEGAL CASES ........................................................................ 278

M: TRAVEL AND EXPLORATION ......................................................................... 283

N: FISHING, HUNTING, MOUNTAINEERING, AND OTHER SPORTS .............. 304

APPENDIX

ANNOTATED ARTICLES

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................. 1

ARTICLE 1: ‘Robert Louis Stevenson’ ................................................................. 7

ARTICLE 2: ‘Nonconformity in Literature’ ......................................................... 15

ARTICLE 3: ‘The National “Malaise”’ .................................................................... 22

ARTICLE 4: ‘The Celtic Spirit in Literature’ ....................................................... 28

ARTICLE 5: ‘An Imperial Club for London’ ......................................................... 32

ARTICLE 6: ‘The Glamour of High Altitudes’ ...................................................... 36

ARTICLE 7: ‘The Life of the Kaffir’ ........................................................................ 41

ARTICLE 8: ‘The Practical Mystic’ ......................................................................... 47

ARTICLE 9: ‘Sir Richard Burton’ ........................................................................... 52

ARTICLE 10: ‘The Urban Sentiment’ ................................................................. 58

ARTICLE 11: ‘Local Colour’ ................................................................................... 63

ARTICLE 12: ‘History and Life’ ............................................................................. 68

ARTICLE 13: ‘George Meredith’ .......................................................................... 73
PART I

INTRODUCTION

John Buchan (1875-1940) is best-known as a writer of popular fiction and the author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), his most famous novel which established the genre of the spy thriller. His literary work is also notable for its historical novels and biographies. In addition, he had a distinguished career as a public man of affairs. After graduating from Oxford with a first in Classics and qualifying as a barrister, he joined the ‘kindergarten’ of bright young men assembled by the High Commissioner for South Africa, Lord Milner, to administer the reconstruction of the country after the Boer War. He spent two years in South Africa, returning to Britain in 1903, when he resumed his career as a barrister specialising in foreign taxation before joining Nelson’s the publishers as chief literary advisor at the beginning of 1907. During the First World War he was appointed Director of Information, responsible for Government propaganda and press relations both at home and abroad. After the war he became Deputy Chairman of Reuters news agency in 1923. He also had a career in politics, which began as President of the Oxford Union, continued as a Conservative candidate for the Peebles and Selkirk constituency before the First World War, and eventually came to fruition when he was elected as MP for the Scottish Universities in 1927. A political insider on close terms with Prime Ministers Baldwin and Macdonald, though never a member of the Cabinet, his political career culminated in his appointment as Governor-General of Canada in 1935, when he became Lord Tweedsmuir.

Underlying these public aspects of Buchan’s career is his lesser-known work as a journalist, beginning in the mid-1890s and continuing intermittently until his appointment to Canada in 1935. His most prolific period was between 1900 and 1914 when he was on the staff of
the *Spectator* and later became its assistant editor\(^1\). He also contributed to many other magazines and newspapers, both influential (such as *Blackwood’s* and the *Times Literary Supplement*) and popular (for example the *Daily Express* and the *Graphic*). A small number of his journal articles were subsequently published in book form\(^2\), but the vast majority (over a thousand items) remain uncollected. Most of these articles, particularly those for the *Spectator*, were published anonymously, and it is probably for this reason that they have attracted little attention from biographers or academic researchers. Yet Buchan’s journalistic output represents a very substantial body of writing which provides insights into his views on such matters as the art of fiction, the role of the author, modernism and poetry, as well as connections with the themes and sources of his literary work, both fiction and non-fiction. In addition, it provides a fascinating commentary on the more general cultural developments of his time.

This thesis breaks new ground by being the first academic work to concentrate exclusively on Buchan’s uncollected journalism. It argues that his roles as essayist, literary critic and cultural commentator which emerge from his journalism have been underestimated in the overall assessment of his career, because this aspect of his work has not received the scholarly attention it deserves. Although concerted efforts have been made in recent years to move Buchan’s literary reputation from that of a popular genre writer into the academic mainstream, which have met with some success, it is important that his position as a significant figure in the literary and cultural world of his time is firmly established if further progress is to be made. The thesis argues that a proper recognition of his roles as essayist, critic and cultural commentator can make a significant contribution towards raising his academic profile.

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\(^1\) There was a break from November 1901 to October 1903 when he was with Milner in South Africa.

\(^2\) These collections are detailed in the Bibliography at the end of Part I, which also provides a full listing of all the magazines and newspapers included in this thesis to which Buchan contributed.
This thesis aims to begin that process by discussing in depth some of the themes, sources and connections with his literary work that a detailed examination of his journalism can reveal, and by providing two new aids to further academic research. First, a full catalogue of his uncollected journalism with each article categorised and summarised as an aid to future researchers, something which has not previously been available in such detail.

Secondly, a selection of annotated articles which could form the basis of the first critical edition of Buchan’s essays.

To achieve these objectives, the thesis is set out in two parts together with an appendix. Part I, the main thesis, consists of five chapters. Chapter One presents a review of Buchan scholarship, ranging from his first contemporary critics through to the latest academic assessments. It emphasises the attempts which have been made to move his literary reputation into the academic mainstream after a period of neglect and occasional hostility, and notes the very limited extent to which his uncollected journalism has been used in academic research to date.

Chapter Two sets out the different phases of Buchan’s career as a journalist and examines for the first time the style and structure of his articles and reviews, showing how he adapted his essays to the status of the magazine or newspaper he was writing for and the requirements of its readership. It argues that Buchan achieved a consistent elegance and authority in his journalism which establish him as a significant essayist of his time.

Chapter Three considers the new aspects of Buchan’s career as a literary critic which are revealed by a consideration of his uncollected journalism. By focussing on key articles and reviews at various stages in his career this analysis shows that Buchan was a perceptive literary critic, conservative in his views but attuned to contemporary developments, attempting to engage with modernism in his criticism while continuing to use traditional genres for his own work.
Chapter Four examines Buchan’s broader critical position as a commentator on the major cultural developments of his time, a role which has not previously been researched to any great extent from the source material of his uncollected journalism. It concentrates on specific topics such as imperialism, Edwardian London, and the political crisis of the early 1930s, examining these through the lens of Buchan’s journalism and tracing connections with his literary work. It shows how his conservative world-view did not prevent him from attempting to understand and explain the rapid changes and great upheavals of the modern world, such as technological innovation and the First World War, which occurred during his lifetime and are reflected in his literary work.

Chapter Five indicates some of the new insights into the themes and sources of Buchan’s fiction and non-fiction that can be gained from an examination of his uncollected journalism. It considers themes in Buchan’s literary work, such as the hero as practical mystic, the hill-top view, and the backstairs world, which are illuminated by his essays. It also finds new sources for scenes in some of Buchan’s novels, in particular The Dancing Floor.

Part II, which is bound separately in two volumes, is a detailed Catalogue of Buchan’s uncollected journalism. It consists of 1020 articles and reviews by Buchan, of which 100 have not been included in any previous bibliography. It has been prepared specifically to assist future researchers by dividing the essays into various categories by subject matter, and providing a summary of the contents of every article and review. These are unique features which have not previously been available.

The Appendix, a selection of Annotated Articles, is also bound separately for ease of reference. It contains a selection of twenty-five of Buchan’s essays, reprinted from the original magazines and newspapers, to which line numbers have been added to facilitate referencing. Headnotes and footnotes have been prepared for each article to form the
basis of a critical edition which could be published to gain further recognition for the significance of Buchan’s essays.

Detailed references within the thesis are printed in bold type. References to the Catalogue are alpha-numeric, beginning with the category letter followed by the number of the article. Thus, H53 refers to category H (Imperial and Foreign Affairs), article number 53 of the Catalogue in Part II, where full publication details can be found. Page references to the original article are provided for quotations, followed by a letter to denote the column of the page if appropriate. Therefore, H53:219b is a reference to the second column of page 219 in the original magazine or newspaper. References to the Annotated Articles begin with the article number followed by the line number(s) of the article reprinted in the Appendix. Thus, a reference 3:59-60 is to Article 3, lines 59-60 in the Appendix.

Abbreviations are used for frequently-sourced reference material, particularly in the footnotes to the Annotated Articles in the Appendix. The abbreviations are:

- CBD  Chambers Biographical Dictionary
- MHD  Memory Hold-the-Door (Buchan’s memoirs)
- NLS  The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
- ODNB  Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
- ODQ  Oxford Dictionary of Quotations
- OED  Oxford English Dictionary

Full publication details of these reference sources are given in the Bibliography at the end of Part I.
CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF BUCHAN SCHOLARSHIP

Buchan’s writing has always had something of a mixed reputation in critical and academic circles. Early in his career, when he had already published a number of essays and short stories followed by his first novel, the historical romance *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895), he was seen as a young writer of talent and promise. A short unsigned profile of him in the *Bookman* of December 1895 noted that he had ‘surely a more precocious literary record than any other of our time’ and ‘an extraordinary and an interesting one for a writer of twenty years of age’ (85a). But later in his career, after his first great popular success with the spy thriller *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), a much longer *Bookman* profile by David Hodge in October 1916 warned: ‘His versatility is a matter he should guard against, and he should remember that while *The Power-House* [his first thriller] and *The Thirty-Nine Steps* are excellent in their way – and doubtless good sellers – they are not the worthiest work for him’ (10a).

This prescient comment outlined a problem which Buchan was never fully able to overcome. He followed up *The Thirty-Nine Steps* with the further adventures of its hero, Richard Hannay, in *Greenmantle* (1916) and *Mr Standfast* (1919), and during the 1920s and early 1930s wrote a succession of popular novels, with the publication of the annual ‘Buchan’ becoming something of an event in the literary calendar. These usually met with favourable reviews in the popular press, but their success overshadowed his other work, the historical novels, military histories, biographies, published lectures, and journalistic essays and articles, causing the more serious critics to dismiss his writing as too prolific and too popular. The assessment by the poet, novelist and critic, William Plomer, was perhaps typical. Reviewing Buchan’s latest thriller, *A Prince of the Captivity*, in the *Spectator* of 21
July 1933, he echoed the warning given by the Bookman: ‘I have no doubt that Mr John Buchan’s books are good of their kind, or that those who have enjoyed Greenmantle and The Thirty-Nine Steps continue to enjoy the numerous works that have subsequently been produced by the same pen’. But after outlining the plot he becomes dismissive: ‘Enough has been said to indicate that this book must be taken as a Buchan and not as a novel. Nobody will dream of applying to it the standards of, let us say, Madame Bovary or The Brothers Karamazov’ (94a). Here Plomer rather misses the point, because Buchan himself never regarded his contemporary fiction as being remotely comparable to such canonical works, whereas he took his historical novels and biographies much more seriously (MHD 196).

The type of comment made by Plomer and other literary critics makes it evident that Buchan’s reputation as a prolific popular novelist meant that his writing tended to be dismissed in the established literary circles of his time. Nevertheless, his election as a Member of Parliament for the Scottish Universities in 1927 did provide him with a certain kudos in the contemporary academic world, and he was invited to give a number of lectures at leading institutions, including Cambridge (‘The Causal and the Casual in History’, 1929), St Andrews (‘Montrose and Leadership’, 1930), the British Academy (‘Lord Rosebery’, 1930), and the English Association (‘The Novel and the Fairy Tale’, 1931), all of which were subsequently printed as pamphlets.

After Buchan’s death in 1940 his popular fiction continued to be read, and The Thirty-Nine Steps has never been out of print since it was first published in 1915 (Macdonald, Companion 169b). Penguin brought out cheap editions of ten of his novels in 1956, but excluded his historical fiction. They were favourably reviewed in the Times Literary Supplement of 1 June 1956 by Julian Maclaren-Ross, who noted that these were the works on which Buchan’s ‘final claim to posterity’ was likely to rest, despite ‘his distinguished
Meanwhile, his work was coming under attack from other critics and academics. Graham Greene, reviewing Buchan’s posthumously published *Sick Heart River* in 1941, was generally appreciative but criticised ‘the vast importance Buchan attributed to success, the materialism’ portrayed in his novels, and noted that ‘it is the intellectual content which repels us now, the Scotch admiration of success’ (105). Richard Usborne in his *Clubland Heroes* (1953) noted that the male characters in Buchan’s clubland world were slightly anti-Semitic and criticised Buchan’s portrayal of women, while Philip Toynbee, writing in the *Observer* in 1956, disliked the snobbery he found inherent in Buchan’s fiction. Gertrude Himmelfarb, in an influential essay for *Encounter* in 1960, added the racism she identified in Buchan’s African novel *Prester John* (1910), and the outdated imperialist attitudes she found in his fiction generally, to the increasingly long charge-sheet being accumulated against Buchan’s reputation, which led to his literary work being spurned in liberal academic circles.

The publication in 1965 of Janet Adam Smith’s long and detailed biography of Buchan stimulated a revival of interest in him. Her book was an in-depth study which examined all of Buchan’s literary output, both fiction and non-fiction, in the context of his life and times. In the same year the critic, MR Ridley, published a substantial essay on Buchan entitled ‘A Misrated Author?’ which sought to defend Buchan’s tarnished reputation in academia and establish him as a serious literary figure. Ridley argued that Buchan was being ‘misrated, largely by people who will not take the trouble to consider his work as a whole’ (2). He was ‘too often written off as a mere writer of thrillers’ by ‘would-be intellectuals’ (3). Ridley emphasised the importance of Buchan’s historical novels as well as his thrillers, and stressed the significance of his non-fiction writing, especially the historical biographies. Also in this essay, he was the first to draw attention to Buchan’s writings about literature and
his conception of what a novel should be, quoting extensively from *The Novel and the Fairy Tale*, which he regarded as ‘an admirable piece of criticism’ (27).

Ridley’s challenge to treat Buchan as a serious literary figure was taken up by some scholars, aided by the publication in 1966 of an extensive annotated bibliography compiled by J Randolph Cox, which gave details of all the major critical writing about Buchan to that date. This led to the publication in 1975 of the first full-length critical study of Buchan’s work by David Daniell of University College, London. His book, *The Interpreter’s House*, included a detailed defence of Buchan’s reputation from the attacks of Greene, Usborne, Himmelfarb and others. More importantly, it made a positive case for Buchan to be considered as a serious literary figure, stressing in particular the influence of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson on his fiction, the importance of the historical novels which had previously been neglected, and the wide range of his other writing, including his military histories and journalistic essays as well as the historical biographies.

Daniell’s book pointed to a growing interest in Buchan’s work which coincided with the development of a new field of scholarly enquiry, that of modern popular genre fiction such as the adventure novel, the spy thriller, and the detective story. During the 1980s this combination of factors led to the positioning of Buchan as a pivotal figure in the development of the spy thriller. His achievement came to be seen as the fusion of late nineteenth century adventure tales of hunters and hunted in the manner of Robert Louis Stevenson, Rider Haggard, and Rudyard Kipling, with the invasion-scare spy stories of William Le Queux, E Phillips Oppenheim and Erskine Childers in the years leading up to the First World War. This synthesis, summed up by the American academics John Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg in their 1987 book *The Spy Story* (40-41), was seen as being epitomised by *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), which they regarded as ‘the first major version of the twentieth-century spy story’ (41). They argued that it established a pattern for subsequent
espionage writers in the inter-war years and after, tracing a direct line from Buchan through the work of Graham Greene and Eric Ambler to Ian Fleming and John Le Carré. This view of Buchan’s literary significance gradually became so firmly established that it made its way into general academic surveys, such as *The Oxford English Literary History*. In Volume 10, *The Modern Movement: 1910-1940* (2004), Chris Baldick noted that Buchan’s thrillers ‘display higher literary accomplishment’ than his contemporaries, such that ‘Buchan dominated the genre’, with *The Thirty-Nine Steps* ‘especially influential’ (284).

At the same time as Buchan’s reputation in the history of the spy thriller was being developed in the 1980s, some scholars and critics were discovering other areas of interest in his work. Michael Denning examined narrative and ideology in the British spy story (1987) with an extended discussion of Buchan’s thrillers; the eminent Scottish psychoanalyst, JD Sutherland, in a 1988 article, investigated connections between Buchan’s life experiences and his fiction with special reference to his final novel *Sick Heart River*; Juanita Kruse published a study of *John Buchan and the Idea of Empire* (1989), which took into account some of his non-fiction writing and journalism; Christopher Harvie provided a detailed examination of the links between JG Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and Buchan’s fiction in his 1990 essay ‘For Gods are Kittle Cattle’, and also considered how Buchan’s political views were reflected in his fiction as part of his study of British political fiction since Disraeli, *The Centre of Things* (1991); while JP Parry, in a 1993 essay ‘From the Thirty-Nine Articles to The Thirty-Nine Steps’, provided an extended discussion of Buchan’s religious as well as political thought.

This growing academic interest in Buchan had been assisted at the beginning of the 1980s by the publication of Robert G Blanchard’s detailed bibliography of Buchan’s works, *The First Editions of John Buchan: A Collector’s Bibliography* (1981), which included for the first
time a listing of his numerous articles for the *Spectator* and other journals\(^3\). In addition, the
John Buchan Society, founded in 1979 to promote Buchan and his writings, started issuing
its journal in 1980. By the end of the decade the *John Buchan Journal* was beginning to
publish a number of articles by scholars such as David Daniell and Christopher Harvie. The
status of Buchan’s work was further enhanced in the 1990s by the publication of his major
novels in the World’s Classics editions issued by Oxford University Press. The Buchan series
included all the Richard Hannay novels and those featuring another of his heroes, Edward
Leithen, except *The Power-House*, as well as *Prester John, Huntingtower*, and the historical
novel *Witch Wood*. Each was provided with the usual scholarly apparatus of a detailed
introduction, notes, and a select bibliography, edited by academics such as David Daniell,
Karl Miller, and Kate Macdonald, who had completed a PhD thesis on ‘The Fiction of John
Buchan’ in 1991. The 1990s also saw the publication of another biography of Buchan,
Andrew Lownie’s *John Buchan: The Presbyterian Cavalier* (1995), which updated Janet
Adam Smith’s 1965 life using more recently published material and private papers, while
providing fresh insights and further bibliographic details. Lownie also edited *John Buchan:
Poems* (1996), which brought attention to these somewhat neglected areas of Buchan’s
writing.

By the turn of the century the range of scholarly interest in Buchan’s work had increased
considerably. Some critics began to look in depth at specific and often unconsidered
aspects of his life and work. For example, Isobel and Michael Haslett examined the
influence of Greek and Roman literature on Buchan’s life and writing (2001-02); Michael
Redley discussed the effect of Buchan’s little known interest in East Africa on his work
(2002); and Kate Macdonald considered the range of Buchan’s writing during the First

\(^3\) Many of Buchan’s unsigned articles for the *Spectator* had been identified and listed earlier in Eileen
Stewart’s 1979 PhD thesis, ‘John Buchan – Borderer’, but the list was selective and the thesis had
not been published.
World War, including his forgotten journalism during the early months of the conflict (2007). Other scholars sought to broaden their investigations to examine how Buchan’s work both reflected and contributed to the cultural and political discourses of the period in which he lived. In a 2003 essay, Peter Henshaw considered the influence of Buchan’s South African work and writing, arguing that it played a part in the reconstruction after the Boer War which led ultimately to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910; Victoria Stewart included some detailed discussion of Buchan’s neglected novel The Gap in the Curtain (1932) in her 2008 essay on the relationship between JW Dunne’s theories of time and the literary culture of the 1930s and 1940s; and Christopher Harvie’s book A Floating Commonwealth: Politics, Culture and Technology on Britain’s Atlantic Coast, 1860-1930 (2008) considered Buchan as one of the significant Scottish Celtic influences on the political, socio-economic and cultural discourses of the non-metropolitan elite in the early twentieth century.

The amount of scholarly work on Buchan and his writing was now becoming so varied and substantial as to justify the publication of a volume of critical essays specifically devoted to his work. Reassessing John Buchan: Beyond The Thirty-Nine Steps, edited by Kate Macdonald, was published in 2009. The book was intended to be representative of the substantial critical work now being undertaken on Buchan over a range of topics and informed by a number of disciplines. This was reflected in the authors of its seventeen essays, who included not only several academics from the literature departments of British universities, but also lecturers and professors in English from Belgium, the Middle East, Hong Kong and Canada, historians from Oxford University and academic institutions in Canada and South Africa, and a professor of Film Studies in the United States, as well as contributors with backgrounds in theology, the classics, and commerce. The essays themselves considered different aspects and connections between Buchan’s cultural roots and beliefs, his life experiences, his writing, and the cultural and political background of his
era. Specific subjects included Buchan’s Calvinism, his twin loyalties to Scotland and
England, his views on sport and masculinity, war and pacifism, Britain and America, and the
depiction of Islam and the East, businessmen and archetypal women, politics and ecology
in his fiction.

The year 2009 was significant for Buchan studies because as well as this edited collection of
essays, two further books of importance were issued. Kate Macdonald published her
Companion to the Mystery Fiction of Buchan, which in fact covered more ground than its
title suggested by encompassing the whole of Buchan’s fiction, including the historical
novels and short stories. It was a comprehensive A to Z reference guide for scholars and
readers, with an extensive bibliography. The year also brought the publication of another
book-length study of Buchan’s work, Nathan Waddell’s Modern John Buchan: A Critical
Introduction, which sought to position Buchan as a writer who engaged with twentieth-
century modernity in ways which had previously been underestimated by academics and
critics, both in terms of the extent to which his fiction incorporated various aspects of the
modern world in which he lived, and the critical stance he adopted in his writing towards
modernism and other cultural developments of the period.

The publication of Macdonald’s collection of essays, her Companion, and Waddell’s Modern
John Buchan, all within the same year, indicated that the assessment of Buchan’s literary
achievement was now being widened beyond the spy thriller genre. Patrick Parrinder and
Andrzej Gasiorek, for example, as editors for Oxford University Press of The Reinvention of
the British and Irish Novel 1880-1940 (2011), which took in the period of literary history
covered by Chris Baldick’s The Modern Movement (2004), gave much more attention to
Buchan’s career than Baldick. In their extensive collection of essays Nicholas Daly provided
a fuller account of Buchan’s spy thrillers by including Mr Standfast, The Three Hostages,
and Huntingtower as well as The Thirty-Nine Steps and Greenmantle, and by mentioning his
heroes Edward Leithen, Dickson McCunn and the Gorbals Die-Hards as well as Richard Hannay (234-37); and Cairns Craig considered Buchan’s career as a historical novelist in the tradition of Robert Louis Stevenson (480-81), which was omitted by Baldick, featuring in particular Witch Wood (1927) as being among ‘some of the major works of the Scottish novel in the twentieth century’ (480).

If Parrinder and Gasiorek’s recent volume indicates that Buchan’s other fiction is now coming to be recognised as well as his spy thrillers, this does not mean to say that his literary reputation has yet been fully restored to the academic mainstream. There are still dissenting voices who echo the earlier critical prejudice against Buchan, such as Stanley Weintraub, who in his review of Macdonald’s collection of essays (‘John Buchan Reassessed’, 2010), states that Buchan’s reputation will ‘remain tethered, as long as books are read, to The Thirty-Nine Steps’, and will resist any attempt ‘to shift the focus from Buchan’s robust quest-thrillers to his other accomplishments, which were many, yet forgettable’ (372). Although Weintraub’s view would now seem to represent a minority voice in the academic world, Buchan’s reputation still suffers from the prolific and popular nature of much of his fiction during the inter-war period. The emergence of the ‘middlebrow’ in recent years as an area for academic study of inter-war literature, while indicating that Buchan might be considered as a middlebrow writer, has not led to the development of interest in his work which might have been expected. Kate Macdonald argues that this is mainly because Buchan ‘is still assessed as operating within a context of genre literature, which is inferred to be inherently inferior to “literary” literature, middlebrow or not’ (Companion 10). Thus, Buchan tends to be overlooked in academic discourse on middlebrow culture, so that Erica Brown and Mary Grover’s recent collection, Middlebrow Literary Cultures (2012), does not reference him at all.
Neither has much interest in Buchan’s work been generated by one of the latest developments in the study of twentieth century literary culture, the notion of ‘intermodernism’, introduced by Kristin Bluemel in her essay collection *Intermodernism: Literary Culture in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain* (2009). Intermodernism seeks to study the effects of modernism and the responses to it not by viewing the literature of the inter-war period as a binary opposition between modernism and other forms of writing, as has been the main tendency in the past, but by examining inter-war literature through the writing of those authors who, while engaging with modernism and seeking to understand it, nevertheless continued to write in traditional genres. Bluemel’s book contained a listing of possible intermodernist authors worthy of study (208-24), which included popular fiction writers of the period such as Margery Allingham, Daphne du Maurier, Graham Greene, Eric Linklater, and Dorothy L Sayers. Again, the name of John Buchan was not mentioned. Yet Nathan Waddell’s 2009 study, *Modern John Buchan*, positioned Buchan’s critical stance in precisely the area between modernism and traditional genres, seeking to understand modernism while continuing to write popular fiction, which Bluemel defines as intermodernist. In his latest essay on this subject, ‘John Buchan’s Amicable Anti-Modernism’ (2012), Waddell notes that, in terms of the middlebrow or intermodernism, ‘cases can be advanced for thinking about his novels, short stories and poems in the languages of either framework’ (79).

In evidencing his arguments in this latest essay and in his earlier book, Waddell makes good use of Buchan’s ‘The Old and the New in Literature’, which originated as a paper presented to the Royal Literary Society in 1925 and was subsequently included in the collection of lectures and essays *Homilies and Recreations* (1926). He also references a number of similar items from this and other Buchan collections, but makes only limited use of his uncollected journalism for the *Spectator* and other magazines. In fact, very few of the recent books and articles on Buchan’s writing that I have mentioned in this review make
anything more than passing reference to his journalism, and only the essays by Michael Redley and Peter Henshaw in Kate Macdonald’s collection *Reassessing John Buchan* make significant use of his uncollected journalism. As Macdonald writes in the introduction to her collection: ‘Buchan’s *Spectator* journalism….is a fascinating but underused resource to supplement Buchan’s fiction writing and his burgeoning historical and biographical work from the turn of the twentieth century’ (6). It is a major aim of this thesis to foreground Buchan’s journalism for the *Spectator* and other magazines, and to make it more accessible to those scholars and critics who may seek to complete the work of restoring his reputation to the mainstream of literary debate.

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4 This also applies to the latest collection of essays edited by Kate Macdonald and Nathan Waddell, *John Buchan and the Idea of Modernity* (2013).
CHAPTER TWO

BUCHAN THE ESSAYIST

In one of his earliest essays, his obituary of Robert Louis Stevenson for the *Glasgow University Magazine* in January 1895 (see Article 1), Buchan refers to the essay as ‘that most delicate and difficult of literary forms’ (1:32). Yet it was a mode of writing which would continue to engage him throughout his literary career, first as a young writer seeking recognition in the literary world of the fin de siècle; secondly as a professional journalist for the *Spectator* in the Edwardian period; then as a correspondent for the *Times* on the Western Front in the First World War; and finally, after he had achieved popular success with *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in 1915, as a celebrity columnist in various newspapers and magazines of the inter-war period. This chapter outlines each of these four distinct phases of Buchan’s journalistic career and examines the style and structure of his essays, showing how he adapted these aspects of his work to correspond with the status of the magazine or newspaper he was writing for and, more importantly, with its readership. It also considers how these aspects of his writing interacted with his fictional work. The broad thematic content and detailed subject-matter of his essays will be examined in subsequent chapters.

The Young Essayist, 1893-99

In his obituary of Stevenson, Buchan admits that he ‘has long been an enthusiastic admirer’ (1:8-9) and ranks Stevenson in the tradition of Lamb and Hazlitt as ‘the greatest of all English essayists’ (1:164-65). He particularly praises the style of his essays, with their ‘attempts to reach perfection in word and phrase’ (1:36-37). There would seem to be an element of youthful over-enthusiasm here in Buchan’s estimation of Stevenson’s work, and he was later to modify his views, finding him ‘too much of a looker-on, a phrase-maker in life’ (MHD 43). But there is no doubting the influence which Stevenson had on Buchan and
many writers of the 1890s. Buchan’s obituary cites authors as diverse as WE Henley and Richard Le Gallienne as being indebted to Stevenson (1:149-50), and emphasises his influence on younger writers like himself: ‘He is the supreme stylist of our age and generation’ (1:68-69).

This does not mean to say that Stevenson’s style was without its critics among Buchan’s contemporaries, and his obituary essay recognises this: ‘Its matchless purity has been called rigid’ (1:61), and it seemed that ‘writing was with him a game of word-hunting, that we see him picking his phrase, trying many keys’ (1:62-63). Buchan’s obituary essay can be criticised in similar terms. It has a tendency to indulge in repetitive phrase-making, such as the description of Stevenson as ‘a scholar among dullards, a “gentleman among canaille”, a gipsy among a race of successful merchants’ (1:155-56) – three striking phrases each of which make much the same point. Or take the timing of Stevenson’s death ‘at the summit of his fame, at the tip-top of his life, at the height of his energy’ (1:172-73) – three phrases that are not so striking, clichés almost, which attempt to create an effect without enhancing meaning. In his search for memorable phrases Buchan’s style can sometimes overreach itself, as in this comparison of Stevenson with his contemporaries: ‘Amongst the ignavum pecus [lazy herd] he seems like a mediaeval knight who has found himself by some strange chance amid the revelry of a feast of Isis ’ (1:158-60). This sentence, with its Latin phrase and Egyptian goddess, seems altogether too grandiose for the point it is making.

It is of course possible that Buchan deliberately included these excesses of style in his obituary essay as a homage to Stevenson, but in fact they are a feature of his other essays of this period, which began with ‘Angling in Still Waters’ (N1), published in the Gentleman’s Magazine in August 1893, the month in which Buchan reached his eighteenth birthday. It was followed by a number of other essays and short stories published in established magazines such as the Gentleman’s and Macmillan’s. The style of his writing during this
period has been criticised as ‘arty or fanciful’ (Smith, Biography 94), ‘rather flowery’ (Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 33), and ‘self-consciously literary’ (Daniell, Interpreter’s House 5). But it must be remembered that Buchan was a young undergraduate at this time, seeking to establish a reputation for himself in the increasingly competitive literary world of the fin de siècle as an essayist in the tradition of Lamb and Hazlitt and as a storyteller in the mould of Stevenson and Scott. The style of the period was decorous belles-lettres, tending towards the baroque, in the aesthetic manner developed by Walter Pater and taken up by Stevenson and, later, by Kenneth Grahame. Buchan was a particular admirer of Pater who, along with Stevenson, was a model for his early writing style (MHD 41). He was also an enthusiast for Kenneth Grahame’s early work, giving a copy of his Pagan Papers (1893) and The Golden Age (1895) to his sister Anna, and writing to his friend Charles Dick that The Golden Age was ‘surely the most beautiful book published for many years’ (3 July 1895, NLS Acc.7214 Mf.Mss.310). Buchan recalls the belletrist style of the 1890s in his late article ‘Pan’ (N44:41) and acknowledges in his memoirs that his early writing consisted mainly of ‘imitative exercises’ which resulted in ‘a slightly meretricious and “precious” style, stiff-jointed, heavily brocaded’ (MHD 42, 41). His imitation of Stevenson extended to the titles of some of his early essays. ‘A Gossip on Books and Places’ (A2) and ‘A Note on Parodies and Parodists’ (A3), both from 1894, echo Stevenson’s ‘A Gossip on Romance’ (1882) and ‘A Note on Realism’ (1883). It even extended to the Oxford entrance examination. His college tutor asked Buchan whether he admired Stevenson because his ‘essay in the scholarship exam was just like a bit out of him’ (letter to Charles Dick, 15 October 1895, NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.310).

The pronounced imitation of the Stevensonian style in Buchan’s early essays is offset to a large extent by the personal element in his writing. In most of these essays Buchan is writing from his own experience. ‘Angling in Still Waters’ (N1) and ‘Rivuli Montani’ (N2) describe the pleasures of fishing on the Tweed and in the pools and streams of the hills in
the Scottish Border Country where Buchan spent several summer holidays in his youth.

‘The Country of Kidnapped’ (A8) resulted from a walking holiday in the Highlands of Scotland in the spring of 1898 (Smith, Biography 67). Buchan was a voracious reader at this time and kept a commonplace book of quotations and jottings. These literary interests form the basis for several of his early essays, such as ‘A Note on Common-place Books’ (A1) and ‘The Muse of the Angle’ (B1). Buchan also recorded his early impressions of Oxford University in ‘Oxford and Her Influence’ (K1) and ‘The Graduate as Freshman’ (K2). Thus the stylistic flourishes and overstated literariness of the young essayist are underpinned by personal observation and experience, a combination which is also evident in Buchan’s early short stories. Indeed, several of his essays in this period contain story elements. ‘Angling in Still Waters’ (N1), for example, is presented in the form of a personal narrative of a day’s fishing on the Tweed, while ‘Sentimental Travelling’ and ‘Night on the Heather’ in Buchan’s 1896 collection Scholar-Gipsies similarly contain a narrative outline with some dialogue (Macdonald, ‘The Fiction’ 159). This technique of providing solid background detail which offsets the overt literariness of the narrative is developed much further in Buchan’s later fiction, in which the romantic excesses of the plot are continually kept in check by the apparent realism of the settings in his novels.

Meanwhile, Buchan’s early essays succeeded in acquiring the literary reputation he desired. While still only eighteen years of age he was asked to edit and introduce the Essays and Apothegms of Francis, Lord Bacon (1894), and his essay ‘The Muse of the Angle’ (B1) on depictions of the sport of angling in English poetry led to Buchan editing Musa Piscatrix (1896), an anthology of fishing poems. At Oxford he won the Stanhope prize for his essay on Sir Walter Raleigh, which was published in 1897. He also completed his first

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5 Buchan’s letters to his friend Charles Dick during 1893 (NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.310) provide details of Buchan’s reading, from Jerome K Jerome and Conan Doyle (11 April), via Robert Bridges and Henry James (5 July), to Victor Hugo and Henrik Ibsen (11 July). His commonplace book, ‘Promus’ (NLS 6542/9), provides further evidence of the extensive range of Buchan’s reading at this time.
novel, the short historical romance *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895), and published the collection of essays and short stories, *Scholar-Gipsies* (1896). His writing proved to be an important source of income to finance his studies at Oxford, which was supplemented by becoming a reader for the publisher, John Lane (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 41). When he came down from Oxford at the end of 1899, having published further essays and short stories together with two more historical novels, Buchan had established himself as a young writer of great promise and was immediately taken on by the *Spectator* in the next phase of his journalistic career.

*The Professional Journalist, 1900-14*

From the turn of the century until the outbreak of the First World War, Buchan was writing regularly for the *Spectator*, except for a break of two years between November 1901 and October 1903 when he went to South Africa as Private Secretary to The High Commissioner, Lord Milner. During this period the *Spectator* was one of the most influential weekly journals in Britain. Conservative in outlook, it was aimed at an elite readership of statesmen and politicians, civil servants and churchmen, army and navy officers, writers and academics, business leaders and professional men – in short, the leading opinion-formers of the day. Buchan later referred to them as ‘a great majority of educated Englishmen, who found in the *Spectator* a reflex of their own habits of mind’ (*C111:11f-12a*). The *Spectator*’s owner and editor was St Loe Strachey⁶, who was to form a lasting friendship with Buchan. In his article ‘“Spectator” Memories’ for the centenary edition of the paper in 1928, Buchan referred to Strachey as ‘a great editor’ and looked back on their ‘long years of friendship’ (*C119:21a*). For his part, Strachey held Buchan in high regard as a journalist, noting the ‘excellent work that Buchan has done for me and the great help he has given me’ (quoted in Smith, *Biography* 162).

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⁶ John St Loe Strachey (1860-1927) had acquired the *Spectator* in 1898, eventually relinquishing control in 1925 (*ODNB* 5 December 2013).
When he acquired the paper, Strachey had continued the *Spectator*’s well-established policy of anonymous contributors that both protected the independence of the journalists and allowed them to write as generalists on a wide variety of subjects rather than develop specialisms in specific fields, which tended to be the case whenever signed journalism was introduced (Kent xix). This anonymity policy therefore enabled Buchan to contribute a wide range of articles and reviews. The paper itself usually consisted of thirty-six pages, divided into distinct sections: ‘News of the Week’, containing single-paragraph notes on various items arising from the week’s news; ‘Topics of the Day’, being page-length discussions of individual matters of current interest (the equivalent of today’s leading articles); ‘Letters to the Editor’; ‘Poetry’, containing first publication of one or two complete poems; ‘Art’, ‘Music’, or ‘Theatre’ reviews; ‘Books’, including four or five page-length reviews plus a round-up of ‘Novels of the Week’; ‘Current Literature’, being short reviews of some of the week’s publications, with a listing of the remainder; and finally about ten pages of advertisements. Occasionally, a ‘Literary Supplement’ of book reviews and articles was published with the main paper.

Beginning in January 1900, Buchan contributed occasional leading articles to the ‘Topics of the Day’, and full-length reviews for the ‘Books’ section, all unsigned. He soon developed a good working relationship with Strachey, and by June his contributions were becoming more regular and numerous. He deputised for the editor when he went on holiday in August 1900 and for periods thereafter whenever Strachey was away, although he was not officially appointed as an assistant editor until January 1906 (Smith, *Biography* 81, 150). But in January 1907 Buchan became chief literary advisor to Nelson’s the publishers, an appointment which was followed by his marriage in July. As a result of these changes, Buchan relinquished his assistant editorship of the *Spectator* (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier*

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7 He is also known to have written paragraphs for the ‘News of the Week’ section and short reviews for ‘Current Literature’, but no reliable means of identifying these contributions is available (Blanchard 201).
96, 98), but continued to write for the paper, restricting his contributions mainly to book
reviews with occasional leading articles.

Throughout his time at the Spectator, Buchan wrote articles for other journals, particularly
Blackwood's Magazine and the Times Literary Supplement, but these averaged no more
than three or four per year in total. In February 1907 he took over responsibility for one of
Nelson’s journals, the Scottish Review, which had originally been launched in July 1905 as a
Scottish religious weekly. Buchan tried to turn the paper into ‘a kind of Scottish Spectator’
(Gray xiii) by introducing new features on social and foreign affairs, literature and culture,
but his changes met with resistance from the paper’s parochial Scottish readership, its
circulation dwindled, and the Scottish Review ceased publication at the end of 1908
(Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 102-03).

Although Buchan failed in his attempt to raise the tone and outlook of the Scottish Review,
he seems to have had little difficulty in changing his own writing style to suit the
requirements of the Spectator. Early in his career he had particularly admired the
Elizabethan style of Francis Bacon. In his introduction to Bacon’s Essays and Apothegms in
January 1894 he wrote: ‘There is a dignified stiffness about his style; like some statesman
giving audience to meaner men, which has a peculiar charm for us in these days of loose
and slipshod writing’ (xxiii). Although Buchan’s early essay style tended to be similarly
dignified and stately, self-consciously literary and highbrow, this soon changed when he
began writing for the Spectator. He quickly realised that such elements of the Elizabethan
style were inappropriate for a professional journalist in the twentieth century. He summed
up the difference in an article for the Spectator of 23 June 1906, ‘A Mirror for Journalists’:

We do not….seek in a leading article, written to edify the man in the train, the polished,
jewel-like form of an essay composed for the delight of the man of leisure. [Instead,
there is] a working model, consciously imperfect, a kind of compromise between
colloquial speech and a more formal statement, which is, or should be, the standard for
journalism....For the essence of such work is that it makes an appeal to a certain sort of mind, and its language must be intelligible to its audience (A21:979b).

Buchan seems to have worked towards this model from an early stage in his *Spectator* career by adapting his writing to the house style of the paper, which required something more impersonal than the style he had adopted in his early essays. The difference is exemplified in the use of the first person pronouns, ‘I’ and ‘we’. In his early essays, most of which are signed or initialled, Buchan often used ‘I’ to express a personal statement or opinion, but he also used ‘we’ for authoritative stylistic effect when he really meant ‘I’, as in his obituary of Robert Louis Stevenson: ‘we must not refuse praise to Zola for his laborious creations, though our sympathy with him may be of the scantest’ (1:12-13). Here Buchan is dressing up his own opinion about Zola as an authoritative, generally accepted point of view. Similarly, ‘we should put Stevenson on a higher plane than Walter Pater’ (1:70) is really Buchan’s own personal view. By way of contrast, the *Spectator* house style rarely allows personal opinions to be directly stated because its articles are contributed anonymously. Instead, it uses the first person plural voice to express the editorial view of the paper as an authoritative opinion on matters of substance. Buchan adopts this house style from the outset of his *Spectator* career, using for example such phrases as ‘we have insisted again and again in these columns’ (3:30-31) and ‘in this proud self-confidence we find the true attitude’ (3:79-80) in an early essay, ‘The National “Malaise”’, dated 3 February 1900.

Buchan also used the first person plural voice in both his early essays and his *Spectator* articles to mean ‘the people of Britain’, ‘the nation’, as in ‘our literature’ (1:7), ‘our age’ (1:69), or: ‘We are told that we are keeping cool and showing our dogged spirit, but we are all of us unhappily conscious that the compliment is not wholly merited. The nation has become restless’ (3:7-10). However, bearing the readership of the *Spectator* in mind, he often subtly altered his use of ‘we’ in his articles to mean the *Spectator* and its readership
collectively, as a group of like-minded individuals who share much the same outlook on life.

In ‘An Imperial Club for London’ (14 November 1903, Article 5), he begins by appealing to supporters of the British Empire, in particular ‘those who know the Colonies’ (5:3-4). This statement aims to encompass most of the Spectator’s readership, who would agree with the paper’s policy of supporting the Empire in principle, even if they had never visited the colonies. Buchan treats his readers as a special group: ‘those who are chary about certain popular methods of union’ but wish to ‘further an end which they desire as ardently as any one else’ (5:1-3). It is an elite group, separate from the ‘popular’ and ‘any one else’. The remainder of the article is written for this elite group, one which ‘knows the ready hospitality of the Colonies but must regret that we cannot, as things now stand, repay it in kind’ (5:34-35). In this instance ‘we’ clearly refers to the majority of like-minded readers of the Spectator, who themselves form a sort of club for which the Spectator is the house journal.

By using the first person plural voice in this way, Buchan seeks to advance his arguments by building a consensus in support of his opinions to which no member of the Spectator ‘club’, his readership, could reasonably object. This consensus approach is part of his strategy in constructing an article, which aims not only to persuade, but also to bring pleasure and satisfaction to the reader. In terms of modern reader-response theory, Buchan has in mind a clear idea of the Spectator reader, who is the equivalent of Wolfgang Iser’s ‘implied reader’ (xii). He (the reader is usually assumed to be male) is part of the educated elite, a member of the establishment with a conservative temperament, often a busy man of affairs who has little time to contemplate matters outside his specific sphere of influence.

To use Stanley Fish’s terms, he is a member of an ‘interpretive community’, an ‘informed reader’ with specific expectations of the text he is reading (171). In the context of his previous experience of the Spectator, he would expect the article to be principled, well-informed, logical and practical. Buchan’s strategy is to meet these requirements by writing
within the boundaries of what Hans Robert Jauss would call the *Spectator* reader’s ‘horizon of expectations’ (23), thereby constructing an article which, while introducing new opinions and arguments, nevertheless provides pleasure and satisfaction to the reader.

Buchan, of course, is himself a member of the *Spectator’s* interpretive community and knows exactly what his readers expect. His articles usually follow a basic logical sequence. First, they define the problem to be solved, or the question to be answered, or the attitude of mind to be considered as one of the ‘Topics of the Day’. Then they describe its current manifestation in the modern world, giving practical examples and facts where appropriate, and consider its historical and cultural context. This particularly appeals to the conservative temperament of the reader if it can be shown that the topic has a continuity with the past, with precedents which have been resolved over time. After clarifying any specific points to avoid misunderstanding, the article will argue its case and propose a remedy, detailing its advantages and comparing them with the drawbacks of other possible solutions. The emphasis throughout is on a high standard of integrity, fidelity to empirical observation and experience, and logical exposition from first principles. In this way the article provides pleasant and satisfying reading, clarifying a topic which the reader may previously have felt uneasy about, and leaving the impression that he would undoubtedly have arrived at the same conclusion if only he had the time to think about the topic.

‘An Imperial Club for London’ (Article 5) follows this basic structure. It begins with an aspect of the modern world which may well be making the reader feel vaguely uneasy: ‘The air is thick with Empire and the rumours of Empire’ (5:1). It narrows this atmosphere down to a specific problem: the difficulties of improving communication and promoting understanding between Britain and the Colonies, so that ‘it must seem a pity that there are not more facilities for that social union which is as important as the political’ (5:4-5). Note the emphatic inevitability of this statement – a consensus opinion from which no
reasonable Spectator reader could possibly disagree. The article then provides a practical example of a Colonial visitor to London who finds that Britain is ‘a country where the social organisation does not readily admit a stranger’ (5:20-21), which contrasts with ‘the ready hospitality of the Colonies’ (5:34). A solution is then proposed: ‘a first-class club, with a good situation and the best management’ (5:40). The failings of existing clubs, such as the Imperial Institute, are outlined before the advantages of a new Imperial Club are discussed, explaining ‘the benefits to Englishmen’ (5:68) as well as to Colonials, with examples of how the club might work in practice. The article ends with a gentle appeal to the male chauvinism of the Spectator readership by citing the success of the Ladies’ Empire Club in London, which ‘provides for ladies a club such as we desire to see founded for men’ (5:93). The reader is left with the favourable impression that a reasonable and practical solution has been proposed to one of the many problems of managing an empire in the modern world.

Buchan’s book reviews for the Spectator are structured in a similar logical manner (Article 9, ‘Sir Richard Burton’, is a typical example). They usually consider the subject matter in the context of previous books on the subject: how does the current book compare, and does it have anything new to say? They may also consider the difficulties of writing in this particular genre (biography, military history, travel writing, and so on): does the author succeed in overcoming these difficulties, and what are the particular merits and faults of his book? They then provide some detailed commentary on the contents of the book, for example the main events of the subject’s life, the major military campaigns, or the places visited. Finally, there is a summing up, and again the reader is left with the impression of having been pleasantly informed and entertained. He may now decide to purchase the book if it is of interest to him and has been given a good review, or he may be satisfied that he has been provided with the main points and criticisms of the book without having to take the time to read it.
By tailoring the structure of his articles and reviews to the perceived requirements of the
*Spectator* readership, Buchan moved closer to the working model of journalism which he
outlined in his essay ‘A Mirror for Journalists’ quoted earlier. His writing now made the
‘appeal to a certain sort of mind’ which that quotation mentioned, but needed a suitable
style to convey ideas and arguments that were often quite complex in a way which would
be ‘intelligible to its audience’. He did this by toning down the ornate style and repetitive
phrase-making of his early essays, and adopting a clearer, more lucid style using shorter,
sharper sentences that aimed at the ‘compromise between colloquial speech and a more
formal statement’ that his working model required. The difference can be seen by
comparing the opening sentences of two essays. The first is an example of his early style,
taken from ‘Nonconformity in Literature’, published in the *Glasgow Herald* on 2 November
1895 (Article 2):

If a modern Lucian were to go through our streets to-day noting us as he went, and if an
up-to-date “Banquet of Philosophers” were the result of his observations, we fancy that
it would afford as amusing reading as its ancient prototype, or indeed as any work of its
kind from Horace to Swift. For while possessing much that is good and showing many
signs of excellence to be, our age has that peculiar blemish that all such periods must
have – a desire for the new and impatience under the restraint of the old (2:1-6).

The second extract is the opening of one of Buchan’s early essays for the *Spectator*, ‘The
National “Malaise”’, published on 3 February 1900 (Article 3):

In our modern world of telegrams and special editions, when the public nerves are kept
in a perpetual tension, and the bird of ill-omen in the shape of the small newsboy
hovers about the street, there is a special temptation to a kind of irritable unrest (3:1-3).

Both of these openings refer to the streets of modern Britain, but there the similarities end.
The first sentence of the earlier essay makes a rather meandering literary comparison with
the work of a Greek satirist, a Roman poet, and Jonathan Swift, which only a minority of
readers might fully understand. It also fails to arrive at any clear point. That has to wait
until the end of the second sentence: ‘a desire for the new and impatience under the
restraint of the old’. By contrast, the *Spectator* essay refers to contemporary Britain in a pithy metonym, ‘our modern world of telegrams and special editions’, which the reader instantly recognises from his own observation and experience. The elegant metaphor of the bird of ill-omen, immediately explained as the small newsboy bearing bad tidings, then secures the reader’s attention in a way which is beyond the obscure literary references of the earlier essay, and the sentence ends by pointing the way to the rest of the article through the statement that ‘there is a special temptation to a kind of irritable unrest’, which indicates the national ‘malaise’ that the essay goes on to consider.

Thus, Buchan has already improved his style at this early stage in his *Spectator* career, but he has not yet perfected it. ‘The National “Malaise”’ is only the third article he wrote for the *Spectator*, and in its long second paragraph it tends to overstate the literary and historical parallels (3:34-63), a frequent fault of his early essays. In particular, he has not yet arrived at that ‘compromise between colloquial speech and a more formal statement’ that is the aim of the working model from his article ‘A Mirror for Journalists’ quoted earlier. He was to achieve this in his later, mature *Spectator* style after he had returned from South Africa. The difference is illustrated by the following extract from ‘African Secret History’ (Article 17), a review of a book on the Transvaal secret service before the Boer War. It was published on 2 December 1911 and begins as follows:

There is a saga of Africa – North, East, South, and West – which does not get into the history books. It is the story of the backstairs, the things behind the scenes of business and politics, the great underworld which many drift into and few return from. You may hear bits of it in bars and mining camps and from chance companions; occasionally it appears in fiction; but the truth is that those who know most about it are the least likely to write down their knowledge ....for there are rich and respected citizens abroad to-day whose fortunes were built on queer foundations. But anyone who knew the Transvaal before the war will be able to fill up the gaps. It is not a pretty story. New mining camps are not Sunday schools, and the haste to get rich drives men into ugly devices (17:1-6 and 9-13).
This is perhaps more informal than Buchan’s usual style in his later *Spectator* essays, certainly closer to colloquial speech than the formality of his early articles, but still a compromise between the two. More significantly, it shows Buchan moving towards the style he would later adopt in his breakthrough novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915). This extract would not be out of place at the beginning of that novel, with Buchan’s hero, Richard Hannay, telling the reader how he made his fortune in South Africa before coming to London. There he meets Scudder, the secret agent, who has become involved in something like ‘the great underworld which many drift into and few return from’ described in the above extract. As Hannay puts it in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*: ‘there was a big subterranean movement going on, engineered by very dangerous people. He [Scudder] had come on it by accident, it fascinated him; he went further, and then he got caught’ (10).

The *Spectator* extract may not have quite the same personal style of Hannay’s narrative, but it does indicate that the apparent gulf between Buchan’s formal *Spectator* style and that of his popular fiction is not as great as it might first seem. Indeed, Buchan may well have had the *Spectator* readership in mind when he wrote his early spy novels such as *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. He knew that his friend Arthur Balfour, the former Conservative Prime Minister and just the type of reader that the *Spectator* targeted, had a weakness for the invasion-scare spy stories of E Phillips Oppenheim. So he decided to write a similar kind of novel, but involving characters that a reader like Balfour would be interested in (Smith, *Biography* 192, 206-07). Balfour later wrote to Buchan telling him how much he had enjoyed *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (22 May 1916, NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.304).

Buchan, then, succeeded in achieving the working model that he outlined in his 1906 article ‘A Mirror for Journalists’. His articles and reviews for the *Spectator* achieved a uniformly high standard, distilling the essence of a complicated problem or a complex book in a logical format, clearly argued and presented in a style which was sufficiently formal to include elegant phrases and literary metaphors wherever appropriate to the subject.
matter, yet colloquial enough when the occasion demanded, and at all times readily
intelligible to the reader. Buchan himself became the model professional, the consummate
journalist, as W Forbes Gray, his assistant editor on the Scottish Review, testifies in his
introduction to Comments and Characters (1940), his collection of Buchan’s essays and
pieces for that paper:

Though still in his early thirties, Buchan displayed all the qualities of an accomplished
literary journalist (xv). The width and accuracy of knowledge in so young a man was
amazing….And behind a skilful narrative, attractively presented, were sound judgment,
logical consistency, a sense of proportion, and always an appeal to first principles. His
editorials were models of direct, lucid and graceful exposition (xvi).

The War Correspondent, 1914-18

On the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, Buchan left the Spectator to set up
two new ventures for Nelson’s the publishers, where he had been chief literary advisor
since 1907. The first was a cheap weekly magazine, The War, which began publication on
22 August with up-to-date pictures and reports on military topics and an editorial by
Buchan, who also contributed occasional articles (see Catalogue I 38 et seq). The second
was a more authoritative and considered history of the war as it progressed, written from a
longer perspective several months after actual events. This was Nelson’s History of the
War, written almost entirely by Buchan, its first volume appearing in January 1915. It
proved to be more successful than The War, which ceased publication on 6 March 1915
after intense competition from other weekly war magazines had made it uneconomic. But
the Nelson’s History continued publication throughout the war and later formed the basis
of Buchan’s four-volume A History of the Great War (1921-22) (Macdonald, ‘Translating
Propaganda’ 183).

Buchan’s early war writing led to his appointment by the Times as its special correspondent
at the Second Battle of Ypres in May 1915, from where he dispatched six eye-witness
reports (I 71-76), followed by a long summary article in July (I 79). He returned to the Western Front for the Times in late September to file four further reports on the Battle of Loos (I 81-84). Also in 1915 he began writing occasional articles on the war for Land and Water (I 77 et seq), and in 1916 he cabled a series of short reports to the Chicago Daily News on the progress of the Somme campaign (I 91-98). By then Buchan was working for the Intelligence Corps at General Headquarters in France with responsibility for handling press and propaganda matters (Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 125), so that his cables to Chicago seem to have been an attempt to influence American opinion on the war by giving very positive views of events in the Somme offensive.

The dispatches which Buchan wrote for the Times in 1915 stand out from his other war writing, and are important in his journalism as a whole, because they are the only occasions in his career when he acted as an eye-witness reporter rather than editorial commentator, literary reviewer, or military historian. He had reviewed a book on famous war correspondents for the Times Literary Supplement the previous November (I 53), in which he noted that modern warfare is too big and complex for the reporting of the ordinary correspondent to convey a full picture of all the military operations. ‘At its best it is brilliant journalism to enlighten and excite for the moment till the full accounts are available’ (I 53: 490d). This is what Buchan attempts in his Times dispatches. They concentrate on personal narrative, what he has done and seen himself, while details of the military situation are kept to a minimum. His account of the destruction of Ypres (Article 19) provides an example of his personal reporting style. It is vivid with striking images of the ruined buildings and their contents, such as the house where ‘the whole front has gone and bedrooms with wrecked furniture are open to the light’ (19:25), and ‘the big gilt clock with its hands irrevocably fixed’ hanging loose from the damaged stonework of the Cloth Hall (19:54-55). But it is also sensitive to the sounds and smells as well as the sights that he encounters. He is ‘oppressed by the utter silence’ (19:48), and some jackdaws cawing ‘only
intensify the stillness’ (19:51); while in ‘a carefully-tended garden’ (19:35) there ‘hangs a sickening smell of decay, against which the lilacs and hawthorns are powerless’ (19:39-40). The overall effect is to impress on the reader at a personal level the wholesale destruction of property and human life which can be wrought by modern warfare.

In his Times dispatches Buchan writes with the novelist’s descriptive power and eye for detail. They show that he could be an equally good eye-witness reporter as he was a professional journalist. As the Bookman profile of Buchan by David Hodge published in October 1916 recorded: ‘he has been doing work of which all Fleet Street is proud. His war copy is free from highly coloured passages, and it is with calmness, dispassion and in pellucid English that he records the happenings. His value as a War Correspondent has been proved beyond question’ (7b).

The Celebrity Columnist, 1919-35

The First World War made Buchan’s name as a novelist and historian. The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915) was a great popular success, not least in the trenches where it provided absorbing reading for troops who needed an escape from the horrible realities of the war (Macdonald, ‘The Fiction’ 30). Its follow-up, Greenmantle (1916), was equally popular. Nelson’s History of the War, which eventually ran to twenty-four volumes published at regular intervals until 1919, also brought Buchan to the public’s attention as a historian (Strachan 78). The result of all this success was that after the war Buchan concentrated his writing on popular fiction, historical novels and biographies, restricting his journalism mainly to occasional articles and reviews in the Spectator, Times Literary Supplement, and various other newspapers and journals. In the more popular papers he was often introduced as a kind of celebrity columnist. In the Daily Express of 9 August 1930 he was ‘The Famous Novelist’ (8), while the Daily Mirror of 10 November 1928 had him as ‘the Distinguished Historian’ (11). Elsewhere, the Book Seller of December 1927 had an article
'Interviews with Famous Authors: John Buchan’, the Tatler of 4 May 1932 carried a profile ‘Meet John Buchan’, while the November issue of Homes and Gardens in the same year published a four-page photo-article ‘Mr John Buchan at Home’.

The only sustained sequence of articles that Buchan wrote for periodical publication after the First World War was for the Graphic between 5 April 1930 and 16 April 1932. This was a weekly magazine aimed at a popular middle-class readership with many photographic illustrations. It covered news from home and abroad, especially the Empire, together with articles on the arts and sciences, music and sport. Royal occasions and the fashionable social world were given prominent coverage. Buchan’s articles, all signed, usually appeared fortnightly with occasional holiday breaks. In writing them he adopted a personal and conversational style more suited to the Graphic readership than the authoritative and influential tone he had used for his articles and reviews in the Spectator before the war.

This change of approach can be seen in Article 25, ‘England’s Changing Face’, from the Graphic of 2 August 1930. It consists of twenty-two short, easily digestible paragraphs compared with the much longer, more complex structure of his early Spectator articles, such as ‘The National “Malaise”’ (Article 3) which has only five paragraphs in total. Buchan begins his Graphic article: ‘We are all agreed that the face of England is changing’ (25:1).

This is a consensus from which few of his readers would demur. He then advances his arguments through several rhetorical questions, the answers to which are suggestive and conditional, rather than authoritative and forthright. ‘Is the rural beauty of England slipping away under our hand?’ (25:8) - it is possible, but not if action is taken to prevent it. ‘If these are the characteristics of rural England, what are the dangers which threaten them?’ (25:38-39) – urban sprawl, new roads and by-passes, but ‘if properly handled’ they need

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8 I have excluded here his more lightweight, gossipy columns: the monthly diary for English Life from September 1926 to November 1927; his ‘Auspex’ pieces for the Spectator from 2 January to 19 March 1932; and his ‘Atticus’ column for the Sunday Times between June 1932 and September 1935.
not spoil the countryside (25:53). His argument is couched in a personal style: ‘I hope, ‘I
believe’, I think’. Whenever he uses the first person plural voice, he means himself and his
readers, and by inference the ordinary citizens of England. He never uses it in the old
Spectator way to express the editorial opinion of the journal, or as the voice of an elite
club. In the Graphic Buchan’s aim is to take his readers with him rather than force his
opinions on them.

Buchan’s journalism effectively came to an end in 1935 when he took up his official
position as Governor-General of Canada, and he published only a handful of articles after
that date. It had been a long and distinguished career of over forty years. Although his vivid
war reporting for the Times had been a highlight, the peak was undoubtedly the very long
series of articles and reviews that he wrote for the Spectator before the First World War.
Many of these were of the highest quality, models of the journalistic essay in the elegant
and authoritative style of the period. It is unfortunate that the anonymity policy of the
Spectator has meant that these essays have remained in relative obscurity and have not
been given the prominent place they deserve in the overall assessment of Buchan’s literary
work.
CHAPTER THREE

BUCHAN THE LITERARY CRITIC

Chapter Two made the case that Buchan is an underrated essayist based mainly on the
evidence of the changing styles of his uncollected journalism. But of course the content of
his journalistic work must also feature significantly in any assessment of Buchan as an
essayist. Throughout his career, and particularly in the period 1900-14 when he was a
professional journalist on the Spectator, Buchan wrote reviews of a wide range of books on
such topics as poetry, biography, history, travel and exploration, as well as articles
commenting on many of the political, economic and cultural issues of his time. Thus, he
performed a dual role as literary critic and cultural commentator, but because most of his
journalism was published anonymously, these aspects of his career have received less
attention from biographers and critics than his literary work. This chapter examines Buchan
the literary critic as revealed by his uncollected journalism, while Chapter Four will consider
his role as a cultural commentator.

Early Criticism

There is considerable evidence from his early writing that Buchan had pretensions to
literary criticism from the outset of his career. A manuscript volume of early work, begun in
June 1894, contains handwritten essays on ‘The New Criticism’ and ‘Modern Criticism’ (NLS
Acc.6975/1), and there is a separate manuscript essay, ‘Claudian’, dating from about this
time, which begins by noting that writers of decadence were currently coming back into
critical fashion, and goes on to argue the case for a revival of the works of the decadent
Latin poet Claudian (NLS Acc.12329/3). These essays, though unpublished, indicate that
Buchan was already showing considerable interest in literary criticism at this time and was
aware of contemporary developments. On 18 May 1896 he wrote from Oxford to his friend
Charles Dick that John Lane, who had already published two of Buchan’s short stories in his journal the *Yellow Book*, had asked him to write a long article on ‘Modern Criticism’ for the magazine: ‘I am thinking of doing so and expanding it into a small book on Aesthetic Criticism’. He began writing it, but in a subsequent letter to Dick dated 18 August 1896 he noted that it was becoming ‘frightfully abstruse I fear’, and he appears to have abandoned it in favour of his new novel, *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, which the same letter indicates had already been planned out (NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.310).

Several of the early essays which Buchan did complete and publish were on literary topics: ‘Common-place Books’, ‘Books and Places’, and ‘Parodies and Parodists’ (*A1-A3*) all date from 1894. These were essays either of specialist interest or for magazines of limited circulation, such as his obituary of Robert Louis Stevenson in the *Glasgow University Magazine* of 9 January 1895 (Article 1). His first major foray into contemporary literary debate was his essay ‘Nonconformity in Literature’ (Article 2), published in the *Glasgow Herald* on 2 November 1895. In this article Buchan deliberately comments on subjects of current interest in literary circles, setting out his opinions forthrightly in a newspaper that had a widespread and influential readership in Scotland. In this respect the article foreshadows the leading articles and reviews he would later write for the *Spectator*. It features the wide range of literary knowledge, from Classical authors and biblical references to modern European writers and contemporary poets and novelists, which was to characterise Buchan’s later journalism. It also reflects his growing confidence as a literary critic. The previous month, October 1895, John Lane had met Buchan in London to recruit him as a reader for his publishing firm, the Bodley Head, advising on literary manuscripts submitted for publication. They also discussed terms for two new books,  

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9 These were ‘A Captain of Salvation’ (January 1896) and ‘A Journey of Little Profit’ (April 1896).
10 Buchan revealed this in a letter to his friend Charles Dick dated 26 October 1895. In a subsequent letter to Dick on 1 November 1896, he indicated that he had also become a reader for Fisher Unwin, who paid him ‘very lavishly’ (NLS Acc.7214 Mf.Mss.310).
Scholar Gipsies, Buchan’s first collection of essays and short stories, and Musa Piscatrix, his fishing anthology, to be published by the Bodley Head in the following year (Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 38). With the publication by Fisher Unwin of his first novel, Sir Quixote of the Moors, in the same month as his meeting with Lane, Buchan was clearly beginning to make his mark in literary circles.

‘Nonconformity in Literature’ is best known for its attack on the Kailyard school of Scottish literature, which is discussed in the headnote to Article 2, but it also criticises two other literary movements prevalent in the 1890s, decadence and naturalism. In a phrase which echoes his earlier obituary of Stevenson, Buchan points out that the claim of the contemporary decadents to represent ‘a new age, a new era, a new hedonism, a new Heaven knows what’ (2:56) is in fact as old as the Romans. He particularly criticises the aesthetic aspects of the fin-de-siècle decadents, their ‘affected seeking after esoteric beauties’ which has led them to disdain ‘the things which common men think great and good’ (2:48-49). Here Buchan’s critical sense has alighted on a trend of the 1890s which was to become more readily apparent in the modernism of the early twentieth century – the growing division between highbrow and popular literature. The decadents and, later, the modernists believed that only new ideas, often difficult to comprehend and frequently enigmatically expressed, were worthy of literature, and accordingly they viewed popular lowbrow writing with something approaching contempt. This was a distinction that Buchan understood, but never agreed with. For him, the qualities which appealed to the common man, such as strong storylines in fiction and simple emotions in poetry, were among the basic requirements of all good literature. Indeed, the notion of the common man, albeit with heroic qualities, was to become a focal point in the development of Buchan’s fiction, epitomised by the character of Dickson McCunn, the retired Glasgow grocer, who has some

12 See for example Adrian Hunter 8, Hanson 11, and Nash 171.
extraordinary adventures in *Huntingtower* (1922), *Castle Gay* (1930), and *The House of the Four Winds* (1935).

Buchan’s criticism in this article of another literary school of the late nineteenth century, naturalism, is also revealing of his thoughts on the basic requirements of literature. He criticises the naturalists for ‘dealing with the seamier side of life and lauding it as the very core of the matter’ (2:65). Using the notion of the common man as his reference point, Buchan believed that the seamier side of life was precisely what the reader does not want from literature. He has enough of the struggle for existence in his own life, and turns to literature to escape and be uplifted. As he was to put it later in *The Novel and the Fairy Tale* (1931), an important published lecture giving his mature thoughts on the art of fiction which has tended to be overlooked until recently by his biographers and critics, the best works of fiction are ‘interpretations of life in a hopeful spirit’, which ‘enlarge our vision, light up dark corners’, and ‘revive hope in humanity by revealing its forgotten graces and depths’ (14). This is a principle which underlies much of Buchan’s fiction, both the contemporary adventures and the historical romances, including novels such as *John Burnet of Barns* which Buchan had begun writing by the time of this article13.

This principle also leads Buchan to his most fundamental objection to what he sees as the ‘nonconformity’ of decadence and naturalism – their rejection of conventional moral standards by exalting vice into a virtue: ‘Here of a truth is nonconformity. The moral law has been accepted by saint and sinner for many hundred years, and has been the basis of all sound work, artistic or social, which has ever been done’ (2:79-81). Buchan believed that the requirement of literature to provide an interpretation of life in a hopeful spirit meant that good should triumph over evil, with virtue rewarded and vice rejected. The tendency

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13 In a letter to his friend Charles Dick dated 3 July 1895, Buchan reported that he had ‘written two long chapters’ of the novel (NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.310). The article was published on 2 November 1895.
of the 1890s *avant garde* to ignore or subvert these conventions was anathema to Buchan, leading to his outright rejection in this article of what he saw as the immoral aspects of the ‘nonconformity’ represented by decadence and naturalism.

Nevertheless, Buchan’s critical sense has picked up here an important aspect of *fin-de-siècle* culture in Britain and Europe. It was a period when the old Victorian outlook on life and its moral standards were being challenged by different ways of viewing the world and by new forms of literature. This clash of the old and the new is a theme which Buchan highlights in this article and was to fascinate him throughout his writing career, not only as an aspect of his criticism, but also and more importantly as a feature of his fiction and a basis for his political views. The first paragraph of the article sees this theme as a clash between generations: ‘our age has that peculiar blemish that all such periods must have – a desire for the new and impatience under the restraint of the old’ (2:5-6), with ‘our younger writers….seeking for the odd’ (2:12) and attempting to experiment. He welcomes this ‘spirit of inquiry’ (2:18) as the only way in which advances can be made. Indeed, Buchan himself experimented in his own way in some of his early fiction. In his first novel, *Sir Quixote of the Moors*, he purposely carried out an experiment by attempting ‘to trace the influence of scene and weather on the action and nature of man’¹⁴ in the manner of Robert Louis Stevenson. And in an unpublished short story, ‘The Face of Proserpina’, written in the summer of 1895¹⁵, he experimented with a character who displays many of the characteristics of the contemporary decadents criticised in this article. He is an aesthete who admires art and beauty, writes poetry, and smokes opium in a garishly decorated London apartment.

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¹⁴ From an article entitled ‘Sir Quixote’ in a Fisher Unwin collection, *Good Reading about Many Books* (1895), quoted in Smith, *Biography* 90.

¹⁵ Buchan reported that he had finished and was busy revising this story in a letter to Charles Dick dated 3 July 1895 (NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.310). The manuscript of the revised version is in NLS Acc.12329/2.
So it is not the experimental nature of the work of the young writers which Buchan finds objectionable (after all, he was a young writer himself), but their desire to pursue a cult of the new as an end in itself, and the tendency of their followers among the critics to praise their work for this reason instead of judging it against established critical standards (the ‘eternal laws which try all things’ – 2:25). This, he argues, can only lead to hubris: the young writers of the current generation should be more modest in their aspirations. Here Buchan is adopting the traditional critical standpoint that a young man cannot hope to be a great writer unless he learns by experience and goes through ‘the pains, the hard and bitter drudgery of his art’ (2:110-11). For Buchan, traditional standards must take precedence unless and until their usefulness has been proved to be outmoded by the work of the younger generation. In this respect, Buchan is content to leave the final judgment to posterity: ‘Time is the great leveller of books and men, and we confidently leave the work to him to be placed and valued’ (2:95-96).

In summary, ‘Nonconformity in Literature’ is a significant article in the development of Buchan as a young critic. Although best known for its attack on the Kailyard school, the article’s less widely recognised, yet forthright criticism of decadence and naturalism shows that Buchan has a thorough grasp of contemporary trends in the literary fin de siècle. It is also revealing of some basic standpoints in Buchan’s critical outlook, in particular the privileging of tradition over more recent literary forms and his rejection of the challenge which naturalism and decadence posed to conventional Victorian moral standards, which show him to be a conservative critic and writer who is antipathetic to the more extreme aspects of modern literary experimentation. This was a stance that he would maintain largely unchanged throughout his Spectator career and subsequently.
When Buchan began writing for the *Spectator* at the beginning of 1900, he was twenty-four years old, much younger than the other three permanent staff writers on the journal. The owner-editor, St Loe Strachey, was nearly forty, Meredith Townsend, a previous owner, was still an assistant editor at the age of sixty-nine, while Charles Graves, the other assistant editor, had joined the paper in 1884 (*ODNB* 5 and 19 December 2013). Buchan, as the junior member of staff, was given a mixture of leading articles and book reviews to write, but he was rarely assigned new novels or other contemporary literature to review, this being reserved for the more senior staff members. So as a reviewer he tended to specialise in biography, history, or international affairs and travel. However, an exception was *Studies in Spiritual History* by Fiona Macleod, the pseudonym of the Scottish poet, novelist and critic, William Sharp. Buchan’s review appeared under the title of ‘The Celtic Spirit in Literature’ on 28 July 1900 (Article 4). Like ‘Nonconformity in Literature’ it is more significant for the insights it provides into Buchan’s views on literary criticism and his approach to fiction than the comments it makes on Macleod’s book.

*Studies in Spiritual History* is a product of the Celtic revival in literature during the 1890s, and Buchan’s criticism of it is informed by his views on the movement as a whole. He welcomed the attempt to identify and develop national literatures from the roots of the traditional folk tales of the Celtic countries, be they Irish, Scottish or Welsh. Fairy tales and myths had been significant influences in his own childhood, as he was later to recall in his memoirs: ‘We were a noted household for fairy tales. My father had a great collection of them, including some of the ancient Scottish ones like *The Red Etin of Ireland*’ (*MHD* 15). Norse mythology also captured his imagination. At Oxford he presented a substantial paper, ‘Our Debt to the North’, on Celtic and Norse poetry, to his college literary society,
the Ingoldsby (Smith, Biography 57). He wrote about this paper to his friend, Charles Dick: ‘I am altogether rather intoxicated just now with things like the Mabinogion in Celtic poetry and the Helgi songs in Norse. I am trying to make my paper as thorough and original a piece of work as possible’ (10 February 1898, NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.310).

This interest in national folk tales, myths and sagas had important consequences for Buchan’s literary work. He came to view story-telling as the basis of all good fiction, from simple fairy tales to complicated Victorian novels. This was a theme which he later developed in The Novel and the Fairy Tale (1931, see especially 6-7), and it forms the basis of his own fiction. His interest in the national aspects of folk tales and myths led him to promote a specifically Scottish identity in literature. This can be seen in his own early work before Oxford, London and South Africa took him away from his native land. Myth and legend form the early part of his short story ‘The Far Islands’ (1899) as Buchan traces the Scottish ancestry of the story’s hero, Colin Raden, and ‘Song of the Moor’ (1897) has the atmosphere of a fairy story set in Scotland. The use of Scottish vernacular is a feature of Buchan’s early short stories, particularly ‘A Journey of Little Profit’, ‘The Oasis in the Snow’, and ‘The Herd of Standlan’, which were collected in Grey Weather (1899)16, itself subtitled ‘Moorland Tales of My Own People’. His poetry also used Scottish dialect (see his 1917 collection Poems Scots and English), and he occasionally reviewed Scottish vernacular poetry in the Spectator. In 1910 he enthusiastically greeted a new Scottish poet, Charles Murray (B36), and in 1915 he praised the Scottish verse of Violet Jacob in her Songs of Angus (B68), for which he also wrote a preface. Both of these poets were included alongside established Scottish writers such as Burns, Scott, and Stevenson in The Northern Muse (1924), an anthology of Scottish vernacular poetry which Buchan selected and edited. This was part of his contribution to the Scottish Renaissance in literature and art during the inter-war period, when Buchan used his reputation as an established writer, historian and

16 Grey Weather also included ‘Song of the Moor’, retitled as ‘The Moor-Song’.
(from 1927) politician to promote Scottish culture. He was also involved in setting up the National Library of Scotland in the early 1920s, and joined its Board in 1925 (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 221).

Buchan, then, fully supported the Celtic revival’s attempt in the 1890s to construct national literatures from what he calls in this review ‘a material of myth and folk-tale’, but he warns that the ‘manner of presenting it’ must be ‘suitable to its nature. It is not a peculiar inspiration, to which the old canons of art do not apply’ (4:71-73). Thus, just like the Kailyard school and the practitioners of decadence and naturalism, the new literature represented by the Celtic revival is not exempt, in Buchan’s conservative view, from traditional standards of literature and criticism. What he particularly objected to was the tendency of modern Celtic authors to move from the mythical to the mystical using language both vague and incoherent. As he put it in a later review concerning modern Irish verse: ‘It seeks an archaic simplicity and mystery, and it has evolved a manner of its own to attain its ends’. But in inferior hands, ‘it is apt to become a mannerism. By dint of doubtful syntax, halting lines, the judicious use of a few [vague] epithets’, a kind of ‘Celtic glamour’ is produced. ‘But there is nothing in the substance or form of such writing to make it poetry. As often as not it is only a platitude obscurely expressed’ (B25:543a). This is the main fault which Buchan finds in Macleod’s first story under review, ‘The Divine Adventure’. The author’s ‘fancies are too common, her moral in general too obvious. She says too much, she breaks into little rhapsodies and sermons, and then at the end, feeling that the fable does not carry its own instant interpretation, she is driven to some terrible pseudo-scientific jargon by way of a moral’ (4:23-26).

Buchan’s views on literature at this stage in his career were heavily influenced by Robert Louis Stevenson, as his obituary of him (Article 1) made clear. Here he formulates his detailed criticism of ‘The Divine Adventure’ in Stevensonian terms, comparing it
unfavourably with Stevenson’s fable ‘The Touchstone’\textsuperscript{17}. What Macleod’s story lacks, according to Buchan, is a sense of ‘romantic inevitableness’, in which the incidents are derived from the setting or situation and are portrayed with ‘the ordinary romancer’s gift’, so that the author conveys a sense of drama as well as the spiritual truth of the fable (4:16-18). In his essay ‘A Gossip on Romance’ (1882), Stevenson refers to ‘a fitness in events and places’ for stories of romance (54). ‘Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck’ (54-55). Iona is such a place, where St Columba and his followers once settled. Macleod spent some time there in the 1890s and is therefore able to imbue ‘Iona’, the second story in the book, with the sense of ‘romantic inevitableness’ that is lacking in ‘The Divine Adventure’ because she is able to connect it with her own experience. As Buchan comments, this and the other successful tales in the book ‘are all done with a simplicity and a clearness of outline which show what Miss Macleod can attain to when she banishes the rhetorical vagueness which is the fault of her temperament’ (4:64-66) and is also ‘the defect of the Celtic temperament’ (4:69).

So for Buchan it is the author’s own experience that is important in ‘bringing out old mystery from the past and grafting it boldly upon our prosaic present’ (4:42-43). Macleod shows us ‘the old pagan back-world’ and ‘traces odd survivals far into Christian times’ (4:33-34). This was something that Buchan had himself attempted in his story ‘No Man’s Land’, published by \textit{Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine} in January 1899 and later collected in \textit{The Watcher by the Threshold} (1902). This story makes use of Buchan’s own experience of the hill country in the Scottish Borders to describe an ancient tribe of Picts who have survived into modern times. It has many similarities with Arthur Machen’s tale ‘The Shining Pyramid’ (1895) about a tribe of pre-Celtic pagan people who have survived in the Welsh

\textsuperscript{17} Buchan’s letter to Charles Dick of 10 February 1898 referred to earlier (NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.310) mentioned that he had just purchased a copy of Stevenson’s collected \textit{Fables}, which contained ‘The Touchstone’ and were published posthumously in 1896.
hills, and with Machen’s ‘Novel of the Black Seal’ contained within *The Three Imposters* (also 1895), which has a similar theme. This reflects the new interest in paganism which developed alongside the Celtic revival of the 1890s. In 1892, before he adopted the pseudonym of Fiona Macleod, William Sharp had edited the *Pagan Review*, one of the key texts of the ‘new paganism’ (*ODNB* 17 January 2013). Buchan had taken a distinct interest in the survival of pre-Christian cults at Oxford, where he attended the lectures of Francis Bussell on Byzantine history (Smith, *Biography* 70), and where the Crocodile Club, which met to read and discuss literature with Buchan as president, had read another of Machen’s stories, ‘The Great God Pan’ (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 41). It was an interest to which Buchan returned at intervals throughout his literary career, perhaps because it reflected a subject which fascinated him and permeated his fiction - the contrast between civilisation and barbarism. The theme of old, barbaric pagan beliefs and rites surviving into the modern, civilised Christian world is taken up again in his short story ‘Basilissa’ (1914), which Buchan later developed into a major post-war novel *The Dancing Floor* (1926), featuring one of his main protagonists, Edward Leithen. The story of ancient tribes surviving into the modern world is echoed by the Naked Men of Buchan’s novel *Midwinter* (1923), who are earthy and wild, know the secrets of the old ways, and live in the moorlands and forests of England, on the edge of the civilised world. At the end of his career Buchan included the story of an ancient Eskimo tribe, ‘The Faraway People’, who have survived into modern times, in his children’s novel, *The Long Traverse*, which was left unfinished at his death and published posthumously in 1941. This story contains specific mention of the Picts in parts of Scotland: ‘Some people think that they survived right down almost into our own day’ (116-17), thereby referencing the story back to ‘No Man’s Land’.

Towards the end of this review Buchan provides his interpretation of the qualities represented by the Celtic spirit in literature: ‘a passion for the soil of the homeland, an ever-present sense of the mystery of life, and a power of seeing in the changes of Nature a
reflex of the soul’s drama’ (4:78-80). These are all qualities which, to a greater or lesser extent, he attempted to portray in his own fiction, from the early experiment with the fluctuating effect of landscape and weather on character in his first novel, *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895); through the changing national allegiances of his leading protagonist, Richard Hannay, to Scotland, South Africa and England as his adventures progressed; to the philosophical musings on the mystery and meaning of life by Edward Leithen in his last completed novel, *Sick Heart River* (1941). Buchan finds these qualities epitomised for the specifically Scottish Celtic spirit in ‘the inward meaning of the forlorn Jacobite sentiment’ (4:83-84). Buchan viewed the Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745 as being of central importance in the history of Scotland, ‘the point of juncture between the feudal and the modern worlds’ as he put it in a later *Spectator* review (see D7:392b). Yet even as Scotland progressed inexorably towards the modern world after the defeat of the 1745 rebellion led by Bonnie Prince Charlie, the Jacobite sentiment of the Celtic spirit looked back forlornly to the old days which would never return. The 1745 rising had formed the background to Buchan’s historical novel *A Lost Lady of Old Years*, which had been published in the year before this article, and it was a subject to which Buchan would return later in *Midwinter* (1923).

If ‘The Celtic Spirit in Literature’ emphasises in Buchan’s view the importance of connecting the romantic inevitableness of certain events and places with the author’s own experience in order to avoid any tendency towards a mannered mysticism in storytelling, this does not mean to say that the writer should veer in the opposite direction towards excessive realism. It was always important to Buchan that the author should aim at a balanced narrative, the style which he sought in his early essays, where decorous flourishes and overstated literariness were underpinned by personal observation and experience, just as the romantic excesses of the plots in his later fiction would be counterbalanced by the apparent realism of the settings.
Buchan subsequently examined these aspects of the literary art in one of his pieces for the *Spectator*, ‘Local Colour’, published on 29 December 1906 (Article 11). The article criticises the approach of the American author, Gertrude Atherton, and other writers who insist on visiting the actual locations of their fiction in order to enhance the realism of the descriptions in their novels. Buchan is quite scathing of this desire to be meticulously accurate, stating that he cannot understand ‘what such an ideal has to do with the novelist’ (11:19-20), because ‘speaking generally, such details do not matter in the slightest’ (11:28-29), especially where the requirement is only to provide ‘local colour’ (11:41) for a scene or incident. In such cases excessive attention to accuracy shows that the author has ‘a defective sense of proportion’ (11:42) and lacks ‘the proper kind of imagination’ (11:48).

This was a criticism which had surfaced very early in Buchan’s literary career and was influenced, like so much of his early work, by his reading of Robert Louis Stevenson. In an article for the *Academy* of 7 May 1898 on ‘The Country of *Kidnapped*’, he begins by stating ‘Stevenson was not….the painstaking minute geographer. He did not, after the agreeable fashion of certain novelists (so we are informed by the press) visit the scenes of his romances with the set purpose of collecting information on the spot….But, speaking generally, he romanced with his landscapes’. Nevertheless: ‘His landscape is always subtly correct in atmosphere’ (A8:502a). Here Buchan appears to be aiming a further blow at the Kailyard novelists and their supporters in the press, but the main thrust of his argument is virtually identical to his criticism of Mrs Atherton in ‘Local Colour’.

In developing his critique Buchan compares the author’s desire for accuracy in local colour with what he calls ‘statesmanship by globe-trotting’ (11:50), which was the subject of an earlier *Spectator* article (G16). They are ‘exact parallels’ (11:60-61) in this instance and an interesting reflection on the dual career which Buchan was later to establish as a man of letters and a man of affairs. Both are subject to the same fallacy as Buchan sees it. The
globe-trotting statesman suffers from the mistaken belief that ‘no man is entitled to speak with authority about, or to administer, a far country unless he has visited it’ (11:50-51). But he is usually far more effective if he studies the reports of experts than if he relies on a fleeting visit himself. ‘So, too, with the novelist. If he has any power of imagination, he will often be far better able to construct his picture at second hand from books than if he had visited the place for a day of two and seen only one aspect of it’ (11:55-57).

It seems that Buchan used this technique occasionally to provide local colour in his own fiction. Although he often chose settings which he knew well from his own experience, such as the Scottish Border Country, London and the Cotswolds, or places he visited frequently or for an extended period (Skye, the Alps, South Africa), there are others that he only visited once or never at all. In The Half-Hearted (1900), the second part of the book is set entirely on the North West Frontier of India, which Buchan never visited, and it seems likely that he based his descriptions of the hill-stations and native tribes on the short stories of Rudyard Kipling (Smith, Biography 99, 102; Macdonald, ‘The Fiction’ 162-63). He cites Kipling in his memoirs as an early influence, ‘more because of his matter than his manner’ (MHD 41), and praises him in this article for his descriptions of Indian settings as an example of an author who is ‘steeped body and soul in the air of the place’ (11:85).

Another example is Salute to Adventurers (1915), a historical romance set in seventeenth century Virginia which reflected Buchan’s interest in American history and his detailed reading about the US Civil War and the places associated with it, which included Virginia (Smith, Biography 269-70). Buchan recalls writing the novel: ‘I described places in Virginia which I had never seen, and I was amazed, when I visited them later, to find how accurate had been my guesses’ (MHD 194). Here Buchan is being a little modest; his ‘guesses’ were based on detailed reading, so that when he eventually visited Virginia and the Civil war battlefields in 1924, the American historian, Samuel Morison, who was one of his guides,
was particularly impressed by Buchan’s knowledge of the locations (Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 158-59).

That knowledge would have been enhanced by his book reviews for the Spectator, which included a biography of Captain John Smith, who became president of the Colony of Virginia in the early seventeenth century (C23). His reviews of books on travel and exploration (see Catalogue section M) would also have provided useful background material and local colour for his subsequent fiction. For example, ‘Lost in the Arctic’ (M60) deals with an expedition to Greenland in 1909-12 that showed great courage and endurance in overcoming misfortune and deprivation. The harshness of the setting and the struggle for survival are echoed in Adam Melfort’s rescue of Falconet from the icy wastes of Greenland in A Prince of the Captivity (1933). Buchan did not visit the Arctic Circle himself until 1937, when he was Governor-General of Canada.

There is a second aspect of Buchan’s criticism in ‘Local Colour’ which was of even deeper significance to him from the start of his career. This was to view landscape not as a minor source of local colour, but as a fundamental inspiration for the writer and therefore a major part of the novel. ‘A landscape will indeed give subtle suggestions to the artist’, and especially to ‘the novelist during the inception of his work’, but these ‘things are not for the literary tourist’, such as Mrs Atherton (11:74-77). ‘The writer who makes landscape an integral part of his drama must so absorb the atmosphere of a place that its spirit seems to brood over his pages’ (11:78-80). It was just such a landscape, the moors of the Scottish Border Country which Buchan came to know so well in his youth, that inspired his first novel, Sir Quixote of the Moors (1895), which was influenced by Stevenson’s portrayal of the Scottish moorlands that Buchan mentions in this article (11:84). In the novel the landscape itself becomes a character, its changing atmosphere and weather influencing the spirit and moods of the human protagonists. The moors have a brooding presence similar
to that of Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native* (1878) by Thomas Hardy, who is also referenced in the article for his deep knowledge of the southern countryside (11:83).

The Scottish landscape and weather also feature in Buchan’s other early historical novels, *John Burnet of Barns* (1898) and *A Lost Lady of Old Years* (1899). But when Buchan returned to the historical novel after the First World War, a new landscape provided the source of his inspiration. He and his family moved into Elsfield Manor, some four miles north east of Oxford, at the beginning of 1920. Buchan had developed an affinity for the countryside around Oxford during his university days in the late 1890s. Now, as he recalls in his memoirs, ‘I…learned to know intimately what I had hitherto only admired’, and ‘acquired a new loyalty and a new heritage, having added the southern Midlands to the Scottish Borders’ (MHD 192). Once again ‘I tried to discover the historical moment which best interpreted the ethos of a particular countryside’ (196). The result was twofold: *Midwinter* (1923), set at the time of the Jacobite march to Derby in 1745, in which Buchan attempted ‘to catch the spell of the great midland forests and the Old England which lay everywhere just beyond the highroads’; and *The Blanket of the Dark* (1931), set at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries some two hundred years earlier, in which he ‘brought all the valleys of Cotswold into the picture’ (MHD 197). In between there was a return to the Border Country and the Scottish religious struggles of the mid-seventeenth century for *Witch Wood* (1927), which Buchan regarded as the best of his historical novels (MHD 196).

From all this evidence there can be no doubt that the significance which Buchan attributes in ‘Local Colour’ to landscape as a source of literary inspiration not to be taken lightly by the author, was something which deeply affected his own fiction, particularly his historical novels. Indeed, this article and ‘The Celtic Spirit in Literature’ are examples of Buchan developing and applying his early views on literary criticism to specific book reviews, while at the same time evolving themes and techniques for use in his own fiction.
By the time he took up his appointment as chief literary advisor to Nelson’s the publishers at the beginning of 1907, Buchan was reaching maturity as a literary critic at the *Spectator*. He had written some 170 reviews and become the paper’s regular critic of ‘Recent Verse’, which required a long article three or four times a year usually covering between ten and twenty volumes of contemporary poetry (see Catalogue section B). He was also able to write with authority on the style of the professional journalist (‘A Mirror for Journalists’, 23 June 1906, *A21*, discussed in Chapter Two). Because of his work for Nelson’s, Buchan had to restrict the number of articles he wrote for the *Spectator*, so that from March 1907 onwards he was mainly employed as a literary critic rather than a leader writer. A number of articles from this later period provide significant insights into Buchan’s mature opinions on the art and purpose of fiction and the function of literary criticism. Two in particular, both from 1909, are of special interest in that they were written at a time when Buchan was beginning to re-engage with the novel in his own literary career. *Prester John* came out in the year after these articles, being serialised between April and September 1910 and published in book form in August of that year. With the exception of *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906), which was more in the nature of a symposium about empire than a creative work of fiction, it was his first novel for a decade since *The Half-Hearted* in 1900 (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 111).

The first of these two articles is ‘George Meredith’, an obituary Buchan wrote following the death of the novelist, poet and philosopher in May 1909 (Article 13). In his assessment of Meredith’s literary work in the article Buchan states his opinion that Meredith’s ‘must rank among the greatest names in nineteenth-century literature’ (13:23). This is a view which, although correctly based on Meredith’s novels rather than his poetry, would now be seen as overstated and unduly influenced by his contemporary reputation as ‘probably the
greatest writer of fiction in the world’ (13:20). Certainly, Meredith’s critical reputation declined significantly during the twentieth century and currently remains at a low ebb, despite efforts to revive it (ODNB 23 April 2013). However, Buchan attempts to arrive at an impartial assessment by applying the ‘canons of art’ as he sees them to Meredith’s work (13:34), and in doing so provides an important indication of his own views at this time.

Buchan’s assessment of Meredith’s fiction begins by stating that ‘the true nature of fiction’, as reflected in ‘the practice of the masters’, is to take ‘a large fragment of life in all its detail and variety’ (13:27-29). It is a view that he had held since the start of his literary career, as he recognises in his memoirs: ‘In my undergraduate days I had tried my hand at historical novels, and had then some ambition to write fiction in the grand manner, by interpreting and clarifying a large piece of life. This ambition waned and, apart from a few short stories, I let fiction alone until 1910’, when Prester John was published (MHD 194). Although this falling away of ambition is the reason Buchan gives for the fallow decade of novel writing after The Half-Hearted, it is an ambition that he nevertheless finds realised in Meredith and all the great Victorian novelists, as he later makes clear in his 1931 published lecture The Novel and the Fairy Tale (5). Buchan’s article is careful to distinguish this aim from that of the naturalists, ‘those who think that a mass of undigested and unselected detail is fiction’ (13:32-33). Meredith and the great Victorians use the ‘shaping spirit of imagination’ (13:33) to produce an interpretation of life rather than the inventory produced by the naturalists.

Moreover, it is an interpretation of life in an optimistic spirit. This is a key factor in Buchan’s view of the purpose of fiction (The Novel and the Fairy Tale 14), quoted earlier when discussing ‘Nonconformity in Literature’ (Article 2). ‘Mr Meredith is an optimist, and believes that the universe is on the side of man’s moral strivings. He believes in the regeneration of the world by man, and in the high destiny of humanity’ (13:81-83). He is opposed to the ‘barren fatalism’ of contemporaries such as Thomas Hardy (13:80-81). Buchan finds that Meredith’s optimism is ‘of the old heroic kind’ (13:101) and compares it
favourably with the contemporary tendency towards what he sees as a morally vacuous aestheticism: ‘To-day, when the fashionable philosophy of life is one of thin sentiment, when men tend to strip morality of rigour, and dally idly with weakness and revolt, it is impossible to overpraise this manly voice’ (13:110-13). Buchan therefore places Meredith firmly within the Victorian tradition, a novelist who avoided the fashionable modes of naturalism and aesthetic decadence.

This philosophy of an optimism which is also heroic underlies Buchan’s own contemporary fiction as it develops from Prester John into the first thrillers involving Edward Leithen (The Power-House 1913) and Richard Hannay (The Thirty-Nine Steps 1915), and their subsequent post-war adventures. In these novels his heroes, although sometimes faced with seemingly impossible odds, are able to influence the course of events by making the right moral choices in a crisis, thereby guiding the action towards an optimistic outcome. As Buchan says of Meredith in this article: ‘He sees the necessity of the dramatic moment, when the characters in a single crisis of destiny stand revealed in their essential truth….It is all one if this moment is romance, or comedy, or tragedy’ (13:34-37). In Meredith, as Buchan shows, the tendency is towards comedy, while in Hardy the result is tragedy, but Buchan himself chose romance in the tradition of Scott and Stevenson as the appropriate genre for his own fiction.

In developing his discussion of the characters in Meredith’s novels, Buchan emphasises that: ‘No writer has ever done better justice to the average man. He looks not to the outside, but to the soul, and his true knights-errant are plain people’ (13:55-57). He goes on: ‘….greatly daring, he will make his heroes out of tailors’ sons and schoolmasters and prosperous business men’ (13:59-60). Here he cites the example of Tom Redworth, the successful businessman, who eventually marries the heroine in Meredith’s Diana of the Crossways, and he uses the same example over twenty years later in his discussion of the
ordinary man as hero in *The Novel and the Fairy Tale* (10). It is precisely this approach which Buchan takes in his own contemporary fiction. In *Prester John* the hero, David Crawfurd, is a young man left impecunious when his father dies, who is sent abroad by his uncle in search of a better future. Edward Leithen, at the beginning of his career in *The Power-House*, is a hard-working lawyer, while Richard Hannay, although he has made a small fortune as a mining engineer in South Africa, is a colonial nonentity in London at the outset of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. After the First World war, Buchan introduced additional heroes from ordinary walks of life in his fiction, such as Dickson McCunn, the retired Glasgow grocer, and the Gorbals Die-Hards, a gang of street urchins from the slums (*Huntingtower*, 1922).

The second article from 1909 is ‘The Poetics of Aristotle’ (Article 14), which provides links with Buchan’s previous criticism as discussed in connection with earlier articles, but also sets out some of the principles which he was to follow in his own contemporary novels and would form the basis of his mature thoughts on the art of fiction in *The Novel and the Fairy Tale* (1931).

The article first of all makes clear that Buchan’s approach to fiction, both in writing and criticism, is rooted in Aristotle’s *Poetics*. He states that, whereas the ‘whole conception of a theory of art is modern’  

18 Buchan may have taken this point from Bywater’s preface to the edition under review in this article, in which Bywater states that ‘the very idea of a Theory of Art is modern’ (Bywater, *The Poetics* vii).
Aristotle’ (14:58-59). Here we find the source of the essentially conservative nature of Buchan’s criticism which was evident from the outset of his career. According to Buchan, the fault of many modern critics is that they base their approach on abstract theories of aestheticism and neglect ‘the eternal rules of art’ (14:104) established by Aristotle from analysing practical examples. Indeed, Buchan appears to be fearful that these Aristotelian principles are being lost to the modern reader, and suggests that an interesting commentary on the Poetics could be written using ‘modern plays and novels. In this way the most casual reader would be enabled to see the universal application of [Aristotle’s] doctrine’ (14:47-49).

The review goes on to consider some specific aspects of this doctrine. First is the importance of character revealed by action, the significance of the dramatic moment, which Buchan had previously emphasised in his obituary article on Meredith. Whatever the form or genre, plot and action are of more importance than detailed character-drawing or exquisite style, so that the elaborate modern psychological novel is ‘very admirable in its way, but it is not the highest form of art. The great moments are still those in which things happen’ (14:61-62).

Next, the review briefly mentions Aristotle’s doctrine that the longer stories are usually the best, and Buchan draws the modern parallel that a good novel is superior to a good short story. He then discusses Aristotle’s ‘famous statement of the relation of art to actuality’ (14:72-73). This privileges the artistic imagining of the kinds of thing that might happen (‘universals’) over the historical description of actual events. Buchan’s interpretation of the principle is decisive: ‘With one stroke this demolishes the crude theories of realism, which would make art a photograph’ (14:79-80). Art ‘must universalise its material, and an unrelated and non-significant corner of life is of no value for art merely because it happens to exist’ (14:82-83). Here Buchan returns to his criticism of naturalism, which in his view
unnecessarily incorporates the insignificant details of life into the substance of art. He also specifically criticises the decadents in his views on the tragic hero. He must be elevated but sympathetic, brought down not by depravity (which would be decadent), but by a fatal error of judgment, or by ‘some flaw which is scarcely a vice’ (14:96).

Throughout his review Buchan makes reference to Shakespearian tragedy (King Lear, Hamlet, Othello), as one might expect in a discussion of the influence of Greek tragic drama. But he also provides many illustrations from a less expected source, the nineteenth century European novel (Guy Mannering, Vanity Fair, The Egoist, The Lady of Monsoreau, Les Misérables), thereby making explicit the connections between ancient Aristotelian principles and the modern art of fiction and the novel. For example, two of the basic components of plot in Greek tragedy, the Peripateia or Reversal of Fortune and the Discovery or Recognition, are illustrated by reference to Guy Mannering and Les Misérables. These links were to be developed further by Buchan over twenty years later in The Novel and the Fairy Tale. In the intervening period, he became famous as a popular novelist after the breakthrough success of The Thirty-Nine Steps in 1915. Because of this sequence of events, The Novel and the Fairy Tale can be criticised as Buchan’s apologia, an attempt to establish some literary justification for his success. But this 1909 article makes clear that Buchan firmly believed in the Aristotelian principles of character revealed by action, the dramatic moment, heightened reality, good basic plotting, and an elevated but sympathetic hero, before he managed to combine them in a form of contemporary fiction, the spy thriller, that brought him popular success.

Towards the end of the review Buchan disdains the highbrow novels of ‘certain select modern practitioners’, who ‘have forgotten all about Aristotle’s doctrine’ (14:90-91). He contrasts them unfavourably with ‘the crude purveyors of popular fiction’, who nevertheless ‘grope after fundamental drama’ in a manner that he finds ‘unconsciously
Aristotelian’ (14:91-93). Buchan would not have associated himself with these crude purveyors, and neither have most of his critics, but in his deliberate application of Aristotle’s principles to his own contemporary novels there is a clear sense in which Buchan’s popular fiction can be said to be ‘consciously Aristotelian’.

Post-War Criticism

Having left the Spectator at the start of the First World War and been war correspondent for the Times on the Western Front in 1915, Buchan joined Haig’s staff at General Army Headquarters in France, drafting communiqués and assisting generally with propaganda matters. In 1916 he transferred to the Intelligence Corps with a roving commission to handle press matters, before being appointed as director of the Department of Information, which was set up by the War Cabinet in 1917 to co-ordinate government propaganda (Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 124-25, 128). He also continued as a director of Nelson’s the publishers, writing the Nelson’s History of the War, which was completed in September 1919, and published two novels, Greenmantle (1916) and Mr Standfast (1919), which followed up the great popular success of The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915) by featuring the war-time adventures of its hero, Richard Hannay.

All this work left Buchan exhausted for a time after the war, but when he had recovered sufficiently to ‘survey the post-War scene’, as he put it in his memoirs: ‘To my surprise I found that I had recovered something of the exhilaration of youth’ (MHD 180). In literary terms this led him to re-engage for a time with modern writing: ‘During the War my reading was confined to a few classics, but after 1918, feeling rejuvenated and enterprising, I did my best to get on terms with my contemporaries’ (MHD 201). Two articles that he wrote for the Spectator in the summer of 1922, ‘A New Defence of Poetry’ in July (Article 20), and a review of a contemporary novel, ‘This Freedom’, the following month (Article 21), can be seen as part of this process of re-engagement.
The process had begun in fictional form the previous year with *Huntingtower*, which had been serialised in *Popular Magazine* in August and September 1921 before being published as a novel in August 1922 (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 170). In *Huntingtower* Buchan introduces a new hero, Dickson McCunn, the prosperous Glaswegian grocer with a liking for romantic literature, who sells his business and sets off in search of adventure. On his journey he meets John Heritage, a young modernist poet, and they discuss their interests in literature. McCunn is a middle-aged and middlebrow representative of the plain man with traditional views, and to him the slim volume of poetry that Heritage has written is intensely dislikeable. His criticism echoes that of Buchan himself twenty-five years earlier in ‘Nonconformity in Literature’. He finds the verse difficult to comprehend and enigmatically expressed – ‘worse than the worst of Browning to understand’. The subject-matter is distasteful, dealing with the seamy side of life, often with oaths and ‘intimate anatomical details which scared the honest reader’, whereas Heritage argues the modernist position that ‘there’s nothing unfit for poetry’ (*Huntingtower* 26). These contrasting literary views are resolved as the novel progresses. Heritage is caught up in the romance of the adventure and plays the part of the romantic hero. At one point, cold and alone in a tower surrounded by the enemy, he is forced to burn a copy of his book to provide some warmth, thereby symbolically recognising the worthlessness of his modernist verse when set against the morally uplifting romantic adventure in which he has become involved.

It must be remembered that *Huntingtower* is a light-hearted novel written for a popular audience, with the victory of romance over modernism the predictable outcome of a minor literary sub-plot. In his article on ‘A New Defence of Poetry’, however, Buchan’s critique is more serious and even-handed. His critical approach is again framed in similar terms to his earlier article on nonconformity in literature: a binary opposition between the new and the old, a younger generation seeking to experiment by finding different ways of viewing the world in new forms of literature, while an older generation looks on dismissively with a
critical distaste bordering on disgust. The danger, as Buchan sees it, is that these contrary views can become extreme and entrenched, so that the modern generation pursues a cult of the new as an end in itself, while their conservative elders declare that everything new must be second-rate. His conclusion is similar to that of his nonconformity article: ‘On the whole, I think the conservative is more in the wrong; the perverse modern has at least a creed which he must defend by argument and is aggressively alive and snuffing the wind, whereas the other is, in a manner of speaking, dead’ (20:6-9). Thus, the spirit of enquiry of the modern generation is the only way in which advances can be made, but there are dangers to be avoided. In particular, the contemporary fashion for analytical detail can provide a false view of the whole because such fragmentation cannot fully describe nature, life, or human emotions. Here Buchan quotes Samuel Johnson’s criticism of the metaphysical poets in his Lives of the English Poets (1779) (20:58-63).

For Buchan, then, a critical examination of modern poetry must steer ‘a delicate course’ (20:16-17) between the two extremes of conservatism and modernism. He finds that the book under review succeeds because the author takes a fresh approach by rejecting critical doctrines, ‘formalism and pedantry’ (20:30), and ‘the drearier jargon of the new psychological schools’ (20:31-32). Instead, she adopts a reader-based perspective: ‘she interprets what philosophers call the “ordinary consciousness” – which is right, for joy in good poetry is spread in the widest commonalty’ (20:23-24). Here, Buchan is restating his early belief from ‘Nonconformity in Literature’ (Article 2) that the qualities which appeal to the common reader (manifested by Dickson McCunn in Huntingtower) are among the basic requirements of all good literature. However, his review is not uncritical of the author’s approach, especially where she compares the new and the old ‘as if they were on the same plane’ (20:71), when he does not believe she would in fact ‘seriously allege any real equality’ (20:74). This, he thinks, indicates ‘a slight blurring of perspective’ (20:75), but it also betrays Buchan’s own conservative bias in that he instinctively privileges established
authors of high reputation, such as Keats and Byron, over new writers like Aldous Huxley and Gilbert Frankau. He is also critical of the second half of the book, but overall he praises the author’s ‘healthy modernism’ and that of her younger contemporaries, stating his belief that ‘almost the best work in literature to-day is being done in poetry’ (20.34-36).

Note the qualification ‘almost’, which begs the question of where in contemporary literature he believes the best work is being done.

Buchan concludes his review by acknowledging that the book has inspired him to read more modern verse and even try to write it. But his attempt to re-engage with contemporary poets after the war did not last, as he records in his memoirs: ‘Alas! I had put it off too long. My ear simply could not attune itself to their rhythms, or lack of rhythms. Much of the verse seemed to me unmelodious journalism’ (MHD 201). Instead, he turned to the vernacular poetry of his native country, selecting and editing an anthology of Scottish verse, The Northern Muse, which was published in 1924. It contained many established poets of high reputation such as Burns, Scott, and Stevenson, but Buchan did not neglect to include some poems by modern authors, such as Charles Murray and Violet Jacob, whose work he had previously reviewed for the Spectator (B36 and B68).

Buchan’s other 1922 review for the Spectator, ‘This Freedom’ (Article 21), is unique in the context of Buchan’s journalism because it is the only review he ever wrote of a contemporary novel. As such it can be seen as part of his attempt to re-engage with modern writing after the First World War. Although the author of This Freedom, ASM Hutchinson, is a traditional writer rather than a modernist, the novel has a contemporary theme in that it deals with the life of a woman, Rosalie, who is in revolt against the social dominance of men and places the success of her business career above the responsibilities of her family life. The tragic plot is a rather exaggerated illustration of a debate which had emerged after the First World War about the relationship of women and work. There were
now more opportunities for women in the workplace due to the reduction in manpower as a result of the war. This led to some controversy over women taking jobs from men, especially soldiers returning from the front line. Married women, rather than war widows or younger single women, were a particular target, as their proper role was seen as being entirely domestic (Bourke 102-104). The issue of working wives was therefore a matter of public debate in the 1920s, but Hutchinson’s treatment of this contemporary theme in his novel is decidedly conservative. Despite the presence of some modern stylistic elements, such as the repetition of the phrase ‘Strike on’, ‘like a legend in a moving picture’ (21:75-76) which Buchan appears to find so irritating, the author’s conclusion is decidedly anti-feminist. After a series of tragedies ‘the book closes with a stricken mother [Rosalie] shaken out of all her creeds’ (21:19-20).

Buchan accepts this theme as ‘a legitimate thesis’ (21:23), but his criticism of the novel is not based on its theme. Although he has reservations that a ‘book written too patently to expound a thesis is a dangerous experiment for a writer of [Hutchinson’s] type’ (21:65-66), he is more concerned that the author has not allowed himself any of what Buchan calls ‘side-shows’ (21:69) – sub-plots or comic relief – to provide the reader with some variation from the central theme. So his main criticism is not of the theme itself but of its treatment by the writer, and in constructing his critique he again uses the critical framework familiar from his early career, which he had developed further in ‘The Poetics of Aristotle’.

One of the central points of Buchan’s critical approach is that fiction should present a moral conflict. It follows therefore that he objects fundamentally to those modern writers who reject conventional moral standards. In this review he praises the author because he ‘has the courage and intelligence to be a moralist. He realizes that the conflict which makes drama is in the last resort a moral conflict’ (21:26-27). But in this book, contrary to Aristotle’s dictum, Hutchinson fails to show the inevitableness of the tragedies that befall
Rosalie, which are so numerous that their overall effect is more comic than cathartic. This is the main reason for the failure of the novel as Buchan sees it, which leads him to seek an explanation for the ‘great popularity’ of the author’s previous work, which has ‘honourably won a world-wide public’ (21:39-40). Here Buchan falls back on another of his critical reference points, the canon of great authors and classic novels. He cites Sir Walter Scott’s notion of a ‘hurried frankness of composition’, or what Buchan calls ‘gusto’, as ‘the passport to the plain man’s affections’ (21:49-50). Note the importance here of the reader as the common man, another key factor in Buchan’s critical framework. Buchan finds the most obvious example of this notion in ‘the romance of adventure’, in which ‘the author clutches the reader by the arm and hurries him along, treats him like a friend, establishes a mutual confidence’ (21:51-53). Buchan’s contemporary thrillers, particularly the first person narratives of Richard Hannay such as The Thirty-Nine Steps, are examples of this technique, which is one of the main reasons for their popular success. Buchan also cites authors such as Dickens and Victor Hugo who write with gusto, whereas Flaubert and Henry James do not have this quality. When gusto is applied with a moral purpose, the result is what Buchan calls ‘unction’ (21:54), which is ‘a priceless quality, for it reproduces as no bloodless analysis can something of the speed and passion of real life’ (21:58-59). According to Buchan, it has produced some of the great novels of the world, such as David Copperfield and Les Misérables. By implication, the ‘bloodless analysis’ of more modern authors is unlikely to produce such great works of fiction.

In his only review of a contemporary novel, then, Buchan continued to apply his conservative critical framework. This meant that his attempt to re-engage with contemporary writers was bound to fail. For Buchan, there was a critical canon based on Aristotle’s Poetics which ‘defines for all time’ (14:40) what Buchan saw as ‘the eternal rules of art’ (14:104). When measured against this fixed critical framework, all the more extreme examples of modernist verse and fiction, which rejected established conventions of content
and style, would inevitably be found wanting. It followed that new forms of literature required new critical approaches if they were to be properly assessed and appreciated, but Buchan could not adapt. In his memoirs he confesses that ‘my intelligence admitted the merit of much that filled the rest of me with ennui’, so that ‘the rebels and the experimentalists for the most part left me cold’. He concludes that, even in respect of the most highly acclaimed modern work, ‘my traditionalist mind is simply not competent to judge at all’ (MHD 201, 202, 203).

After the failure of his attempt to re-engage with modern writing in the early 1920s, Buchan wrote relatively little more by way of literary criticism for the remainder of his journalistic career. He returned briefly to his dissatisfaction with the more experimental aspects of modern writing in ‘Jargon of the Age’, an article for the Graphic in February 1931 (A63), in which he criticised the influence of American slang on the English language and its perceived ‘threat to structure as well as to vocabulary. The performances of Miss Gertrude Stein, and of Mr James Joyce in his later works, are an extreme case of a general tendency to an emotional looseness and disorder’. The structure of language, whether spoken or written, ‘is capable of infinite modifications, but these must stop short of disintegration’ (A63:286b). There were also a few articles on Sir Walter Scott (A65, B71, B73), a piece for the Daily Express criticising the lack of a specifically Scottish contemporary literary culture (A59), and a reprint of The Novel and the Fairy Tale (A61-62). But apart from this, Buchan’s literary criticism was mainly confined to a consideration of genre writing such as ‘The Christmas Tradition in our Literature’ (A64) and ‘The Ballad of Tradition’ (B72). However, two of these later essays are significant for their views on the genres in which Buchan specialised, adventure fiction and the historical novel, and for the insights they provide into his work.
The first is ‘Adventure Stories: From Defoe to Stevenson’ (Article 22), published on 4 December 1926 in *John O’London’s Weekly*. This article provides significant insights into Buchan’s views on adventure stories and his own writing in this genre, and brings together several strands of his critical thinking about fiction which were discussed earlier in this chapter. Buchan sees events and action as the most significant aspects of the novel of adventure: ‘the very core and essence is the imaginative conception of the incidents’ (22:36-37). Here is the Aristotelian emphasis on plot and character revealed through action that he discussed in Article 14. In addition: ‘the incidents should themselves be strange and romantic, or, if they are commonplace, they must have a strange and romantic setting’ (22:23-24). This is the sense of ‘romantic inevitableness’ that Buchan took from Robert Louis Stevenson, in which the incidents are derived from the setting or situation and are portrayed with the ‘romancer’s gift’ (4:16-17). Again, Buchan rejects any detailed psychological insights into the reactions of the characters to the incidents, which he suggests is the substance of Conrad’s stories. Psychology should be kept in the background of adventure stories because it holds up the progress of the all-important plot. The narrative must move with ‘a peculiar certainty and speed’ (22:52-53), and Buchan supports this statement by quoting the same passage from the *Journal* of Sir Walter Scott confessing to ‘a hurried frankness of composition’ (22:55) that he employed in his criticism of *This Freedom* (21:49). It is very close to his own description of his writing method which he revealed in his memoirs: ‘I never consciously invented with a pen in my hand; I waited until the story had told itself and then wrote it down, and, since it was already a finished thing, I wrote it fast’ (MHD 195-96). The microfilm manuscripts of many Buchan novels held by the National Library of Scotland (Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.318-25) certainly support this claim. There are occasional changes to words or phrases, and sometimes the inclusion of a new sentence or (rarely) a new paragraph. But the lack of substantive alterations makes it clear
that Buchan must have had the details of his novels very clear in his mind before sitting down to write.

In addition to the plot, Buchan stresses the importance of narrative pace in adventure stories, ‘with a strong emphasis placed on the conflicting categories of space and time’ (22:66-67). He explains this concept further in his memoirs: ‘We live our lives under the twin categories of time and space, and when the two come into conflict we get the great moment’. An example from fiction is the hurried journey which must be completed within a certain period of time, ‘as when we follow an expedition straining to relieve a beleaguered fort, or a man fleeing to a sanctuary with the avenger behind him’ (MHD 194). Such hurried journeys are a feature of Buchan’s own fiction, not least The Thirty-Nine Steps in which Hannay, wanted by the police and seeking sanctuary, is pursued across the Scottish moors by German agents.

Narrative pace is the main distinction that Buchan makes in dividing the adventure novels of his day into two classes. The first provides only a minimum of detail and ‘trips unashamed within easy distance of unreality’, on the assumption that ‘the pace at which it moves will carry the narrative over the crevasses of the improbable’ (22:70-73). This is very close to Buchan’s description of his own contemporary fiction which he gave in the dedication that prefaced The Thirty-Nine Steps: ‘the romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible’ (3). The second class of adventure story attempts ‘to give verisimilitude by a multitude of concrete details’ (22:74), and he cites Robinson Crusoe as an example, where the romance mainly derives from the strangeness of the situation and setting – a man shipwrecked and seemingly alone on a remote island – rather than the narrative pace of the action.

Buchan’s contemporary novels clearly belong primarily to the first class of maximum pace and minimum detail that he identifies in this article, but they nevertheless contain
elements of the second class in terms of detailed landscapes and settings which offset the romantic excesses of the plots and action, using ‘local colour’ in the form of landscape and scenery which he knew well from his own experience or from the books on travel and exploration that he had read and reviewed. He also uses the background of real events to provide authentic elements in the fictional secret histories that his novels often portray, an aspect of his writing which will be discussed in Chapter Four with regard to Article 17 on ‘African Secret History’. Buchan’s blurring of the distinctions between the two classes of adventure story is important in his own work because it is by the fusion of two types of adventure in The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915) that he created a new class, the spy thriller, which was to provide a pattern for subsequent writers during the inter-war years and afterwards. Buchan’s new fusion was between the adventure tales of hurried journeys, hunters and hunted, in the fiction of such writers as Stevenson and Rider Haggard, which he identifies in his first class of adventure story, and the invasion-scare spy stories that were popular in the years leading up to the First World War, of which Erskine Childers’ The Riddle of the Sands (1903) is a leading example of the second class.

Although Buchan fused together these two different types of adventure tale with great success, he is careful in this article to isolate the adventure story from other genres such as the psychological novel, the domestic novel, social comedy, the detective story, and the historical romance. For him the adventure story is ‘a highly sensitive form’ which needs to be balanced: ‘a little overloading of the psychology, a little creaking of the machinery, and the glamour goes’ (22:64-65). He cites Stevenson’s The Master of Ballantrae as the kind of failure which results from the mixing of genres. Yet it is a warning that he himself ignored in some of his later fiction after this article was written. A Prince of the Captivity (1933) attempts to mix Buchan’s spy thriller format with the kind of political novel which deals with the ‘Condition of England’ in the manner of a nineteenth century novel of ideas. But the attempt fails because the long central section of the book, which deals with the
political and economic crisis of the early 1930s resulting from the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression, disrupts the narrative pace so important to the spy thriller. Later, in the last of Dickson McCunn’s adventures, *The House of the Four Winds* (1935), which is set in a fictional Central European state called Evallonia that has some similarities with the Ruritania of Anthony Hope’s *The Prisoner of Zenda* which Buchan discusses in this article, he attempts an uneasy mixture of adventure story and comedy which also failed and resulted in the book receiving poor reviews from the critics (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 173).

In general, though, Buchan was a successful novelist of adventure. He enjoyed writing his stories and seems to have been a little embarrassed by their success, as he records in his memoirs: ‘I always felt a little ashamed that profit should accrue from what had given me so much amusement’ (MHD 196). In this article he frankly admits that ‘the adventure story is not one of the major types of literature….It may be perfect of its kind, but its kind is in the second class’ (22:45-47). Nevertheless, he treats the adventure story seriously as a genre worthy of the attention of the literary critic. In doing so, he was largely writing against the grain of literary criticism in the 1920s, which tended to avoid any detailed examination of popular genres until the publication of QD Leavis’ *Fiction and the Reading Public* in 1932.

The second of Buchan’s later articles on literary genres which throw light on his own work is ‘The Most Difficult Form of Fiction’, published in the *Listener* on 16 January 1929 (Article 23). In choosing to discuss the historical novel in this article, Buchan was again writing against the grain of 1920s literary criticism. After attaining a heightened popularity during the First World War due to the reader’s need for escapist fiction, the historical novel, like the adventure story, declined in popularity in the aftermath of the war. It was seen as out of date and representative of a past which had failed when faced with the serious realities
of modern life that the war had emphasised (Orel 161-62). Buchan, on the other hand, felt that the war did not represent a catastrophic break with the past such that everything had to be built anew: ‘I wanted the sense of continuity, the assurance that our contemporary blunders were endemic in human nature...that beloved things which were threatened had rocked not less heavily in the past’ (MHD 182-83). He considered that the historical novel was an important way of stressing that continuity in fictional terms, and took the writing of his own historical novels much more seriously than his contemporary thrillers (MHD 196).

In this article he notes that one of the reasons the historical novel has fallen out of favour is because it is considered too dull and difficult by low-brow readers, while at the same time being too shallow and superficial for high-brow critics. But his argument is not that the historical novel is too difficult for the modern reader; it is rather that the modern author finds it too difficult to write. Here he makes an important distinction between the historical novel and the historical romance. The latter is ‘too easy’ (23:42). ‘Odd clothes, fantastic speech, the facility for trite adventure, are false guides to drama’ (23:44-45). The historical novel, on the other hand, is ‘almost too difficult’ (23:46), because ‘the writer in every case has to construct for himself, imaginatively, not only the drama, but the atmosphere and the modes of living’ (23:15-16). In this respect, though Buchan acknowledges that his view ‘may be the pedantry of an historian’ (23:54), the difficulties faced by the historical novelist are similar to those of the historian. Both require ‘a strong independent imagination’ (23:56) to reconstruct past modes of thought as well as past modes of living, together with ‘a scrupulous gift of selection’ from the bric-à-brac of the past, and ‘an austere conscience’ in presenting the results honestly to the reader (23:50-51).

Buchan was to expand on these views later in 1929, the year in which this article was written, when he delivered the Rede lecture at Cambridge University on ‘The Causal and the Casual in History’. The connections between that lecture and this article for the Listener
are fully discussed by Nathan Waddell in his *Modern John Buchan* (82-86). Here I want to suggest that Buchan’s views on the difficulties of writing historical novels, and history generally, are rooted in the problems he encountered when making his own first attempts in these genres.

Buchan’s first two novels were historical romances heavily influenced by Robert Louis Stevenson. *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895), was something of an experiment, a short novella in which Buchan attempted to trace the influence of landscape and weather on the actions of his characters. It was followed by *John Burnet of Barns* (1898), a full-length romance with a much more complicated plot than *Sir Quixote* and a far greater range of scenes and characters. Both are set in the same historical period, Scotland in the 1680s, but neither places great emphasis on the historical aspects, which are usually kept in the background. However, in his next novel, *A Lost Lady of Old Years* (1899), Buchan attempted to engage more closely with history. It is set during the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, a period used by Sir Walter Scott in his first historical novel, *Waverley* (1814). Indeed, it is the first of Buchan’s novels to demonstrate the influence of Scott rather than Stevenson by incorporating well-known historical figures into the fictional plot. Just as Scott featured Prince Charles Edward Stuart, the figurehead of the rebellion, in *Waverley*, so Buchan includes him in *A Lost Lady*. He also provides a detailed portrait of Lord Lovat, one of the Jacobite nobles executed for his part in the rebellion, as well as John Murray, the Prince’s secretary, who betrayed Lovat and others to save himself from execution. The ‘Lost Lady’ of the title is Murray’s wife, Margaret, who is portrayed in the novel as being true to the Prince’s cause.

In accordance with the principles he was later to set out in his *Listener* article, Buchan wanted his portrayal of Margaret Murray to be as scrupulously honest and accurate as possible, but it undoubtedly caused him significant problems, as evidenced in some of the
letters he wrote to his friend, Charles Dick, during the novel’s composition. He seems to have begun writing confidently, with only a hint of difficulty, because on 8 September 1896 he states: ‘I have begun my Lost Lady and have got most of the first chapter done. I am writing it very carefully’. But by 4 February 1897 he was experiencing problems with her portrayal: ‘I have lately been reluctantly compelled to the conclusion that Mrs Murray of Broughton was really a very bad lot, and that her life does not bear inspection. So I shall have to put a note to my book saying that I have abandoned the historical conception’.

However, this by no means reduced his difficulties, because on 17 July he wrote in exasperation: ‘The Lost Lady has now reduced my hair to a silvery white’, and by 27 July he was having problems finishing it: ‘I am getting towards the end of my Lost Lady now, but the work grows increasingly difficult’ (letters to Charles Dick NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.310).

Thus, in order to finish writing A Lost Lady Buchan had to come to a compromise over historical accuracy. In 1898, a year before the novel was published, Robert Fitzroy Bell had edited the Memorials of John Murray of Broughton, a collection of Murray’s papers and journals. In his introduction Bell attempted a rehabilitation of Murray’s reputation and in doing so unfairly tarnished that of his wife (Robertson ix), whereas Buchan’s novel condemns Murray unreservedly while portraying his wife as blameless of any treachery.

Buchan refers to some of the historical inaccuracies in his novel in a dedicatory letter to Duncan Grant Warrand, a fellow student at Oxford, which was printed as a preface to the novel. The letter begins with the admission, which was indicated in his letter of 4 February 1897, that he has abandoned the historical conception: ‘To you, the well-read historian, there is little need to say that every event in this tale is not recorded for gospel’. Later, in an apparent reference to Bell’s book, Buchan writes: ‘you will ransack Broughton’s “Journal” in vain to find my veracious narrative of the doings of [Murray’s] beautiful wife. Such little matters are the chronicler’s licence’ (A Lost Lady xv). The reference to his ‘veracious narrative’ may have been an ironic exaggeration by Buchan, but it seems to
indicate that he felt his portrayal of Mrs Murray’s character in his novel was more accurate than the distorted version given in Murray’s ‘Journal’ and Bell’s introduction to it.

The difficulties that he encountered in writing *A Lost Lady*, which forced him to compromise in his aim for historical accuracy, may well have been the reason why Buchan decided to leave the historical novel at this point and attempt his first contemporary novel, *The Half-Hearted* (1900). But when he returned to writing history at full length, his biography *The Marquis of Montrose* (1913), he again encountered difficulties in the portrayal of his leading character. Buchan wrote this book in an attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of Montrose and establish him as one of the great figures of seventeenth century Scottish history, but his research was not as thorough as it should have been, and his handling of the sources was not always judicious, so that his portrayal led to accusations of bias. In his second biography of Montrose published in 1928, Buchan sought to overcome these criticisms by detailed research and a more balanced portrayal. He strove for historical accuracy in ‘an earnest attempt to discover the truth’ (*Montrose* vii). The result was a much more successful biography. Buchan also used his extensive research for *Montrose* as background for a historical novel, *Witch Wood* (1927), in which Montrose appears as a historical figure within the fictional plot. Because of the amount of research, *Witch Wood* is a much more successful historical novel than *A Lost Lady*, and is generally regarded as the best of Buchan’s historical fiction, even his masterpiece19. Buchan thought it the best of his historical novels, and the reason he gives is significant: ‘I believe that my picture is historically true, and I could have documented almost every sentence from my researches on Montrose’ (*MHD* 196-97). In *Witch Wood* Buchan’s detailed research enabled him to achieve the combination of historical accuracy and truth that he believed was necessary to realise past modes of thought and living, and to portray them honestly to the reader. The result was his most successful attempt at ‘the most difficult form of fiction’.

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19 See for example Greig xvi; Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 179; and Macdonald, *Companion* 195a.
This chapter has discussed a small sample of the many book reviews and articles on literature in Buchan’s uncollected journalism. Taken together they show him to be an astute literary critic, attuned to contemporary trends from the outset of his career.

Although he remained an aesthetic traditionalist, basing his views ultimately on ‘the eternal rules of art’ established by Aristotle’s Poetics (14:104), he nevertheless attempted to engage with modern forms of literature while continuing to write in traditional genres. This aligns him closely with conceptions of the middlebrow and intermodernism developed by recent literary criticism, and fully supports the case made by Nathan Waddell in ‘John Buchan’s Amicable Anti-Modernism’ that Buchan’s work should be considered within the framework of these terms. Furthermore, Buchan’s reviews and articles also demonstrate the considerable extent to which his roles as a critic and as a writer of fiction are interconnected, so that together they form a consistent whole in their views of the purpose of literary criticism and the art of the novel.
CHAPTER FOUR

BUCHAN THE CULTURAL COMMENTATOR

If Buchan’s work as a literary critic has been undervalued principally because of the anonymity of much of his journalism, his essays and articles on many of the other major cultural developments of his time have equally been overlooked for the same reason. In particular, his role as a leader writer for the Spectator, fashioning opinionated articles each week for the paper’s section on ‘Topics of the Day’, placed him in an ideal position to review contemporary developments. Taken together, these articles provide a fascinating commentary on Imperial Britain and Edwardian London in the period leading up to the First World War. Later in his career, after the war, Buchan used his status as a popular novelist and historian to write occasional essays and articles on topics which were of particular interest to him, especially after he entered Parliament in 1927. This chapter considers Buchan’s role as a commentator on imperialism, Edwardian London, history, politics, and other cultural topics by examining specific articles and tracing their connections with his literary work, both fiction and non-fiction.

Imperialism

Buchan began writing for the Spectator at the beginning of 1900, a time early in the Boer War when Britain was suffering a series of military defeats which shocked the nation. In only his third article, ‘The National “Malaise”’ (3 February 1900, Article 3), Buchan showed at an early stage how closely he was attuned to the volatile mood of the country at this time. His article considers the damaging effects of the defeats on the national psychology, which would subsequently lead to a general questioning of imperial attitudes and the fitness of Britain to be an imperial nation. These matters were considered in depth the following year in a collection of essays edited by Charles Masterman, The Heart of the
Empire, which argued that in recent times the nation had concentrated on imperial and foreign affairs while neglecting conditions at home in Britain, both in terms of the national spirit and imagination as well as the living standards of the poor and their physical condition. Buchan’s article on ‘The National “Malaise”’ is an important early contribution to this debate. It both directs attention to the psychological aspects of the problem, and also frames the medical nature of the language used to discuss it. Buchan’s ‘malaise’ (3:26) and ‘malady’, ‘morbid and pathological’ (3:96-97) are echoed by Masterman’s own use of ‘fundamental malady’ and ‘disease’ to describe the problem in The Heart of the Empire (50).

In developing his argument in this article, Buchan takes several of the principles which he had previously used in his literary criticism, as discussed in Chapter Three, and applies them to the contemporary situation. At the very beginning there is the contrast between the new and the old. The modern world is portrayed as having a malign effect. The invention of the telegraph and the development of the popular press have enabled news of the war to be brought home speedily to the British public on a daily basis. It is ‘our modern world of telegrams and special editions’ (3:1), and here again Buchan’s phraseology anticipates the future debate. GP Gooch, in his essay on ‘Imperialism’ for Masterman’s volume, refers to the problem using the metonymic phrase ‘the era of telegraphs and special correspondents’ (314)\(^2\). The modern press has whipped up a state of nervous unrest in a nation ever eager for fresh news. Buchan contrasts this with the old methods of news-gathering when details came slowly and the public response was more dignified. The contemporary reaction has been to exhibit an excessive gravity and depression, which Buchan considers in many cases to be forced and artificial, particularly amongst the young. They treat the bad news from South Africa as if setbacks in war had never occurred before,

\(^2\) Similar phrases can also be found in the later literature of the period, for example in EM Forster’s Howards End (1910), where Margaret Schlegel refers to the business world of the Wilcoxes as ‘a life in which telegrams and anger count’ (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1975, 41).
and adopt an air of melancholy and mourning. But Buchan sees this as an affected pose in the manner of the aesthetes and decadents of the literary world. It is a question of following the prevalent fashion because, for most of the young, their lives have not been touched by events in South Africa.

Buchan considers that the remedies for the situation are a common sense of perspective, the realisation that the nation has suffered setbacks before and overcome them, and an optimistic outlook which interprets the situation in a hopeful spirit. These are qualities which Buchan believes also underlie all good literature, a point which is emphasised by his extensive use in this article of examples from poetry, fairy tales, and history. Thus Wordsworth’s ‘The Happy Warrior’ describes ‘the true attitude of mind’ and ‘the goal to which the nation should strive’ (3:34-35), while the heroes of the old fairy tales and ballads display ‘a certain fine ardour of the spirit which refuses to bow the head or lower the voice at mere disaster’ (3:45-46).

The article also contains in embryonic form themes which Buchan was later to develop in his fiction. The increased pace and complexity of modern life, represented here by the rapid publication of news from South Africa, mean that there exists a state of ‘perpetual tension’ and ‘irritable unrest’ (3:2-3), with the result that the ‘nation has become restless and ill at ease’ (3:9-10). In an implicit reference to the growing criticism of the conduct of the war, Buchan warns that such unrest can give rise to ‘unintelligent carping, which finds scapegoats….and hinders capable men in their duties….It fosters perpetual suspicion, malice, and all uncharitableness’ (3:90-92). If it is not kept within limits it becomes irrational, ‘a vague, incoherent emotionalism’ (3:95) that can affect the nation’s ‘dignity and mental balance, which are the assumed products of civilisation’ (3:87-88). This could result in the loss of ‘the superb self-confidence and pride which is the foundation of the greatness of nations’ (3:58-59). Thus, modern life induces lassitude and loss of nerve in the
face of adversity, and civilisation is endangered by a psychological degeneration. What is required is ‘a brave heart and a bold face’ (3:32), and ‘the positive resistance rather than the passive submission’ (3:48) which would be shown by many of Buchan’s later fictional heroes. Here Buchan is not only anticipating future debates about imperial attitudes and the nature of empire, he is also using national events to construct a psychological narrative of courage and stoicism – a framework within which the future Buchan hero can operate.

Masterman, Gooch and the other essayists in *The Heart of the Empire* were liberals whose criticism of imperialism abroad and radical concern for the ‘Condition of the People’ (4) at home influenced the social reforms, such as old age pensions, unemployment and health insurance, that were introduced by the Liberal Government after its landslide victory in the General Election of 1906, which brought Masterman and Gooch into Parliament (Gilbert xv-xvi, xxvii). Buchan, on the other hand, was a conservative whose first instinct was to defend the Empire, as he does in ‘The National “Malaise”’. His imperialist views were soon deepened and enhanced by the two years he spent in South Africa (September 1901 – October 1903) as private secretary to Lord Milner, who was a guiding influence for Buchan on imperial matters (Smith, *Biography* 133; Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 182). During that period, as Michael Redley has shown (‘South African War’ 67, 69), Buchan was authorised by Milner to keep in regular contact with St Loe Strachey at the *Spectator* to offer guidance on the paper’s editorial policy on South Africa and seek its support for Milner’s policies. Buchan also arranged through Strachey or other friends for several of his articles promoting Milner’s policies to be published in the *National Review* and *Blackwoods*, either anonymously or under pseudonyms (see Catalogue H15-17, M3-4). On his return to Britain Buchan continued his role as an advocate of imperialism in general and Milner’s policies in particular, which he had been involved in implementing while in South Africa (see for example H23, H58, H62, H164, H167). He also published two books on imperial subjects.

*The African Colony: Studies in the Reconstruction* (1903) derives directly from his
experiences and considers the current political, economic, and racial problems of South Africa and its future, while *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906) considers imperialism more generally in the form of a fictional symposium.

In addition to these articles and longer works, Buchan’s reviews for the *Spectator* after his return from South Africa included a number of books on the problems of imperialism in the African continent (for example H36, H44, H53, H59, H75, H82). Several of these related to the problems of native policy and British attitudes to the indigenous populations under their control (see in particular H79). An example is ‘The Life of the Kaffir’ (Article 7). Here Buchan’s review of a book by Dudley Kidd incorporates several of the insights he gained and the attitudes he formed during his two years in South Africa. He positions himself as someone who already has some knowledge of native life: ‘Any one who is familiar with Kaffirs knows how hard it is to collect accurate information’ (7:23-24). It has been pointed out that natives did not enter Buchan’s daily life in South Africa except as servants or labourers (Smith, *Biography* 124). However, his work required extensive travel on land settlement business to tribal locations, where he talked to local chiefs and missionaries (Redley, ‘South African War’ 72). This gave him some understanding of the natives and their grievances, so that when it came to the question of native policy, which he viewed as ‘one of the cardinal South African problems’ (7:18), Buchan was at the liberal end of the opinion spectrum among the British colonial elite, although he continued to consider the question in terms of civilisation and barbarism. In particular, his review quotes with approval the author’s assessment that the natives are ‘low down in the scale of civilisation’ (7:99-100). Their ceremonies, customs and folk-tales are ‘all hoar-ancient’ (7:52), making them similar to the pagan tribes in Buchan’s fiction which have survived into the modern Christian world, as discussed in Chapter Three. They have a low mental capacity which is ‘the great barrier to education’ (7:66) and their future development.
Nevertheless, Buchan did not agree with those within the British colonial establishment who thought that the natives should be segregated and forced to develop separately. He was firmly in favour of integration, as he makes clear in *The African Colony* (1903): ‘There are men...who would segregate the natives in a separate territory under British protection. The chief objection to this policy is that it is impossible. The native is in our midst, and we must face the facts’. Buchan’s solution is to keep the natives integrated and, by example and education, ‘patiently and skilfully bring to bear upon the black man the solvent and formative influences of civilisation’, thereby giving him the opportunity to ‘prove himself worthy of an equal share in the body politic’. He accepts that this will inevitably be a long process and the experiment may fail, in which case the native ‘will sink back to his old place’ (291). But, as he puts it in this review, the missionaries have made a start, despite much of their work being ineffective: ‘the Christianised Kaffir....marks a stage immeasurably higher than the raw life of the kraal’ (7:91-92). Buchan’s hope for the future, then, lies in the integration and education of the native, which ‘must be the conclusion of every man who looks at the problem with a serious and tolerant mind’ (7:107-08).

All of these aspects of his thinking feature in Buchan’s novel *Prester John* (1910), his only major work of adventure fiction to emerge from his experiences in South Africa. It is his own ‘epic of the veld’ (7:31), written against the grain of popular literature on empire during the Edwardian period. The Boer War had revealed weaknesses in British military power which resulted in such a rising tide of pessimism that the relief of Mafeking in May 1900 was greeted with public hysteria. In a reaction to this after the war, the popular literature of empire tended to be jingoistic and aggressively imperialist, with the emphasis more on violent suppression of the natives rather than any civilising mission (Daniell, ‘Introduction’, *Prester John* xiv-xv). Examples of this trend are the *Boys’ Own Paper*, founded in 1897, and *The Captain*, a boys’ magazine published by Newnes, in which a bowdlerised version of *Prester John* was serialised in 1910 under the title of ‘The Black
But in *Prester John* itself violence is kept to a minimum, either reported second-hand rather than directly described, as in the ambush of Dutch settlement cattlemen and their families (108), or avoided altogether when the hero, David Crawfurd, and Captain Arcoll ride into the natives’ war-camp to persuade them to lay down their arms (194-97).

The novel also contains some criticism of imperial attitudes towards the natives. Crawfurd is disgusted by Japp the storekeeper’s treatment of his servant girl, Zeeta: ‘She was an orphan from a mission station, and in Japp’s opinion a creature without rights’ (34). Arcoll observes that there has been no native uprising for about fifty years, but: ‘It is no credit to us. They have had plenty of grievances, and we are no nearer understanding them than our fathers were’ (73). And at the final meeting with the natives Crawfurd makes them a promise: ‘We have come to you not in war but in peace, to offer a free pardon, and the redress of your wrongs’ (197). There are echoes here of efforts to understand the natives’ life and ways of thinking represented by Dudley Kidd’s book, and of Buchan’s own talks with native chiefs during his work in South Africa.

But it is in his depiction of Laputa, the native chief who attempts to lead an uprising against British rule, that Buchan departs most radically from the prevailing trends in popular literature. Laputa is by no means ‘a most convenient stage property to the novelist of adventure’, as Buchan puts it in this review (7:4). His character is drawn on such a grand scale that he dominates the novel, completely overshadowing the young hero, Crawfurd. Laputa has many civilised attributes. He is educated in Western classical civilisation, able to quote Virgil, and learned in Christian theology, having preached in the Scottish Free Kirk. He is both the ‘Christianised Kaffir’ of Buchan’s review (7:92) and the ‘noble savage’, as Crawfurd observes: ‘In his minister’s clothes he had looked only a heavily built native, but

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21 David Daniell, in the Appendix to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of *Prester John* (1994) and in his earlier essay ‘Buchan and “The Black General”’ (1985), discusses the alterations made for the serialised version, which number over five hundred, noting that they were ‘highly unlikely’ to have been made or authorised by Buchan (Appendix 205).
now in his savage dress I saw how noble a figure he made’ (83). He is indeed a complex character, combining elements of both civilisation and savagery. But he has the limitations of the native mind which Buchan refers to in this review. As Arcoll observes: ‘I said he was an educated man, but he is also a Kaffir. He can see the first stage of a thing, and maybe the second, but no more. That is the native mind’ (76). This limitation is crucial to the outcome of the novel. In the cave of the Rooirand, when Laputa assumes the mantle of native leader, the ceremony is a mixture of Christian Gospels and pagan rites, civilisation and savagery. Crawfurd realises at this point that savagery has gained the upper hand in Laputa: ‘I knew his heart, black with all the lusts of paganism. I knew that his purpose was to deluge the land with blood’ (104). In the terms of Buchan’s fictional construction this means that Laputa and the uprising are doomed, because he has failed to see beyond the early stages of his education and is sinking back to his old place.

The novel ends with an example of Buchan’s hope for the future, the founding of ‘a great native training college....an institution for giving the Kaffirs the kind of training which fits them to be good citizens of the state’ (202). In front of the great hall of the college is a statue of Laputa. The juxtaposition contrasts the failure of his uprising with the success of the college and symbolises for Buchan, in Prester John as in this review, the best hope for a solution to the native problem.

Edwardian London

Buchan, then, uses his experiences in South Africa to inform his subsequent writings in fact and fiction on imperialism and the native question, both topics of great debate in Britain in the aftermath of the Boer War. But when he returned to the club life of London in October 1903, Buchan detected a change which had a significant effect on his writing. Clubs had played an important part in Buchan’s life from his early days at Glasgow University. There he set up the Nameless Club with his close friends from Hutchesons’ Grammar School in
Glasgow, Charles Dick and John Edgar. At Oxford he joined several clubs and societies\textsuperscript{22} as a means of widening his interests and meeting new people, a process which culminated in his election as President of the Oxford Union in November 1898 (Smith, \textit{Biography} 33, 72). While at Oxford he also made occasional visits to London for meetings with his publishers at some of the gentlemen’s clubs, and became a member of the Devonshire. But it was not until he came down from Oxford to London in January 1900 to study for the Bar and joined the Piccadilly, the Bachelors’, and the Cocoa Tree that he fully entered into the milieu of club life which was to become a recurring feature of his contemporary fiction (Lownie, \textit{Presbyterian Cavalier} 38, 43, 64). His first attempt at depicting the world of the gentlemen’s clubs, in chapters five and seven of \textit{The Half-Hearted} (1900), has been criticised as shallow and uncomfortable, with feeble dialogue and comment (Daniell 79-80). But this book was written before Buchan had moved to London and fully immersed himself in the club life of the capital. By the time he left for South Africa in September 1901 he was more attuned to this world and confident enough to describe and criticise it on his return.

He did this in ‘An Imperial Club for London’, published in the \textit{Spectator} on 14 November 1903 (Article 5), very soon after his return from South Africa. In this article what is most striking about Buchan’s criticism from a literary point of view, especially in the first paragraph containing the imagined reactions of a colonist coming to London for the first time, are the similarities with the opening paragraphs of \textit{The Thirty-Nine Steps}, which Buchan wrote in the autumn of 1914, almost eleven years after this article. Here are the imagined reactions of the colonist in the article:

\begin{quote}
He arrives in London eager to make the most of his time….He hunts up his friends, and finds them immersed in their own affairs, and unable to show him more than a few perfunctory civilities. The whole atmosphere is changed. It is a country where the social organisation does not readily admit a stranger. He finds no sign anywhere that England
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{22} These included the Horace Club and the Ibsen Society, the Ingoldsby, the New Caledonian Club formed by Buchan and his Scottish circle, and Vincent’s, the premier Oxford sporting club (Smith, \textit{Biography} 59; Lownie, \textit{Presbyterian Cavalier} 57).
\end{flushright}
considers himself and his land of any great importance… And so in the end, thoroughly disillusioned, he wanders from his hotel to the music halls and back again, counting the days till he can return to a more hospitable place (5:15-29).

For comparison, these are the thoughts of Buchan’s hero, Richard Hannay, on his first visit to London from South Africa at the beginning of The Thirty-Nine Steps:

England was a sort of Arabian Nights to me, and I counted on stopping there for the rest of my days. But from the first I was disappointed with it…. Plenty of people invited me to their houses, but they didn’t seem much interested in me. They would fling me a question or two about South Africa, and then get on [to] their own affairs…. 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 (7).

The similarities are clear. Both the imagined colonist and Richard Hannay arrive in London with high hopes which are soon disappointed. They feel isolated and ostracised by a society only interested in itself and its own affairs. Both soon tire of, as Hannay puts it, ‘seeing sights’ (7) and the ‘silly show’ of the music hall (8). But the similarities between article and novel extend further than the disillusionment of the colonial visitor. Hannay’s club is ‘rather a pot-house, which took in Colonial members’ (8), and this clearly demonstrates the need for the sort of Imperial Club envisaged in the article. The overall plot of the novel also makes much the same point as the article, that improved interaction with the colonies would be of great benefit to England. In the end it is Hannay, the experienced colonial outsider and practical man of action, who saves the naval plans from falling into German hands in the novel, while Sir Walter Bullivant and the Foreign Office, who have been dangerously complacent, are at a loss to know what to do. As Hannay comments: ‘I told myself…. that four or five of the cleverest people living, with all the might of the British Empire at their back, had the job in hand. Yet I couldn’t be convinced. It seemed as if a voice kept speaking in my ear, telling me to be up and doing’ (86).

These links between article and novel stem from Buchan’s growing disillusionment with London after his return from South Africa. As he recalls in his memoirs: ‘London had ceased
to have its old glamour. The eighteenth-century flavour, which entranced me on my coming down from Oxford, had wholly departed, leaving a dull mercantile modern place’ (MHD 127). He goes on: ‘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’ (128). It is as though the psychological malady that Buchan had sensed in his earlier article ‘The National “Malaise”’, written before he left for South Africa and meanwhile elaborated in Charles Masterman’s The Heart of the Empire, had now permeated into the capital’s way of life. It is the same general atmosphere of decadence and degeneration which alienates Hannay at the beginning of The Thirty-Nine Steps. The possibility of such a degeneration is hinted at in this article, where the visiting colonist is apt to feel that ‘Britain is an exclusive, self-contained community, to which the Colonies are tagged on as dependencies’ (5:25-27), and ‘the danger of such a state of things is that in the long run it will impair those ties of sentiment and kinship’ (5:32-33) which bind London, the heart of Empire, with the colonies. What is required is ‘a real sense of Imperial brotherhood’ (5:59), and a more equal relationship between mother country and colonies in which ‘the views of citizens of new commonwealths even upon purely English questions’ are properly valued (5:78). Hannay amply demonstrates this in The Thirty-Nine Steps when Sir Walter Bullivant and the British Establishment need his help.

The danger that the Empire might decay at its heart in London, implicit in The Thirty-Nine Steps, had already been more explicitly portrayed by Buchan in The Power-House, written a year earlier in 1913. Here the degeneration of civilisation represented by the villain, Andrew Lumley, has seeped into the heart of the British Establishment, the core of the nation. Lumley is himself a member of the Establishment, extremely wealthy and regularly

23 The excessively ostentatious nouveau riche, especially from a foreign country (OED 28 February 2013).
invited to political dinners and society gatherings, where he ‘pulls the strings more than anybody living’ (75). But he is also the head of an international organisation of anarchists called the Power-House, which is in a sense another club, although it is ‘the most dangerous secret organisation in the world’ (72). Lumley ‘can only succeed under the disguise of high respectability’ within the Establishment (112). When Edward Leithen, his opponent, has gathered sufficient evidence to expose him, he commits suicide.

In his novels after the First World War Buchan develops the idea of the club as a place of sanctuary where his protagonists, Hannay, Leithen and others, are able to escape from the dangers of London and the modern world, and where the old standards Buchan referred to in his memoirs continue to be upheld. Like Hannay’s new home at Fosse Manor in which he settles after the war, the club represents a quiet domestic setting that provides a familiar and reassuring background for the reader and acts as a contrast to the unfamiliar, sometimes foreign and exotic settings of the fictional adventures. The Thursday Club is a prime example, ‘started after the War by some of the people who had had queer jobs and wanted to keep together’ as another of Buchan’s heroes, Sandy Arbuthnot, tells Hannay in the 1924 novel The Three Hostages (59). In The Dancing Floor (1926) Leithen takes the young hero, Vernon Milburne, to dine at the Thursday Club (47), while in The Runagates Club (1928) Buchan uses the Thursday in its earlier and rather wilder incarnation of the Runagates as the setting for a dozen short stories of adventure narrated by its various members. By the time of the short story ‘Ho! The Merry Masons’, published separately in 1933, the Thursday Club ‘is not quite the same home of wild tales as its progenitor [the Runagates]. Its newer members are too pre-occupied with the cares of life, and are apt to engage in grave discussions of current problems’ (Complete Short Stories vol. 3, 271). Note the use of the word ‘home’ in this quotation to indicate the domestic nature of the club. By

24 The scenes set in the Thursday Club in Chapters V and XVIII of The Three Hostages are the only occasions in Buchan’s fiction when his leading protagonists, Hannay and Leithen, are stated as being present at the same time, although there is no conversation between them.
now the Thursday has become similar to the London club in the opening scene of A Prince of the Captivity (also 1933), which Buchan uses as a familiar, rather staid setting to introduce the adventures of the book’s hero, Adam Melfort.

Buchan’s growing disillusionment with the modern world of Edwardian London, from which the traditional club provides a sanctuary, is further evidenced by ‘The Urban Sentiment’, published in the Spectator on 22 September 1906 (Article 10). Here Buchan defines the urban sentiment in terms of civilisation. It is ‘a special zest for civilisation’ that particularly values ‘all the small and intimate comforts which man has devised to fend his life from the rude simplicity of Nature’ (10:11-14), and involves ‘loving civilisation to the exclusion of barbarism’ (10:24). It is ‘metropolitan at heart’ (10:15) and is commonly associated in English literature with London, a city that is a palimpsest of history in which ‘every street is haunted, every corner recalls a vanished past’ (10:51-52). But this urban sentiment evolved at a time when the ‘old Londoner believed that what he loved was eternal, and no anticipation of decay marred his enjoyment’ (10:31-32). Now, in the modern age of Edwardian London, the city is growing and changing rapidly, ‘becoming new, rational, utilitarian….losing its historic and picturesque trappings’ (10:95-96), so that ‘the romance of civilisation’ (10:97) is disappearing.

Buchan’s fears about the degeneration of civilisation were later to surface in fictional form in The Power-House, published in December 1913, and this work is also of special significance in the context of the urban sentiment because it is the first of Buchan’s novels to be set unequivocally in the modern era of the twentieth century. Previously he had written only historical novels or, in the case of The Half-Hearted (1900) and Prester John (1910), contemporary novels which were firmly of the nineteenth century in terms of atmosphere and style, with little or no reference to modernity. But in The Power-House modernity is everywhere, in the noisy, bustling streets of London – ‘that crowded and
garish world’ (73) – and in the frequent mention of various technological aids to modern life: the telephone, telegrams, photography, electric light, the ‘Tube’ (60), and the motor car. There is a sense in which the traditional and the modern exist side-by-side in the novel, as when the hero, Edward Leithen, escapes the villains by making ‘a dive between a butcher’s cart and a motor-bus’, during ‘a block in the traffic’ (97). But there is also a sense in which the old is being replaced by the new as London expands and changes its character, for example in ‘those small, square, late-Georgian mansions which you see all around London – once a country-house among fields, now only a villa in a pretentious garden’ (26). The city’s ‘geographical vastness’ mentioned in the article (10:89) is echoed in the novel by Leithen’s need, in ‘the homely London I knew so well’ (96), to use a directory to find Antioch street in the central area (78), and by his plan to ‘baffle my pursuers by taking a wide circuit round the western suburbs of London’ in his motor car (96).

The modern London depicted in The Power-House, then, reflects something of the changes in the urban sentiment which Buchan discusses in this article. The novel is also influenced by Robert Louis Stevenson’s technique in The New Arabian Nights, which will be discussed in Chapter Five, of ‘dissociating romance from quaint places and planting it boldly in the citadel of the commonplace’ as this article puts it (10:91-92), with Leithen undertaking a series of adventures within the confines of the city. However, as Buchan also observes in the article, ‘there is no urban sentiment’ in Stevenson’s work since any large city other than London ‘would have done nearly as well’ (10:92-94). But because Buchan defines the urban sentiment in terms of civilisation and decay, London is essential as the setting for The Power-House. No other city will suffice because, for Buchan, London is the centre of British civilisation, the heart of an Empire that is itself a civilising influence on the world. Buchan’s fear was that ‘the Empire might decay at the heart’ (MHD 128), and therefore London is the only appropriate city in which he can fictionalise that fear of the fragility of civilisation, which he does in the modern London depicted in The Power-House. As Andrew Lumley, the
villain in the novel, tells Leithen: ‘You think that a wall as solid as the earth separates civilisation from barbarism. I tell you the division is a thread, a sheet of glass’ (38).

This idea of the fragile division or thin line between civilisation and barbarism is an important theme which runs through much of Buchan’s contemporary fiction. It is rooted in fin-de-siècle fears that the increasing speed and complexity of change in modern life might bring an end to Victorian notions of the continual progress of civilisation, and could even bring about a reversal towards degeneration and decadence (Greenslade 17-18; Hennegan 188-89). Buchan regards the idea as so important that he delays the fast-paced thriller action of The Power-House for over eight pages (37-46) while Lumley and Leithen discuss the matter in some detail. Part of Lumley’s argument about the precariousness of civilisation is foreshadowed in one of Buchan’s articles for the Spectator. In The Power House he tells Leithen:

Now, suppose something happened to make our standard of value useless. Suppose the dream of the alchemists came true, and all metals were readily transmutable. We have got very near it in recent years, as you will know if you interest yourself in chemical science. Once gold and silver lost their intrinsic value, the whole edifice of our commerce would collapse. Credit would become meaningless, because it would be untranslatable. We should be back at a bound in the age of barter….All our civilisation, with its industries and commerce, would come toppling down (39).

This is very similar to the argument Buchan makes in his article ‘The Material Pillar of Society’, published in the Spectator on 5 December 1903 (Catalogue G12). The article comments on the recent news of the discovery of radium, an element of high atomic weight which is constantly decomposing into elements of low atomic weight, giving off heat and radioactivity. The article points out that gold is an element of high atomic weight, and considers whether, like radium, it could decompose into baser metals, so that science might in future achieve what the medieval alchemists dreamed of. It then speculates:

....Do people realise what would happen if this medieval dream ever became a modern reality?....the basis of our civilisation would disappear....the elaborate system of
commerce which mankind has built up during a thousand years would crumble about our ears (G12:965a)....The destruction of civilised society would be the only result. Our commerce would become barter and little more (G12:965b).

The similarities between Buchan’s article and Lumley’s argument are obvious. The article also draws a similar conclusion about the fragility of civilisation: ‘We do not always realise how delicate an affair is the system which looks so stable; take away one screw and the machine will fall to pieces’ (G12:965b).

When Buchan develops the idea of the fragility of civilisation in his later fiction after the First World War, the thin line between civilisation and barbarism becomes a metaphor for the problems of modernity, which have been accentuated and intensified by the war. In Huntingtower (1922) for example, Buchan’s first contemporary novel written after the war ended, the modernist poet John Heritage says: ‘...it sounds ridiculous, I know, in Britain in the twentieth century, but I learned in the war that civilization anywhere is a very thin crust’ (116). In the article, the gradual disappearance of the urban sentiment is a symptom of the thin line, of the decay which modernity is bringing to London life, so that EV Lucas, the author of A Wanderer in London, ‘standing in the midst of violent change, has something of the air of a last survivor’ (10:32-33).

Buchan ends his article by speculating that the urban sentiment ‘is more likely in the future to attach itself to country places’ (10:97-98) where modernity has not yet taken hold, the pace of change is much slower, and the romance of the past has not been lost. Londoners are increasingly looking to the country for that type of civilised life which is now lacking in the city. As Leithen observes in The Power-House: ‘The south of England is now so densely peopled by Londoners that even in a wild district, where there are no inns and few farms, there are certain to be several week-end cottages’ (33). Leithen himself follows this trend in Buchan’s fiction after the First World War. Although he continues to live and work in London, by the time of his appearance in ‘Full Circle’ in the collection of short stories The
**Runagates Club** (1928) he has also acquired Borrowby, a country estate in the Cotswolds.

As for Buchan’s other main hero, Richard Hannay, he never acquires the urban sentiment and, as we have seen, is particularly unimpressed by London when he arrives there at the beginning of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. After the war he settles in his own Cotswold country estate at Fosse Manor, where he spends his evenings reading into county history: ‘I liked to think that I lived in a place that had been continuously inhabited for a thousand years’, where ‘Cavalier and Roundhead had fought over the countryside’ (*The Three Hostages* 8). Hannay has discovered the romance of the past in the country, not in London.

**History**

Buchan, as a historical novelist, was just as interested in the romance of the past as the fictional heroes of his contemporary novels. Like Hannay, he had acquired his own small country estate after the war at Elsfield Manor, near Oxford, in a region that was steeped in local history, as was the Scottish Border Country of his youth (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 146; Smith, *Biography* 222). Two of his later historical novels, *Midwinter* (1923) and *The Blanket of the Dark* (1931), are set in this region. But long before this Buchan had become interested in the writing of history and the way in which the subject was researched and represented by academics. A number of his reviews for the *Spectator* covered books by academic historians (see for example D5, D10, D12, D65), and in his article ‘History and Life’ published in the *Spectator* on 2 February 1907 (Article 12), Buchan entered a debate about the nature and purpose of history which was engaging contemporary historians. The debate had emerged during the nineteenth century as a result of changes to the approach and methodology of history introduced by Leopold von Ranke and other German historians during the first half of the century. Until then, although much work had been done to bring together important collections of original documents, successful writers of history such as Voltaire and Gibbon had placed greater emphasis on narratives of high literary quality.
which interpreted and judged a historical period, rather than attempting to gain a more thorough and detailed understanding through research into primary records. Ranke, on the other hand, insisted on using the widest possible variety of sources – memoirs, diaries, letters, government documents, diplomatic reports, and original accounts by eyewitnesses. His aim was to show what actually happened in a fact-based approach which was as objective as possible (Marwick 33, 34).

Ranke’s application of what became known as ‘scientific’ methods also led to important further developments – the establishment of history as an academic subject at university level, and the emergence of the professional historian. He instituted seminars on research techniques at Berlin University, and gradually the teaching of history spread to other institutions in Europe, so that during the second half of the nineteenth century history was beginning to establish itself as a specialist academic discipline. The first professional historical journals were launched in Germany (1859), France (1876), and eventually in Britain with the *English Historical Review*, first published in 1886 (Marwick 41, 43).

The new scientific techniques of historical study took hold in Britain more slowly than the rest of Europe mainly because the emphasis on history as a literary art had met with great critical and popular success in mid-century through Thomas Babington Macaulay’s *History of England from the Accession of James II* (4 vols. 1848-55). Even Lord Acton, who supported the scientific method for establishing what actually happened, thought that the historian should go further by making moral judgments on the protagonists of history, as Buchan’s article clearly establishes at the outset. The debate continued into the new century with JB Bury, in his 1902 inaugural address as successor to Acton as Regius Professor of Modern History at Cambridge, insisting that history was simply a science. This elicited a reply from Macaulay’s great-nephew, GM Trevelyan, in the *Independent Review*.
(‘Clio, a Muse’, December 1903), that historians also required imagination and the literary art for interpretation and exposition of the facts (Marwick 52, 64, 66, 68).

It is at this point that Buchan enters the debate. He had already touched on the differences between contemporary theorists of history in his review of Trevelyan’s *England under the Stuarts* in the *Spectator* of 10 December 1904 (D16), and he had reviewed the science versus art question as part of his article on the new role suggested for the psychologist in history (7 January 1905, D17). In ‘History and Life’ he engages fully with the issues in a detailed and closely-argued article which concludes that ‘history is as much art as science’ (12:34). This result is perhaps not surprising as Buchan was in the first place a writer of literary fiction and only secondly a historian. In arriving at this conclusion Buchan applies his views on the objectives of the novelist to his arguments about the purposes of the historian. In *The Novel and the Fairy Tale* (1931) he argues that the novelist’s ‘method of reproducing reality is not that of an inventory of details, but of a judicious selection’. Furthermore, in portraying his characters and their actions the novelist should ‘pass judgements on these characters’, so that he ‘regards some as definitely good and some as definitely bad’ (7). This is very close to Buchan’s argument from the start of this article: ‘the historian is more than the compiler: his business is to elucidate as well as to chronicle. Therefore he must pass judgment on his characters and their doings, settle their place in the hierarchy of merit or infamy’ (12:6-9).

Buchan goes on to argue that in making his judgments the historian cannot be as entirely objective as Ranke had suggested, because ‘the austere scientific ideal is impossible to apply to a subject-matter which touches so closely the hopes and desires of men’ (12:82-83). The historian, like the novelist, cannot maintain ‘a god-like aloofness in the face of characters and deeds which appeal to his emotions as well as to his reason’ (12:88-90). In addition, as moral and ethical standards can vary considerably in different historical
periods, the historian requires imagination to ‘show the relation of our existing standards to earlier doings’ (12:32-33). Above all, ‘he must attract. A moral is of small use unless the reader be made to feel that the characters to which it applies were living people’ (12:35-36). Hence the title of the article, ‘History and Life’. Like the novelist, who must create ‘characters recognizable as real types’ (The Novel and the Fairy Tale 7), the historian must have the literary imagination to bring historical characters alive so that the reader can relate to them.

Buchan in this article, then, approaches the historical debate in literary terms and resolves it on this basis in favour of history being an art as well as a science. The scientific method is necessary to reproduce the past from the primary records, but the literary art is required to elucidate it. ‘Style and imagination are as indispensable as accuracy and logic’ (12:37-38). In the debate between Bury and Trevelyan, Buchan comes down firmly on the side of Trevelyan, as his review of England under the Stuarts (D16) had already indicated and his later article on ‘Clio, a Muse’ was to confirm when Trevelyan’s essay was republished in slightly less polemical form in 1913. Buchan subsequently became a close friend of Trevelyan whereas, although he gave Bury’s book on the Eastern Roman Empire a good review in 1912, he continued to regard him as ‘a modern scientific historian’ (D65:763a).

Buchan’s view that history could not be reduced to a wholly scientific method also led him to reject modern theories of historical processes, a position he would later argue formally and forcefully in his Rede lecture at Cambridge University in 1929, published as The Causal and the Casual in History. In that lecture he dismisses ‘the pseudo-scientists’ who ‘believe that they can provide a neat explanation of everything in the past by subsuming it under a dozen categories’, and he attacks ‘the doctrinaires, like Marx and his school, who would fit

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the centuries into the iron bed of a single formula….The romantic accident cannot be expelled by the mechanical doctrine’ (43-44). Buchan’s view is that these modern theories do not allow for chance happenings that change the course of events. For him the casual as well as the causal has its effect on history. That being the case, he argues, the ideas and actions of individuals, the great men of history, can have an effect in changing the historical process. As he puts it: ‘The hero in history is a terrible nuisance to the lover of dapper generalities. He breaks the symmetry’ which the pseudo-scientists and doctrinaires seek to impose (14).

These arguments clearly show how Buchan the novelist influences the approach of Buchan the historian. Just as chance circumstances and heroic actions affect the plots of his novels, so they can also change the course of history. There is a place for the romantic hero in history as well as the novel. It is therefore not surprising that Buchan’s serious historical writings, apart from his military histories associated with the First World War, are mainly concerned with historical biography: Montrose, Cromwell, Caesar, and Augustus, to which might be added his literary biography of Sir Walter Scott. All of these had been heroes of Buchan since his childhood and undergraduate days (MHD 32, 41, 199). The chief difficulty for him in writing their lives was for the historian to keep the novelist in check. In the same way that Buchan believed history should be a balanced combination of science and art, as the article ‘History and Life’ shows, so it was necessary for Buchan the novelist in writing history to make a judicious selection from the mass of facts and details in order to pass judgment on the historical characters and portray them in a style to which the reader can relate. The key here is ‘a judicious selection’ (Buchan’s own phrase, though not his italics, from The Novel and the Fairy Tale 7). The historian must exercise wise and careful judgment in the handling of his sources and the portrayal of his characters, otherwise historical biography can become unthinking hagiography.
These were pitfalls which Buchan did not totally avoid in his first historical biography, *The Marquis of Montrose* (1913). Previously, he had published a short history of his college, Brasenose, in 1898 while still at Oxford, and had written a significant number of articles on historical subjects for the *Spectator* and other journals (see Catalogue sections C and D), several of which had been collected in *Some Eighteenth Century Byways* (1908). But *The Marquis of Montrose* was his first attempt to write history at full length, and it met with mixed reviews when it was published in September 1913. There was high praise from the *Times Literary Supplement* but scathing criticism from the *British Weekly*, the journal which Buchan himself had implicitly criticised two decades earlier in his attack on the Kailyard school, and which now accused him of bias in his judgments and carelessness in his use of sources (Smith, *Biography* 232-33, and Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 115-16). WL Mathieson provided more balanced criticism in the *Scottish Historical Review* of October 1913, praising Buchan’s style in his portrayal of Montrose’s character and exploits, but commenting that he had been altogether too summary when considering Montrose’s dealings with the Covenanters. Overall he notes ‘an asperity of tone and an unguardedness of statement which suggests the brilliant litterateur rather than the cautious historian’ (quoted in Smith, *Biography* 233). This perceptive observation indicates that Buchan had not yet achieved the necessary balance between novelist and historian.

Some of these faults are foreshadowed in Buchan’s review of an earlier biography of Montrose by Mrs Hugh Pryce, published in the *Spectator* of 8 June 1912 (Article 18). In this review he is quite clearly in awe of Montrose and anxious that the revisionist process of rehabilitating his hero in the history of Scotland should be completed by ‘the great biography [which] remains to be written’ (18:9). He is aware of the problem of bias, but implies that it can be disregarded: ‘No writer, whatever his bias, now questions the great Marquis’s nobility of purpose any more than he questions his remarkable genius’ (18:3-4). He also notes the need for careful and balanced judgment. There is now ‘ample evidence’
available for a further biography of Montrose (18:12), which ‘should give us the different aspects in true proportion....for the difficulty with a hero is that the glamour and the romance of his deeds are apt to blind us to things which, if less dramatic, are equally vital’ (18:15-17). Quite so, but the hyperbolic phrases Buchan employs in this article indicate that he has already prejudged the outcome. Montrose is ‘a unique personality’ who had ‘a marvellous career’ (18:14). He is ‘the first great democrat that Scotland produced’ (18:33-34) and ‘by far the most modern man of his age’ (18:59), ‘the greatest soldier of his day’ (18:82) and ‘probably the greatest soldier that Scotland has produced’ (18:107-08). From all this it is not difficult to see how Buchan’s biography of Montrose, written in the wake of this review, might attract accusations of bias and lack of judgment.

To be fair to Buchan, he does make clear in the preface to his book that he has ‘not attempted to write a complete biography of Montrose’ and has ‘passed rapidly over his early years’ to concentrate on his military campaigns, relegating to the notes at the end of the book all references to sources and controversial points (The Marquis of Montrose 5). Nevertheless, he was undoubtedly stung by the criticism which the book received, so much so that after he had completed his military histories of the First World War, he set himself to write a second biography of Montrose which would correct the faults of the earlier version. According to his handwritten note at the front of the manuscript of this second biography, the process was started as soon as the first had been published and criticised: ‘I began to collect material in the autumn of 1913. The writing was begun during the General Strike of 1926. Finished at Elsfield March 1928’ (NLS Acc.6542/4). It was published under the simple title of Montrose in September 1928. In the preface Buchan acknowledges the mistakes of the earlier version: ‘many of the judgments....were exaggerated and hasty’. This time his reading of the manuscript sources has been supplemented by ‘a study of the voluminous pamphlet literature of the time’. Accepting that Montrose remains a controversial figure in Scottish history, he concludes: ‘I cannot hope to find for my views
universal acceptance, but they have not been reached without an earnest attempt to
discover the truth’ (vii).

Comparison of the texts of the two versions indicates that the earlier book has been
extended by almost a hundred pages to include a new introductory section on the early
seventeenth century and expanded chapters on the religious strife in Scotland, the
Covenanting Wars, and Montrose’s rivalry with the Duke of Argyll during the early part of
his career. The main theme that runs through Buchan’s review of Mrs Pryce’s book, namely
that Montrose was a romantic but tragic hero fighting against overwhelming odds
represented by religious extremism and political intrigue, who ultimately failed because his
modern views were too far ahead of his time, is maintained in the final version of the
biography. Even some of the phrases are the same: ‘Montrose was armed and mailed
Reason, Philosophy with its sword drawn’ (18:67-68) survives with one word changed
(‘unsheathed’ for ‘drawn’) through both versions of the biography (pages 291 and 394
respectively). But in general Buchan’s judgments and conclusions are more balanced and
nuanced in the final version, better supported by his reading of the sources and his
understanding of the period. As a result the reviews were much more favourable.

According to the English Historical Review of July 1929, Buchan had ‘produced a complete
study of his hero….founded upon a deep and wide research’, which was ‘a valuable
contribution to Scottish History’, while the Times of 28 September 1928 thought that it was
‘likely to remain the standard life’ (both quoted in Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 185).

These opinions have stood the test of time, as Buchan’s 1928 biography is still one of the
Buchan’s role as a leader writer for the *Spectator* on the ‘Topics of the Day’ required him to provide comments on the political scene in Britain from the outset of his career (see Catalogue G3-6, dating from December 1900 – February 1901). After his return from South Africa in October 1903 he wrote several articles on the great controversy of the time in economic policy: whether Britain should maintain its established doctrine of Free Trade between nations, or consider adopting a system of import tariffs to protect its home industries from the competition of other countries such as Germany and the United States (J5-6, J11, J23, J25-26). Here Buchan was following the editorial policy of the *Spectator* as laid down by its owner and editor, St Loe Strachey, who was an ardent supporter of Free Trade. He had written to Buchan on 21 May 1904 requiring him to adopt ‘an aggressive Free Trade attitude….to carry the war into the enemy’s country and….bring Balfour and Joe into ridicule’ (quoted in Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 88). Balfour was Conservative Prime Minister at the time, and Joe was Joseph Chamberlain, leader of the campaign for Protectionism. A note of caution therefore needs to be adopted when considering whether the views on specific political issues contained in Buchan’s articles for the *Spectator* are wholly consistent with his own views. It is not so much a question of disagreement in principle, as Buchan was in favour of Free Trade and disliked Protectionism (Kruse 88), but more a matter of tone and emphasis. He wrote articles attacking Chamberlain (G28-29) and, to a lesser extent, Balfour, a personal friend (J5-6), which might not have been quite so critical if he had been expressing his personal views rather than those of his editor. In a subsequent article (J25), written after the controversy had been decided in favour of Free Trade, Buchan criticised the tactics of the Free Trade protagonists for being too dogmatic, which appears to have attracted the disapproval of Strachey (see the headnote to Article 20 for evidence of this).
Later in his career with the *Spectator*, Buchan wrote several articles and reviews on the controversial reform of the House of Lords (G36, G41, G47, G55) and Lloyd George’s Insurance Bill to provide sickness and unemployment benefits (G50-51). By then he was taking an active interest in politics, writing extended articles for *Blackwood’s Magazine* which attacked the Liberal Government (G42) and analysed the results of the two General Elections of 1910 (G43, G49), before becoming the prospective Unionist (Conservative) parliamentary candidate for Peebles and Selkirk in March 1911. But there were no further elections before the First World War, after which Buchan withdrew from politics until he became MP for the Scottish Universities in April 1927. He then developed such close links with Stanley Baldwin, the Conservative Prime Minister, and Ramsay Macdonald, the Labour leader and fellow Scot who succeeded Baldwin in June 1929, that he became an advisor to both, though he was never a member of the Cabinet (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 222).

His position as a political insider enabled him to comment knowledgably on the financial crisis of 1931, when a run on the pound led to the formation of a National Government led by Ramsay Macdonald, which abandoned the gold standard and imposed import duties to protect British industry, thus ending the Free Trade policy which the *Spectator* had defended before the war (Taylor 363-73). Buchan’s series of fortnightly articles for the *Graphic* cover this period and contain several articles on the crisis (G85, G88, G90-91, G96-102, G104, G108, and J30-34).

The world economic depression of the early 1930s and the financial crisis in Britain with its political consequences form the background to Buchan’s novel *A Prince of the Captivity* (1933), which was written between February 1931 and April 193227. This novel represents something of an experiment for Buchan. It begins in typical fashion, the smoking room of a London club, moves on to elements of espionage and adventure, before ending with

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27 These dates are taken from Buchan’s handwritten note at the front of his manuscript of the novel (NLS Acc.7214 MF.MSS.325).
hunters and hunted in a final chase over the Alps. But the long central part of the novel, Book II dealing with the political world of a fictional Midlands city, does not conform to the normal pattern. It represents Buchan’s attempt to provide a fusion between the contemporary thriller and the nineteenth century novel of ideas, to produce a ‘Condition of England’ novel for the post-war world (Panek 41). Although *The Thirty-Nine Steps* represented a successful fusion of adventure stories with espionage tales, *A Prince of the Captivity* is less successful because the fusion of genres is too disjointed; the central political section disrupts the flow of action expected in a typical Buchan thriller.

Nevertheless, many of the issues raised in the political section can be linked with Buchan’s views as expressed in his contemporary articles for the *Graphic*. The serious nature of the economic crisis is set out in his article ‘In a National Emergency’ (*J32*), which advocates economies in government expenditure and protection of the domestic market (the crisis had caused Buchan to overcome his pre-war dislike of Protectionism). Such a policy would mean a fall in living standards for the nation as a whole, and a difficult decision politically for the Labour Government. The inadequacy of the political response to the situation is discussed in ‘The Political Circus’ (*G85*). In this article Buchan states his belief that the nation can be trusted to accept a fall in living standards and make ‘a great effort of discipline and sacrifice’ (*G85:391c*), a phrase which is repeated with minor variations in *A Prince of the Captivity* (159, 176, 193). Buchan’s criticism of the Government’s response to the crisis is developed further in ‘The Twilight of Parliament’ (*G88*). It is ‘a Government which has lost the will to govern….Whenever a really vital question emerged it sidled away from it’ (*G88:38a*). This is very similar to a comment in *A Prince of the Captivity*: ‘It’s the black, blank apathy of your Government crowd….They’ll neither bless nor ban, only shilly and shally’ (194).
In ‘Duty in the New Session’ (G97) Buchan welcomes the formation of a National Government to resolve the crisis, a move he had been advocating for some time, and in ‘Britain Can Start Afresh’ (G99) he approves of the emergency measures it has introduced. His classical view of economics, in which government expenditure is reduced in times of depression in order to produce a balanced budget, was opposed to the ‘new economics’ being developed at the time by John Maynard Keynes, who favoured increasing government expenditure to create employment, thereby giving rise to a deliberate budget deficit financed by loans (Taylor 338-39). Buchan’s fundamental disagreement with Keynesian economics is forcefully expressed in a letter he wrote to his wife on 17 September 1931, after he had arranged for Keynes to give a talk to MPs of all parties at the height of the crisis: ‘he talked to them unmitigated twaddle’ (NLS Acc.7214 Mf.MSS.306). Such a divergence of views between Buchan and Keynes may well have influenced the shaping of Warren Creevey’s character in A Prince of the Captivity in opposition to the hero, Adam Melfort. According to one of Buchan’s biographers, Creevey is ‘supposedly based on Maynard Keynes’ (Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 175).

In ‘Stampede or Recovery?’ (G100) Buchan considers that the crisis represents a moment of destiny for Britain when ‘a nation does stand at the crossroads’ (G100:60a). This metaphor of the ‘crossroads’ is repeated in A Prince of the Captivity (133, 176). But he is also fully aware of the international aspects of the crisis, with Germany central to resolving the international situation. In his Graphic article ‘One Voice for Europe’ (H178) he states: ‘Germany seems to me to be the key-point. She has made a great effort to set her house in order....But the danger is not over’ (H178:492a-b). These comments are echoed by Loeffler, the fictional German Chancellor in A Prince of the Captivity: ‘Chiefly Germany and Britain, for these are the key-points....Germany must set her house in order without delay, for delay means disaster’ (171). Buchan’s biographers agree that the character of Loeffler is based on Heinrich Brüning, who was German Chancellor when Buchan was writing A Prince
of the Captivity (Smith, Biography 279; Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 175). Unfortunately, Brüning failed to achieve Buchan’s key-point and set his country’s house in order. By the time the novel was published in July 1933, he was out of office and Hitler was Chancellor of Germany.

All of Buchan’s articles commenting on contemporary politics are informed by a basic set of political beliefs. These can be glimpsed in some early articles and reviews for the Spectator, such as ‘The Renascence of Heresies’ (G14) and ‘Toryism’ (G18), dating from 1903-04, and ‘The Reserves of Conservatism’ (G37, 1908). But the most detailed exposition of Buchan’s political views in his journalism is ‘Conservatism and Progress’, written for a special edition of the Spectator entitled ‘Outlining a Better World’, which was published on 23 November 1929 (Article 24). In this signed article his respect for ‘the supreme value of tradition’ (24:89) and the established order naturally inclines him towards conservatism, but he is in no sense an old-fashioned reactionary Tory, refusing to countenance any change, ‘the blind devotee of things as they are’ (24:52). He believes that progress must be made, and he reconciles this with his conservatism by recognising that progress necessarily involves change, but it must build on existing foundations instead of destroying all that has gone before; it must be practical rather than idealistic, evolutionary not revolutionary.

Throughout the article he emphasises the importance of the individual. Politics deals with ‘actual human beings’ rather than abstractions such as the ‘political’ man or the ‘economic’ man (24:42-44). Conservatism is an ‘attitude of mind’ rather than a party dogma, a matter of individual temperament which ‘has very little to do with current party divisions’ (24:106-08).

These basic political beliefs are significant because Buchan uses them to shape a view of the world which informs much of his writing. In terms of literary criticism, this is evident at an early stage of his career in his essay ‘Nonconformity in Literature’ (Article 2), in which he
privileged tradition over more recent literary forms and was wary of modern experimentation. It led him to criticise those fin-de-siècle writers who pursued a cult of the new as an end in itself and rejected established standards. Later, his essay on ‘The Poetics of Aristotle’ (Article 14) restated his belief in fixed principles of criticism by which even the most modern works of literature should be judged. After the First World War Buchan’s attempt to re-engage with modern writing (Articles 20 and 21) was framed in similar terms to his political beliefs: a desire to find an acceptable middle course between traditional forms and modernist literature, just as his politics sought a reconciliation between conservatism and progress. The attempt failed because the more extreme modernist writers rejected all established conventions of content and style. Their approach was anathema to Buchan because they refused to build on existing foundations. They were like the ‘hasty idealist’ he describes in this essay, who ‘believes that he can wipe the slate clean and write on it what he pleases; but never in history has that feat been achieved; the old writing shows through and makes nonsense of the new’ (24:66-68).

In terms of Buchan’s view of history, Article 18 on ‘Montrose’ showed how he rejected the views of some modern theorists that historical processes are formulaic and repetitive, subject to fixed laws of causation and effect, because they do not allow for chance happenings and individual decisions which change the course of events. Here Buchan’s political view of the importance of the actual rather than the abstract, the individual rather than ‘political’ man, holds sway. The ideas and actions of individuals, the heroes of history, can have an effect in changing the historical process, and this influenced the choice of subjects for his biographies, which tended to concentrate on significant men of history such as Montrose and Cromwell, Caesar and Augustus.

If Buchan’s basic political beliefs form a view of the world that can be traced in his literary criticism and historical writing, it is also certainly present in his fiction. In The Novel and the
Fairy Tale (1931), the published lecture which is an important statement of his views on
literature, Buchan argues that a key feature of all successful works of fiction, one that is
epitomised by the great Victorian novels, is that they have ‘a dominant purpose, a lesson, if
you like, to teach, a creed to suggest’ (7). Their purpose is to provide interpretative views of
the world and of humanity, but ‘they are interpretations of life in a hopeful spirit’ (14).
Buchan puts these beliefs into practice in his own novels, particularly in his contemporary
fiction from The Power-House (1913) onwards. He perceived that his conservative view of
the world, which valued the established order of things, was being threatened by the
increased pace of change and complexity of modern life which induced a lassitude and loss
of nerve in the face of adversity and raised the possibility of a psychological degeneration.
This was particularly evident to him after his return from South Africa, when Edwardian
London seemed to have acquired a craze for money and the ostentatious display of wealth
and luxury, which indicated that British civilisation might decay at its heart. Buchan gave
fictional representation to this view of the world in his theme of the thin line between
civilisation and barbarism, which he introduces in The Power-House as a metaphor for the
problems of modernity and the threat they pose to the established order of politics and
society. Andrew Lumley, the villain of the novel, an influential member of the metropolitan
elite with evil intentions, is the personification of the thin line. He is situated right at the
heart of the British Establishment, and is capable of spreading anarchy for his personal
advantage. But here Buchan’s belief in the ability of the individual comes to the fore. There
is only a thin line between civilisation and barbarism, so that civilisation can be saved by
the actions of the individual. In the case of The Power-House, Lumley’s plot is foiled by one
of Buchan’s fictional heroes, Edward Leithen, and the established order is preserved in an
optimistic dénouement.

Much of Buchan’s contemporary fiction after The Power-House is constructed along similar
lines. The established order is threatened by a villain or organisation with evil intent, but
the danger is averted by the actions of a hero or group of heroic individuals, and order is restored in an optimistic outcome. This basic format was capable of being expanded and varied in numerous ways so that Buchan could incorporate many of the core beliefs that he set out in ‘Conservatism and Progress’ and in the other articles I have discussed. In this way he developed a kind of cultural politics which informed much of his literary work. This is an important point in assessing the value of Buchan’s journalism. His articles and reviews set out a view of the world that is broadly conservative, yet flexible enough to incorporate liberal or progressive views when justified by the facts on specific issues, and this worldview underpins his literary work, both fiction and non-fiction.

Other Cultural Topics

Apart from the matters discussed previously in this chapter, Buchan’s journalism provides a commentary on many of the other major controversies of his day. At home there were the military deficiencies revealed by the Boer War and the consequent need for reform of the army and for military training of civilians (numerous articles in Catalogue section I; K7-9, K15, K17); and the reform of Trade Union law (J1, J9, J13, J15, J17-21). Abroad there was the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 (I 15-17, I 19, I 21-24), which was followed by the Russian Revolution of 1905 (H63-64, H70, H72, H77, H97, H105, H118, H127); and the growing naval rivalry with Germany (I 27, I 33, I 37).

Beneath the major issues of politics and foreign affairs there were many underlying topics of more general cultural interest which Buchan brings to the fore in his articles and reviews. These include the philosophical debate between the new pragmatism of William James and the more traditional idealist views of Josiah Royce (F14-16, F20-21, F25, F34, F36-37, F45); the new approach to Aesthetics developed by Benedetto Croce (F23-24, F46); and Henri Bergson’s theories of time, free will, the soul and the comic (F26, F29-31, F33, F35-36, F41). Bergson’s philosophy was of particular interest to Buchan. His novel The Gap
in the Curtain (1932) explores issues of time in connection with previsions of the future and the question of free will versus predestination. It has as an epigram at the beginning of the novel a quotation from Bergson’s Creative Evolution, which is referred to again in the text (24). Buchan had reviewed Bergson’s book for the Spectator over twenty years earlier (F29).

Not all of Buchan’s articles on cultural topics made such intellectual demands on his readers as Bergson’s philosophy. There were plenty of articles and reviews on travel and exploration, sport and leisure, as a glance through sections M and N of the Catalogue in Part II will show. The period before the First World War was a time when the last unknown areas of the world were being explored and some of the highest mountains climbed, so that Younghusband’s expedition to Tibet (M13) and Scott’s race with Amundsen to the South Pole (M62) could arouse great interest in Britain and beyond. Claims were even made to have conquered mountain peaks which were subsequently proved to be false (see M36, M66 on Mount McKinley). These expeditions and others such as the conquest of the Ruwenzori (the ‘Mountains of the Moon’ in Equatorial Africa, M40) provided material for Buchan’s post-war book The Last Secrets: The Final Mysteries of Exploration (1923). In his Preface to the book Buchan regretted that ‘many of the great geographical riddles of the world have been solved’, so that ‘most of the exploration of the future will be the elucidation of details’ and the ‘overwhelming romance of the unveilings we have been privileged to witness’ will be missing (vii-viii). Buchan’s journalism reflects this change. After the war there are no further articles on exploration or mountaineering. Instead, he concentrates on leisure pursuits closer to home and his own holidays hunting and fishing (N41-43). He also becomes concerned about the preservation of the rural landscape, especially in the face of modern house-building and road developments as a result of the increased use of the motor car for travelling to work and for leisurely drives and picnics in the countryside.
Buchan voices these concerns about the rural landscape in an article he wrote for the *Graphic*, ‘England’s Changing Face’, published on 2 August 1930 (Article 25). He describes a countryside in danger of being defaced by urban sprawl, speculative house-building, and the roadside advertising hoardings being erected by the Shell company at the time to encourage motor tourism using its petrol. Buchan also incorporates several themes in this article which are familiar from his fiction. There is the notion of the rural landscape as representing a ‘deep England’: ‘We felt its spirit in all our literature. It seemed a thing so deep-founded, so part of ourselves, that nothing could change it so long as England endured’ (25:13-15). This is reminiscent of Hannay’s hill-top view in *Mr Standfast*, which will be discussed in the next chapter. The countryside, with its ‘visible evidences of the past’ (25:24) – ancient villages, old churches, winding roads – gives ‘a dominant impression of continuity, of a dozen older Englands existing side by side with the new’ (25:29-30). We are reminded here of Buchan’s own desire for a sense of continuity in the aftermath of the First World War (*MHD* 182-83) and, going further back in time, of his historical novel *Midwinter*, with its depiction of ‘the Old England which lay everywhere just beyond the highroads’ in the eighteenth century (*MHD* 197). The countryside has always been there ‘for our refreshment when we wanted it’ (25:13), just as it is for the hero in almost every novel that Buchan wrote, for it provides ‘that link with a different world, which is the essence of romance’ (25:54-55). The dangers of urban sprawl and the consequent decay of rural life represent a threat to the thin line between civilisation and barbarism, that enduring theme of Buchan’s contemporary fiction: ‘Such barbarism would be the end of the beauty of rural England, which is pre-eminently a civilised thing’ (25:46-47). Modernity represented by the widespread building of new houses and roads is a threat which must be averted, brought under control, and order restored.

Buchan’s solution to this problem is a reconciliation between tradition and change along the lines of the beliefs he outlined in ‘Conservatism and Progress’ (Article 24). Change must
come if there is to be progress, but new building must be controlled to preserve the best of
the countryside: ‘A town must grow, but not in a shapeless wen which spoils its ancient
amenities’ (25:62-63). Buchan excludes one aspect of the countryside from the need for
preservation, the great English country houses and their enclosed parklands. Their
exemption seems at first surprising until one remembers another of Buchan’s beliefs from
‘Conservatism and Progress’: ‘The conservative may well be a violent innovator. He has no
passion for change for change’s sake....But when the case for change is clear he will act
boldly, for he sets no sentimental value on a tradition which has lost the stuff of life’
(24:70-73). For Buchan, the era of the great houses and estates is over. Many are already in
decline or have passed to new owners: ‘The feudal dignity of the past has vanished and can
never be resurrected’ (25:84-85). They have lost the stuff of life and therefore must go. The
estates may be preserved as parks for the use of the nation or given over to agriculture,
while the houses may become institutions or be demolished to provide material out of
which new houses can be built, thereby ‘preserving in the new whatever is still valuable in
the old’ (‘Conservatism and Progress’ 24:74).

The range of topics covered by Buchan’s uncollected journalism, from foreign affairs, the
problems of imperialism in Africa, and the changes in Edwardian London, to post-war
politics and the financial crisis of the early 1930s, via underlying cultural trends in history
and philosophy, sport and leisure, firmly establishes the importance of Buchan’s role as a
cultural commentator on the times in which he lived. His essays are shaped by a
conservative world-view which continually attempts to understand, explain, and come to
terms with a period of rapid change and great upheaval, and this engagement with
modernity is everywhere reflected in his literary work, both fiction and non-fiction.
CHAPTER FIVE

THEMES AND SOURCES

The two previous chapters, which considered Buchan as a literary critic and cultural commentator, have shown how closely his journalism is connected with his literary work. This chapter will seek to show some of the other ways in which his articles and reviews provide fresh insights into his fiction and non-fiction.

The Influence of Stevenson

Although Buchan’s obituary of Robert Louis Stevenson (Article 1) shows how Stevenson influenced Buchan’s early writing style, it is a wide-ranging essay which also contains several of the themes that would frequently recur in Buchan’s later work. There is the relationship between nature and man (1:78-79), the notion of life as a pilgrimage (1:161-62), and that fusion of romanticism, realism and idealism (1:132-34) which would become the essence of his fiction, both contemporary and historical. Much critical attention has been given to these and other aspects of Stevenson’s influence on Buchan’s early fiction, short stories and essays. But this article raises two other points of interest which have not previously been linked to such an early stage in Buchan’s career.

In an article for the *Times Literary Supplement*, originally published anonymously in 1955, Julian Maclaren-Ross pointed out that ‘Buchan, influenced by the earlier example of Stevenson, adapted the sense of helpless terror conveyed in the first part of *Treasure Island* to a metropolitan setting’ (‘Out of the Ordinary’ 118 vic). In a subsequent article published the following year in the same journal he attributed this change to ‘a method initiated by Stevenson in *The New Arabian Nights*....of imbuing realistic settings with a

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28 See for example Smith, *Biography* 36-37, 86, 89, 95-96, 102, 141; Daniell, *Interpreter’s House* 24, 30, 110; and Macdonald, *Sir Quixote* xii.
sense of menace and stealthy terror’ (‘The Hunted and the Heather’ 327c). In fact Buchan has already picked up this point in this early article on Stevenson where he notes that ‘The New Arabian Nights is one of the most characteristic of his works, full of that freakish idealism which would find a Bagdad in Leicester Square’ (1.124-26). Here he is attracted by the juxtaposition of the romantic and exotic east with the more prosaic background of central London.

It was an idea that Buchan made central to his first contemporary thriller, *The Power-House* (1913). The plot involves Edward Leithen, a London solicitor, investigating the disappearance of a rich adventurer, Charles Pitt-Heron. Tommy Deloraine, a friend of Leithen, is sent to find Pitt-Heron before two of the villain’s agents catch up with him. The trail leads via Moscow to Central Asia, where Pitt-Heron is eventually rescued. This part of the plot, involving hunters and hunted in exotic locations, would normally have formed the centrepiece of the story, as in Buchan’s previous contemporary novels of adventure, *The Half-Hearted*, which is partly set on the North West Frontier of India, and *Prester John*, where most of the action takes place in South Africa. But in *The Power-House* this part of the plot is deliberately kept in the background. Instead, the action is switched to central London, where Leithen is pursued by the arch-villain, Andrew Lumley, and his international organisation of anarchists known as The Power-House. London itself is depicted like the east as being oppressively hot and crowded, with a sinister undercurrent of hidden dangers. As Leithen makes his way along busy Piccadilly followed by some of Lumley’s men, he reflects on his situation: ‘It was the homely London I knew so well, and I was somehow an exile from it. I was being shepherded into a dismal isolation, which, unless I won help, might mean death’ (96). He concludes that ‘there were a dozen ways of spiriting me out of this gay, bustling world. I foresaw that, if I delayed, my nerve would break’ (100). Here

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29 Stevenson refers to London as ‘the Bagdad of the West’, and also makes specific reference to Leicester Square, in the opening sentence of his *More New Arabian Nights: The Dynamiter* (1885).
Buchan has created his own version of the world portrayed in Stevenson’s *The New Arabian Nights*. He refers to this at the end of the novel when, with Lumley dead and his Power-House defeated, Tommy Deloraine returns, having rescued Pitt-Heron, to tell Leithen of his adventure and says: ‘It was like a chapter out of the Arabian Nights’ (121). But Leithen and the reader know that, in terms of Buchan’s fiction, the real Arabian Nights adventure has actually taken place in London.

This idea is carried forward from the end of *The Power-House* to the beginning of Buchan’s next thriller, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), where the hero, Richard Hannay, having made a small fortune in South Africa, has come to London expecting to find ‘a sort of Arabian Nights’ (7) but is severely disappointed. The city appears too mundane, boring even, after his life in South Africa. That is until he finds Scudder, a secret agent, dead in his flat, and realises that he will be wanted by the police as well as the villains. Buchan has reversed Hannay’s situation by applying Stevenson’s method from *The New Arabian Nights*. Prosaic London has turned instantly into a city of danger and menace where Hannay feels ‘like a trapped rat’ (21). He seeks escape to Scotland, where his further adventures begin.

The second point of interest in this article arises from Buchan’s reference to Dr Jekyll and two other Stevenson works as being ‘of the same order’ as *The New Arabian Nights*, ‘romances of our own day, revelations of the inexplicable in common things’ (1:127-28).

Andrew Lownie has noted that ‘Buchan was heavily influenced by the Calvinist preoccupation with the “divided self”, most obviously seen in Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*’ (*Presbyterian Cavalier* 112), in which the dualities of good and evil exist side by side in the same character. Many of Buchan’s later villains exhibit this dual nature: they are predominantly evil, but have good qualities in them which evoke a positive response from the hero. In *The Power-House* Leithen tells Lumley: ‘I abominate you and all your works….but I admire your courage’ (115). In his later adventures Hannay is opposed by two
villains, Moxon Ivery in *Mr Standfast* and Dominick Medina in *The Three Hostages*, who are ‘parallels and opposites’ to Hannay (Macdonald, ‘The Fiction’ 340, 342).

These later developments in Buchan’s heroes and villains, with their echoes of Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, are foreshadowed in Buchan’s first full-length novel, *John Burnet of Barns*, which was written ‘between 1894 and 1896’ (Smith, *Biography* 95) and is therefore contemporaneous with Buchan’s obituary article on Stevenson. Burnet, the hero, is a gentleman with an ‘over-fiery temper’ (105), which causes him to throw a glass at his cousin, Gilbert, during a dinner party. Gilbert, on the other hand, is a villain with some gentlemanly qualities, which enable him to play down the incident in front of the other guests. Feeling a sense of shame after this episode, Burnet reflects about Gilbert: ‘There was much about him that I liked; he had many commendable virtues’. But he has ‘a strange foreboding of the man, as if he were my antithesis’ [Buchan’s italics] (105). Towards the end of the novel, after Gilbert has sought to deprive Burnet of his estate, attempted to steal from him the heroine, Marjorie Veitch, and killed her brother, Burnet is still fascinated by Gilbert: ‘As I looked on him I hated him deeply and fiercely, and yet I admired him more than I could bear to think’ (273). Describing their climactic duel Burnet admits that ‘now I had no pity in me. A terrible desire to do to him as he had done to my friends gripped me’ (277). At the end of the duel Burnet has Gilbert defenceless at the point of his sword and realises that there are forces deep within him that he has not previously recognised: ‘An awful delight was in my heart, which now I hate and shudder to think on. I waited, torturing him’, while ‘all my heat seemed turned into deadly malice’ (277). If he now kills Gilbert he will have committed the same evil act as Gilbert himself in killing Marjorie’s brother, thereby absorbing his antithesis into his self, forming a synthesis of good and evil, Jekyll and Hyde. At this point a shot rings out and Gilbert is killed by one of his own men who has

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30 The title page of Buchan’s manuscript draft of the novel is dated July 1894 (NLS Acc.7214 Mf.Mss.321); his obituary of Stevenson was published on 9 January 1895.
turned against him. Burnet is saved from himself. ‘With that one shot all rancour had gone from my heart’ (277), and ‘I kneeled beside him with no feelings other than kindness’ (278). The happy ending of Burnet’s marriage to Marjorie can now take place.

As well as foreshadowing themes which would frequently recur in his later fiction, this obituary article on Stevenson gives an early indication of several of Buchan’s views on literature and criticism which feature in his subsequent journalism. First there is the emphasis on romance and adventure. Buchan sees Stevenson as having experienced ‘a romantic life’, which he likens to ‘a rare story of adventure’ (1:4-5). For Buchan, an author should be a man of action as well as intellect, someone who has travelled abroad and experienced life. Thus, he refers to Stevenson’s travel books and sees him as ‘the most romantic figure of these latter days, battling to the end with disease, tasting life in its true sense’ (1:154-55). Such experience, in Buchan’s view, enabled the writer to develop a philosophy of life, which he should reflect in his writing: ‘The primary virtue of Stevenson after all seems to lie in his gospel of life’, a ‘directly didactic side, in which...he seeks to teach his generation’ (1:152-54). Buchan interprets Stevenson’s ‘gospel of life’ to coincide with his own view ‘that it is the first duty of man to serve God and his neighbours’ and to view the world as ‘a place of pilgrimage’, concluding that ‘this surely is no ignoble creed’ (1:160-64). These notions of romance and adventure to be experienced by a man of action and intelligence, who brings his experience and philosophy of life into his writing in order to instruct and guide the reader, are criteria which Buchan was to use consistently in his literary criticism and journalism, especially after his two years in South Africa where he experienced something of the life of travel, action and adventure for himself.

**The Hill-Top View**

When Buchan returned to London from South Africa in October 1903, he missed the outdoor life and sense of adventure he had experienced there. To compensate, he took up
the sport of mountaineering and followed it seriously until his marriage in July 1907. During this period he wrote an essay on ‘The Glamour of High Altitudes’, published in the Spectator on 9 January 1904 (Article 6), in which he identified two separate but related aspects of mountaineering that explained the attraction of the sport and were subsequently to become recurring features in his fiction. The first is the climb itself and its attendant dangers. ‘The senses are quickened, the nerves are at perpetual tension’ (6:43), while all the time ‘there is a chance of a thunder-storm or a fall of rocks, which may be the end of a practised mountaineer’ as well as the enthusiastic amateur or tourist (6:13-15).

The combination of nervous tension and imminent danger is of course prime material for the development of incidents in the type of romantic adventure which interested Buchan. But for him there is a greater attraction than the climb itself: ‘The real glamour of high altitudes is found, not in the means of attaining them, but in their intrinsic character’ (6:57-58). Reaching the peak of a high hill or mountain gives the climber not only a sense of achievement, but also a clearer perspective on ‘the ordinary world of men’, which ‘seems small and inconsiderable compared to the august spaces around’ (6:77-78). He can attain ‘a supreme moment of detachment’ (6:81) and an ‘exaltation of the spirit’ (6:86-87). The overall effect is regenerative: ‘there is much refreshment for the human soul’ (6:67-68).

These two elements of mountaineering, the physical and the psychological, are foreshadowed in some of Buchan’s early fiction, but do not come together in any significant way until he himself had sufficient experience of climbing to write about them convincingy. In John Burnet of Barns (1898) there is a long description of the hero’s travels through the hills of the upper Tweed as he seeks to evade capture by his enemies (210-14). But his journey is closer to the hill scrambling which Buchan was used to at the time from his holidays in the Scottish Borders than serious mountaineering, and the tension comes more from Burnet’s pursuers and the adverse weather conditions than from any climbing difficulties. In A Lodge in the Wilderness (1906), various eminent people meet to discuss the
problems of Empire at Musuru, a fictional mountain lodge in Equatorial Africa and a location similar to that of Skellum Kloof, which Buchan describes from his own experience in his 1903 book *The African Colony* (119-20). Here, the high altitude provides a suitable sense of detachment and perspective in the discussions of Imperialism, but lacks the individual psychological effect which Buchan describes in this article.

It is not until *Prester John* (1910), written after Buchan had taken up serious mountaineering himself, that the two elements are successfully combined for the first time in his fiction. At the climax of the novel the young hero, David Crawfurd, is alone in a cave deep within the Rooirand mountains of South Africa. His sole means of escape is via a gap high up in the roof of the cave which can only be reached by climbing the cave wall.

Buchan’s long account of the climb (185-89) contains sufficient technical detail to be convincing, as well as providing all the nervous tension and imminent danger described in Article 6. Crawfurd at one point attempts to reach part of the cave wall behind him ‘and get what we call in Scotland a “stell”’ (187), then embarks on a ‘hand traverse’ (188), while all the time ‘my mind [was] wholly occupied with the task’ (186), ‘for a slip would send me into the abyss’ (187). When he eventually succeeds in escaping through the roof of the cave onto a high plateau, having achieved ‘one of the most difficult of all mountaineering operations’ (188), he experiences a sense of exaltation and the clearer perspective described in the article. A new dawn is breaking: ‘All of a sudden I realized that at last I had come out of savagery’ (189). ‘The fresh scent of the air and the whole morning mystery put song into my blood….My first care was to kneel….and give thanks to my Maker’ (190).

After *Prester John* the tense climb and the elevated view become regular features of Buchan’s fiction. In *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) Hannay climbs a dovecot after escaping from the locked storeroom of the bald archaeologist. From there he has ‘a fine prospect of

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31 As Francis Carey, the owner of the lodge, says in the novel: ‘the truth can only be known to the man on the hill-top’ (*A Lodge in the Wilderness* 32).
the whole ring of moorland’ (69), and makes the important discovery of the hidden landing strip for the aeroplane which has been following him. In *Mr Standfast* (1919) Hannay travels to the Coolins on the island of Skye (Chapters VI and VII), Buchan’s own favourite location for rock-climbing (see Article 6 headnote), and later he and Launcelot Wake make an epic journey through the alpine Col of the Swallows during a blizzard (Chapter XVII). This novel, written during the last two years of the First World War, also contains perhaps the most significant example of the hill-top view in all of Buchan’s fiction. Walking through the Cotswolds Hannay climbs to a ridge overlooking a quintessentially English vale:

In that moment I had a kind of revelation. 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....It was more; for in that hour England first took hold of me. Before my country had been South Africa....But now I realized that I had a new home. I understood what a precious thing this little England was, how old and kindly and comforting, how wholly worth striving for....For in that hour I had a prospect as if from a hilltop which made all the present troubles of the road seem of no account. I saw not only victory after war, but a new and happier world after victory, when I should inherit something of this English peace (15).

In this passage Buchan encapsulates all the heightened sense of perspective, exaltation of spirit and refreshment of the soul which he associated with the real glamour of high altitudes. He intimates in this moment of epiphany for Hannay a sense of England and Englishness which was to be taken up after the war by many writers and politicians, such as George Orwell and Stanley Baldwin32, who looked back to pre-war England as if to some golden age. This sense of a ‘deep England’ is also reflected in Buchan’s later essay on ‘England’s Changing Face’ (Article 25). But here Hannay is looking forward to an idyllic vision of life in England after the war and acknowledges for the first time that England is beginning to supersede South Africa in his affections. In later novels he has purchased Fosse Manor in the Cotswolds and settled into the English way of life, just as Buchan himself was to do at Elsfield Manor after the war rather than return to his native Scotland.

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32 See for example the final paragraph of Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* (1938), and Baldwin’s speech to the Royal Society of St George on 6 May 1924 in the collection of his speeches *On England* (1926).
In some of his later fiction Buchan transferred the focus of such moments of revelation from his heroes to their enemies in order to give them a new vision of humanity. In another rock-climbing episode at the climax of *The Three Hostages* (1924) the villain, Dominick Medina, at the limit of his endurance on the rock-face, recognises the humanity shown to him by Hannay as he grasps the rope Hannay has thrown him as a lifeline, but the rope breaks and he falls to his death. In *The Courts of the Morning* (1929) Sandy Arbuthnot arranges the capture of Castor, who intends to become dictator of a fictional South American republic. Castor is taken from his controlled urban environment to a high plateau in the distant mountains, where it is hoped that the altitude and closeness to a wild natural environment will give him a new perspective on humanity. The plan succeeds only for Castor to be murdered in the end by one of his former henchmen. Adam Melfort adopts a similar plan in *A Prince of the Captivity* (1933) to convert Warren Creevey, a wealthy economist who uses his financial genius for selfish gain rather than for the wider good of humanity during a period of economic crisis (the Great Depression of the early 1930s). Melfort takes Creevey out of his familiar civilised world into the natural, but more primitive surroundings of the Italian Alps, where he hopes that the altitude and the attendant dangers will provide Creevey with a fresh perspective and have a regenerative effect on him. The plan succeeds: ‘The consciousness of having reached the summit seemed to rouse Creevey to a new vigour’, and ‘his face....was human again’ (318). Creevey’s new-found sense of humanity will make him a force for good in the world as the novel closes.

**The Practical Mystic**

Buchan’s Calvinist upbringing, which was mentioned earlier in connection with the ‘divided self’ of Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, taught him that religious faith must be supplemented by duty, discipline, and work as a means of preparation for the after-life. These beliefs are combined in the notion of the practical mystic, undoubtedly an attractive
figure for Buchan and the subject of an essay for the Spectator on 16 July 1904 (Article 8).

This notion is clearly linked to the spell which Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress held for Buchan from an early age (see Article 8 headnote): ‘its picture of life as a pilgrimage over hill and dale, where surprising adventures lurked by the wayside, a hard road with now and then long views to cheer the traveller and a great brightness at the end of it’ (MHD 18). It also explains Buchan’s attraction to one of his early heroes, Oliver Cromwell, the Puritan soldier-statesman who came to prominence in the religious strife and Civil War of the seventeenth century. Cromwell was, in Buchan’s view, the practical mystic par excellence, as this article makes clear. In his full-length biography, Oliver Cromwell (1934), Buchan places him ‘in the first rank of greatness’ (19). There is ‘no parallel in history to this iron man of action’ (525), whose Christian faith was of such strength that it ‘must make its possessor a mystic’ (529).

But Buchan is careful in this article not to restrict his notion of the practical mystic to men of strong religious faith: ‘If a man’s work is worthy, if his idealism is concerned with the true things of the spirit….he has a right to the name of “practical mystic”. His mysticism may be religious, or artistic, or moral, or political’ (8:44-47) provided that it ‘quickens his impulse for action’ (8:49). This explains the attraction of another of Buchan’s early heroes, James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, the Scottish general who supported King Charles I in the Civil War. In his biography Montrose (1928), Buchan ranked his hero as ‘the foremost Scottish man of action’, a romantic figure, ‘the complete paladin, full of courtesy and grace’, who ‘wins fights against the odds and scribbles immortal songs in his leisure’ (394). He was also a thinker, and Buchan considers that he and Cromwell were ‘the two great idealists’ of the age (388). But his ideals were opposed to those of Cromwell and derived not from his Christian faith but from ‘pure reason’, so that he ‘preached a doctrine of
government which had to wait for nearly two hundred years till it found an audience’ (394).

For Buchan, then, the practical mystic is not solely a religious zealot; he can also be a romantic hero. Furthermore, Buchan does not restrict his definition to the great men of history like Cromwell and Montrose. The nature of the practical mystic ‘descends in gradations from the heroic type till it comes into touch with our everyday life’ (8:32-33). This brings the definition out of the realm of elitist history and into the world of democratic modernity. The practical mystic can be a labourer or a statesman, a worker or a politician, or any grade of contemporary society in between. For such a man, his mysticism ‘sets things in their true perspective’ (8:71). ‘It will also give him courage’ (8:74) but, ‘above all, it gives him insight, and that tireless energy which comes only from devotion to an ideal’ (8:78-79). These are qualities which, Buchan observes, are largely unrecognised in ‘a prosaic age which is chary of enthusiasm, and flatters itself that it is sane’ (8:79-80). They are also qualities which are represented in the heroes of Buchan’s contemporary fiction. There is a sense in which his modern heroes are all to some degree practical mystics within the broad definition of this article.

Lewis Haystoun, the main protagonist of Buchan’s first contemporary novel *The Half-Hearted* (1900), is one of the elite, Oxford-educated and ‘quite the ablest man that has been there for years’ (31). But he is uncertain about his future, directionless, half-hearted, a ‘wandering dilettante, the worst type of the pseudo-culture of our universities’ (16-17). His friend, Wratislaw, summarises the problem: ‘You can’t be single-hearted. Twenty impulses are always pulling different ways with you, and the result is that you become an unhappy self-conscious waverer’ (152). Wratislaw’s remedy is for Haystoun to stop thinking

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33 In his later article on Montrose Buchan states that he ‘was not any kind of mystic or fanatic’ (18:68). But there he is comparing Montrose with the religious and political extremists of his time. In the terms of this article Montrose’s political vision, which was far ahead of its time, allied with his impulse for action undoubtedly qualifies him as a practical mystic.
and take action: ‘The great things of the world have all been done by men who didn’t stop to reflect on them’ (150). This echoes Buchan’s view of the great practical mystics like Cromwell and Montrose, in whom he saw no divide between vision and practice, thought and action. As he put it in his 1928 biography of Montrose, he had ‘that single-hearted gift for deeds which usually belongs to the man whose vigour is not impaired by thought’ (29). He sums up: ‘Montrose knew no cleavage between thoughts and deeds’ (386). In The Half-Hearted Lewis Haystoun eventually accepts Wratislaw’s advice, takes decisive action, and dies saving the Empire from Russian invasion on the North West Frontier of India.

For Buchan at this time the Empire was an ideal which should attract the practical mystic. His 1906 novel A Lodge in the Wilderness is a fictional symposium in which representative members of the governing elite meet at a remote but luxuriously appointed lodge in East Africa to discuss the Empire. The lodge is owned by Francis Carey, a wealthy Imperialist, who has arranged the symposium and is ‘a practical mystic – an iron hand to change the fate of nations, and all the while a soul lit by its own immortal dreams’ (176). In the novel Lord Appin, a character partly based on Lord Rosebery,34 sums up on the ‘ultimate ideal’ of Empire: ‘There is room for….mysticism, and….practical good sense, and….Liberal principles, and….Toryism – room, too, for the hard scientific faith of young men….; room even for….anarchic individualism’ (246). The Empire therefore needs young men of whatever political creed who are also practical mystics, which is what Louis Haystoun has become at the end of The Half-Hearted.

Richard Hannay is much lower in the intellectual and social spectrum than Haystoun. He is the practical man of action who, at the beginning of The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915), is a colonial visitor from South Africa. But he is caught up in events which take him to the heart of the Establishment, assisting Sir Walter Bullivan of the Foreign Office to foil a German

34 This attribution is from Smith, Biography 136 and Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 90. They also attribute the character of Francis Carey to Cecil Rhodes.
plot to steal British naval plans. By the end of the novel Hannay has become sufficiently
drawn to ‘the Old Country’ (7) to enlist in the British Army when war breaks out. By the
beginning of his next adventure in Greenmantle (1916), Hannay’s motivation has started to acquire a mystical element. When Bullivant asks him to take on an especially dangerous war mission, Hannay briefly considers whether to accept: ‘I had told him that I was out to serve my country. He could not give me orders, but was I not under orders – higher orders than my Brigadier’s?....I knew in my soul that if I declined I should never be quite at peace in the world again’ (15). Hannay is discovering a patriotism for the Old Country which is tinged with religion (‘higher orders’ affecting his ‘soul’). Towards the end of the war this has developed into a vision of the country he is fighting for and of the peace which will follow, revealed in the hill-top epiphany which Hannay experiences in Mr Standfast (1919).

It is a vision, again tinged with religion, of a peaceful England, ‘deep and holy and ancient’ (15), which will guide him when he settles down after the war, and it is a sign that Hannay, too, has become a practical mystic.

Buchan’s other main protagonist in his contemporary novels, Edward Leithen, is also a practical man, although of a more sedentary kind than Hannay. He is a hard-working lawyer who eventually becomes Attorney-General. In The Power-House (1913) he describes himself as ‘a dry creature, who loves facts and logic. I am not a flier, I have no new ideas, I don’t want to lead men, and I like work. I am the ordinary educated Englishman’ (37). As a man of reason and logic Leithen is often used by Buchan to present the cold, common-sense view in stories which border on the supernatural, or involve specialised knowledge or scientific experiments, such as his first appearance in the short story ‘Space’ (1911) and the later novel The Gap in the Curtain (1932). Sometimes, like Hannay, he is caught up in events, as in The Power-House (1913), but often his adventures are motivated by a desire to escape from the tedious drudgery of his legal career, for example in John Macnab (1925). Again like Hannay, he is not a particularly religious man, but when confronted by
paganism on a Greek island in *The Dancing Floor* (1926) he finds himself turning to Christianity. At first he is overawed when he witnesses a pagan ceremony, which instils in him a desire to worship the false gods of the islanders. But retreating to the church on the island he sees a wooden carving of Christ:

That sight worked a miracle with me. I suddenly felt that I was not alone, but had august allies. The Faith was behind me....The shabby church, the mazed and ignorant priest took on suddenly a tremendous significance....They were the visible sign and warrant of that creed which we all hold dumbly, even those who call themselves unbelievers – the belief in the ultimate omnipotence of purity and meekness (125).

This moment of revelation has a significance for Leithen similar to that of Hannay’s vision of a deep England in *Mr Standfast*, but Buchan does not develop it further in Leithen’s case until his final novel, *Sick Heart River* (1941), in which Leithen, dying of tuberculosis, goes in search of a man who has disappeared in the frozen north of the Canadian arctic circle. There his body becomes feeble in the freezing conditions, but his mind develops an increasing freedom, so that the second half of the novel becomes a psychological study of Leithen’s internal struggle to make sense of his life and face up to death, in Buchan’s words ‘to make his soul’ (14). He rescues the man and also saves the lives of a small tribe of Indians, giving up his own life in the process. The arctic wilderness enables him to rediscover the religiosity which was revealed to him in *The Dancing Floor*, to come ‘face to face with his religion’ (113). As he struggles through the frozen wastes he realises that: ‘He was now alone with God. In these bleak immensities the world of man had fallen away to an infinite distance, and the chill of eternity was already on him’ (114). At the end of his life, Leithen has become a practical mystic.

Other Buchan heroes bear the characteristics of the practical mystic. Dickson McCunn, the retired Glaswegian grocer, is the ordinary man who has the capacity for the heroic. In *Huntingtower* (1922), the first of his adventures, Buchan describes him as ‘an incurable romantic’, who dreams of ‘fantastic journeys’ like those he has read in the novels of Sir
Walter Scott (14). He conceives a ‘Great Plan’ to go on such a journey himself, so that when he retires he decides to undertake a walking holiday in search of adventure: ‘the Great Plan had ceased to be an airy vision and become a sober well-masoned structure’ (14). In other words, McCunn has become a practical mystic, ‘the eternal pilgrim; he was Jason, Ulysses….Cortez - starting out to discover new worlds’ (17). In A Prince of the Captivity (1933) the hero, Adam Melfort, with his vision of a childhood island paradise mixed with his quest to find a new leader to guide the world out of its economic problems, is another practical mystic, a view confirmed by his mentor, Scrope, who tells him: ‘You are a formidable fellow….the rational fanatic – the practical mystic’ (97).

Buchan’s view of the hero as practical mystic, personified for him by the historical figures of Cromwell and Montrose, can be contrasted with his assessment of a more modern candidate for heroic status, the Victorian explorer Sir Richard Burton, whose biography Buchan reviewed for the Spectator on 26 May 1906 (Article 9). There seems little doubt from this review that Buchan saw Burton as something of a heroic figure. He had a love of adventure, was daring and courageous, risking his life on his pilgrimage to Mecca and his expedition to Harar, Islamic Holy Places forbidden to non-Muslims. The story of his wanderings ‘would be thought incredible in any novel’ (9:28). But Buchan recognises his faults. His fierce vitality could make him irascible and violent at times, turning him into ‘a force, crude, blind, thoughtless, sweeping opposition before it’ (9:94-95). When this happened, matters of conscience and rules of conduct meant little to him. Despite this, Buchan concludes that ‘he is a great figure’ (9:96), but he is not a true hero in the terms of Buchan’s fiction. His heroic qualities are fatally flawed, turning him into someone who is ‘sinister, tragic’ (9:14). ‘Half mystic, half materialist’ (9:84) he is not a practical mystic in the mould of Buchan’s historical heroes like Cromwell and Montrose. Despite being brought up in a staunch Anglican family, who initially destined him for the Church, and later marrying a Roman Catholic, Burton persisted in agnosticism throughout his life (ODNB 14 March 2013).
Clearly he lacked the religious zeal of a Cromwell, but he also had none of the reasoned idealism of Montrose. Instead, his mysticism stemmed from his own sense of self. ‘Strange fires burned in his soul’ (9:84). Carried away by his fame, he would not allow his strange and exotic adventures to speak for themselves, but had to ‘surround them with an atmosphere of theatrical mystery’ (9:26-27), so that ‘every expedition he ever took is chronicled in some large and verbose work’ (9:68-69). Being ‘an incorrigible obscurantist’, he ‘loved to mislead the world’ (9:24) by adopting a romantic, Byronic pose. Unlike Buchan’s fictional heroes, he was always selfish, not selfless.

In addition, as Buchan observes, ‘there was something in his nature antipathetic to the English tradition’ (9:82-83). He used the various postings in his diplomatic career as a means of furthering his own interests, travelling and writing, instead of serving his country. On the rare occasion that he did involve himself in his duties, during his consulship at Damascus, he made several powerful enemies and eventually had to be recalled by the Foreign Office. When the invitation came from General Gordon in 1877 to join him in the Sudan (Article 9, note to line 99), Burton was more interested in absenting himself from his consulate at Trieste to hunt for gold in the ancient mines of the Midian in the north west region of the Arabian Desert (ODNB 14 March 2013 and <http://www.miskatonic.org>). This was the tragedy of Burton’s career as Buchan sees it, ‘frittered away on a hundred aimless wanderings’, instead of being ‘harnessed in the service of his country’ like Hannay, in which ‘he might have left a heroic name in history’ (9:97-100).

Burton, then, is a flawed hero, but several aspects of his character and career bear striking similarities to one of Buchan’s leading fictional protagonists, Sandy Arbuthnot, especially in his early appearances in Greenmantle (1916) and The Three Hostages (1924). The major influences in the creation of Sandy have been shown to be Buchan’s close friend from Oxford, Aubrey Herbert, and, especially in his later appearances in The Courts of the
Morning (1929) and The Island of Sheep (1936), TE Lawrence (of Arabia), whom Buchan came to know well after the First World War. But James Buchan, the author’s grandson, has argued that the Sandy in Greenmantle was created from ‘certain heroic misfits of the Victorian Orient – Sir Richard Burton, Sir Francis Younghusband, Charles Doughty, even, at a pinch General Gordon’, as well as from his Oxford friend, Aubrey Herbert.

Buchan’s review certainly provides evidence for this argument with regard to Burton. When Sandy Arbuthnot is first introduced to the reader in Greenmantle he is already so widely-travelled that: ‘If you struck a Mecca pilgrimage the odds are you would meet a dozen of Sandy’s friends in it’ (23), echoing Burton’s own pilgrimage to Mecca. Like Burton, he is an intellectual man of action, an Orientalist who ‘know[s] the East about as well as any living man’ (26), and is a noted linguist, speaking several languages including Arabic (24), German (30), and Turkish (170). Above all, he is a master of disguise who understands ‘something of the soul of the East’, of ‘the true Oriental’ (182). Sandy knows that to pass off successfully as an Arab it is necessary not only to look and speak like an Arab, but to think and act like one, following his religious customs and social practices as closely as possible, as Burton did in his pilgrimage to Mecca. Sandy does this to great effect in Greenmantle as the leader of the Companions of the Rosy Hours (136-38), and eventually as the prophet Greenmantle himself (272). But Sandy, like Burton, is a flawed hero, ‘a man of genius’ with ‘the defects of such high-strung, fanciful souls’ (225), in Sandy’s case a conscience and sense of honour which occasionally come into conflict with the roles he has to play when in disguise, as in his relationship with the villain, Hilda von Einem, in Greenmantle (225).

There is one further interesting link between Sir Richard Burton and Sandy. Burton’s friend and collaborator, who set up the Khama Shastra Society with him (see Article 9, note to line

35 See for example Smith, Biography 207, 255-56; Lownie, Presbyterian Cavalier 140; and Macdonald ‘Introduction’ to Greenmantle xii-xiii.
36 Buchan also wrote articles and reviews on Younghusband (see for example H56 and H150) and Doughty (M32), as well as his account of Gordon at Khartoum (1934).
70) and assisted in its publications, was Forster Fitzgerald Arbuthnot (ODNB 14 March 2013).

The Backstairs World

On 2 December 1911 Buchan published a review in the Spectator on ‘African Secret History’ (Article 17). It concentrates on secret service work in South Africa, and has several links back to his novel Prester John, which had been published the previous year, while at the same time providing glimpses forward to The Thirty-Nine Steps and Buchan’s later spy thrillers. As the review says, the secret service is ‘the story of the backstairs’, the ‘great underworld’ which is mainly the subject of gossip and rumour, and ‘occasionally it appears in fiction’ (17:2-5). It is an aspect of the modern world which had interested Buchan from the beginning of his career. His first contemporary novel, The Half-Hearted (1900), sent its hero, Lewis Haystoun, to the North West Frontier to foil the secret plans of a Russian spy for the invasion of India. The novel was unsuccessful partly because Buchan had never been to India and had no inside knowledge of the secret service. These faults were remedied in Prester John, which draws on Buchan’s experiences in South Africa. His detailed knowledge of the landscape and locations depicted in the novel was gleaned from long periods in the saddle on the veld and in the bush, visiting many areas as part of his land settlement responsibilities after the Boer War. This enabled him to absorb the atmosphere and portray the spirit of places, an aspect of fundamental importance to his writing which was shown by his article on ‘Local Colour’. For parts of the plot of Prester John he was able to draw on his own experiences as well as stories and gossip from his acquaintances in British military intelligence (see Article 17 headnote). The authenticity of the kind of IDB (illicit diamond buying) schemes and illegal liquor selling depicted in the novel is confirmed by Blackburn and Caddell’s book under review and highlighted in Buchan’s article.
These realistic aspects of the backstairs world are key ingredients in Buchan’s spy thrillers. They provide authentic elements in the fictional secret history which the novels portray, and they are set against the background of real events which the reader can identify. In *Prester John* the plot revolves around the secret history of a native rising which is narrowly averted. Captain Jim Arcoll, the ‘chief Intelligence officer among the natives’ (73), is a veteran of the two Matabele Wars of the 1890s (70), which were fought by British forces to quell native unrest. Most contemporary readers would have been aware of these wars, and also of the more recent Bambatha rebellion in Natal in 1906, which seems to have provided Buchan’s inspiration for the main plot of the novel (Lownie, *Presbyterian Cavalier* 112; Redley, ‘South African War’ 73-74). Buchan wrote several articles for the *Spectator* in 1906 on the dangers of this uprising (*H85, H92, H94, H106, H107*). He points out in particular the trouble which might be caused if a leader emerges to unify the disparate tribes in a common grievance or fanatical cause such as ‘Ethiopianism’ (*H85*). In *Prester John* it is Laputa who emerges as the unifying native leader claiming to be the successor of the legendary Prester John, King of the medieval Ethiopian Empire, as Captain Arcoll explains (71-75).

Jim Arcoll is in many ways the forerunner of Richard Hannay in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Hannay has spent his formative years in South Africa and, like Arcoll, fought in one of the Matabele Wars (*Thirty-Nine Steps* 19). He is steeped in veldcraft (21) and native ways (46 – ‘the old Mashona trick’). Both are adept at disguise, an essential attribute of any secret agent in the backstairs world of Buchan’s novels. Hannay has learnt in South Africa the best way of carrying off a disguise (52), and uses it to evade his pursuers dressed first as a milkman (Chapter 2), then as a roadman (Chapter 5). Arcoll is also adept at disguises, capable of bringing about ‘an amazing transformation’ as a native (*Prester John* 68), which he uses to great effect in keeping track of Laputa (74-75).
Arcoll of course is a professional Intelligence officer, while Hannay is an amateur drawn into the backstairs world by chance when Scudder, the secret agent, takes him into his confidence. The plot of *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, however, follows the *Prester John* format of a fictional secret history set against the background of real events, this time a German plan to steal British naval secrets in the context of Anglo-German naval rivalry leading up to the outbreak of war in August 1914, a scenario all too real for contemporary readers when the novel was published in 1915.

Buchan’s review highlights ‘those tales of the veld and the bush which are now becoming only a faint memory’ (17:74), stories of gun-running and ‘the perennial romance of hidden treasure’ (17:80). He was to return briefly to this era in the last of his Hannay novels, *The Island of Sheep* (1936). In a long flashback episode (Chapter IV), Hannay narrates an adventure from ‘the early years of the century’ when ‘the land north of the Limpopo River was now and then an exciting place to live’ (41). It is a place where ‘many have gone native, and ended as poor whites in a dirty hut in a Kaffir kraal’ (41), which echoes Buchan’s comment in this review about ‘those who sank lower and became “mean whites” living on the bounty of native kraals’ (17:92-93). This adventure in *The Island of Sheep* actually unites Arcoll and Hannay for the only time in Buchan’s fiction.

**The Dancing Floor**

In the spring of 1910 Buchan and his wife went on a holiday cruise of the Aegean, and soon afterwards Buchan wrote a review for the *Spectator* of a book by John Cuthbert Lawson on *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion* (Article 15). Buchan’s cruise is generally recognised as having provided the inspiration for three of his works of fiction: the short stories ‘The Lemnian’ (1911) and ‘Basilissa’ (1914), and the novel *The Dancing Floor*
‘The Lemnian’ is a story associated with the battle of Thermopylae in 480 BC, and Buchan visited this site during his cruise. ‘Basilissa’ is a tale inspired by a house he saw on one of the islands, shuttered and impenetrable with an air of mystery (Smith, Biography 265), one of those places that Robert Louis Stevenson had said ‘speak distinctly’ of romance and ‘cry aloud’ for a tale to be written (‘A Gossip on Romance’: 54-55).

The Dancing Floor is based on ‘Basilissa’, but it is greatly expanded to include one of Buchan’s main protagonists, Edward Leithen, and several scenes of London and country house life. The second half of the novel is set on a Greek island which has been inherited by the heroine, Koré Arabin, from her recently deceased father. He had antagonised the islanders by his outrageously decadent behaviour, and when an exceptionally poor harvest is followed by a severe winter, the islanders blame their hardships on the Arabin family. As Easter approaches they plan to set aside their modern Christian beliefs and revive an old pagan ceremony at a sacred place on the island (the ‘Dancing Floor’ of the title), and to burn Koré in her house as a human sacrifice to appease the ancient Greek gods. Leithen and the hero, Vernon Milburne, go separately to the island to save Koré. Vernon succeeds by escaping with her from the burning house dressed as a god and goddess. The islanders are so frightened by this apparent rebirth of the pagan gods that they willingly return to Christianity.

The sources which inspired Buchan to base the second half of The Dancing Floor on the revival of ancient pagan rites on a remote Greek island have been examined in some detail by Marilyn Deegan in her Introduction to the Oxford World’s Classics edition of the novel (1997), and by Isobel and Michael Haslett in their essay ‘Buchan and the Classics’ (2009).

Both emphasise the influence of Buchan’s friend and former tutor, Gilbert Murray, who

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37 His biographers, Janet Adam Smith (Biography 177, 265-66) and Andrew Lownie (Presbyterian Cavalier 166), both make this connection.
38 See also their earlier essay ‘The Dancing Floor: Places and Sources’ in the John Buchan Journal 20 (Spring 1999): 6-19.
was updating and expanding his book *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (1912) when Buchan started writing *The Dancing Floor* in 1924, and of Jane Harrison’s *Themis: A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion* (1912), which was being reworked at that time for a revised edition. Marilyn Deegan also cites James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1922, as an additional source for the ceremonies described in Buchan’s novel (xxiv). However, neither Deegan nor the Hasletts make any reference to John Cuthbert Lawson’s *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion*, whereas Buchan’s review (Article 15) indicates that there are several close connections between Lawson’s book and *The Dancing Floor*.

In his review Buchan expresses reservations about Lawson’s academic methodology and scholarly conclusions, but praises highly the literary aspects of the book. The author has ‘a style which is only too rare in books of scholarship’ (15:5), and Buchan admires ‘the vigour and ingenuity with which he reconstructs his picture’ (15:50). Overall, it is ‘a piece of good literature’ (15:51) and ‘the whole book from its imaginative power is in the highest degree fascinating and suggestive’ (15:113-14). From this it is clear that Buchan is very interested in the Greek customs and rituals which the book invokes and, in particular, the ‘description in the last chapter of the Easter ceremonies in a Greek village’, which ‘reveals high gifts of imagination and style’ (15:52-53). Such ceremonies play a key part in the plot of *The Dancing Floor*, and the description of them in Buchan’s novel (84) appears to be a condensed version of the details provided in Lawson’s book (574-76). Here is the relevant extract from Lawson:

The Lenten fast was drawing to a close when I arrived….the ordinary diet is reduced to bread and water, to which is sometimes added a nauseous soup made from dried cuttle-fish or octopus…..Then comes ‘the Great Week’….[and]….the long service of Good Friday Night….At the top of the nave, just below the chancel-step, stood a bier and upon it lay the figure of the Christ, all too death-like in the dim light. The congregation gaze upon him, reverently hushed, while the priests’ voices rise in prayer and chant as it were in lamentation for the dead God lying there in state. Hour after hour passes. The women have kissed the dead form, and are gone. The moment has come for carrying the Christ out to burial. The procession moves forward – in front, the priests with candles and torches and, guarded by them, the open bier borne shoulder-high – behind, a reverent,
bare-headed crowd. The night is dark and gusty. It rains....Unheeding of wind and rain, the women kneel at open door or window, praying, swinging censers, sprinkling perfume on the passing bier. Slowly, haltingly, led by the dirge of priests, now in darkness, now lighted by the torches’ flare and intermittent beams from cottage doorways....the mourners follow their God to his grave....

But there is a sequel on the morrow. Soon after dark on Easter-eve the same weary yet excited faces may be seen gathered in the church....What is happening there now behind those curtains which veil the chancel from the expectant throng? Midnight strikes. The curtains are drawn back. Yes, there is the bier, borne but yesternight to the grave. It is empty. That is only the shroud upon it. The words of the priest ring out true, ‘Christ is risen!’ And there behind the chancel, see, a second veil is drawn back. There in the sanctuary, on the altar-steps, bright with a blaze of light stands erect the figure of the Christ....A miracle, a miracle! Quickly from the priest’s lighted candle the flame is passed. In a moment the dim building is illumined by a lighted taper in every hand. A procession forms, a joyful procession now....crying aloud the news ‘Christ is risen’ and answering ‘He is risen indeed’. In every home the lamb is prepared with haste, the wine flows freely; in the streets is the flash of torches, the din of fire-arms, and all the exuberance of simple joy. The fast is over....(574-76).

Here for comparison is Buchan’s condensed version from The Dancing Floor. Koré is speaking to Leithen:

‘Have you ever been in Greece at Easter – during the Great Week?....The people have been starved all Lent, living only on cuttle-fish soup and bread and water....’

Then in rapid staccato sentences she sketched the ritual. She described the night of Good Friday, when the bier with the figure of the crucified Christ on it stands below the chancel step, and the priests chant their solemn hymn, and the women kiss the dead face, and the body is borne out to burial. With torches and candles flickering in the night wind, it is carried through the village streets, while dirges are sung, and the tense crowd breaks now and then into a moan or a sigh. Next day there is no work done, but the people wander about miserably, waiting on something which may be either death or deliverance. That night the church is again crowded, and at midnight the curtains which screen the chancel are opened, and the bier is revealed – empty, but for a shroud. ‘Christ is risen,’ the priest cries, as a second curtain is drawn back, and in the sanctuary, in an ineffable radiance, stands the figure of the risen Lord. The people go mad with joy, they light their tapers at the priest’s candle, and, like a procession of Bacchanals, stream out, shouting ‘He is risen indeed’. Then to the accompaniment of the firing of guns and the waving of torches the famished peasants, maddened by the miracle they have witnessed, feast till morning on wine and lamb’s flesh in the joy of their redemption (84).

Many of the details in these two extracts are so strikingly similar, if not identical, there can be no doubt that in The Dancing Floor Buchan has followed the description of the Easter ceremonies in Lawson’s book.
In his review Buchan also draws attention to the final chapter of the book on ‘The Union of Gods and Men’ (15:91-92) and the legend of Kore, acted out in the ancient Mysteries (15:95-98). Buchan had long been interested in the myth of Kore (also known as Persephone in Greek legend and Proserpina in Roman mythology). In the mid-1890s he wrote an unpublished short story called ‘The Face of Proserpina’ and his review of Walter Pater’s Greek Studies in 1895 (A5) mentions Kore. But the inclusion of her legend in his review of Lawson’s book appears significant given that Buchan subsequently adopted her name in that of his heroine, Koré Arabin, in The Dancing Floor. The Mysteries are also mentioned in the novel (77). Furthermore, the plot involves the inhabitants of the Greek island planning to make a human sacrifice of Koré to appease the gods. In his review of Lawson’s book Buchan highlights ‘a remarkable story of a human sacrifice in the island of Santorini during the Greek War of Independence’ (1821-32), in which ‘the victim was sent as a messenger to the gods’ (15:79-82). He follows this in The Dancing Floor by twice mentioning the case of a human sacrifice which happened ‘not so long ago in Santorini’ (79, 107) to prepare the reader for the planned sacrifice of Koré and to strengthen its credibility. The novel also refers to the Greek word pharmakos, meaning a scapegoat, for such human sacrifices (28), and the same term is used by Lawson (355).

There are further detailed similarities between Lawson’s book and The Dancing Floor. Buchan’s review notes the survival of ancient myths in the names of modern Greek saints, and one of his examples from Lawson’s book, Dionysus becoming S. Dionysius (15:17-18), is mentioned in the novel (28). The ‘Nereids’ or fairy-folk (15:60) are also mentioned in The Dancing Floor (82), as are the Callicantzari (15:70), creatures capable of transforming themselves into different shapes such as centaurs (112). Lawson’s book (184) also

39 There are two manuscript versions of this tale in the National Library of Scotland (Acc.6975/1 and Acc.12329/2).
mentions the *strigla*, a kind of harpy, and *vrykolakas*, a vampire, names which also appear in the novel (82).

In view of all these correspondences and similarities, and bearing in mind that Buchan’s review was published very soon after the Aegean cruise which provided him with such a source of inspiration, it can only be concluded that John Cuthbert Lawson’s book should now be regarded as an additional source for *The Dancing Floor* which has not previously been identified.

Anti-Semitism

The existence of a few casual remarks about Jews and Jewishness by some of the characters in his contemporary novels has led to Buchan being accused of anti-Semitism, an aspect of his fiction that has caused some controversy. The matter has been much discussed, and the arguments are well summarised in Kate Macdonald’s entry on ‘Buchan and Anti-Semitism’ in her 2009 *Companion to the Mystery Fiction* (40-44). But it is important to recognise the significance of context in any discussion of the subject. Buchan was writing his contemporary novels during the first part of the twentieth century before the Second World War, a time when casual anti-Semitic remarks were part of the discourse of all classes, reflected both in conversation and public writing, including a great deal of the popular fiction of the period. It is therefore not surprising that Buchan’s novels contain an element of the casual anti-Semitism of the time. Certainly none of his contemporary reviewers took any exception to the occasional Jewish references in his fiction, and it was not until 1953 that Richard Usborne in his *Clubland Heroes* noted the slightly anti-Semitic nature of some of his male heroes. But this of course was only after conventional pre-war attitudes had been overturned by the horrors of the Holocaust in the Second World War, which could not have been foreseen by Buchan or anyone else writing before the early 1940s.
Similar contextual considerations need to be applied when discussing Buchan’s review of Houston Stewart Chamberlain’s *Foundations of the Nineteenth Century*, published in the *Spectator* on 25 February 1911 (Article 16). After the First World War Chamberlain became associated with the emerging Nazi movement, and later still the book came to be seen as a significant text in the formation of the Nazis’ racial theories and their persecution of the Jews (ODNB 12 June 2013). But all this was in the future. Buchan, reviewing the book in 1911, some twelve years after it was first published in Germany, considers it in the context of the time, as an academic work of history ‘written to prove a thesis’ (16:1-2). He understands its impact in Germany, ‘for this kind of dogmatic survey of history, if picturesquely written, is the fashion at present in that country’ (16:18-20). He is also aware of its influence elsewhere, referring to Lord Redesdale’s introduction promoting it as ‘a new gospel’ (16:15). But he plays down the anti-Semitic nature of the book: ‘Mr Chamberlain is no vulgar Anti-Semite. He has an immense respect for the great qualities of the Jew’ (16:90-92), and his conclusions are ‘carefully guarded’ (16:20). Here Buchan seems to be using the adjective ‘vulgar’ to indicate that Chamberlain’s arguments are neither crude and lacking refinement, nor intended to rouse popular opinion by being aimed at the common people (the Latin root of the word which Buchan would have been perfectly aware of as an Oxford-educated classicist). In other words, this is an academic book with a thesis which ‘merits serious consideration’, even though there is a danger that ‘if translated roughly into popular language’, its conclusions ‘might seem to give support both to the fashionable *Judenhetze* and to national pride’ in Germany (16:20-22).

Buchan’s review is therefore carried out in this context. He points to the problems associated with such a generalised thesis, then outlines the main elements of the thesis itself, in which he finds the chapter on the Greeks far from convincing, ‘full of dubious race generalisations’ (16:40-41), before giving his overall opinions in a concluding paragraph. These opinions cannot be said to provide any evidence for those who would accuse Buchan
of anti-Semitism. Although he concedes that Chamberlain has provided ‘a bold and sensational thesis’ (16:115) and the book is ‘a monument of erudition’ (16:127), he finds that Chamberlain ‘has carried his race theories to desperate lengths’ (16:119-20). He is compelled at times to distort the facts to fit his theory, such as when, in discussing the influence of Christianity, he goes to great lengths to prove that there were no elements of the Jewish race in Jesus Christ, which Buchan calls ‘a waste of fallacious ingenuity’ (16:72). He also seeks to explain the Renaissance as being the result of the Teutonic genius by portraying the great Italians such as Leonardo and Michelangelo as Northmen. By distortions such as these Chamberlain ‘reveals the impossible basis of his doctrine. The thesis cannot be held proved in the extreme form in which he has stated it’ (16:121-22). Buchan concedes that Chamberlain might have a better case if he argued it in a more moderate form, better perhaps than any alternative arguments that the foundations of the nineteenth century are ‘wholly Latin or wholly Jewish’ rather than Teutonic, but a good argument could be made for such alternative theories. In any event ‘among extreme doctrines there is…no finality’ (16:124-26).

Buchan returns to this subject of alternative theories in a review of two books on ‘The Jew’ in July 1913 (D70). He finds that one of the books, The Jews and Modern Capitalism by the eminent German economist and sociologist Werner Sombart, ‘has come within measurable distance’ of proving that the Jew is ‘the motive power in the world’s progress’, which is the ‘exactly opposite thesis’ to that of Chamberlain (D70.102b). Again, a close reading of this review does not provide any substantive evidence to support Buchan’s alleged anti-Semitism. On the contrary, he highlights the case for Zionism, which is argued ‘with much force and eloquence’ in the second book he reviews (D70.103b). This was a cause which Buchan himself was to take up in the 1930s when he was a Member of Parliament, and which he discusses in the first of his long series of articles for the Graphic (5 April 1930, H175).
Buchan was later to review another book by Chamberlain, his two-volume biography of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant, which was published in an English translation by Lord Redesdale in 1914 (C104). This review makes no reference to the Jewish question or Chamberlain’s earlier book, except for a brief mention of The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century in the opening paragraph, in which Buchan expresses his ‘doubts about the profundity of the principle’ expounded in the book, ‘but at any rate it systematized a vast quantity of historical material and made a very pretty story’ (C104.269b).

The Aftermath of War

The dispatches which Buchan wrote for the Times from the Western Front in the spring and autumn of 1915 are important in terms of his journalism in that they are the only occasions on which he acted as an eye-witness reporter. But they are also significant for his development as a novelist, because they record his impressions as he encounters for the first time and at first hand that precariousness of civilisation which he had previously only rendered in fictional form, especially in The Power-House (1913).

In his dispatch of 22 May 1915 (Article 19), Buchan’s eye-witness account of the destruction of Ypres resembles the threatened figure crossing a landscape of unknown dangers that is a recurring theme in his fiction, such as when Richard Hannay, wanted by the police, is pursued across the Scottish moors by German spies in The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915). But here the figure in danger is Buchan himself, moving through the landscape of war-torn Belgium, under threat at times from German shells and snipers. He contrasts the relative civilisation of the areas behind the lines with the barbaric destruction of Ypres itself as he moves closer to the front line. He begins in the countryside, where rural life is continuing as normal: ‘the country people are at work in the fields, and the children are playing round the cottages’ (19:6-7). He then encounters roads filled with military men and vehicles, yet still recognisably civilised, with their ‘converted London omnibuses’ (19:11) in
the heavy traffic, ‘as busy as Piccadilly-circus’ (19:14). But when he enters Ypres itself, the contrast is immediate: ‘suddenly you pass out of this wholesome bustle through the fire zone and into a place of the dead’ (19:14-15).

Buchan’s description abounds in such contrasts between the civilisation represented by Ypres and the destruction wrought by the German bombardment. The overall effect is to impress on his readers at home the precariousness of civilisation in the face of the destructive power of modern warfare. Britain has not experienced war in Western Europe for a hundred years, but it is now no longer a distant event in some far-flung outpost of Empire. What is happening in a Belgian town is close by, at the centre of Western civilisation. The proximity of the war to Britain is emphasised when Buchan leaves Ypres and moves closer to the front line: ‘In appearance the country is very like rural England....Only everything is broken’ (19:94-97). In the officers’ dugouts ‘you will see the smartest of leaders, men whose names are on everybody’s lips and whom you last met at a London dinner-party, dragging himself from an underground lair like a badger’s earth’ (19:115-17); while ‘to see, half a mile from where they fell, the new graves of men one had known in the pride of youth and strength is to awake with a shock to the desolation of war’ (19:125-27).

Having impressed on his readers the imminent dangers of the present war, Buchan remains optimistic about the outcome and the survival of civilisation because of what he calls ‘the human factor’ (19:144). Ypres was abandoned by its inhabitants and the Allied soldiers in the face of the German bombardment, but now they are beginning to return: ‘Slowly under constant shell fire we are getting on with the work of clearing of the ruins’ (19:74-75). Of the buildings themselves: ‘There is a terrible splendour about these gaunt and broken figures, these noble shattered façades, which defies their destroyers’ (19:83-85). And the destructive power of modern warfare itself depends in the end on the human factor.
Buchan describes the pyramid shape of the modern war machine (19:133-34), in which an immense manufacturing and transport base tapers to a point at the front line where the qualities of the fighting man will decide the outcome, as he has done in all previous wars. Buchan uses the story of le Roi d’Ypres, the lone British soldier who supposedly took control of the town for a week, ‘as emblematic of a certain governing and winning quality in our race’ (19:157), which will determine the outcome of the war.

The human factor was a theme which Buchan would develop in his later writing about the war and return to in his subsequent fiction. He had mentioned it in his previous dispatch for the Times (I 72) and he added more detail in his next report (I 74), while the strategic implications were considered in his first article for Land and Water the following month (I 77). Later, the emblematic parable of le Roi d’Ypres was transformed into a short story, ‘The King of Ypres’, published in the Christmas edition of the Illustrated London News at the end of 1915. Later still, when Buchan came to write A History of the Great War (4 vols. 1921-22), he included condensed versions of his eye-witness report from this despatch on the destruction of Ypres and the pyramid structure of the modern war machine, with only minor amendments to the wording (vol. II: 59-61, 83). At the end of A History of the Great War Buchan makes clear that in his opinion it was the human factor which he had identified in his Times reports that decided the outcome:

> The war was a vindication of the essential greatness of our common nature, for victory was won less by genius in the few than by faithfulness in the many. Every class had its share, and the plain man, born in these latter days of doubt and divided purpose, marched to the heights of the heroic unsurpassed in simpler ages. In this revelation democracy found its final justification, and civilisation its truest hope (vol. IV: 443).

Here the historian meets the novelist in a conflation of Buchan’s conservative views. The war has shown that the individual in history can still influence the course of events, but the

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40 Buchan refers to the pyramid shape of modern warfare again in A Prince of the Captivity (1933), when Warren Creevey inverts the pyramid to show himself as the directing mind behind the modern machine (265-66).
final outcome of modern warfare is determined less by the great men of genius than by the plain man acting en masse. He is the hero, the everyman of fairy tale and fiction, who can overcome the problems of modernity in ‘these latter days of doubt and divided purpose’ by rising to the occasion and achieving victory in a common cause. For Buchan this represents the justification for democracy and the best hope for the preservation of civilisation against the destructive forces of modernity.
CONCLUSION

Buchan’s literary reputation is based on his success as a popular novelist, the inventor of the spy thriller. Although there has been considerably increased scholarly interest in his work in recent years, the perception that he is mainly a genre writer persists and has limited the success of attempts to move his literary reputation further towards the academic mainstream. Other areas of his writing have received some recognition, particularly the historical novels and, to a lesser extent, the historical biographies, but his uncollected journalism has remained a neglected aspect of his work, largely overlooked even by Buchan specialists. The result has been that his roles as essayist, literary critic, and cultural commentator have been significantly undervalued, and he has tended to be omitted from consideration in those academic specialisms, such as the middlebrow and intermodernism, which might be expected to encompass his writing.

My thesis has sought to address this situation. It is the first academic work to concentrate exclusively on Buchan’s uncollected journalism. Successive chapters in Part I have argued the case for Buchan to be considered as an essayist of elegance and authority, as an astute literary critic attuned to contemporary trends and prepared to engage with modernism while maintaining a conservative stance, and as a wide-ranging cultural commentator with a consistent world-view, a cultural politics, which informed all aspects of his writing. It has also shown how a study of his journalism can provide further understanding, explanation, and illustration of the major themes explored in his literary work and reveal new sources for his fiction.

Additional research is clearly required if Buchan’s literary reputation is to be further enhanced. His uncollected journalism, in its volume and range, provides a major potential field of study. My thesis aims to open up this area of his work to future research in two entirely new ways. Part II is a catalogue of Buchan’s uncollected journalism, totalling over a
thousand articles and reviews, which builds on the established Blanchard bibliography by providing more detailed information in a format specifically designed to aid researchers. In particular, it provides a categorisation of Buchan’s articles and a summary of every one of them, features never before available to scholars. In addition, the Appendix contains the first annotated collection of Buchan’s essays, which have been used to illustrate the arguments in the main thesis. They also form the basis of a critical edition of Buchan’s uncollected journalism which could be published with a view to gaining further recognition for this neglected aspect of his writing.

Research into Buchan’s uncollected journalism has recently been facilitated by the publication in June 2013 of the entire Spectator archive on the internet. This provides both scanned and digitised copies of the magazine free of charge, so that all of Buchan’s Spectator articles (about three-quarters of his total journalistic output) are now readily available to researchers. It is hoped that this resource, together with all the detailed arguments, fresh insights, and new research features provided by this thesis, will stimulate the study of Buchan’s journalism as a means of establishing his status as an essayist, literary critic, and cultural commentator, and thereby moving his reputation further towards the academic mainstream.

\[41\] Available at <http://archive.spectator.co.uk> (8 March 2014) or simply by typing ‘Spectator archive’ into an internet search engine such as ‘Google’.
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