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“A FRAUD CALLED JOHN BUCHAN”: BUCHAN, JOSEPH CONRAD, AND LITERARY THEFT’

Douglas Kerr

Which novel is being described here?¹

A reclusive and unworldly Scandinavian, the self-doubting son of a domineering father who was a writer, is content to live a life of obscurity on his remote island. But his sanctuary on the margins of civilization is invaded by a piratical gang led by a gentlemanly and murderous villain, bent on getting their hands on what they believe is a great treasure in his possession. There ensues a desperate struggle, reaching a bloody conclusion in which the invaders are finally destroyed, by the defense mounted by the islander and those who are pledged to help him.

Admirers of Joseph Conrad will have no trouble recognizing this as the story told in his novel *Victory*, completed just before the outbreak of the First World War and published in the following year, 1915. Enthusiasts for the work of John Buchan, meanwhile, will find this account equally familiar, pointing out that it summarizes the main plot of Buchan’s novel *The Island of Sheep*, a book published in 1936, a dozen years after Conrad’s death, and twenty-one years after the publication of *Victory*, whose story it so strangely echoes. The congruence of these two novels, hitherto unremarked as far as I know, is the starting point for this investigation. It is the scene of the crime, if you will, though as with other more famous investigations it is not clear from the outset at least just what crime – or whether a crime – has actually been committed.

There is clearly a *prima facie* case for bringing a charge of theft against Buchan. Yet in many respects *The Island of Sheep* could hardly be further removed from Conrad’s *Victory*. The story of *Victory* unfolds in Eastern waters, and it plays to its climax on Samburan, the ‘Round Island’, apparently between Java and south-eastern Borneo, where the Swede Axel Heyst has taken refuge from a disappointing world. There he brings the

bedraggled Lena, whom he has chivalrously rescued from service in Zangiacomo's travelling orchestra, and probably a worse fate, and when the island is invaded by the villainous Mr. Jones and his two henchmen, it is Lena who brings about their defeat, though at the cost of her own life; Heyst, having lost her, dies in a fire at the end of the story, presumably by his own hand. None of these elements of Conrad's story are taken up in *The Island of Sheep*. Buchan's novel is as Northern a tale as *Victory* was Eastern. Buchan's embattled islander, Valdemar Haraldsen, is a Dane, but his island refuge is in the Norlands, an archipelago very like the Faroes to the north of the British Isles, and at the other end of the earth from *Victory*'s Samburan. Much of Buchan's story takes place in England and Scotland (with an earlier episode in southern Africa) and recounts the persecution of Haraldsen and his daughter by a gang consisting of his father's enemies as well as more opportunistic and sinister villains. But Haraldsen is lucky in his allies, who include the resourceful Richard Hannay and Sandy Arbuthnot (Lord Clanroyden), veterans of earlier Buchan adventures, including *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) and *Greenmantle* (1916). With the help of these people Haraldsen defeats his enemies in a showdown on his island in the Norlands, and may be supposed to live happily ever after.

In spite of these manifold differences, however, it is difficult to dismiss the similarities between the stories as simply coincidental. Nor can it be sufficient to put them down to the undoubted fact that both writers were engaged in producing the kind of adventure story that provided them with a common box of stage properties to dip into, including a wicked and piratical gang of villains, siege, kidnap, deception, and desperate defense against the odds. These are generic elements in *Treasure Island* and *Peter Pan*, as well as in *Lord Jim* and *The Three Hostages*, and they reappear serviceably in *Victory* and *The Island of Sheep*. Every genre has its own idiom and vocabulary. The fact that there is gunfighting in John Ford's film *Stagecoach* and Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* does not prove that Zinnemann stole from Ford, but nor does it prove he did not. Besides generic parameters of romance adventure, there are other properties which the Buchan story shares with its Conradian predecessor that cannot really be explained as being drawn from the common stock. The Scandinavian provenance of the islander, the unworldly

diffidence and antisociability that isolate him and make him vulnerable, so carefully mapped to his relationship with a difficult father, departed but still felt to be exigent in his demands – the psychological center of Heyst’s story as it interested Conrad – is reproduced in Buchan’s Haraldsen with a completeness hard to justify as mere coincidence.

Then there are the invading villains, both gangs under the leadership of a denationalized gentleman with a history of crime in South America. *The Island of Sheep* has a whole boatload of desperadoes, but as they approach Haraldsen’s sanctuary, with intent to murder, Hannay the narrator describes the leading three in terms that recall Mr. Jones and his henchmen in *Victory*: “D’Ingraville was a fallen angel, Carreras a common desperado, but Martel seemed to be *apache*, sewer-rat, and sneak-thief all in one” (*Island* 1124). Martel, as it happens, turns out not to be what he seems, but Hannay’s description brings to mind the taxonomy, or class system, of the invaders of Samburan as Axel Heyst defines them for Lena’s benefit, the envoys of the outer world. “Here they are before you – evil intelligence, instinctive savagery, arm in arm. The brute force is at the back” (*Victory* 329). The fact that, in both books, villains like this gang up to attack a victim like that, on his island home beyond the reach of the law, in the mistaken belief that he possesses a great treasure, adds up, I suggest, to circumstantial evidence – enough to justify a declaration that the game is afoot. The game becomes more intriguing, if not necessarily clearer, with the introduction of a further item of evidence, which is that Conrad once accused Buchan of plagiarism.

I. Buchan and Borrowing

In November 1899, William Blackwood sought Conrad’s opinion about a story by a new young writer, John Buchan, which the proprietor of *Blackwood’s Magazine* had accepted for publication in that month’s installment. Conrad’s reply, in a letter to Blackwood of 8 November 1899, begins with a dismissal of criticism, in Conrad’s most patrician manner, as a form of work ‘less useful than skirt-dancing and not quite as honourable as pocket-picking’; besides, honest criticism is always liable to be misconstrued and so Conrad says

he prefers to say nothing critical about Buchan's story. He will allow only that it is grammatically written, but immediately qualifies even this faint praise by confessing that he knows nothing of grammar. These preliminaries seem lighthearted enough, but in fact Conrad has been winding himself up to unleash the following missile.

There is one thing (though hardly pertaining to criticism proper) which ought to be said of that – production. It is this: it's [*sic*] idea, its feeling, its suggestion and even *the most subtly significant details* have been wrenched alive out of Kipling's tale '*The Finest Story in the World*'. What becomes of the idea, of the feeling, of the suggestion and of the incidents, in the process of that wrenching I leave it for the pronouncement not of posterity but of any contemporary mind that would be brought (for less than ten minutes) to the consideration of Mr. Buchan's story. The thing is patent – it is the only impression that remains after reading the last words – it argues naiveness of an appalling kind or else a most serene impudence. I write strongly – because I feel strongly.

One does not expect style, construction, or even common intelligence in the fabrication of a story; but one has the right to demand some sort of sincerity and to expect common honesty. When that fails – what remains?²

And the following day Conrad told Edward Garnett all about it, with a little embroidery.

Bwood is fussing now over a fraud called John Buchan. Asked me to give him my opinion of that unspeakable impostor's story in the last *Maga*. And I did give it to him too. I said it was too contemptible to be thought about and moreover that it was stolen from Kipling as to matter and imitated from Munro as to style. I *couldn't* keep my temper.³

Conrad's odd loss of temper is a curious incident in itself, and it is worth examining the basis of his accusation. Rudyard Kipling's 'The Finest Story in the World', which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* in July 1891 and later in his collection *Many Inventions* (1893), is about a bank clerk, Charlie Mears, who has a narrative in his head, about the experience of a Greek galley slave and, later, one about a member of a Viking expedition across the Atlantic to the American continent. These stories come in the sort of vivid and convincing detail that a bank clerk, it is assumed, would not have the

education to have learned about nor the imagination to invent. Charlie does not have the skill to write his stories down and seeks the help of a friend of his, the narrator, a professional writer. The narrator recognizes that the stories are the memories of Charlie's past lives. Realizing their astonishing literary and commercial value as authentic historical witness, he determines to buy his friend's stories, transcribe them from Charlie's dictation, and publish them for his own profit. But his scheme comes to naught when Charlie falls in love with a tobacconist's assistant and is thereafter interested only in writing dreadful Swinburnean love poems: the finest story in the world will never be written.

It is the trope of ancestral memory that links this Kipling tale to the Buchan story, 'The Far Islands', that so unexpectedly enraged Conrad. 'The Far Islands' traces Colin Raden's ancestry back through hereditary Scottish aristocrats to a companion of Bran the Blessed, the giant king of Celtic legend. Colin, a healthy young man with no particular attachment to his national traditions, has recurring reveries about a westward journey across the sea through the mists towards – but never reaching – a group of islands. Scraps of Latin come to him; he gets them translated, and they appear to refer to the Hesperides, islands of apple trees in the western ocean. His family is one of the oldest in the country, 'aristocrats when our Howards and Nevilles were greengrocers,' says Tillotson the genealogist ('Far' 616). Colin goes with his regiment to a desert war, presumably in the Sudan: 'He found fragments of the Other world straying into his common life' ('Far' 617). His reverie about the Rim of the Mist, an increasing refuge on the campaign, comes clearest to him when he is shot and dying, and now at last in his imagination he makes landfall: '[w]ith a passionate joy he leaped on the beach, his arms outstretched to this new earth, this light of the world, this old desire of the heart – youth, rapture, immortality' ('Far' 619). With the attainment of this vision at the moment of his death, the story ends.

The scraps of Latin, not understood by the rememberer, echo a motif in the Kipling story – Charlie seems to remember graffiti scrawled by the galley slaves in ancient Greek, a language he does not understand. Beyond this it is hard to see any other incidents 'wrenched alive out of Kipling's tale' as Conrad complained, or to make a general case of

plagiarism against Buchan. The trope of a recovered memory of earlier incarnations was not original to either story; it had been the premise of Rider Haggard's novel *She* (1887) and would be elaborated in the sequel *Ayesha* (1905).⁴ But the fact is that ancestral memory is an idea quite frequently encountered in late Victorian fiction, and accompanies the epoch's scientific fascination with all kinds of inheritance – the cultural inheritance explored in the anthropology of myth and folklore, the narratives of physical inheritance for which Darwin had provided an explanation, and the psychic legacies assumed in the idea of tendencies – to crime, for example – transmitted with physiological features from one generation to the next within a family or a people. Ancestral memory was no casual romance device, but a large and important topic, related to contemporary understandings of race, a theme of great importance in Buchan's work as Alan Sandison and Juanita Kruse have shown. Buchan was, after all, an exact contemporary of C. G. Jung (born 1875), the propounder of inherited psychic archetypes and the 'collective unconscious'. The theme of ancestral memory recurs throughout Buchan's work and he is unlikely to have needed the Kipling story to inform him about it.

Apart from this, the Buchan story has little in common with the Kipling one. Buchan has no equivalent to Kipling's sardonic interest in the relationship between the naive rememberer and his amanuensis. In Kipling, Charlie's descent from an earlier incarnation as a Greek galley slave is arbitrary. For Buchan, in contrast, the whole point about Colin's visionary gift is that it is the sign and proof of an impressive ancestry going way back to the Celtic origins of Britain, and an authentication of his status as bearer of an unbroken national heroic tradition. Colin's visions, meanwhile, are of a distinctly Celtic Twilight kind; they are of mists and romantic shorelines, and they feature no people, whereas the memories in the Kipling tale are characteristically novelistic, realistic, and technical.

Why then Conrad's outrage? He had no particular love for Kipling, his younger contemporary who was by this time something of a national institution while Conrad was not well known as an author, and was financially insecure. He may well have felt some

hostility towards the upstart Buchan, who was some eighteen years his junior but very much a Scotsman on the make, an undergraduate at Oxford who wrote to pay his way through university. During his time at Oxford, Buchan would publish five books in addition to numerous short stories and articles, with a facility unlikely to endear him to Conrad, for whom writing was always a slow and sometimes an agonizing business. Conrad had laboriously secured the trust of Blackwood, and with it a precious outlet for the serialization of his fiction; the second installment of *Lord Jim* was in the same number that carried 'The Far Islands'. Buchan had had his first story in *Blackwood's* earlier that year (January 1899), a preposterous enough tale called 'No-Man's Land', about a young Oxford Fellow in Celtic Studies who stumbles upon a semi-feral tribe of Picts living in the Galloway hills. In the next twenty years *Blackwood's* became Buchan's favourite periodical outlet: he published fourteen pieces in its pages, and Blackwood was also the publisher of Buchan's lightly fictionalized debate on the future of the empire, *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906). Almost overwhelmed by his own struggles in 1899, Conrad could not be expected to warm to a young man whom he may have thought of as a facile vulgarian. Buchan, however, admired Conrad, and as chief literary advisor to the publisher Nelson's, he was later to be responsible for issuing Conrad's *A Personal Record* and the Conrad-Hueffer collaboration *Romance* in a series of popular reprints.

But we risk missing an important point if we put Conrad's vehemence down to in-house rivalries among Blackwood's writers. There is another dimension to the matter. As Zdzisław Najder says mildly: 'To scold others for the sins we are inclined to commit is not commendable, but it is quite common' (205). And indeed, while Conrad's attack on Buchan as a plagiarist is not especially convincing, Conrad's own propensity to borrow without due acknowledgment is a matter of record.

II. Conrad and Borrowing

Like any other writer, Conrad's principal indebtedness is to his own work, and is manifold. *Victory* in particular, as Edward Said observed, is 'a novel full of reminiscences' and 'full of self- quotation' (qtd. In Mallios 286). The invasion of the

gentlemanly pirate has its prototype in *Lord Jim*, for example, and the story of a man who burns down his house after losing the woman he loves had already been told in Conrad's first novel, *Almayer's Folly*. A good deal of detective work has been done on the question of Conrad's indebtedness to others.⁵ Ian Watt, in the course of acknowledging Conrad's borrowings from Maupassant and others throughout his writing career, says that nevertheless 'although Conrad was perhaps too proud to own up to what he owed, he was also too proud to owe very much to anyone' (50).⁶ Watt notes that Conrad had a remarkable but erratic memory, and suggests he probably forgot that he was remembering; besides, most of his borrowings 'seem more curious than important' (50).

'Why did Conrad borrow so extensively?', asks Yves Hervouet, who is unwilling to see these borrowings explained away, by Watt and others, as unconscious. This view—we might call it the Moonstone defense—cannot account, Hervouet says, for the extent and detail of Conrad's purloinings: '[b]ut the number, the length, and the obvious nature of the borrowings . . . make it abundantly clear that Conrad knew exactly what he was doing, and that we are faced with a deliberate method of composition' (53). There may be practical, psychological and literary-historical explanations for this phenomenon. Frederick R. Karl usefully identified 'the dependency pattern that seems intrinsic to Conrad's way of working and surviving' (537–38). Hervouet argues that Conrad's reliance on printed sources belongs to this same pattern, was entirely conscious and deliberate, but was scarcely a matter of choice. Conrad felt he lacked inventiveness, and especially with certain subjects for which he could not draw on a great fund of personal experience, he sometimes needed help.

The literary-historical account Hervouet advances for Conrad's borrowings has to do with the centrality to literary modernism of borrowing, allusion, and imitation. While the literature of the past has always been used as a source of inspiration or an aesthetic model, the case is made that from the time of Flaubert onwards literary writing has tended to take its shape in the field of learning, to exist – as Michel Foucault, quoted by Hervouet, described Flaubert's *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* – 'only in and through the network of the already written' (64). *The Waste Land*, *Ulysses*, and Pound's *Cantos* are

the usual suspects summoned to this modernist identity parade, their pockets visibly bulging with canonical swag; in this company, Conrad's novels with their borrowings do not stand out conspicuously. Their intertextual connections – Hervouet lists dozens, in relation to a selection of just four of Conrad's titles, and the list is undoubtedly incomplete – 'contribute considerably to the density and complexity of the stories', he claims, as well as lifting them to that level of generality and universality characteristic of all great art (63).

Yet the honorific ascription of writerly borrowing to modernism seems both inaccurate and oddly unfair. It is hard to see why this imbrication in 'the network of the already written' should be seen as a quality of modernist (and of course postmodernist) writing, a category that excludes work like Buchan's thrillers on the grounds of genre, as much as it excludes specifically parasitic work like *Hamlet* or *Joseph Andrews* on chronological grounds (Hervouet 64).⁷ Indeed for the classic author, tradition was a shared collection of paradigms, a prestigious neighborhood in which writers were proud to situate their own new-built work, citing the masters to lay claim to their own role in the tradition. As Linda Hutcheon points out, 'perhaps only in a Romantic (and capitalist?) context where individuality and originality define art can the "borrowing" from other texts be considered plagiarism – or "stealing"' (234). And she adds: 'The relevance of any textual affiliation to interpretation, for example, can only be determined when we have decided *who* is going to be praised [. . .] or blamed for the literary borrowing [. . .] or stealing' (237).

Literary appropriation, then, may not only be quite differently regarded in different critical jurisdictions, but may also constitute any number of different illocutions, from homage to pillage. I exist in and through the network of the already written (goes the modernist conjugation): you borrow; he is a plagiaristic fraud.

Before returning to the specific case of Buchan and Conrad, it will be useful to arm ourselves with some distinctions elaborated by Gérard Genette in the first chapter of his book *Palimpsests*. Everything that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or

concealed, with other texts, is named ‘transtextuality’ by Genette, and he goes on to recognize five types, of which two seem germane to this case: ‘intertextuality’, which comprises quoting, plagiarism, and allusion, and ‘hypertextuality’ which, Genette explains, refers to ‘any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (which I shall, of course, call the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary’ (3-7, 5). Genette gives two examples of the kinds of transformation that may be involved in this process. Both Virgil’s *Aeneid* and James Joyce’s *Ulysses* are hypertexts of the same hypotext, Homer’s *Odyssey*. Virgil and Joyce do not comment on the Homeric precursor, but neither the *Aeneid* nor *Ulysses* could exist without it. *Ulysses* is a simple or direct transformation of the *Odyssey*, transposing its action to twentieth-century Dublin. The *Aeneid* is a complex or indirect transformation, in Genette’s terms, because it does not transpose the action of Homer’s poem, but tells an entirely different story; it does so, however, by imitating Homer. Both cases, the simple transformative appropriation of a pattern of actions and relationships, and the more complex imitative appropriation of a style, involve a degree of ‘mastery’, to use Genette’s word, over the hypotextual precursor (6). But, we should add, they also of course involve a deference to the original, a recognition of its primacy and generative power even in the act of consuming it. Harold Bloom’s account of poetic misprision in terms of tropes and defenses offers a different way of looking at such relationships (85-105). As we shall see, there is a poignant doubleness – an assertion of mastery, and an admission of belatedness – to what Buchan does with the work of his precursor Conrad.

III. Buchan and Conrad

I return then to the relation between Buchan’s fictional world and Conrad’s, not yet to consider the case of *Victory* and *The Island of Sheep*, but to take into account an earlier and yet more awkward pairing. Buchan’s novel *The Courts of the Morning* (1929) features a number of his recurrent characters, including John S. Blenkiron, Lord Clanroyden (Sandy Arbuthnot), Archie Roylance, and even (very briefly) Richard Hannay. Most of the action takes place in Olifa, an imaginary republic on the Pacific seaboard of South America, at first sight ‘a decadent blend of ancient Spain and second-

rate modern Europe', rich in silver and copper and increasingly prosperous, and consequently politically unstable, as the result of the activities of the Gran Seco Company, a mining concern (one of its properties is called the San Tomé mine), with an ambitious European director (*Courts* 30). A revolution is fomented, a civil war breaks out, there are acts of individual bravery and loyalty, adventures and escapes, an army arrives just in time, and at the end of the story the Gran Seco, with its mineral riches, becomes an independent province, firmly tied by commercial and political partnership with the United States (*Courts* 380).

While there are not, as far as I can see, any verbal echoes of Joseph Conrad's *Nostromo* (1904) other than the name of the mine, the setting and events of *The Courts of the Morning* are quite startlingly reminiscent of Conrad's South American novel, and there is a *prima facie* case for saying that the Buchan book is a *Nostromo* hypertext. And yet, just as we saw that *The Island of Sheep* is in significant respects a book hugely different from Conrad's *Victory*, the point I want to make now is that *The Courts of the Morning* is in most important ways nothing like *Nostromo*. For one thing, although the topography, ethnography, history, and economics of Olifa are all expounded with scrupulous realism, as are these features of Costaguana in *Nostromo*, the improbable plot of *The Courts of the Morning* is as far removed as possible from anything that could happen in a Conrad story. Blenkiron and Clanroyden have discovered that Castor, the denationalized gobernador of the province of the Gran Seco and the head of the company, is "the greatest *agent provocateur* in history," a dangerous megalomaniac who intends to mount a coup in Olifa, as a prelude to destabilizing Latin America, challenging the growing power of the United States and discrediting democracy (*Courts* 99). Castor belongs to the anarchist strain of Buchan villains, discussed by Philip Ray and Kruse (96–106). Blenkiron and Clanroyden with their allies decide to preempt his nefarious plans by fomenting the revolution themselves and provoking an invasion of the province by government forces. They then kidnap Castor in order to separate him from his sinister henchmen, and eventually persuade him to lead the revolution after converting him (under the benign feminine influence of Blenkiron's niece and Roylance's wife, with whom he falls in love) to the cause of goodness, democracy, and the American alliance. As a result of this

conversion Castor, who had wanted to be ‘a Napoleon to shape the world’, declares himself now ‘quite content if [he] can help to make an inconsiderable Latin republic a more wholesome state’ (*Courts* 309, 310). As a matter of fact he dies in the violent climax of the story, but his death only serves to cement the beginnings of a new world order, duly welcomed by the new president-elect:

The era of the Old World is over, and it is the turn of the New World today. I have often heard you [Clanroyden] say that the difficulties even of Europe must be settled in the West. Listen to me, señor. The time will come when the problems of the West will be settled between the United States and Olifa. (*Courts* 381)

No doubt it is possible to read Conrad’s *Nostramo* in many different ways, and it could be argued at least that for the Occidental Republic of Sulaco, the story has a happy ending. But even in the most sanguine interpretation, *Nostramo* is far removed from the absolutely relentless closures of *The Courts of the Morning*. The diabolical villain Castor is converted through association with the best of Anglo-Saxon womanhood to something like sainthood; the rootless cosmopolitan is humanized by developing attachments in the form of love for people, place, and nation, and becomes even lovable himself. His former heavies, the so-called Conquistadores, homicidal mercenaries and drug addicts to a man, are comprehensively defeated. There is never any suggestion that there might be anything questionable in the actions of Blenkiron and Clanroyden, who subvert a state and start a bloody war; their activities are presented as an irreproachable and completely successful exercise in nation building. Everything that in *Nostramo* might be ambiguous, compromised, obscure, indeterminate, insoluble, variously modalized, and ironic – modernist, in a word – in *The Courts of the Morning* is straightforward, aboveboard, settled.

Since, then, the two novels appear to be so radically different in temperament, how to account for the scandalous echoes from one to the other in setting, situation, and motif, whether these echoes are deliberate or unconscious? I am not, as a matter of fact, sure of the answer to this question. But in my mind is an image of a person who closes the door left open and tidies up the bits, after a particularly disruptive guest has blown in and

blown out again. *The Courts of the Morning* closes or restores the matter of *Nostramo* in something like an act of rehabilitation. Or to put it differently again, Buchan's recapitulation of material from *Nostramo* may be an acknowledgment of a half-buried dependence, an act of respect, but it is also a travesty or act of redress, the kind of ideological reversal that Genette calls 'thematic transformation' (213). This could be the accusation levelled at Buchan in the dock, but it might equally be his defense.

Let me illustrate this point with two contrasting examples of borrowing. The first example (itself borrowed from Hervouet's essay) is a sentence of Conrad's in *Almayer's Folly*. "It has set at last," said Nina to her mother, pointing towards the hills behind which the sun had sunk' (147).⁸ This echoes the words of Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod*: "It has set at last," said Alf to Halban, / Pointing to the sun from the window of his crenelle' (Hervouet 57). This is an example of intertextuality, in Genette's taxonomy, specifically plagiarism. Whether conscious or not, its function appears to be simply prosthetic, a crutch to help the writer on his way. We may wonder at the triviality of the misdemeanor, but there seems to be nothing more mysterious or consequential about it. The second example is Buchan's, and it is the naming of the San Tomé mine in the Gran Seco in Olifa in *The Courts of the Morning*. San Tomé was the name of the great silver mine at the heart of all the action in *Nostramo*. The borrowing in this case is even less rational than Conrad's appropriation of the lines from *Konrad Wallenrod*; Buchan had an almost unlimited choice of nomenclature for this mine and, for that matter, need not have named it at all. The borrowing seems quite gratuitous. I take it as something like a symptom, the trace or acknowledgment of a hypertextual dialogue in which the troubling implications (aesthetic and ideological) of the Conradian precursor text are reprocessed to serve the purposes of Buchan's quite different, more sturdy, and confident picture of the world.

It is with this understanding of the process that I return, and not before time, to the case of *The Island of Sheep*, approaching Buchan's debt in that novel to *Victory* not as an act of theft but as one of redress, in the sense of a restoration, a return to propriety, the righting of a wrong; at the back of the word is also (by way of a useful false etymology)

the idea of reclothing. The project seems to be in effect a critical activity performed upon Conrad's fiction; I cannot resist describing it as snatching *Victory* from the jaws of its own defeatism. In *The Island of Sheep* we can watch motifs from *Victory* rehabilitated to serve a new story that offers deep reassurance of various kinds to its reader, and no doubt its author Buchan, living in the increasingly beleaguered world of the 1930s. Motifs from the Conrad story may return, but the shaky moral compass of *Victory* is stabilized, the worryingly open questions of the earlier novel – questions, for example, about the ethical organization of the universe – are answered and closed in the later one. Nobody arrived in time to help Conrad's Heyst and Lena when Samburan was invaded, and they perished. But those same Buchan characters and qualities that always prevailed in the end in the time of the Kaiser, in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and the rest, can still pull it off in the Norlands in the age of Stalin and Hitler.

Meanwhile at the level of genre we may begin to understand *The Island of Sheep* as restoring fictional motifs – such as villainous gang, treasure island, heroic resistance, fight against the odds, and so on – which Conrad had used for his own aesthetically radical purposes in *Victory*, back to their original function as the vocabulary of the beguiling and conservative genre of romance. Northrop Frye suggested long ago that the basic myth of romance is one of redemption (186–206). Lena in *Victory* may in a sense redeem Heyst but she cannot save him, nor can she turn her story into romance of a conventional kind. But in *The Island of Sheep* redemption seems to be offered not only to several of the characters, but also to the hypotextual ghost of Conrad's *Victory*.

Both novels are launched from a similar structure of feeling, an elected withdrawal from the world into forms of passive isolation which in turn are experienced as untenable or insufficient. From the example of his father and the disappointments of his own activities in the interest of the Tropical Belt Coal Company, Conrad's Axel Heyst has withdrawn to Samburan from the world from which nothing can be expected. In the first chapter of *The Island of Sheep*, titled 'Lost Gods', Richard Hannay too is in belated mood, and we find him living the life of a country gentleman at Fosse, with his adventures behind him – these adventures, some of which featured in earlier Buchan narratives, having been

enacted chiefly in the theatres of empire and war. His old comrade in arms Lombard, once dashing and idealistic, “a young knight-errant,” is now almost unrecognizable as a stout bald man on a commuter train (*Island* 936). Heyst’s story might be described as that of a man who finds again something to have faith in, though this does not save him. The case of Hannay and Lombard, and of Haraldsen, is simpler. They are restored, in a thoroughly Buchanesque phrase, to ‘a decent vigour of spirit’ and regenerated by the romance of their adventure on the Island of Sheep (*Island* 938). For Lombard in particular, the danger successfully undergone ‘had brought back [. . .] something of his youth and his youth’s dreams’ (*Island* 1137). Heyst’s island becomes a crematorium where his story ends in ashes, but Haraldsen’s island turns out to be a place of birth and restoration. ‘The Norlands are a spiritual place which you won’t find on any map,’ Lombard tells Hannay, announcing in the novel’s last chapter that he intends to come back there to make his soul. ‘Every man must discover his own Island of Sheep. You and Clanroyden have found yours, and I’m going to find mine’ (*Island* 1138). Paradise restored is a quasi-feudal sense of people belonging to a place and the place belonging to them, the restoration of a youthful purpose and rootedness. Haraldsen has successfully defended his home, but in a sense it is the stockbroker-belt paladin Lombard who is the hero who finds himself at the end of the story.

Buchan’s novel reaccentuates, in a sort of narrative anagram, a whole clutch of motifs from Conrad’s *Victory* to its own purposes. Some of the borrowings are arbitrary and seem pointless; these I would class as merely symptomatic. Others are exploited in different ways, and among these the Scandinavian provenance of the victim is an interesting example, for arguably the Buchan story makes more of this than Conrad did. Conrad’s Heyst is Swedish. This helps to explain why his temperament is gloomy, possibly accounts for his aristocratic courtesy, and marks him as a solitary even among the other Europeans out East. That is about all. But although Buchan’s Haraldsen is not actually a native of the Norlands, his Nordic provenance gives him a particular legitimacy as a landowner there which means, crucially, that the local whaling folk rally to his side in the crisis of the invasion. Much is made of the cultural theories of the elder Haraldsen, a poet and adventurer who has educated his son in the belief that ‘the Northern culture

was as great a contribution to civilization as the Greek and Roman, and that the Scandinavian peoples were destined to be the true leaders in Europe' (*Island* 955). Ethnic inheritance continues to be important to Buchan, as we saw it was in 'The Far Islands'. Meanwhile his Danish parentage is some explanation of the junior Haraldsen's morbidity and melancholy (another explanation is that, like Heyst, and like their common hypotextual ancestor Hamlet the Dane, he suffers under 'the dominant influence' of his absent father [*Island* 988]).

Nordic heritage is also crucially the warrant for Haraldsen's berserk fit in the crisis of the action, when he reverts to ancestral type, and destroys his principal antagonist unarmed and single-handed in a fit of blind rage. The local whalers who come to help – 'men with conical caps, and beards like trolls and wild eyes and blood-stained whale spears' – go into battle in (or out of) the same state of mind, and the whole scene is enacted in a thoroughgoing Nordic atavism, again evidence of something like a racial unconscious (*Island* 1116). 'I doubt if the Norlanders knew what they were doing,' observes Sandy. 'Like Haraldsen they had gone back to type – they were their forebears of a thousand years ago making short work of a pirate crew' (*Island* 1135). We might recall that 'instinctive savagery' and 'brute force' were embodied in Ricardo and Pedro, the invaders of Samburan, in *Victory* (329), as if in confirmation of Lombrosan ideas of the link between criminality and primitive atavism; the same instinctive aggression emerges from the Nordic past in *The Island of Sheep*, but here significantly it emerges only to do battle for the forces of law and order and property, and then it subsides again, under proper control. It has served its purpose in the defeat of the villainous D'Ingraville, 'the outlaw at war with society' (*Island* 1082).

The Island of Sheep, then, does for *Victory* what *The Courts of the Morning* had done for *Nostromo*, activating a memory of reading that may be deliberately recalled, or could be as unconscious as the deep memories of Kipling's Charlie Mears. Leaving behind as clues or symptoms a cluster of similarities, many of which seem too arbitrary to be counted as thefts, the later text pays a kind of homage to the earlier by redressing it, simplifying its theme, reaccentuating it in a more traditional and popular genre, and at the

same time reinscribing, in apparently bold and confident characters, ideological positions – on property, family, locality, and nation in one case, and on capitalism, the world order, and human nature in the other – which the earlier text had worked to question, or erase.

The Island of Sheep is an exercise in popular fiction, which tells a story that carries a warning of a threat to decent law-abiding folk, but also shows confidence in the strength and resolve of the forces of right, armed with courage and decency, and sporting skills that attach them to the earth, under the natural leadership of upright men, assisted in a crisis by local folk. It is the standard scenario of much of Buchan's fiction. The stability of civilization is threatened by traitors within, and ideological outcasts – the spy ring in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, the African Laputa in *Prester John* (an 'enemy within' by virtue of his being, besides an African partisan leader, an ordained minister of the Free Church of Scotland), the Irish cosmopolitan Medina in *The Three Hostages*, and a stock of what Clanroyden excitingly calls 'all kinds of geniuses and desperadoes' (*Island* 1007).

Against these enemies, the forces of good are ranged in an always defensive war; whether the compass is that of Mafudi's kraal early in *The Island of Sheep*, in the Gran Seco in Olifa, or the Western Front of the Great War itself in *Mr. Standfast*, Buchan's basic chronotope is that of the stockade, where a beleaguered resistance is mounted, and the attackers eventually defeated.⁹ The image of the stockade successfully defended has its psychological roots in Buchan's deep conservatism, and in *The Island of Sheep* the defensive forces are recruited from an established social order that comprises the hereditary aristocracy (Clanroyden), the white dominions and the army (Hannay), the City (Lombard), and others, including the police (the trusty Macgillivray), various loyal servants and retainers and a clutch of plucky and understanding wives; the continuity of this vision of society – it is really a utopia – is further guaranteed by the part played in the victory by a resourceful new generation, Hannay's son and Haraldsen's daughter. The warrant of this social order, fantasy though it may be, has no equivalent at all in Conrad, who simply had no such vision of Britain, or of anywhere else. The nearest counterpart would be the group of professionals that listens to Marlow's tale on the *Nellie* in 'Heart of Darkness', though these men have no social agency; significantly, all they can do is listen helplessly to the story, and gradually disappear in the dark. Unlike Buchan, Conrad

had little faith in the ability of society to come to its own defense against the forces of darkness. Consequently Buchan's release of these social and ideological resources into a scenario repeated from Conrad's *Victory*, and now thanks to them played out to a more desirable ending, is something like a social reconstruction.

Meanwhile his hypertextual transformation of the matter of *Victory* tropes the hypothesis of the earlier book, redressing it with an infusion of thoroughly Buchanesque values that enables it to resist its own potential for problem and tragedy, and to close upon a simple conclusion conforming to the desire of the principal characters, and of the generic reader of romance – a reader whom Conrad was never able to satisfy in the same way. In this rather strange respect at least, Buchan has no case to answer, for he was serving the ghost of Joseph Conrad not with a theft, but with a gift.

NOTES

¹ This is a revised and expanded version of 'Stealing *Victory*?': The Strange Case of Conrad and Buchan', *Conradiana* 40:2 (Summer 2008) 147-63.

² To William Blackwood, 8 November 1899 (*CL* 2: 216).

³ To Edward Garnett, 9 November 1899 (*CL* 2: 218).

⁴ Confusingly, Haggard himself was repeatedly accused of plagiarism. As Joseph Bristow notes, in one instance *Allen Quatermain* was charged by a reviewer with extensive borrowing from a travel narrative by E. F. Smith, and later a story by Smith "was criticized by one commentator for abstracting large parts of *Allen Quatermain*" (146).

⁵ See work listed here by Epstein, Knowles, and Watt, and the essays collected in Moore, Knowles and Stape eds.

⁶ This second statement is certainly untrue in a strictly fiscal sense. Conrad was indeed proud, but he also ran up money debts, especially to his long-suffering agent J. B. Pinker, on a heroic scale. See Stape.

⁷ I call these two works parasitic on the 'already-written' for slightly different reasons. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is known to be a reworking of an earlier play which already had a performance history, and Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* appropriates and parodies Richardson's hugely successful *Pamela*.

⁸ This is, as a matter of fact, possibly the most important and intriguing sentence in Conrad. It features frequently in *A Personal Record* as the point at which Conrad abandoned the writing of *Almayer's Folly*, his first novel, whose composition is the central motif of this autobiographical work. The sentence is the point at which Conrad's career as a writer almost foundered, more than once. *Konrad Wallenrod*, from which the words are plagiarized (or appropriated), was the great poem of romantic Polish nationalism, a thoroughly patriarchal text for Joseph Conrad, besides bearing his own name.

⁹ With some inevitability, Richard Hannay finds his sanctuary in a country retreat, Fosse, named after a defensive fortification.

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