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Kate Macdonald

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Hunted men in John Buchan's London, 1890s to 1920s

Kate Macdonald

University of Ghent

Introduction

John Buchan is well known for his use of the hunted man in the wilderness.¹ In his novels *John Burnet of Barns* (1896), *Prester John* (1910), *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), *Midwinter* (1923) and *John Macnab* (1925), and in the short story 'The Frying-Pan and the Fire' (1928), named and unnamed pursuers act as an imperative of fear and action, driving the plot onwards, and recasting the landscape as an arena of pursuit, and as a refuge. His arenas were the remote and under-populated lowlands of Scotland (*The Thirty-Nine Steps*), and more generalised open landscapes, for instance: Lancashire in *The Dancing Floor* (1926), South Africa in *Prester John* and 'The Green Wildebeest' (1927), East Africa in 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' (1910), Greece in *The Dancing Floor*, and Virginia in *Salute to Adventurers* (1915).²

Less known are Buchan's stories where the hunted man is pursued in the heart of civilisation, usually London. This recurrent motif in Buchan's fiction can be linked to his growing relationship with London as a home, his place of work, and his cultural milieu. Buchan's identity as a Londoner developed over time. After leaving Oxford he read for the bar in the Middle Temple and had a bachelor clubland existence, then became a married man with a family. In 1920 the Buchans left London for Oxfordshire, but Buchan retained his regular commute back to Paternoster Square and Westminster, to his publishing job and, later, his seat in the House of Commons. He left London for good in 1936 when he was Lord Tweedsmuir sailing for his new job as Governor-General of Canada.

Three of Buchan's novels and two of his short stories, set in the Victorian, Edwardian, First World War and immediate post-war periods, use the separations between London's physical spaces and its social demarcations as settings for pursuit, and as a locus of fear. Reader participation in the action of the stories was encouraged by using the familiar setting of central London streets as an unfamiliar zone of panic, juxtaposed against the oblivious daily life of Londoners, at all four points of the compass. My interest here is in how Buchan used London as an enclosed urban space, as well as for its identity as a locus of civilised society. In London, Buchan used the crowd as pursuers, indeterminate individuals in the roles of hitherto unknown henchmen, spies, gang members, or criminal associates, who will suddenly appear at the hero's heels. The London arena for Buchan was a zone of contrasts. In *The Power-House* enemies walked there in safety. Vice walked the streets. Heroes were unable to be heroic, because of the laws about the conduct of a gentleman in public, but heroes could be attacked with impunity by the mastermind's thugs in the guise of common criminals.

Although Buchan experimented with mean streets, drawing missionaries in the East End who were positioned on a moral borderline between vice and Christian salvation, the Mayfair area was his preferred location for criminal activity. He knew it well, and it would have been familiar to the class he particularly wanted to buy his books, the London upper classes. It would also have been familiar to readers all over the world as one of the most well-known and written about districts in London. Mayfair was the seat of diplomatic power, next to political power, and contained two royal palaces as well as embassies and government buildings. It was also the clubland zone, where Buchan heroes Edward Leithen and Richard Hannay belonged socially, and where young unattached men could encounter adventure. Assassins lurk outside Hyde Park, waiting for a soaked tramp who is really a South American president. Hannay and Leithen are chased, again and again, through familiar streets by unfamiliar terrors, and pursue the truth into the outer reaches of Gospel Oak and Blackheath.

The concept of liminality is crucial for an understanding of Buchan's fiction, in which his major preoccupation was the thinness of the line between civilisation and anarchy.³ In these novels and stories he locates the liminal in London, as a conscious focus for the conjunctions of fear, danger, conspiracy and unwanted change. This repeated trope can also be read as a symptom of modernism, infiltrating Buchan's resolutely non-modernist adventure writing, since it 'makes everything new'. Seeing the familiar as strange is also an aspect of the self-nativising that Virginia Woolf, for example, engaged in at the same period, in *The Voyage Out* (1915).⁴

The borders that Buchan's characters cross are perceptual and conceptual:

- moving from north to south and north again
- moving into and out of different class strata
- moving from one *quartier* to another
- moving in and out of the safe and dangerous zones.

This movement is fundamental to the plots. The stories depend on this changing of physical and mental location to push the action forward, and to articulate Buchan's essential fear of anarchy in place of civilisation. This was Buchan's major theme, throughout his fiction, and is identifiable in these works by his use of London as the site of the struggle to keep, or break, that line.

Temptation in 'A Captain of Salvation' (1896)

Buchan's earliest London story is located in Limehouse and the Isle of Dogs. It was published in *The Yellow Book* in 1896, an anomaly among its peers, and still one of the strangest stories to appear in that exclusive collection.⁵ When he wrote the story Buchan had hardly visited London, but he had grown up in a Gorbals slum parish, and describes the London slums with more than a

suggestion of Dickens. The moral degradation on display matches the fight his hero has with his soul: 'slatternly women and brutal men lined the footpath, and in the kennels filthy little urchins grinned and quarrelled. Every now and then some well-dressed, rakish artiste, or lady of the half-world, pushed her way through the crowds, or a policeman, tall and silent, stalked among the disorderly. Vanity Fair and its denizens were everywhere, from the chattering hucksters to the leering blackguards and sleek traffickers in iniquity' ('Captain' 35).

After an unspecified social disgrace, Jack the 'Salvation Captain', the chief protagonist and almost the only character, '*went under*' (italics in original), in the sense that he sank from higher levels of society into 'the seething, struggling, disordered crowd below' ('Captain' 29). He then became a wanderer, then found God, and joined the Salvation Army. Buchan was to go on later in his career to write a great deal about the nonconformist evangelical church, but this is the only mention of the Salvation Army in his fiction (and a rare sighting in the literature of the period, George Bernard Shaw excepted). Jack is not unctuous, however: he has joined this Army out of pride and anger rather than through the love of God.

The story begins as Jack goes into the West End 'on a money-collecting errand, one which his soul loathed, performed only as an exercise in resignation' (30). He goes to Piccadilly, passing his old club and the houses of former friends, and is tormented by hunger rather than for a longing for his old life. There is no desire to return to his former friends, and this disinterest in, or perhaps this resistance to moral and physical comfort, is soon to be matched against another kind of friendship. Jack's Army uniform is a 'badge in the eyes of most people of half-crazy weakness' ('Captain' 30), and his moral struggle, his constant doubts and regrets fuelled by pride and anger, is sustained by the strength, not weakness, of his Christian belief which keeps him going in the face of universal derision.

His next 'crusade' is to the Isle of Dogs, where the story develops into a narration of tests of his commitment and the strength of his resistance to temptation. He has already not been tempted by luxury, so it is no surprise that when a prostitute attempts to join him, he rejects her easily. His third trial is the Devil, in the guise of Hilton, a bad old friend, whom Jack had abandoned when he found God. Hilton tells him travellers' tales that are strikingly similar to the siren call of Arnold's scholar gypsy, in that they offer the lure of the open road with no responsibilities: 'the halcyon voices of paganism and nature which are still strong in the earth' ('Captain' 39). At this time Buchan was also writing vivid essays about precisely these longings,⁶ but in 'A Captain' he privileges the Christian alternative of duty rather than the lure of indulgence. Jack is tempted to leave with Hilton and go back to Africa, but resists, with 'convulsive pain, of exquisite agony, of heart-breaking struggle' ('Captain' 39).

Jack's struggle is played out east to west rather than north to south, but he stays firmly in one class level. This fallen angel will stay where he has been

put. Although he does move across *quartiers*, safety and danger move with him, and there is no place safe from temptation, except within the strength of his faith in God and his Christian duty, even if powered by anger and pride.

***The Power-House* (1913)**

Fifteen years later, Buchan was a considerably more experienced writer who had published several novels and three collections of short stories. *The Power-House*, a short novel, was originally only published as a serial in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1913 but was rapidly published in book form in 1916 to take advantage of the success of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* a year earlier. *The Power-House*, and its hero Edward Leithen, thus predate Richard Hannay and Hannay's adventures, but also prefigure them. The story starts in a precise geographical location, outside the Houses of Parliament, and immediately sets up an opposition of drama and location. Two adventures take place concurrently in this novel. One is a race on horseback from Bokhara, 'like a chapter out of the Arabian Nights with a dash of Fenimore Cooper' (*The Power-House* 105). This is all the glamour we get, because the real adventure happens in London. Leithen is not a private investigator, but a lawyer and an MP. After finding clues to the identity of a mysterious organisation in Blackheath and the Old Bailey, Leithen encounters its mastermind, Mr Andrew Lumley, in a remote house in Surrey, and ends up fighting this elderly man for the fate of western civilisation, against a backdrop of London streets.

As in the later 'Sing a Song of Sixpence', Leithen crosses the border of civilisation into anarchy when he goes home for the evening.

It was a bright summer evening, and Piccadilly had its usual crowd of motor cars and buses and foot passengers. I halted twice, once in St James' Street and once at the corner of Stratton Street, and retraced my steps for a bit; and each time I had the impression that someone a hundred yards or so off had done the same. (*The Power-House* 41-42)

The next day,

the sense of espionage increased [...] There seemed to be nobody in Down Street as I emerged from my flat, but I had not walked five yards before, turning back, I saw a man enter from the Piccadilly end, while another moved across the Hertford Street opening. it may only have been my imagination, but I was convinced that these were my watchers. (*The Power-House* 42)

As the pursuit heats up, Buchan's precision of detail on London surroundings for his readers increases. Leithen is so familiar with the London Underground trains on his commute to the Temple and his Chambers that he knows exactly in which tube carriage to stand to be able to catch an earlier lift to the surface at Chancery Lane, and sees his watcher tearing up the stairs to try to intercept the lift passengers in time. This level of detail pulls the reader into the story

even more firmly: they can map Leithen's progress, and can practice that trick for themselves, by this means entering into the tension of the story.

Buchan uses the London streets as loci of fear, pursuit and entrapment. They also act as signifiers, where street names and *quartiers* are used to signify zones of action, security and privilege. But they are not permanent zones of safety or danger. As well as a house in the Surrey hills, Mr Lumley has a set in the Albany, securely in the heart of Mayfair. This indicates that this criminal mastermind has influence everywhere. By openly visiting an address in Grosvenor Place he shows that he also has the entrée to all levels of society (*The Power-House* 44). There are no limits, no borders between civilisation and anarchy for him.

Leithen has a friend called Chapman, a Labour MP (Leithen is Tory), whom he asks to move from his Bloomsbury lodgings to share Leithen's rooms in Mayfair. Chapman is willing, but is out of place in this part of town. Dislocated, beyond his normal limits, and keen to attack the enemy, he assaults innocent strangers in the, to him, unfamiliar Regent Street, Jermyn Street, and Piccadilly, getting in trouble with the police. This reminds us that one must stay in one's own place to be comfortable, and effective.

Leithen is lured to a restaurant in Antioch Street,⁷ located in Fitzrovia, although Leithen describes it as a Bloomsbury restaurant (*The Power-House* 57). He is nearly trapped and kidnapped by his enemy's thugs, but is rescued by Chapman. Since Fitzrovia is clearly not safe territory for Leithen or Chapman, they must get back to Mayfair. Their race to safety through central London is one of Buchan's tensest episodes. Leithen asks the police to see himself and Chapman home.

It was a queer request for two able-bodied men to make on a summer evening in the busiest part of London [...] you would have said it was the safest place on earth. But I was glad we had the policeman with us, who at the end of one beat passed us on to his colleague, and I was glad of Chapman. For I am morally certain I would never have got home alone.

The queer thing is that there was no sign of trouble till we got into Oxford Street. Then I became aware that there were people on these pavements who knew all about me. I first noticed it at the mouth of one of those little dark side-alleys which run up into mews and small dingy courts. I found myself being skilfully edged away from Chapman into the shadow, but I noticed it in time and butted my way back to the pavement. I couldn't make out who the people were who hustled me. They seemed nondescripts of all sorts, but I fancied there were women among them. (*The Power-House* 62-63)

Buchan is using the teeming but non-specific Londoners as agents of pursuit and terror.

I was nearly caught before we reached Oxford Circus. There was a front of a big shop rebuilding, and the usual wooden barricade with a gate. Just as we passed it there was a special throng on the pavement, and I, being next the wall, got pushed against the gate. Suddenly it gave, and I was pressed inward. I was right inside before I realised my danger, and the gate was closing. There must have been people there, but I could see nothing in the gloom.

It was no time for false pride. I yelled to Chapman, and the next second his burly shoulder was in the gap. The hustlers vanished, and I seemed to hear a polite voice begging my pardon. (*The Power-House* 63)

Notice the modernity of the description: this is a recognisably contemporary London, with nothing changed in the essentials. This pursuit could happen today.

Later, when Chapman is put out of action, and a crucial letter stolen, Leithen has to take on London's geography alone. He telephones for his car and usual chauffeur, intending to reach his refuge of an embassy in Belgrave Square via a 'wide circuit round the Western suburbs of London, namely Harrow and Brentford' (*The Power-House* 84). Buchan characters rarely head for the suburbs unless they are looking for trouble. Their zones are the Law Courts and Mayfair, or the countryside proper, so it is not surprising that as soon as Leithen leaves Mayfair for the then (1913) outer reaches of Bayswater, his plans are abruptly changed. Somewhere along the Edgware Road, he realises that his chauffeur has been switched. He discreetly escapes from the car at a traffic light, and starts an epic journey south to the safety of an embassy in Belgrave Square. He 'came out on the Bayswater Road pretty far west', and, crossing Hyde Park, comes to Park Lane, and tries to reach Hyde Park Corner via Hamilton Place. By the time he reaches Piccadilly he has 'the indefinable but unerring sensation of being watched' (*The Power-House* 71).

Buchan cranks up the tension again: 'There was now less than a quarter of a mile between me and Belgrave Square, but I saw that it would be a hard course to cover' (*The Power-House* 71). The point of the novel is cited again:

'I was alone in that crowd, isolated and proscribed, and there was no help save my own wits [...] Now I saw how thin is the protection of civilisation. An accident and a bogus ambulance, a false charge and a bogus arrest – there were a dozen ways. (*The Power-House* 71)

He proceeds to give us some narrow escapes:

A car which seemed about to draw up at a club door suddenly swerved across the street, and I had to dash to an island to escape it [...] A little group of workmen with their tools were standing by the kerb, and they suddenly moved towards me. A pavement artist, who looked like a cripple, scrambled to his feet and moved in the same direction. There was a policeman at the corner, and I saw a well-dressed man go up to him, say something, and nod in my direction,

and the policeman too began to move towards me. I did not await them. I took to my heels and ran for my life down Grosvenor Place.
(*The Power-House* 71-2)

By outrunning his pursuers to the back entrance of the embassy in time, Leithen has won the battle and the action is over. All danger vanishes from the streets, and he feels no fear when he retraces his route that evening to arrive at the Albany and the final showdown with the criminal mastermind.

The most interesting thing about this novel's use of London's borders is that Buchan reinvents the nature of his hero's fear and pursuit by locating it in the heart of the West End. With repeated patterns of plot structure (geographical location, a trap, an escape through streets full of malign strangers), the novel is a recurring demonstration of how danger lurks in the familiar, and that the thin line is present in every aspect of life, not just in high politics or low crime. Leithen does not leave central London for most of his adventure: his wildest adventures happen in the mean streets of Zone 1. The four criteria outlined above all apply: Leithen moves from danger in the north to safety in the south, and moves in and out of class strata. Although he moves from one *quartier* to another, this does not make him safer or at more risk: he can fall into danger no matter where he is in London. *The Power-House* shows how there may be no safe zones at all, if the thin line between anarchy and civilisation is breached.

***The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915)**

The story is set in June 1914, and visiting South African engineer Richard Hannay has been accused of a murder committed by a gang of German spies, who are about to steal crucial Allied naval secrets. He escapes to Scotland, is chased relentlessly, and puzzles out the clues. On his return to London he works with the police and the Foreign Office to foil the gang. Throughout the novel Hannay is known by the public and the police as the Portland Place murderer: his identity is the London street where he lives. I want to look more closely at this novel's use of London, and how the streets are used as obstacles and avenues for pursuit.

The novel starts at Hannay's flat in a block behind Langham Place and Cavendish Place, just north of what is now John Lewis. Hannay does some preliminary wandering about London streets, feeling isolated and bored, and also an outsider. The murder in his flat tips him into a world of danger in every safe place, in that he is pursued by the police for the murder, in the real world, and by the mysterious gang of spies in the underground world; a parallel pursuit, with the spies using the police chase for their own ends.

Hannay decides to make a run for it, and to head for Scotland, which he thinks will be lonely and unpopulated. He tries to fool the gang, whom he knows are watching his flat, by disguising himself as a milkman, and seems to get away with it. The next four chapters contain Hannay's adventures in the Scottish lowlands, getting nowhere, always running, but collecting ideas

and working out the puzzle. He also meets the enemy close up, which is crucial for a recognition scene later on, back in London.

He comes back to London, driving his new ally Sir Walter Bullivant of the Foreign Office, to his house in Queen Anne's Gate. This is located between St James and Westminster, in the heart of power. Sir Walter arranges for Scotland Yard to take Hannay off their 'Wanted' list, and he goes back to his flat in Portland Place, free of one set of his pursuers. He's waiting for developments in the plot. He goes up aimlessly into North London to occupy his mind, and walks back south into central London again, unable to keep away from the locus of power. Although he has been taking a walk in London's bushland, he eats in Jermyn Street, in St James. But Hannay is now impotent, unable to do anything to help unravel the crisis, which the authorities have taken over for themselves.

Then there is a critical discovery, and a chase through London streets. Earlier in the story, Hannay had engaged in some rather pointless baiting of a fop, Marmaduke Jopley. This was ostensibly to allow Hannay to hijack Jopley's car and thus escape disguised as a motoring gent. The episode is a minor one, but later, in London, the hijack achieves its true purpose. Hannay bumps into Jopley at the corner of Duke Street in clubland. Jopley and a gang of his upper-class cronies chase Hannay across Pall Mall, past the gates of St James' Palace, through St James' Park and (presumably) across Birdcage Walk to Queen Anne's Gate. Once again the novel highlights the close links between the centre of the British social establishment with its political centre.

In this novel Hannay's movements are in ellipses north and south, away from and back into the heart of power. Only at the centre can he be effective or active: in other areas he is peripheral and alone. The double layer of pursuit (police and spies) is also indicative of a double understanding of what the plot is about: is it just about a gang of spies stealing naval secrets on the eve of war, or is it about outsiders versus insiders, the stranger in the familiar land? Class strata and changes of *quartier* don't operate so strongly in this novel, but north and south do, and the safe and dangerous zones are, once again, fluid throughout the story.

The Three Hostages (1924)

In this postwar Hannay novel there are few long chases, because the novel's focus is on the infiltration of London society by the criminal mastermind, Dominick Medina. Medina lives in the centre of Mayfair, in Hill St, just off Hyde Park. Hannay's wife, Mary, stays with her aunts in Great Charles Street, Westminster.⁸ His friend Archie lives in Grosvenor Street, also in Mayfair. Hannay lunches with Medina in his club (not specified but probably in St James), he encounters his ally Sandy outside their, also unspecified, club in St James, on his way to Whitehall via Pall Mall. He lunches with Julius Victor in Carlton House Terrace, between Pall Mall and St James' Park, and then dines with Sandy in another unspecified clubland location. He also manages to get

invited to an audience with Medina's Indian guru in Claridges. The Thursday Club, a dining club for adventurers, meets in a restaurant in Mervyn Street, an invented street, but within half a mile of Hill St, via Berkeley Square, so is probably near Bruton Street. All these locations are within a tightly defined locale bounded by the Mall and Oxford Street.

Hannay goes north-east to a nightclub in Fitzrovia to find one of the hostages.⁹ The club is in a block of invented streets, two of whose names come from the Stepney/Bethnal Green area, suggesting instant seediness. Also slightly off-colour is the area north of Oxford Street: Hannay visits the disguised German Dr Newhover in his consulting rooms in Wimpole Street. Even further north, Hannay finds that one of his clues leads him to Palmyra Square in Gospel Oak. The name of the *quartier* is more important than the street, since it is the answer to the clue 'sacred tree' in the verse that Hannay must decode, but its location is also indicative: the north-south axis is operational again, along which most of Hannay's London journeys seem to run.

Mayfair is the constant centre in this novel, the heart of Medina's operations, as well as the heart of power, which is a strong statement about the borders of civilisation being close to anarchy. Once again, Buchan has written a narrative in which the characters go between north and south, and move into and out of different class strata. They move on a quest from one *quartier* of London to another, and also move in and out of dangerous zones, which are not, however, mapped onto the geographical zones, or the class zones: danger is slippery.

'Sing a Song of Sixpence' (1928)

This short story is anomalous, in that it was written and published after the First World War, but is set in a pre-war Edwardian clubland, and is narrated by the young Edward Leithen at around the same time that we can suppose that he was having his adventures in *The Power-House*. It describes his hard-working existence as a junior lawyer with the entrée to London society dinners and balls. Leithen is chaffed for looking like a 'Cit', and is 'notably urban [...] a chance observer might have guessed from his complexion that he rarely left the pavements' ('Sing' 165). Leithen also likes London, and his view could also be taken to be Buchan's own, as Leithen was the character most like him in life pattern and personality:

In London you met sooner or later everybody you had ever known; you could lay your hand on any knowledge you wanted; you could pull strings that controlled the innermost Sahara and the topmost Pamirs. Romance lay in wait for you at every street corner. ('Sing' 165-6)

Control and information is key here, as well as excitement/distraction from everyday life.

Leithen still lives in Down Street. As this short story begins, he dines at a friend's house in Bryanston Square, north of Marble Arch, on the north-east corner of Hyde Park. He leaves his host's house just after the arrest of some armed loiterers outside its very door. He looks out for a cab as the rain starts, but when he finds one, just a few minutes later, in Great Cumberland Place, he also finds that he has no cash on him, only a sixpence. So, despite the now teeming rain, he has to walk home. Walking through Hyde Park he passes a young tramp, and, smitten by charity, offers him his sixpence, and invites the man to come back to his rooms where he can give him dry clothes and a meal. At this point the story could go in various directions.

The temporal and geographical positioning is complete: we are in rich, pre-war Mayfair, on a wet February night. The suggestion of danger and tension has been made (remember the arrest), and it is dark. Campaigners for Buchan's outing as a writer of suppressed homosexual texts would probably like this story to go on to be interpretable as a coded inscription of a gay fantasy encounter but, instead, the encounter is about to leap across the border from a milieu that Henry James or Virginia Woolf might have inhabited, and into the realm of *The Strand Magazine*.

The tramp is not a rent boy, but President Pelem, the leader of a South American republic, in London to make a finance deal, and currently on the run to escape from his putative assassins. He accepts Leithen's sixpence, and his invitation, and comes to the flat, his assassins arriving shortly afterwards. Drama jostles with the ludicrous, as the soaked tramp, standing in the drawing room in his Edwardian underwear, remarks that he recognises Leithen from when they both played cricket at Lords (he was twelfth man for Harrow), and tells his story. Typically for a Buchan story, Pelem has had a race against time, but the race has been run, and now the president simply wants his would-be assassins to leave him alone for a few weeks so he can take a holiday and go to the Grand National. There is a close connection here with the fine line between civilisation (what the president is trying to bring to his country) and the 'gentry who call themselves liberators. Red Masons, anarchists, communists, that sort of crew' ('Sing' 170). Buchan cites familiar examples of how this anarchy operates, with a hijacked car (used already in *The Power-House*) and poisoned oysters.

The assassins arrive at Leithen's flat in another scene of melodrama, but this time straight from American pulp fiction: they were 'two men in waterproofs and felt hats, who kept their hands in their pockets' ('Sing' 173). The border between their world and Leithen's Mayfair flat is quite distinct:

I had never seen this class of ruffian before, to whom murder was as simple as shooting a partridge, and I noted curiously the lean hands, the restless wary eyes and the ugly lips of the type. ('Sing' 175)

These men are on the other side of the social divide from Leithen, and have possibly never tasted partridge, never mind shot it. The story has also crossed

borders of time: Buchan's narration by Leithen is post-war, when pulp fiction was a great deal more common than in the pre-war setting of the story.

Once again, this story crosses *quartiers*, it crosses zones of safety and danger, and it crosses class boundaries. It also demonstrates, again, Buchan's insistence on the absolute centrality of London, specifically Mayfair, to the holding of the line between chaos and peace.

Conclusion

These five Buchan texts can be taken as random examples from his oeuvre, in that they cross between two leading characters' 'worlds',¹⁰ as well as the time of setting and the time of writing. They also cling closely together as a London-centred sub-group within Buchan's thriller fiction, a genre apart from his historical novels, his metaphysical writing or his male quest romances. Their randomness gives them value as responses to the suggestion that Buchan pursued his theme of anarchy versus civilisation throughout his fiction. There simply is hardly a Buchan text that does not deal with this issue: it was a passionately-held concern, as well as a good basis for the writing of tension. Their close affinity makes them a useful set of intermingled contrasts and comparators for considering how civilisation, here represented by London, copes in the face of sustained attack by the nameless forces antagonistic to ordered society. Their continuing theme is that safety is not always apparent, and that the borders between zones of danger and safety are alarmingly osmotic. Civilisation does not flow out, but danger flows in. In fact, danger is everywhere in Buchan, and the more unexpected its location, the more thrilling the read. It dawns on the reader that there is no such thing as a safe place, and that this unsafe London is their own place, the nation's heart, the hub of society, the locus of power, and the very core of British security as we know it. Buchan rattles the cage: for what purpose? To warn, to keep his readers alert, to ensure constant vigilance, though never in a vulgarly alarmist fashion. His fears as expressed in his post-war London fiction were that there would be no return to pre-war values, and to combat this terror he used pre-war heroes in a post-war milieu to show London how to fight the forces of change. The thin line between chaos and safety must be held.

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¹ See, for example, D Butts (1990) 'The Hunter and the Hunted' in ed C Bloom *Spy Thrillers : From Buchan to Le Carre*, London: Macmillan, 1990, 44-58; D Daniell, (1991) 'At the Foot of the Thirty-Ninth Step', *The John Buchan Journal*, 10 (Spring 1991), 15-26; D Daniell, (1992) 'That Infernal Aeroplane', *The John Buchan Journal* 11 (Spring 1992), 10-12; C Harvie, (1993) Introduction to *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, vii-xxii.

² See individual entries for these works in K Macdonald (2009) *John Buchan. A Companion to the Mystery Fiction*, Jefferson NC: McFarland & Co.

³ See K Macdonald 'The Thin Line' in *Companion*, 167-68.

⁴ C J Snyder (2008) *British Fiction and Cross-Cultural Encounters. Ethnographic Modernism from Wells to Woolf*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 97-118.

⁵ See K Macdonald 'The travels of John Betjeman's literary voice in "The Arrest of Oscar Wilde at the Cadogan Hotel"', *Belgian Journal of English Language and Literature* 5 (2007), 59-66 for a discussion of Buchan's fiction in *The Yellow Book*; also K Macdonald 'Buchan and *The Yellow Book*' in *Companion*, 48-49.

⁶ Particularly in the essay collection *Scholar Gipsies* (1896).

⁷ Antioch Street does not exist, and is probably a Buchan invention, like Palmyra Square (see *The Three Hostages*, also discussed). London streets don't generally change their names, and there has been no major remodelling of the street layout since the nineteenth century. Antioch may also have been a historical reference, which is unlikely in a choice of street name (information from H E Taylor).

⁸ This street also doesn't exist, but a Charles Street in Mayfair does

⁹ Close to *The Power-House's* Antioch Street, this area was clearly Buchan's idea of seedy London nightlife.

¹⁰ See K Macdonald 'The separate Buchan worlds' *Companion*, 153-56.