

**Worlds Elsewhere: Studies in Some Late Nineteenth-Century and
Early Twentieth-Century Romance**

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Abstract

Romance as a literary genre, although dominant in medieval Europe, has often been marginalized in later ages. Even when it saw a marked revival in Britain in the later nineteenth century, it still found itself embattled; its practitioners and advocates had to justify their position in an era which tended to regard tales of wonder and adventure as being little more than childish fancies and contrary to prevailing notions about the continuing advancement of the human race and the perceived duty of writers to engage with social issues of the day. However, the phenomenon could not be so easily ignored, or dismissed as belonging merely to the province of lower and undeveloped tastes. This thesis considers the work of several romance writers of the period, of varying background, outlook, and literary ability. These are, principally, Buchan, Chesterton, Conan Doyle, Conrad, Haggard, Kipling, Machen, Stevenson, and Wells. Throughout, the emphasis is upon works which in the past may have been comparatively neglected: for instance, in many cases, such as that of Buchan or Wells, the short stories take precedence over the novels.

Adventuring into new realms of possibility often took the form in this period of an actual journey out to far places. Chapter One discusses the colonial romances of Buchan and Haggard in Africa, Kipling in India and Conrad and Stevenson in the Far East and the South Seas – distinct geographical locations in which differing romance elements come to the fore. It is argued that overall in this period there seem to be fewer romantic possibilities abroad than in former ages, but that they are still seen to linger (perhaps unexpectedly) in Conrad.

Chapter Two undertakes a special study of Haggard in order to show how he modifies the imperial adventure tale of his day by bringing in elements of other, older, romance traditions – this being an important, and under-recognized, aspect of his fiction.

Chapter Three shifts focus from exotic, far-away places to the British Isles, and looks at gothic romances by Doyle, Wells, Machen and Buchan in which isolated areas of Scotland, England, and Wales are seen to remain under the sway of primitive, old-world, and perhaps finally other-world, forces.

Chapter Four looks at urban romance, specifically that of London, in writings by Chesterton, Doyle, and Machen, and also in Buchan's thrillers.

Chapter Five takes as its starting-point the opposite extreme to that of the opening two chapters – the voyage out to far places – to consider the private sphere and the romantic possibilities of the individual human mind and the inner world of dream and fantasy. It also investigates whether these can be taken as reflecting the realities of an external, but unseen, other-world – whether in Wells's scientific and utopian romances or in Kipling's early gothic Indian tales. Buchan's 'The Green Wildebeest' is examined at length as a prime example of a story in which there is no final way of determining whether the events described take place in the psychological, physical, or meta-physical, realm. The concluding section of the chapter discusses how a story like 'The Green Wildebeest' is typical of its time in its lack of certainty regarding the supernatural. However loss of certainty about ultimate realities did not diminish the desire to explore regions outwith the bounds of ordinary experience: consequently, romance in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite censure from realists and progressivists, proved to have not a little staying-power.

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Introduction

i) Romance: the case for and against

Around the turn of the twentieth century, G. K. Chesterton brought out a small book of essays, *The Defendant*, in which he spoke up for the merits of such things as Penny Dreadfuls, skeletons, and slang. To all appearances, it was a slight work, described by the author himself as being ‘futile’ in terms of ‘serious literature’; but he added that these essays were ‘ethically sincere’ in their dealings with topics generally deemed unworthy of scholarly exposition.¹ As such, the title of the collection was apt. It is one of Chesterton’s earliest works, and it demonstrates that at the start of his writing career he was already taking a stance against what he felt to be the prevailing spirit of the age. But it was little surprise that he should have chosen to set himself up consciously as a ‘defendant’, for along with certain other writers of his period who like himself were usually considered under the umbrella term of ‘romance’, this was the position that he was often obliged, if not quite forced, to assume. Romance writers of this era, as Amanda Hodgson notes, offered ‘no cringing apology’ for what they were trying to do² (or were seen to be doing). However they often found themselves having to argue pretty strenuously to prove the points of their case.

Perhaps the hardest task of all, though, was defining ‘romance’. And the debate, of course, continues, with differing approaches to the concept of romance remaining much in evidence. For some, the term retains more lightweight connotations, for instance

¹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Defendant*, fourth edn (London: Dent, 1914), p. vii.

² Amanda Hodgson, *The Romances of William Morris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 6.

Helen Hughes who writes that ‘essentially, the romance is written to entertain’;³ while others use it as the starting-point for extended theoretical discussion.⁴ Romance became an increasingly slippery term after the Middle Ages, when it had assumed a fairly fixed form (certainly in the literary world); since then it has accrued so many definitions that it is now hard to pin down any kernel of meaning. Generally, in the late Victorian period, it coalesced around an oppositional point to ‘realism’. Not that this helped matters much, as the term ‘realism’ was also problematic; but overall the feeling in this period seemed to be that romance was any type of fiction which failed to engage wholly with the here and now, and in a down-to-earth fashion.

However, if it was difficult to provide an exact theoretical definition of romance, in some ways the concept was easily dealt with: it could for instance be regarded simply as fodder for the masses. A popular market may have existed before, but it was in this age that the idea became particularly acute, with the upsurge of a novel phenomenon created by the 1870 Education Act, what Gissing dubbed the ‘quarter-educated’⁵ – a new commercial market of people perceived as having just enough ability to read (and read voluminously) but not enough talent to appreciate high art.⁶

Popular literature is one of the things Chesterton staunchly speaks up for in his defence of ‘Penny Dreadfuls’. He sees it as answering to a ‘simple need for some kind of ideal world in which fictitious persons play an unhampered part’, something which ‘is

³ Helen Hughes, *The Historical Romance* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 2.

⁴ For example, Diane Elam in her book *Romancing the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁵ George Gissing, *New Grub Street* (London: Nash and Grayson, 1927), p. 419 (ch. 23).

⁶ Contempt for the masses was evident in many an intellectual of the day – as documented by, for example, John Carey in his book *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice among the Literary Intelligentsia 1800-1939* (London: Faber, 1992).

infinitely deeper and older than the rules of good art, and much more important'.⁷ Many observers, however, could not look beyond the word 'simple'. And insofar as it was equated with simple storytelling – 'a plain tale told in a language suited to a plain tale' to quote Andrew Lang⁸ – romance could be seen as sufficient for the unenlightened masses.

The other major area in which romance seemed naturally to belong was children's literature, another thriving market at this time. Again, for Chesterton, children's literature – and the whole world of childhood – was something to be taken very seriously indeed. Chesterton celebrates childhood for its freshness and sense of wonder, thus aligning himself with the likes of Wordsworth and Traherne. Also – more importantly in a purely Christian context – he shows himself mindful of the Biblical injunction to become as little children. In all of this, though, it should be remembered that it is *childlikeness* and not *childishness*, which is extolled; the semantic difference between these two phrases can be considerable. However this distinction was not always honoured, and children's literature was all too readily equated with childishness. This might have been justified in the case of many boys' adventure tales which flourished in this period (inspired in the main by continuing British imperialist endeavours) and which generally featured extremely limited plots and characters. But there was also a more distinguished tradition of children's fantasy literature, with the likes of Carroll, MacDonald and Kingsley in the frame, which more obviously approximated to Chesterton's sense of child-like wonder and imaginative possibility. And an adult clientele was not altogether disbarred from this field; more meanings have been, and continue to be, teased out of the Alice Books than most 'adult' works of literature. (Even the boys' adventure-story may not have been altogether as superficial a

⁷ G. K. Chesterton, 'A Defence of Penny Dreadfuls,' in *The Defendant*, pp. 8-17 (pp. 9-10).

⁸ Andrew Lang, 'Alexander Dumas', in *Essays in Little* (London: Henry, 1891), pp. 1-23 (p. 20).

matter as is commonly thought – as will be seen in the case of Haggard, one of the writers most readily associated with that type of writing in this period).

As well as fantasy literature and boys' adventure stories, there was a third distinct category of children's literature in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which comprised re-tellings of famous old tales. The *Arabian Nights* went through several children's editions in this era: for example, the collection brought out by Andrew Lang in 1898.⁹ There was also, of course, the European tradition, in the shape of the many folk and fairy tales which had been brought together at the beginning of the century under the auspices of the Brothers Grimm and which frequently were issued as children's literature subsequently (having first been sanitized, like the *Arabian Nights*, to prevent possible corruption of juvenile minds). There were some who viewed this as being in the nature of major social change, and, moreover, a change to be regretted rather than welcomed. Consider, for example, the following passage from W. P. Ker's lecture on 'Romance', early in the twentieth century:

Few revolutions or general changes of habit have been more important than that which cut off the old romantic popular traditions of folk-lore and ballads in the nineteenth century, and put modern education textbooks in their place. This means a change in the minds of modern civilized human beings, making them unlike all their ancestors. They learn nothing now in the way that all generations, including those of the enlightened eighteenth century, learned their ballads and fairy-stories. These things come to them by way of books; they do not come as part of their real life, from the mouth of their nurse or grandmother; and so the child is taken away from his native earth and his home, and is turned into an abstract educational product.¹⁰

⁹For more information on *The Arabian Nights* as children's literature, see, for example, Brian Alderson, 'Scheherazade in the Nursery,' in *The Arabian Nights in English Literature: Studies in the Reception of 'The Thousand and One Nights' into British Culture*, ed. by Peter Caracciolo (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988) pp. 81-94.

¹⁰ *Collected Essays of W. P. Ker*, ed. by Charles Whibley, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1925), ii, 310-326 (313-314). (Henceforth designated in the text as CEK).

This reads to some degree like an anti-modern education tract; and Ker also refers to a similar complaint made by Wordsworth in *The Prelude* a century or so earlier (CEK, p. 313), that the modern child was being stuffed so full of learning that he was less a child than a 'dwarf man'¹¹ and was no longer having his imagination whetted by the old folktales and ballads. Ker acknowledges that the old tradition of storytelling and romance does still exist; but he rues its transformation from a living oral form to a literary one, a change which took away its vital aspect and helped disinherit modern generations of a rich culture which now they could learn only second-hand through books. From this point of view, the tradition had become artificial. And in the nineteenth century particularly, it became the province of the nursery, something to stimulate a child's imagination and interest for a time, and nothing more (other than the object of continuing antiquarian interest). Hurd had already remarked of the eighteenth century that the age had 'lost a world of fine fabling';¹² one might say that this world reappeared in the nineteenth century largely in a kind of disguise, packaged as children's literature. As such, it was deemed something to be outgrown.

Of course, this was not the only period to have a body of writing which was perceived as being inferior, wasting its energies on vain tales of wonders and marvels – the mark of uncultured minds. One of the most eminent men of letters at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Lord Shaftesbury, had fulminated against contemporary 'Gothic' and 'barbarous [...] models'¹³ and '[t]he love of strange narrations' (CMO, p. 224). He

¹¹ William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. by J. C. Maxwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971; repr. 1976), v. 295.

¹² Richard Hurd, *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, ed. by Hoyt Trowbridge, Augustan Reprint Society, 101-102 (Los Angeles: University of California, 1963), p. 120.

¹³ Lord Shaftesbury, 'Soliloquy, or, Advice to an Author,' in *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. by John M. Robertson, 2 vols (New York: Bobs-Merrill, 1964), pp. 101-234 (p. 221). (Henceforth designated in the text as CMO.)

goes on: 'Monsters and monster-lands were never more in request; and we may often see a philosopher, or a wit, run a tale-gathering in those idle deserts as familiarly as the silliest woman or merest boy' (*CMO*, p. 225). The phrase 'idle deserts' in particular conveys the sense that such things are wholly unfruitful.

The suspicion of 'strange narrations' will probably never quite depart; but the later nineteenth century was a time in which distrust of anything that looked like low literature – in a word, anything that smacked of the 'primitive' – became particularly acute. The primitive was something that the age was finding out rather too much about. For one thing, there was the development of anthropology, stimulated by the imperialist encounter with 'savages' all over the globe; and it was the findings of anthropology which helped relegate folk and fairy-tales not only to children's nurseries but also to the childhood of the race, when Sir Edward Burnett Tylor in his influential 1871 tome *Primitive Culture* formulated the theory that folk customs and tales were primitive survivals, fragments from an earlier, undeveloped stage of culture. (And romance, insofar as it too was seen to be concerned with tales of great heroes and adventures in strange places, could be conveniently assigned to this somewhat denigrated niche.) There was also, of course, Darwinism, and later the emergence of Freudian and Jungian theories which delved into the murky primordial realm of the unconscious.

The 'primitive' argument did rather suit many of the romancers who proudly presented themselves as engaging with the fundamental building-blocks of the human psyche. Chesterton was one of these, as already seen in his backing for popular literature, which he saw as servicing one of the deepest needs for humanity – the desire for a good story – and also in his celebration of childhood, 'that godlike time when we can dance and dream'.¹⁴ Note the adjective, 'godlike'; the 'primitive' for Chesterton is in many respects closer to God, not beast. Perhaps more than any other single literary figure of

¹⁴ G. K. Chesterton, *The Club of Queer Trades* (London: Harper, 1905), p. 46 (ch. 2)). (Henceforth designated in the text as *CQT*.)

the age he invests the ‘elemental’ things of human life with a flavour of sanctity.

Furthermore, he points out quite reasonably that

When men pause in the pursuit of happiness, seriously to picture happiness, they have always made what may be called a ‘primitive’ picture [...] From the Greek or Roman poet yearning for the peace of pastoral life to the last sociologist explaining the ideal social life, this sense of a return and a resolution into elemental things is apparent.¹⁵

Rather than the pejorative term ‘primitive’ Chesterton prefers to draw on the idea of the ‘morning spirit’ (*RLS*, p. 236), and the return to a more pristine world.

The idea of the primitive received a quite different emphasis in the work of some other writers – for instance Jack London. In a 1902 essay praising Kipling (if exaggerating his more strident aspects) London declared in no uncertain tones that the only artists who would endure were those who engaged with ‘the vital facts of [human] existence’.¹⁶ London himself, of course, became renowned for his own full-blooded stories of adventure set in harsh primitive places and dealing with primal passions, not least violence. But whether it came in the guise of violence or the ‘godlike’, the primitive remained something that the age was generally wary of, and an idea at odds with the overarching, dynamic concept of Progress, which, following on from the Industrial Revolution, among other things, was still very much in place.

This kind of ‘onwards and upwards’ thinking is apparent in several literary observers of the period – for instance American critic W. D. Howells. Howells won himself no favours with the romancers (Lang once requested, in a burst of exasperation, that he be

¹⁵ G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Louis Stevenson* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1927) pp. 234-235. (Henceforth designated in the text as *RLS*.)

¹⁶ Jack London, ‘These Bones Shall Rise Again’, in *Revolution and Other Essays* (New York: Macmillan, 1910; repr. 1912), pp. 217-234 (p. 224).

shot).¹⁷ In his essay 'Negative Realism: Stevenson, Balzac', he contended that romance was a vapid form, which had rendered some useful service at the beginning of the nineteenth century in its fight against 'effete classicism' but was now an outdated practice. 'In criticism', he wrote, 'it is [the realist's] business to break the images of false gods and misshapen heroes, to take away the poor silly toys that many grown people would still like to play with'.¹⁸ In another essay he pompously declared that 'no-one hereafter will be able to achieve greatness who is false to humanity either in facts or in duties. The light of civilization has already broken even upon the novel'.¹⁹ With this last phrase in particular it becomes clear how strongly Howells was influenced by the idea of progress.

Of course 'progress' was not a concept limited to the nineteenth century: Scott for instance in his essay on 'Romance' noted how in past centuries increasing refinement in readers had led them to demand 'graces of style and variety of sentiment' rather than 'a naked and unadorned tale of wonders'.²⁰ And at a slightly later date than Howells, E. M. Forster uses scientific and 'evolutionist' terminology in his analysis of various 'Aspects of the Novel' in which he places the element of 'story' – historically seen as a mainstay of romance – on the lowest rung, decreeing it to be the 'lowest and simplest of organisms'.²¹ Furthermore, he rounds off his discussion by looking, like Howells, to the

¹⁷ In a letter to Stevenson dated Nov. 27, 1887, collected in *Dear Stevenson: Letters from Andrew Lang to RLS, with Five Letters from Stevenson to Lang*, ed. by Marsya Demoor (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1990), p. 111.

¹⁸ W. D. Howells, 'Negative Realism; Stevenson, Balzac', in *W. D. Howells as Critic*, ed. by Edwin H. Cady (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul), pp. 80-83 (p. 83).

¹⁹ W. D. Howells, 'Realism: The Moral Issue', in *W. D. Howells as Critic*, pp. 97-103 (p. 100).

²⁰ Walter Scott, 'Romance', in *The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott*, 28 vols (Edinburgh: Cadell, London: Whittaker, 1834-1836) vi (1834) 129-216 (178).

²¹ E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Arnold, 1927), p. 43. (Henceforth designated in the text as *AN*.)

future (albeit in more tentative fashion) and the continuing development of both the novel and of humanity itself (*AN*, p. 221). In a climate such as this, romance was easily castigated as being altogether too backward in its concentration upon 'fundamentals', whether in terms of 'story' or of character.

But romance was also seen to be highly irresponsible in terms of its preferred subject-matter, which lay outwith immediate pressing concerns of the day and still tended, as it has generally been seen to do since medieval times, towards the marvellous. The charge of irresponsibility was not taken lightly in an age which (as in the earlier nineteenth century) continued to turn up social issues which demanded investigation and resolution. It was preoccupied with the position and status of women; with the slums and the masses which remained in sharp focus, leading to the consolidation of the socialist creed; there were other political problems such as the very future of Europe with its vast opposing power-blocs, and the ever-present threat of belligerency. In fact, according to H. G. Wells, the Future in general was very much under scrutiny really for the first time, what with the scientific and technological advances of the age which fuelled speculation as to where humanity might be going. For Wells, it was 'as if a hand had been put upon the head of the thoughtful man and had turned his eyes about from the past to the future'.²²

In fact, as far as such speculations were concerned, romance could sometimes be seen as serving a useful purpose. For example, Dr. Jekyll's unhappy fate might be taken as a warning against scientific presumptuousness – in his particular case the use, and abuse, of chemical potions. In this respect the story can be loosely categorized as science-fiction, or rather scientific romance, as it was known in this period, and this is one category of writing that frequently carries a moralizing purpose (other 'mad scientists'

²² H. G. Wells, *Anticipations: Of the Reaction of Mechanical and Scientific Progress upon Human Life and Thought* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1902) p. 290.

of the period, notably Wells's Dr. Moreau and the Invisible Man, also meet violent ends). Similarly, the enormously popular historical romance (the most clearly distinct branch of romance literature in this period) along with much colonial adventure fiction was normally seen as carrying the praiseworthy intention of demonstrating to readers how Britain had managed to evolve into a great imperial power over the centuries. (Also it helped admonish against the example of France, both pre and post-Revolution.) Peter Keating goes so far as to state that this fiction '[placed] itself [...] abjectly at the service of dominant late Victorian domestic and imperial ideologies'.²³ Such laudatory purposes aside, however, romance, in its refusal to address the blatantly 'real', its avoidance of social issues, and its pandering to basic (if not quite base) desires, was seen to hinder Progress.

Against the clamour of the 'realists', there were some literary observers of the period, like George Saintsbury, who pointed out that writers cannot go on engaging with social issues indefinitely. Saintsbury, like Chesterton, extolled the elemental truths of human nature and existence. In 'The Present State of the English Novel', he wrote: 'The relish with which we read the great romances in prose, drama, and verse is derived from the likeness of the passions and actions, which are always at bottom the same'.²⁴ But he was also at pains to point out that the romance writer draws on 'a perennial source', while the writer who engages merely with delineating particular social problems or customs increasingly finds himself 'working over and over again in shallow ground, which yields a thinner and weedier return at every cropping' (*CES*, iii, 126). Saintsbury thus

²³ Peter Keating, *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1989), p. 356.

²⁴ George Saintsbury, 'The Present State of the English Novel', in *The Collected Essays and Papers of George Saintsbury 1875-1920*, 4 vols (London: Dent, 1923-24; henceforth designated in the text as *CES*), iii: *Miscellaneous Essays*, 120-150 (126).

expressed a not uncommon feeling of the age that the ‘society’ novel had run its course – that it had “‘bred in and in”, until the inevitable result of feebleness of strain has been reached’ (*CES*, iii, 126). Under such conditions, reversion to the ‘perennial’ sources on which romance relies was natural.

H. G. Wells employed imagery similar to Saintsbury’s when writing of those heady days in his autobiography:

The last decade of the nineteenth century was an extraordinarily favourable time for new writers [...] Dickens and Thackeray [...] had exhausted the soil for the type of novel they had brought to a culmination [...] For a generation the prestige of the great Victorians remained like a shadow of vast trees in a forest, but now that was lifting; every weed and sapling had its chance, provided only that it was a different species from its predecessors. When woods are burnt, it is a different tree which reconstitutes the forest.²⁵

For Wells, unlike Saintsbury, the ground had been *altogether* cleared towards the end of the century, to make way for an entirely new kind of writing; as far as he was concerned, it had been a literary revolution, not ‘reversion’. It is not surprising that he should have read the situation in this way, as he was by nature inclined towards a ‘revolutionary’ way of thinking. However, the strict accuracy of his interpretation is open to question. Keeping in mind Saintsbury’s image of the social novel as resting in ‘shallow ground’, one might rather say that in the later nineteenth century the topsoil had blown away – as it does from time to time in literary history – to reveal once more the permanent layer underneath, comprised of the deepest truths of humanity, its enduring traits of character, and deep-seated hopes and fears. A well-known romance critic of the following century, Northrop Frye, lent his support to this line of thinking: ‘[when] conventions wear out [...] literature enters a transitional phase where popular

²⁵ H. G. Wells, *Experiment in Autobiography: Discoveries and Conclusions of a Very Ordinary Brain*, 2 vols (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934) ii, 506.

literature, with romance as its centre, comes again into the foreground'.²⁶ By this argument therefore, the resurgence of romance writing in the later nineteenth century was not simply an adversarial reaction to the three-decker 'realist' novel (or, as has been suggested, to the dominance of women writers).²⁷ In effect, it *was* a reaction, of course, but the cause was more deep-rooted than many people recognized, either at the time or subsequently.

The emphasis on romance as being an engagement with the primary facts and forces of human life could sometimes be seen to have unexpected ramifications. Romance in this period was not just perceived as being antagonistic to 'realism'; it was seen to be particularly at odds with the new Naturalist school of writing, pioneered in France. Zola, the name most readily associated with this school, came under fire from the likes of Andrew Lang, who deplored him for seeking out the "Badlands" of life and character [...] to build mud huts and dunghills' on them.²⁸ But Zola evidently was not as straightforward a case as this depreciation of him by Lang – spokesman for clean, open-air adventure as opposed to sordid realities²⁹ – might seem to suggest. For instance, he attracted criticism even from the Irish 'realist' George Moore. Moore pointed out that Zola at his worst was comparable to Haggard, 'both being recorders of mere facts – the one giving 'turgid accounts of fornicating peasants' while the other supplied 'turgid accounts of massacred negroes'. In this respect both writers were 'in

²⁶ Northrop Frye, *The Secular Scripture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 29. (Henceforth designated in the text as SS.)

²⁷ See, for example, Elaine Showalter in *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siecle* (London: Bloomsbury, '1991), pp. 76-104 (ch. 5).

²⁸ Andrew Lang, 'Mr. Kipling's Stories,' in *Essays in Little*, pp. 198-205 (p. 201).

²⁹ See, for example, Lang's essay on Dumas in *Essays in Little* (see note 6, above).

like measure distasteful to the true artist' as their 'facts' were not seen to be 'tempered and purified in thought and stamped by thought with a specific value'.³⁰

On the other hand, praise devolved upon Zola from certain other writers normally regarded as confirmed 'romantics', for instance Arthur Machen. Machen, best known for his works of gothic horror, might seem at first glance to be diametrically opposed to the champion of Naturalism; but unlike Lang he chose to look beyond, or below, the squalid subject-matter of Zola's work.

Zola is a realist, not, as the imbeciles suppose, because he described – well, rather minutely – many unpleasant sights and sounds and smells and emotions, but because he [...] saw the true heart, the reality of things. Take *La Terre*; do you think it is realistic because it describes minutely, and probably faithfully, the event of a cow calving? Not in the least; the local vet who was called in could probably do all that as well, or better. It is 'realist' because it goes behind all the brutalities, all the piggeries and inhumanities, of those frightful people, and shows us the strange, mad, transcendent passion that lay behind all those things – the wild desire for land, and a longing that burned, that devoured, that inflamed, that drove men to hell and death.³¹

Machen thus postulates that what is normally thought of as 'realism' may only be the surface matter of a novel, whereas 'true' reality deals with the fundamental 'heart' of things. But as already discussed some of the new romancers also claimed the same ground as this definition of realism – that of fundamental truth. Therefore the boundaries of literary classification in this period were not inflexible. Realism and romance were not always rigidly polarized; there remained a broad tradition of opinion in the nineteenth century, from Carlyle to Chesterton, in which the two were run

³⁰ George Moore, 'Turgenev', in *Impressions and Opinions* (London: Nutt, 1891), pp. 65-77 (p. 68).

³¹ *The Caerleon Edition of the Works of Arthur Machen*, 9 vols (London: Secker, 1923), vi: *The Secret Glory*, 193 (ch. 4). (Henceforth designated in the text as SG.)

together³² (although it could make a difference, perhaps, depending upon whether one declared that romance was reality, or vice versa). Generally though the distinction held, and to the detriment of romance – as seen above in the likes of Howells, for whom romance was puerile, trivial and, most of all, outmoded.

ii) The placement of romance: the inner and the outer realms

On a different level from the somewhat fatuous notions of progress as endorsed by Howells, there was another way in which one could say that there was literally no place for romance any more by the turn of the twentieth century. It was not merely that the taste for wonders, the urge to have one's imagination satisfied or one's desires vicariously fulfilled through the medium of a good story, were deemed to have been outworn. There also might have been the feeling that the element of wonder – genuine wonder – was hardly commensurate with an age in which so many things were being documented and docketed. The systematic mapping of the earth, for example, dealt a blow to the age-old romantic dream of setting out for uncharted regions (as discussed in the following chapter). Of course there was a proliferation of adventure tales at this time but these in general only served, in the end, to bear testament that the wild world was increasingly taking on the semblance of well-ordered colonial territories, under the aegis of Western empires (or at least of Western commerce).

However the external realm is not the only one in which one can seek adventure. We find Stevenson as a leading exponent of this theme in 'The Lantern Bearers':

³² See Carlyle's assertion in 'The Diamond Necklace' that 'Romance exists [...] in Reality alone [...] Study Reality [...] search out deeper and deeper its quite endless mystery' in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays of Thomas Carlyle*, 3 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1887-1888), iii, 7. Chesterton meanwhile declared that the ordinary world was the best of all 'impossible', and not merely 'possible', 'worlds' in *Charles Dickens*, twelfth edn, (London: Methuen, 1919), p. 213. (Henceforth designated in the text as CD.)

the ground of a man's joy is often hard to hit [...] It has so little bond with externals [...] that it may even touch them not; and the man's true life, for which he consents to live, lie altogether in the field of fancy. The clergyman, in his spare time may be winning battles, the farmer sailing ships, the banker reaping triumph in the arts: all leading another life, plying another trade from that they chose.³³

The outer world, the world of objective reality, here appears to be of little import. Also in Stevenson's particular description it appears as a bitter place comprised of 'salts and acids' (*SF*, p. 149). The inference naturally follows that one is better off out of it; the 'warm, phantasmagoric chamber' (*SF*, p. 149) inside one's own head seems a more appealing world in which to live.

On a similar note, Walter de la Mare, in his essay 'My Mind to Me...', remarked how one may, mentally, roam so far afield that, like Noah's raven, one might never come back at all.³⁴ All the same, he has to admit that all such journeyings are 'skull-confined' (*PV*, p. 256); and this phrase has a slightly ominous timbre, conveying a sense of mental entrapment. This is the emphasis which one finds in Pater's Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, where, like Stevenson in 'The Lantern Bearers,' he talks of each individual's private chamber within the confines of his own mind. But unlike Stevenson he stresses the idea of confinement: 'the thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without'.³⁵

The idea of enclosure within one's own mind is familiar from the modernist point of view but around the turn of the twentieth century it was capable of instilling a sense of

³³ Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Lantern Bearers', in *R. L. Stevenson on Fiction: An Anthology of Literary and Critical Essays*, ed. by Glenda Norquay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999; henceforth designated in the text as *SF*), pp. 139-150 (pp. 148-149).

³⁴ Walter de la Mare, 'My Mind to Me...' in *Private View* (London: Faber, 1953; henceforth designated in the text as *PV*), pp. 251-256 (p. 256).

³⁵ Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry: The 1893 Text*, ed. by Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 187.

horror in a writer such as Chesterton. Margaret Canovan refers to the well documented period of ‘deep depression’ in Chesterton’s youth when he entertained ‘solipsistic fears that the world was illusion, and horrifying fantasies of evil’, and goes on: ‘When he emerged from this into maturity his philosophy was a triumphant reaction against his own experience’.³⁶ However his general philosophy sometimes appears in the nature of an *over-reaction*. Fears can still surface, and they often do, in his writings – as in Gabriel Syme’s moment of horrible disorientation, in *The Man who was Thursday*, when he is overwhelmed with ‘that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe’.³⁷ We might also consider the case of another Gabriel in Chesterton’s fiction – that of Gabriel Gale, in *The Poet and the Lunatics*, who opines that

the worst and most miserable sort of idiot is he who seems to create and contain all things. Man is a creature; all his happiness consists in being a creature [...]

I also dreamed that I had dreamed of the whole creation. I had given myself the stars for a gift; I had handed myself the sun and moon; I had been behind and at the beginning of all things; and without me nothing was made. Anybody who has been in that centre of the cosmos knows that it is to be in hell.³⁸

On the face of it, the idea that one is ‘behind and at the beginning of all things’ sounds splendidly exalted, although of course – from a Christian viewpoint especially – it can also appear to be the height of arrogance and pride. But apart from the more formal religious considerations, what terrifies Chesterton is not merely the thought that the outer world may after all be essentially dull and unromantic but that it may not even exist at all. He greatly appreciates the human faculty of imagination – in his book on Stevenson he speaks glowingly of the ‘secret planet’ that the creative individual

³⁶ Margaret Canovan, *G. K. Chesterton: Radical Populist* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977) p. 37.

³⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *The Man who was Thursday: A Nightmare* (London: Arrowsmith, 1944) p. 131 (ch. 11). (Henceforth designated in the text as *MWT*.)

³⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *The Poet and the Lunatics: Episodes in the Life of Gabriel Gale* (London: Cassell, 1929), pp. 129-130 (ch. 4).

possesses (*RLS*, p. 40) – but he has no wish to be solely dependent upon it; quite the contrary. Rather he seeks the reassurance that there *is* something out there, so that the individual need not be left alone on his own ‘secret planet’ – in effect, be trapped in his own skin. Secret worlds may be all very well for a time, but ultimately Chesterton, and others like him, both religionists and romantics – wanted to believe in something more, in possibilities both eternal, and *external*. They would have been unwilling to accept Gillian Beer’s proposition that ‘the romance is essentially subjective’³⁹ and that recognition of this came with *Don Quixote* which showed how the outer world proves ‘recalcitrant’ to Don Quixote’s fantasies (*R*, 41). They still sought something outside themselves, and some place outwith the perimeters of ordinary life.

The drive of romance outward, then, was still very much alive in this period. In an essay entitled ‘Maps in Fact and Fiction’, Walter de la Mare remarks that ‘as long as ‘there are ghosts in men’s bodies, the desire for adventure will never perish. We shall seek other means for travel, dare lands beyond land’s end and Thules still more ultimate. Mars shines for conquest’.⁴⁰ This reference to Mars has imperialist overtones, although of course de la Mare is more likely thinking in terms of conquest by imagination rather than by any physical process of colonization. But, in essence, he is commenting upon man’s natural restlessness.

In connection with this spirit of restlessness we might consider what Frye has to say in his *Anatomy of Criticism*. Frye says that romance is the fiction of the ruling classes which takes on different forms in different ages, the chivalric in the Middle Ages, and then the aristocratic and bourgeois in later times.⁴¹ But he adds that there is also ‘a

³⁹ Gillian Beer, *The Romance* (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 8. (Henceforth designated in the text as *R*.)

⁴⁰ Walter de la Mare, ‘Maps in Fact and Fiction,’ in *Private View*, pp. 59-66 (p. 61).

⁴¹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971, repr. 1973), p. 186. (Henceforth designated in the text as *AC*.)

genuinely 'proletarian' element in romance which is never satisfied with its various incarnations,' and goes on to declare that 'in fact the incarnations themselves indicate that no matter how great a change may take place in society, romance will turn up again, as hungry as ever, looking for new hopes and desires to feed on' (*AC*, p. 186). Frye therefore initially appears to endorse the notion that romance is fairly straightforward and conservative in nature, the fiction of the 'ruling classes'; but then he identifies a restless roving impulse lying at the very heart of it, which destabilizes all notions of conservatism. He underscores this point in *The Secular Scripture* by saying that there is something 'nomadic' in romance which 'recalls the heritage of travelling folk-tales and ballads', '[an] imaginative uprooting and drive over and across everything settled and planted and built' (*SS*, p. 186). According to this formulation, romance is the expression of some kind of basic impulse or primal energy which can never be expelled. At one extreme, it could conceivably even be labelled anarchic (not just 'nomadic'); at the other, it appears in exalted, lyrical form, as seen above in de la Mare.

Machen, too, talks of the 'divine discontent' which led the old heroes of romance (and some new ones, like Huck Finn) to 'run away'.⁴² Such a phrase gives vent to a spirit of longing for, or simply the awareness of, something too beautiful to be described. It was this aspect which led Ker to suggest that maybe 'Romance, like Happiness, is 'there where thou art not' (*CEK*, p. 321) or Walter Raleigh to declare that 'It is not needful, nor indeed is it possible, to define Romance'.⁴³ This kind of attitude might appear too

⁴² *Works of Arthur Machen*, vol. v: *Hieroglyphics*, 155-156 (Appendix).

⁴³ Walter Raleigh, *Romance: Two Lectures* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1916), p. 8.

evasive for the purpose of meaningful criticism. However for someone like C. S. Lewis, the sense of the ineffable is the crux of the matter. Our feeling for it he denotes as 'Joy' (in a specialized sense of the word) or as *sehnsucht*,⁴⁴ the German term which is only imperfectly rendered into English as 'nostalgia'; and he conceives of this feeling as answering to an actual Something – in particular an actual place. To a degree he might be playing upon that age-old romantic concept of 'the Land of Heart's Desire'; but the theme occurs frequently enough in his writings to make one realize that it is of the utmost importance to him. At times he speaks of this un-named place in fairly straightforward and distinctly Christianized terms, for instance as 'the land of righteousness'.⁴⁵ However in his sermon, 'The Weight of Glory', he describes it simply as 'a country we have never visited' – and the feeling of *sehnsucht* is the 'news' from this country.⁴⁶

In the essay 'On Stories', Lewis images these intimations from this far country, sometimes wafted to us, as a bird, which can sometimes be caught in the net of 'Story' – as in (Lewis suggests) Morris's *The Well at the World's End*.⁴⁷ But ultimately stories, even the best of them, cannot keep this bird in their grasp; and this, Lewis comments, is like life itself: 'If the author's plot is only a net, and usually an imperfect one, a net of time and event for catching what is not really a process at all, is life much more?'

⁴⁴ For an extended discussion of *sehnsucht*, both in relation to Lewis and in a wider context, see Corbin Scott Carnell, *Bright Shadow of Reality: C. S. Lewis and the Feeling Intellect* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), esp. ch. 1 (pp. 13-29).

⁴⁵ *George MacDonald: An Anthology*, ed. by C. S. Lewis (London: Bles, 1946), p. 22. (Henceforth designated in the text as *GMA*.)

⁴⁶ C. S. Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory', in *They Asked for a Paper* (London: Bles, 1962), pp. 197-211 (p. 200).

⁴⁷ C. S. Lewis, 'On Stories', in *Of This and Other Worlds*, ed. by Walter Hooper (London: Collins, 1982; henceforth designated in the text as *TOW*), pp. 25-45 (p. 43).

(*TOW*, p. 45). And the worry is that this country may remain *forever* beyond our grasp, or indeed that it may not exist, after all; that it might just be a delusion, so that the tantalizing hint of its presence might be just – to refer to Morris once again – ‘news from nowhere’. Morris makes playful use of this phrase, taking the most literal meaning of the word ‘utopia’ for the title of his portrayal of an idealized future society; but for Lewis the whole issue is deeply heartfelt.

iii) The (im)possibility of revelation

Put another way, the idea of ‘news from nowhere’ as it applies to Lewis is really about the seeming imminence, but also the impossibility, of revelation. This is something which Stevenson also touches on in ‘A Gossip on Romance’: ‘how many people have met us with a look of meaning in their eye, and sunk at once into trivial acquaintances; how many places have we not drawn near, with express intimations – “here my destiny awaits me!” – and we have but dined there and passed on!’⁴⁸ The second part of this remark recalls something which has already surfaced earlier in this particular essay: the famous assertion that ‘Certain dank gardens cry aloud for murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck’ (*SF*, pp. 54-55). Now, however, Stevenson seems to be admitting that often (if not always) the romance of place just peters out.

It is worth considering the case of Stevenson more closely as he remains one of the figures most readily associated with romance in this period, dealing as he did in everything from boys’ adventure stories and exotic tales of the South Seas to Scottish historical fiction and the supernatural. Also, of course, his own life was seen to be a romance, at least in the embellished version peddled by family and friends immediately

⁴⁸ Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘A Gossip on Romance’, in *Stevenson on Fiction*, pp. 51-64 (p. 55).

after his death which helped make him something of a legend for a time (before the inevitable reaction set in). In a way, though, his literary art does not appear all that romantic, in the sense of being inspired by true 'feeling'. It is customary to refer to him as an accomplished storyteller and master stylist, but the suspicion has sometimes surfaced that his art was somewhat too mechanical. All literature is a construct; but Stevenson sometimes seems to be peculiarly open to the charge that his work really is nothing more than this, that there really is nothing beneath the surface of his tales and that no genuine revelation is possible because there is nothing to reveal. He himself once wrote that to search below the surface of any work of art is 'to be appalled by [its] emptiness and shocked by the coarseness of the strings and pulleys'.⁴⁹

It would not appear that the charge of 'emptiness' can be applied as a *general* principle, in the case of Stevenson; in fact in the course of the thesis – with specific reference to *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* – the very reverse of this will be argued. But, for the moment, it will be considered, chiefly in the light of what some of his contemporaries had to say about his work. For example an early review of the *New Arabian Nights* commented upon the difference between him and Dumas (with whom he was frequently compared, at least in terms of choice of subject-matter): 'We can imagine Dumas losing himself in his characters, and believing in his stories, while Mr. Stevenson gives us the impression of being outside both. He is the stage manager skillfully directing his actors, while he never ceases to regard them from the point of view of pure art'.⁵⁰ The idea of stage-managing seems especially relevant in the case of Stevenson when one remembers the influence of the Skelt toy theatre on his childhood;

⁴⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, 'On Some Technical Elements of Style and Literature', in *Stevenson on Fiction*, pp. 92-109 (p. 93).

⁵⁰ D. C. & Mrs. Lathbury, Review of 'The New Arabian Nights' (November 11 1882), in *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Paul Maixner, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981)), pp. 113-118 (p. 117).

as he remarked himself, this furnished him with a taste for the ‘stagey’⁵¹ (which can be differentiated from the genuinely dramatic). And alongside this recognition of the overtly theatrical element in Stevenson’s work one might also consider the view expressed by Gerard Manley Hopkins, in a letter of August 15, 1883. In reading Stevenson, he says,

at first you notice no more than an ordinary well told story, but on looking back [...] you see that the persons illustrate the incident or strain of incidents, the plot, the story, not the story and incidents the persons. There was a tale of his called the Treasure of Fourvieres [...] or something like that; it is the story of an old treasure found, lost, and found again. The finding of the treasure acts of course and rather for the worse upon the finder, a retired French doctor, and his wife; the loss cures them; you wait to see the effect of the refinding: but not at all, the story abruptly ends – because its hero was, so to say, this triplet of incidents.⁵²

Hopkins’s insight is a useful one, directing attention primarily to ‘incident’ and most of all the story-structure itself. There is certainly a strong element of fictive play in the *New Arabian Nights*: never more so than at the close with the off-hand dismissal of both the main character, Prince Florizel, and the ‘Arabian Author’, the supposed originator of the whole thing: ‘as for the Prince, that sublime person having now served his turn, may go, along with the Arabian Author topsy-turvy into space’.⁵³ This casual attitude is also evident in the ‘Story of the Young Man in Holy Orders’, which is abruptly cut off: ‘I regret and condemn such practices: but I must follow my original,’ declares the narrator with more than a hint of irony (*NAN*, p. 133).

⁵¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured,’ in *Stevenson on Fiction*, pp. 72-79 (p. 77).

⁵² *Stevenson: The Critical Heritage*, p. 123.

⁵³ Robert Louis Stevenson, *New Arabian Nights* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1912), p. 87. (Henceforth designated in the text as *NAN*.)

Even Chesterton, amidst all his sentimentalizing of Stevenson as a 'lost child' (*RLS*, p. 134) seems sometimes to sense something of all this: 'though [Stevenson] may seem to describe his subject in detail', he says, 'he describes it to be done with it' (*RLS*, p. 187). But although, as Chesterton says, a certain 'hardness of touch' is detectable in Stevenson's style (*RLS*, p. 187) it is not of course that he does not conceive of stories as being primarily for enjoyment and pleasure. In 'A Gossip on Romance' he declares that the experience of reading should be a 'voluptuous' (*SF*, p. 52) and self-indulgent one, like taking a luxurious bath. But there is nothing *beyond* this; and as an author Stevenson often does not, one feels, intend to go any further than the telling of a good story, which really only holds the reader's attention for as long as the process of reading lasts.

For a romance-writer like C. S. Lewis, on the other hand, the 'beyond' is everything. In fact what is intriguing about Lewis is that he more or less takes the 'beyond' as his *starting-point*; and all the mechanism, or the 'net', of story is merely something to try and catch it in. In this connection his comments upon the nature of myth are also illuminating: 'In poetry the words are the body, and the 'theme', or 'content' is the soul. But in myth the imagined events are the body and something inexpressible is the soul' (*GMA*, p. 16). The perceived connection of romance with the fundamental aspects of human existence has been discussed above; for Lewis, at least, the awareness of the 'beyond' is the most fundamental thing of all: 'deeper than our thoughts and even our passions' (*GMA*, p. 17).

It might be said that revelation was finally possible for Lewis as he came to accept the premise, and promise, of a Christian heaven. But even if one doubts the possibility of a final revelation, one can still experience the sense of something 'beyond', which 'sunders the rock of [...] consciousness'.⁵⁴ As Lewis recognizes, this apprehension of

⁵⁴ Katherine M. Wilson, *Thought and Imagination in Art and Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1936), p. 65.

things which lie outside the everyday world, and ultimately outside the knowledge and control of even the most modern and cultivated minds, remains an ineradicable part of human nature. From this point of view, indeed, primitive minds (whether of savages or children) appear better adjusted than many nineteenth-century 'progressivists' were prepared to admit, in retaining a sense of a wonder and mystery surrounding human life. Similarly the 'new' fashion for romance writing in the later nineteenth century, which appeared to deliberately shun all preoccupations with the immediately visible – work, marriage, finance, the house across the street, social institutions – could be seen as exceeding, rather than simply evading, the limits of everyday life and of mimetic art.

Chapter One

i) The shrinking world

‘The big blank spaces in the map are all being filled in, and there is no room for romance anywhere’.¹ So newspaper editor McArdle, as he looks to send his man Malone on a novel assignment, sums up the predicament for would-be romancers and adventurers everywhere in an age which saw a remarkable amount of territorial expansion by European powers, particularly Britain.² McArdle’s creator, Conan Doyle, at least had the consolation of being able to conjure up worlds out of his imagination; but the literati of the period were not immune to the general feeling that there were few places left to dream on – or indeed to dream in. ‘The time is near,’ pointed out Kipling in 1914, ‘when [...] the word ‘inaccessible’ as applied to any given spot on the surface of the globe will cease to have any meaning’.³ And fully twenty years earlier, Kipling’s friend Rider Haggard has already posed the question as to where ‘romance writers of future generations’ would be able to ‘find a safe and secret place, unknown to the pestilent accuracy of the geographer, in which to lay their plots’.⁴

Certainly, geographers at the turn of the twentieth century seemed to have penetrated almost every corner of the globe. Thus, at an international conference at Berne in 1891, the participants felt themselves at last confident enough to outline proposals for the first

¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Lost World and other Thrilling Tales*, ed. by Philip Gooden (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2001) p. 15 (ch. 2). (Henceforth designated in the text as *LWT*.)

² For an overview of European imperialist expansion at this time, see, for example, James Joll, *Europe Since 1870: An International History*, fourth edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), pp. 78-112 (ch. 4).

³ Rudyard Kipling, ‘Some Aspects of Travel’, in *A Book of Words: Selections from Speeches and Addresses Delivered Between 1906 and 1927* (London: Macmillan, 1928) pp. 99-119 (p. 99). (Henceforth designated in the text as *BW*.)

⁴ Quoted in Patrick Brantlinger, *Rule of Darkness: British Literature and Imperialism 1830-1914* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1988; henceforth designated in the text as *RD*), p. 99.

‘World Map’.⁵ It was, in many ways, the high point of what Conrad memorably termed ‘Geography Militant’. By this Conrad meant geography in its first true scientific incarnation, succeeding the earlier, ‘fabulous’ phase and pioneered by individuals like Captain James Cook – a geography which Conrad praises for its ‘search for truth’⁶ (as opposed to the extravagances and acquisitiveness of the earlier phase). At its inception in 1830 the Royal Geographical Society, sponsor of many important expeditions in the course of the nineteenth century, consciously aimed to help geography to attain to the rank of a proper science in Britain, following new standards set by the likes of Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Ritter on the Continent.⁷

Whether the Royal Geographical Society, and indeed nineteenth-century geography as a whole, was always quite as disinterested and scientifically accurate as it claimed to be, is open to debate. However this is generally the image which it promoted, an image backed up by increasingly sophisticated instruments and a vast array of maps of a different spirit to maps of bygone days. ‘Utterly out of fashion now,’ lamented Walter de la Mare in his 1914 essay, ‘Maps in Fact and Fiction’, ‘are the beautiful old hues and designs, the brilliant banners above the tiny miniature cities, the winds and half winds and quarter winds, in black and green and red, of the portolan skin charts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries’ (*PV*, P. 60). The trend, by de la Mare’s time, was for maps full of prosaic detail, based on feats of triangulation rather than of imagination.

Of course the enduring appeal of the non-scientific document, of ‘sketchy maps’⁸ can be recognized as much by geographers as by writers of fiction (the adjective ‘sketchy’

5. See, for example, Lloyd A. Brown, *The Story of Maps* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1949, repr. 1950), p. 299.

6. Joseph Conrad, ‘Geography and Some Explorers’, in *Last Essays* (London: Dent, 1926; henceforth designated in the text as *LE*) pp. 1-31 (p. 14).

7. See, for example, Ian Cameron, *To the Farthest Ends of the Earth: A History of the Royal Geographical Society* (London: Macdonald and Jane’s, 1980), pp. 15-16.

8. Richard Phillips, *Mapping Men and Empire: A Geography of Adventure* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1997), p. 1.

suggests greater imaginative possibilities than the more familiar term, 'sketch map'). The map pertaining to King Solomon's Mines – written by a dying adventurer of bygone days, with his own blood – is an outstanding example, from this period. There is also, of course, the map of Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (although in comparison to the Haggard it is more practical, replete with details concerning 'latitude and longitude' and indeed furnished with 'every particular that would be needed to bring a ship to a safe anchorage upon its shores').⁹ All the same, in the face of the steady advance of real-life mapping of the globe that continued all throughout the nineteenth century, maps of this nature – fragmentary, hinting at strange places and dimly evoking promise of adventure and fabulous reward – could now only really hold their own in the purely fictional realm. As more and more of the world opened up to commercial and imperial 'Western' expansion, it seemed less and less likely that such places could still actually exist.

The final blow was the attainment of first the North Pole, and then the South, as gloomily noted by Walter de la Mare in 'Maps in Fact and Fiction': 'The present generation has experienced the treacherous novelty' of having both 'served up for breakfast' (*PV*, p. 59). Conrad's 'stern romance' (*LE*, p. 16) of polar exploration, stretching back over the years, thus appeared to have been diluted into the realm of the commonplace. And with the conquest of both poles there remained literally no place further to go on the surface of the globe. As a noted geographer of the age, Sir Halford Mackinder, put it, 'With those final discoveries the book of the pioneers has been closed. No considerable fertile new land, no important mountain-range, and no first-class river can any more be the reward for adventure'.¹⁰

⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island*, ed. by Emma Letley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 33 (ch. 6).

¹⁰ Halford Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London: Constable, 1919), p. 39. (Henceforth designated in the text as *DIR*.) For a fuller account of Mackinder's career see, for example, T. W. Freeman, 'The Royal Geographical Society and the Development of Geography', in E. H. Brown, ed., *Geography Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) pp. 1-99 (p. 15ff).

The First World War coming hard on the heels of the polar conquests led Mackinder to make some interesting observations about the modern state of the world.

Whenever we think of the physical, economic, military, or political interconnection of things on the surface of the Globe, we are for the first time presented with a closed system. The known does not fade any longer through the half-known into the unknown; there is no longer elasticity of political expansion in lands beyond the Pole. Every shock, every disaster, or superfluity, is now felt even to the antipodes, and may indeed return from the antipodes, as the air waves from the eruption of the volcano Krakatoa in the year 1883 were propelled in rings over the Globe until they converged to a point in the opposite hemisphere, and thence diverged again to meet once more over Krakatoa, the seat of their origin. Every deed of humanity will henceforth be echoed and re-echoed in like manner round the world. That, in the ultimate analysis, is why every considerable State was bound to be drawn into the recent War, if it lasted, as it did last, long enough. (*DIR*, p. 40)

Mackinder here expresses a strong sense not only of closure but also of *enclosure*, as if for the first time humanity has really learned what it means to live within the circumference of a sphere. And maybe one corollary of this was the feeling that outward movement was no longer possible, causing the focus to shift inward. For instance, in the Kipling essay quoted above, 'Some Aspects of Travel', the particular aspects the author chooses to concentrate on are the psychological – the stresses and strains of travel. He gives us not broad, open vistas, but rather 'pressure-lines' (*BW*, p. 101). But this is the kind of thing that one would generally expect from Kipling, when one recalls how many of his earlier writings dealt with the toil and torment of Anglo-Indian life. However, there are instances of it also in Buchan, who is not so readily associated with this kind of psychological emphasis. For instance, in the late novel *A Prince of the Captivity*, the hero Adam Melfort goes to rescue the lost adventurer Falconet from the Arctic wastes

and finds there that his once romantic expectations are wholly subverted: he realizes that ‘the globe had gone small, and that man had put his impress upon the extremest wilds’.¹¹ And the end of the earth – at least while he is tending the half-mad Falconet – takes on the semblance of a filthy little hell-hole: ‘the wide Arctic world had narrowed for him to a few stuffy cubic feet in a cranny of rock, and his problem to strive not with wild nature but with a human soul’ (*PC*, p. 82 (Book i, ch. 3)). This example serves as a reminder that Buchan’s relationship with the whole adventure-romance tradition, if not as fraught as, say, that of Conrad’s, was not as simplistic as might sometimes be thought.

Whatever their differences in background, and, even more, in literary merit, Buchan, Conrad, Haggard, Kipling, and Stevenson all succeeded one way or another in making an impact on the literary world around the turn of the century with writings which reflected their experience in far-flung places of the world (certainly places far outwith the British Isles); experience gained through varying circumstances of birth, work, and inclination. And because of their dealings with exotic and far away lands it is inevitable that much of their work should be considered in relation to the whole romance/adventure nexus; and in particular the romance of exploration which saw a marked resurgence in the later nineteenth century, due above all to the rapid expansion of Empire.

ii) Haggard, Buchan and Africa

Africa was a place which continued to loom large in European minds all through the nineteenth century, as in previous centuries. From the European perspective there had always existed a sense of wondering curiosity at its unknown interior – the Dark

¹¹ John Buchan, *A Prince of the Captivity* (Edinburgh: B & W, 1996) p. 73 (Book i, ch. 3). (Henceforth designated in the text as *PC*.)

Continent, or alternatively, as Conrad puts it, a continent 'white and big' at its heart, suggesting a blank on which anything could be written (*LE*, p. 20). But Conrad here was referring to a map which dated back to 1852; and things had changed markedly by the time he came to write *Heart of Darkness*. By the end of the nineteenth century, notwithstanding the fact that the phrase from Pliny's *Natural History* – *ex Africa semper aliquid novi* – was very much in the air, many of the old romantic notions pertaining to Africa were being snuffed out in the wake of imperialist expansion.

Haggard (as discussed more fully in the following chapter) went out to South Africa to work in imperial administration in the mid 1870s, and therefore was well placed to witness the decline of native peoples and old ways of life. It was a situation which quickened in him feelings of loss and regret. There is generally in his work a tendency to look back, coupled with a strong sense of wistfulness. He recorded the fall of the Zulus (the effective end of a older and more heroic age) in his Zulu trilogy (*Marie*, *Child of Storm*, and *Finished*). A similar sense of imminent doom for a proud African people also infiltrates *Nada the Lily*, a work often praised by critics; indeed it has been called 'one of the finest novels of the nineteenth century'.¹² Martin Green observes that 'The translations of Homer taught in the public schools, and even more the Norse and Germanic sagas that aroused so much interest in the nineteenth century, provided a literary model for which these African subjects were perfect'.¹³ But like those ancient Homeric tales and Scandinavian sagas, such larger-than-life characters and events in Africa seemed at the close of the nineteenth century to belong to the past. The future appeared to be of an entirely different substance, consisting of efficient colonial administration. There was one final war still being fought, but it was only the weary,

¹² Peter Porter, quoted in Wendy R. Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire: A Critical Study of British Imperial Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987; henceforth designated in the text as *HFE*), p. 2.

¹³ Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 231. (Henceforth designated in the text as *DAE*.)

nerve-sapping, and wholly inglorious struggle between British and Boer which ushered in the new century.

Haggard however does not only grieve for the passing of the heroic African age. In *Allan's Wife* (1887) there is also sadness at the loss of a personal home – the Edenic spot where Allan Quatermain lives with his first wife Stella, and to which he returns (as a widower) after a number of years when all is in ruins.

I mounted my horse, and, quite alone, rode up the valley, noting with a strange prescience of evil that the road was overgrown, and, save for the music of the waterfalls, the place silent as death. The kraals that used to be to the left of the road had vanished. I rode towards their site; the mealie fields were choked with weeds, the paths were dumb with grass. Presently I reached the place. There, overgrown with grass, were the burnt ashes of the kraals, and there among the ashes, gleaming in the moonlight, were the white bones of men. Now it was clear to me. The settlement had been fallen on by some powerful foe, and its inhabitants put to the assegai. The forebodings of the natives had come true; Babyan Kraals were peopled by memories alone.¹⁴

Particularly noteworthy here is the sense of the ghostly; and indeed the whole story is couched in this vein, beginning with the very dedication, to one of Haggard's old companions in Africa.

Perhaps [this story] will bring back to you some of the long past romance of days that are lost to us. The country of which Allan Quatermain tells his tale is now, for the most part, as well known and explored as the fields of Norfolk. Where we shot and trekked and galloped, scarcely seeing the face of civilized man, there the gold-seeker builds his cities. The [...] game has gone, the misty charm of the morning has become the glare of day.

¹⁴ Rider Haggard, *Allan's Wife* [online]. Available: <http://ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext01/awife10.txt>; ch. 14. (Henceforth designated in the text as *AW*.)

Allan's Wife is different from the richly exotic and colourful worlds depicted in the two preceding Quatermain texts, *King Solomon's Mines* and *Allan Quatermain* – the one depicting the grim splendours of a mighty barbaric race, the other evoking the great buildings and sculptures of a lost civilization. In *Allan's Wife*, however, the dominant shade is white. Such an observation might suggest that there is much in the story which could furnish Haggard's usual scourges, the post-colonialists, with plenty of ammunition. In the most obvious sense however the colour white in this text stands for a kind of spirituality: the wraiths of those dead or gone, or the insubstantiality of human memory. Consider, for instance, the image of the white mist which appears in the dedication above and recurs in a passage where Quatermain recalls his old African hunting days (when there were animals to hunt).

Nobody living in those parts of South Africa nowadays can have the remotest idea of what the veldt was like even thirty years ago.

Often and often I have crept shivering on to my waggon-box just as the sun rose and looked out. At first one would see nothing but a vast field of white mist suffused towards the east by a tremulous golden glow, through which the tops of stony koppies stood up like gigantic beacons. From the dense mist would come strange sounds – snorts, gruntings, bellows, and the thunder of countless hoofs. Presently this great curtain would grow thinner, then it would melt, as the smoke from a pipe melts into the air, and for miles on miles the wide rolling country interspersed with bush opened to the view. But it was not tenantless as it is now, for as far as the eye could reach it would be literally black with game. (*AW*, ch. 3)

In the dedication, it is said that the mist rolls away to reveal only 'the glare of day', which can readily be taken in this instance to mean the harsh light of present-day reality; but in the above passage it seems as if the spirit of an entire country (or at least of an entire landscape) is raised from its folds. It is Quatermain's – and Haggard's – dream of the past when the country which now is 'tenantless' was bursting with life; but that life has now vanished back into the mist, never to emerge again.

A certain dreamlike, visionary quality is in evidence at several points in *Allan's Wife*; this is due in no small part to the character of Indaba-zimbi. In the earlier Quatermain tales natives of the greatest standing are kings or warriors; here the major native figure is a witch doctor who possesses the ability to induce trances and visions, most remarkably the vision of Stella during her time of captivity with the baboons (*AW*, ch. 12). And the colour white is associated with the witch doctor in several ways: the single white lock of his hair (compare Mopo in *Nada the Lily*, with his white hand) is several times referred to, and he is frequently to be seen with a string of white bones on his person with which he presumably conducts most of his magic. Bones, one of the truest signs of mortality, are again explicitly mentioned – ‘the white bones of men’ – in the scene of desolation which greets the hero at the end when he returns to his old African home for one last time.

White is also often associated with Stella, most impressively in Quatermain's nightmare on the eve of their wedding-day, in which she appears as a kind of representation of death, standing beside a grave with a ‘wild’ look and dressed in ‘white robes’ which are also ‘death-wrappings’ (*AW*, ch. 10). But she first appears to Quatermain as a more beatific vision, as a ‘white girl’, when he is languishing in the desert (*AW*, ch. 6); and at the end she is transformed into a white ‘wraith’ among the ruins of her old home; a final vision granted to Quatermain (*AW*, ch. 14).

One reason why Stella appears as such an ethereal figure is that Haggard chooses to sentimentalize her as the hero's lost love. However she also seems in some degree to be a personification of the beautiful place where she and her father have made their home. And when Quatermain asks himself whether it is ‘the long years of communing with Nature that [has] endowed [her] with such peculiar grace, the grace we find in opening flowers and budding trees’ (*AW*, ch. 9) he might actually be on to something. The first time he hears her voice (before he actually sees her) he is reminded of the ‘wind

whispering in the trees at night' (*AW*, ch. 6). When crossing a stream he notes that she leaps 'from stone to stone' as agilely as a 'roe-buck' (*AW*, ch. 7); she does not require his manly assistance at all. She appears therefore to function as a kind of nature-spirit, epitomizing its most gentle and beneficent aspects. And so the pain of losing her is also the pain of losing the perfect idyllic home, set in the most bewitching natural surroundings. At the end, however, the very grass of this place is said to have fallen 'dumb' – although, admittedly, the 'music of the waterfalls' is still to be heard.

Allan's Wife is something of a haunted text: haunted by the spectre of dissolution. And Quatermain's frame of mind at the end, when looking upon the desolate place that was once a home, parallels that of Haggard himself when he re-visited South Africa in 1914 after a lengthy period of absence (in his capacity as Royal Commissioner). On this visit he seemed to view himself as something of a relic from a time which could never return. 'Affectionate as was my greeting,' he wrote in his diary, 'I think really it was more to do with the fact that I am a sort of curiosity, a survival from a past generation, than to my own individuality'.¹⁵

Buchan was another prolific and 'popular' writer of the era who was involved with imperial administration in South Africa (and also in other places; the last phase of his official career saw him become governor-general of Canada). And, as with Haggard, the South African encounter proved fruitful for his imagination. Long after he had left, the memory of the place persisted in his fiction. Janet Adam Smith notes for instance that the landscape of his imaginary South American country in *The Courts of the Morning* resembles the Transvaal;¹⁶ his most enduring hero, Hannay, also has a South African background.

¹⁵ Quoted in Peter Berresford Ellis, *H. Rider Haggard: A Voice From The Infinite* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; 1978; henceforth designated in the text as *HVI*), p. 213.

¹⁶ Janet Adam Smith, *John Buchan: A Biography* (London: Hart-Davis, 1965), p. 261.

But Buchan was markedly different from Haggard in many ways: in his background (he had a sound university training which Haggard lacked) and temperament. He was not so given as was Haggard to detailing the past glories of the land, at least not on the same epic historical scale, although he often displays a similarly keen awareness of the old being driven out by the new, in his writings. His short story 'The Grove of Ashtaroth', which first appeared in the 1912 collection *The Moon Endureth*, relates a classic instance of 'old gods falling'. But in contrast to Haggard his fiction also engages closely with the new forces at work, those of modern colonialism, which in 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' are responsible for the destruction of the ancient grove.

Buchan, going out to South Africa in 1901 (a quarter of a century after Haggard) was more involved in the business of reconstruction rather than conquest as such. And he was fired by the example of Lord Milner, South African High Commissioner, 'the most powerful administrative intelligence which Britain has produced in our day', who had in the space of a year 'rebuilt' South Africa 'from its foundations and given it the apparatus of civilization'.¹⁷ And his discussion-novel of 1906, *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, lucidly sets forth guidelines concerning the shape the colonial enterprise should take.

The title of *A Lodge in the Wilderness* connotes a sense of 'lodging', of securing a foothold in the wilderness, but perhaps not much more than this. At the same time however, Buchan was determined not to be *dis*-lodged. The actual lodge of the title is the preferred African residence of politician Francis Carey; and its most salient feature is its homeliness: 'Suddenly [one] comes upon a gate, with a thatched lodge, which might be in Scotland'.¹⁸ This lodge leaves its mark upon the encircling 'wilderness',

¹⁷ John Buchan, *Memory Hold-the-Door* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), pp. 99-100. (Henceforth designated in the text as *MHD*.)

¹⁸ John Buchan, *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (London: Nelson, 1906, repr. 1930), p. 19 (ch. 1). (Henceforth designated in the text as *LW*.)

helping to familiarize and even tame the scene. As such it symbolizes what Buchan hoped imperialism could achieve. In his autobiography he talks of his native country's 'power of domesticating the strange and the terrible' (*MHD*, p. 168); and a process of 'domestication' is what he advocates in this book.

The reader however may be misled in the first instance by the eloquent Mrs. Deloraine who runs on in lyrical vein for several pages, invoking for empire the spirit of the great adventurers of old: 'Ionian [...] Elizabethan [...] romantic' and talking in exalted terms of 'getting at the heart of great forces' (*LW*, pp. 258-262 (ch.11)). However, the more prosaic Lord Launceston administers something of a pull-up when he decrees that Imperialism is in its essence a matter of politics and that what is required, above all, is simply 'a quickened conscience and a tireless intelligence' (*LW*, p. 318 (ch. 13)). The full exposition of Buchan's imperialist creed follows:

The English genius has never regarded its civilization as tied down to the place of its birth. Its task has been to absorb the unfamiliar and to lay bare the unknown, admitting no *terra incognita* into the scheme of things. There is always the home country [...]

Men will not starve in crowded islands when there are virgin spaces waiting for them, and young nations will not be adventurers in far lands, but children of a great household carrying the fire from the ancestral hearth. (*LW*, p. 324 ((ch. 13))

This passage incorporates the familiar colonialist sentiment that there are 'virgin spaces' out there which are waiting to be taken over and controlled; but it is more notable for its domestic references: a great 'household' of nations grouped round the 'ancestral hearth'. (It is well to keep Buchan's classical influences in mind here and to recall the cult of Vesta, goddess of the hearth, which was of such importance in ancient Rome, and upon which Augustus placed no small emphasis at the beginning of the Imperial

period of Roman history.)¹⁹ There will no longer be ‘adventurers in far lands’ because, in effect, there will *be* no more ‘far lands’; the globe will have come under one centralizing, civilizing influence (of course, although Buchan would surely not have it so, this idea could be extended into the realm of authoritarianism and anti-utopia). Such a vision harmonizes with the theme discussed earlier, that of ‘the shrinking world’.

All of this is still an adventure to Buchan, and a very lofty one; he says earlier that it is the ‘*adventurous* mind’ that ‘the unknown call[s] upon [...] to take possession’ (*LW*, p.22), recalling the great pioneer-explorers of old as invoked by earlier, nineteenth-century writers from J. A. Froude, in his essay ‘England’s Forgotten Worthies’²⁰ to Kingsley in *Westward Ho!*. But the basic tenet is that the unknown can, and must be, moulded into familiar and workable form. As Carey finally observes: ‘This old earth [...] is what we have business with. [...] We have been too long away from her in barren cloudlands’ (*LW*, pp. 328-329 (ch. 14)).

However, although so concerned with the conquest of places in *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, Buchan evinces very different views elsewhere in his writings. As discussed in later chapters, a frequent theme in his fiction is that of the *temenos*, or sacred place, which *cannot* always be subjugated to the human will (even that of the most dedicated of modern empire-builders). And in some passages in his autobiography, he exults in South Africa as being an environment which has never proved amenable to the human presence: ‘Its history [...] of generations of adventurers from the Sabeans to the Chartered Company, is as evanescent as a cloud shadow. You will find it in the books, but somehow it is not in the atmosphere and never will be [...] It was a refreshment to be in a world so superbly inhuman, and I found Wordsworth irrelevant’ (*MHD*, pp. 116-

¹⁹ See, for example, J. A. North, *Roman Religion*, New Surveys in the Classics, 30 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 34. The Classical element in Buchan came to full flowering with his well-received biography of Augustus, published in 1937.

²⁰ J. A. Froude, ‘England’s Forgotten Worthies’, in *Short Stories on Great Subjects*, 4 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1901-1903) i, 443-501.

117 (ch. 5)). *A Lodge in the Wilderness*, however, is testament to Buchan's lasting faith in the domestication ideal.

It is interesting to note that Francis Carey is at one point likened to Prester John²¹ (*LW*, p. 12 (Prologue)), the figure of legend who always held a fascination for Buchan, who surfaces in his poem, 'The Song of the Sea Captain' and whose name forms the title for one of his short stories (from the early collection *Grey Weather*) as well as for one of his novels. It is instructive to examine this novel, which marks Buchan's best-known contribution to the boys' adventure-story market, in relation to the colonial-cum-domestication process.

Prester John is saddled with something of an agenda from the beginning: teaching boys how to be sound young British colonists. In this respect the novel follows a major trend in the juvenile literature of the age, the age of high Empire.²² And, overall, Buchan does stick quite closely to this agenda, despite making Laputa, who is utterly resolved to thwart British and all other kind of outside interference in Africa, a compelling figure. Certainly, David Crawford's adventures begin tamely enough, when he is sent out in the capacity of assistant storekeeper to Blaauwildebeestefontein, where all that concerns him, initially, is how to get a thriving trade up and running in the place. This seems a daunting task at first as there are only 'two buildings of civilized shape' in all of Blaauwildebeestefontein, the store and the schoolhouse.²³ However this state of affairs is rectified by the end of the story, when a 'great native training college' is set up boasting 'every kind of technical workshop, and the finest experimental farms' and

²¹ For more information regarding this legendary king see, for example, *Prester John, The Mongols, and the Ten Lost Tribes*, ed. by Charles F. Beckingham and Bernard Hamilton (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996)

²² For further details on this kind of 'colonialist' juvenile writing – in particular the role played by Henty – see, for example, C. C. Eldridge, *The Imperial Experience from Carlyle to Foster* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 68-71.

²³ John Buchan, *Prester John*, ed. by David Daniell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.31 (ch. 3). (Henceforth designated in the text as *PJ*.)

playing-fields and baths and reading rooms and libraries just as in a school at home' (*PJ*, p. 202 (ch. 23)). Not only this, but Wardlaw's school, which was struggling when David first arrived, has now expanded considerably to cover 'a whole countryside' (*PJ*, p. 202 (ch. 23)). And Wardlaw applies the finishing touch with a string of homely references in the closing passage of the book: the nearby 'loch' is stocked with 'Lochleven trout', he says, and the native chiefs are as vociferous as 'an Aberdeen bailie' (*PJ*, p. 203 (ch. 23)).

As to Laputa, he is indubitably grand; Buchan envisages him as a figure of Satanic pride, on a par with his other super-villains like Medina and Lumley, and his fall is explicitly likened to the fall of 'Lucifer' (*PJ*, p. 179 (ch. 20)). Furthermore, he is an educated, scholarly man (one of the main attractions of the Prester John legend surely has always been that this king was supposed to be at the head of a highly *civilized* realm, while also retaining more than a dash of exotic appeal). Yet, if one looks more closely at his actual story, he is not allowed as much domination as would seem to befit his stature. His splendid notions of kingship and the re-creation of an ancient, fabled African empire are demeaned in the first instance when he is presented through Arcoll's discourse as being simply a dangerous fomenter of extreme black nationalism (*PJ*, pp.73-77 (ch. 7)). Arcoll is actually prepared to affirm Laputa's 'greatness', but only in belittling fashion: 'He has the heart of a poet and a king, and it is God's curse that he has been born among the children of Ham' (*PJ*, p.77 (ch 7)).

Similarly, David recognizes Laputa's qualities yet regards him as a mere 'blustering savage' at times (*PJ*, p. 146 (ch. 16)), affecting the kind of superior pose common to many young literary colonial heroes of the age. In another way, though, this could be an indication of the many different roles that Laputa takes on. In the first chapter, although we first hear of him as a man of culture, a minister, preaching in a Scottish parish, he then becomes a sinister figure dabbling in black magic on a dark and lonely shore – an

appearance which serves to align him with the whole Scottish tradition of demonology and black magic (although he remains more glamorous and exotic than any character in, for example, Stevenson's 'Thrawn Janet'). And in chapter 16 alone, as well as being a 'blustering savage' he is, alternately, a terrifying barbarian meditating punishments of dire cruelty for his captive; a 'fanatic', a 'petted child', a 'civilized man', a 'Christian', and then at the end a figure of dignified bearing who speaks of 'honour[ing] bravery' (*PJ*, pp.145-148).

However, Laputa arguably only ever comes into his own in an entirely secret place, in the cave at the Rooirand, an 'uncanny' spot (*PJ*, p. 47 (ch. 4)). This cave, on the occasion of his thundering address to his devoted followers, at which gathering David also happens to find himself, promises for a time to become the very wellspring of old romance. David listens, entranced, with all the rest, to the music which sings 'of old kings, and great battles, of splendid palaces and strong battlements [...] of desperate things, mysteries of horror long shut to the world'; music which seems to come 'straight from Prester John or Sheba's queen, or whoever ruled in Africa when the world was young' (*PJ*, p. 101 (ch. 11)). In addition there is the Biblical element: Laputa prays first of all to the 'god of Israel' and the 'Lord of Hosts' (*PJ*, pp. 103-104 (ch. 11)). (Later in the novel we find different religious intonations, when Laputa talks of the cleansing power of his mission (*PJ*, p. 151 (ch. 17)) in a manner which prefigures Sandy Arbuthnot's comments on Islam as a pure and simplifying power emerging out of the desert, in *Greenmantle*.)²⁴

In the end, however, Laputa cannot really function outside this cave. Although at one point David marvels at the huge strides which he makes across the face of the land (*PJ*, pp. 167-168 (ch. 19)) it is not long after this that he has to finally retreat back underground for good. In the world at large, his ideas do not prove viable (one wonders

²⁴ John Buchan, *Greenmantle*, in *The Complete Richard Hannay* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992; henceforth designated in the text as *CRH*), pp. 105-347 (pp. 266-267 (ch. 15)).

how far Buchan intended his readers to be put in mind of that notorious centre of impracticality, the island of Laputa in *Gulliver's Travels*.)

The section of the novel which depicts Laputa's defeat is interesting in that it appears to be set on a different level to the rest of the story. This is heralded by Laputa appearing in David's fevered dreams at the height of the native insurgence: 'In my sleep I did not think about Arcoll's manoeuvres. My mind was wholly set upon Laputa' (*PJ*, p. 170 (ch. 19)). Laputa here shifts to the region of dreams, and of dreaming. And David's dream seems to be still on him when he rouses himself from his sickbed to go and meet Laputa for the final time in the cave. He subsequently explains his strange, trance-like state at this point as simply the result of his being 'overwrought' (*PJ*, p. 183 (ch. 21)); but there is more to it than this. He goes to meet Laputa in order to act as recording medium for Laputa's final hour, and in this particular capacity he becomes detached from the ordinary run of things, able to analyze the vision which has been granted him: that of the death of romance. The cave will become Laputa's final 'sanctuary' (*PJ*, p.175 (ch. 20)) and resting-place; he will not re-emerge, as once he hoped to do, in order to create a new world (or resurrect a very old one). The river is not the only thing to be 'imprisoned' (*PJ*, p. 175 (ch.20)) in the Rooirand; there are also lost hopes and dreams and desires. Of course Laputa remains an imposing figure even when divested of the mantle of kingship, but at the very end, once he has made his mighty leap, there is left only a sense of quietude: 'Far from human quest he sleeps his last sleep' (*PJ*, p. 181 (ch. 20)).

However the novel soon leaves behind this elegiac, almost Haggardian, strain, as David gradually returns to a more everyday state of mind: 'I felt that beyond this dim underworld there was the great joyous earth, and I longed for it' (*PJ*, p. 183 (ch. 21)). Now, significantly, he remembers Laputa as a 'Titan' (*PJ*, p. 183 (ch. 21)); and the aspect of the Titans that would seem especially relevant here is their imprisonment

under the earth for daring to challenge Olympian rule, as Laputa sought to challenge the ruling gods of early twentieth-century Africa, the Europeans. And on emerging from the cave David reflects that ‘Behind me was the black night, and the horrid secrets of darkness’ (*PJ*, p. 90 (ch. 21)). Earlier he had remarked that being in the Rooirand cave with Laputa and all his legions had afforded him a glimpse into ‘the heart of darkness’ (*PJ*, p.110 (ch. 12)) a phrase made resonant of course by Conrad, and one which conveys some sense of mystery. However ‘the horrid secrets of darkness’ has a different tang; at this point Laputa, with all his splendence, appears to have been thrust away into a black hole. In fact this cave becomes simply a dangerous and unpleasant place from which to escape, in purely adventure-narrative style; Buchan proceeds to devote the whole of chapter 21 to relating how David painstakingly climbs back out again. (Compare similar passages in Haggard, towards the close of *King Solomon’s Mines*, or *She*.)

In the end, the balance of power rests firmly in the hands of the white men; without Laputa, the ‘crusade’ simply collapses into ‘a sorry mutiny’ (*PJ*, p. 191 (ch. 22)). (This theme of a dispersed uprising was to surface later in Buchan’s post-war historical romances such as *The Blanket of the Dark*.) And at a meeting of the native chiefs the normally plain-spoken David finally turns orator – but only in order to proclaim the demise of glamour and adventure, with the going of Laputa. As Tam Dyke observes, it is ‘a dull ending’ (*PJ*, pp. 201 (ch. 23)); Laputa in the official histories is relegated to being merely a ‘footnote’ (*PJ*, p. 165 (ch. 19)). There is an image fashioned in his likeness in front of the training college, but even here – in David’s description of the statue – it is possible to detect the subtlest of put-downs.

In front of the great hall of the college a statue stands, the figure of a black man shading his eyes with his hands and looking far over the plains to the Rooirand. On the pedestal it is lettered ‘Prester John’, *but* the

face is the face of Laputa. So the last of the kings of Africa does not lack his monument. (*PJ*, p. 202, (ch.23) emphasis added).

‘The last of the kings of Africa’ – David grants Laputa that much; however, the use of ‘but’ in the middle of the second sentence, where ‘and’ could conceivably have been used, would appear to suggest that Laputa could not, after all, hope to aspire to the status of the legendary African monarch. (Consider, too, the chapter titles, in which Laputa is only ever referred to as ‘the Reverend’, never as a king.) Kings and emperors of the older kind have passed for good; British rule is of a different colouring, and does not lend itself to romanticizing. Arcoll finds this out when he attempts to sway the native chiefs with ‘a fine speech’ which tells of the ‘mighty [...] power of the white man’ and which draws on ‘their old legends and songs, claiming for the king of England the right of their old monarchs (*PJ*, p. 196 (ch. 22)); this has no effect at all.

Arcoll is a fit representative of the new rule. As Buchan remarked of Milner, he is not a ‘popular leader’ (*MHD*, p. 100); his voice does not, like Laputa’s, sway a crowd, nor the force of his personality. But his actions speak louder than his words, whereas Laputa’s power ultimately resides in his oratory alone (whether as Christian minister or barbarian king). British colonialism is notable for efficiency, not glamour.

The ending of *Prester John* is similar to the end of *Salute to Adventurers*, another book by Buchan aimed at a youthful readership. The protagonist Andrew Garvald appears to be very much of the David Crawford mould (although his patch is not Africa but rather North America, at the time when that particular vast land was only just beginning to come under the sway of the British). He too is the common-sensical type, acting as a foil to more romantic figures – for instance the ‘native’ Salah who like Laputa radiates a ‘singular nobility’²⁵ and similarly dreams of regaining an ancient kingdom (although he

²⁵ John Buchan, *Salute to Adventurers* (London: Nelson, 1915, repr. 1929), p. 137 (ch. 11). (Henceforth designated in the text as *STA*.)

lacks Laputa's more dangerous edge), or the Highlander 'Red Ringan'. (The shades of *Kidnapped* in the latter are impossible to ignore: Andrew's relationship with Red Ringan reads like an inferior version of that between David Balfour and Alan Breck; even the quarrel scene is partly imitated, in Chapter 9.)

However Andrew, like David, also has his moment of wavering, when near the end he is tempted to join Salah on his grand adventure pushing ever westward, but opts instead to stay in Virginia and devote himself to his trade, although he deems that such things are scarcely 'worthy of chronicle'.

Why should I tell of how my trade prospered [...] of how we [...] led the tide of settlement to the edge of the hills? These things would seem a pedestrian end to a high beginning [...] The historian of Virginia [...] may, perhaps, take note of these things, but it is well for me to keep silent. It is of youth alone that I am concerned to write, for it is a comfort to my soul to know that once in my decorous progress through life I could kick my heels, and forget to count the cost; and as youth cries farewell, so I end my story and turn to my accompts. (*STA*, p. 365 (ch. 28))

The westward movement is still continuing (as at the end of *The Virgin of the Sun*, a Haggard novel examined in the following chapter). But Andrew has chosen not to join; and he seems to feel not a little regret; again, as in *Prester John*, there is the fading of romance.

There is an interesting distinction however. In *Prester John* the loss of romance is associated with modern political developments: in *Salute to Adventurers* it is associated with the hero's own personal development. Andrew Garvald anchors romance to a specific time in his life, that of youth – so that, like youth, it must inevitably pass, and he must eventually turn to his 'accompts' and the adult business of settling down and raising a family. (Interestingly enough, as seen in the next chapter, Haggard appears to reverse this idea and to connect romance with old age rather than youth.) As a final point, one might note that the implications of the novel's title are not fully realized; we

may ‘salute’ the adventurers among us, and admire their daring and enterprise, but, ultimately, we do not follow them.

iii) Kipling and India

While in Africa Haggard mourned the extinction of the old and Buchan outlined the shape of the new, in India – the mainstay of the British Empire, ‘the jewel in the crown’ – Kipling regarded the status quo with a frequently sardonic eye. Politically speaking, India bore little resemblance to Africa in this period – certainly South Africa – as the British had steadily consolidated their power in the country since the annexation of Bengal by Clive in the later eighteenth century; and even the one major jolt which they had received in recent times, the Mutiny of 1857, was subsiding into the background. (Certainly in Kipling’s fiction, the Mutiny does not loom very large; he makes few, and generally oblique references to it – although this might be due to the fact that, as the native rebel Khem Singh in *On the City Wall* puts it, ‘’57 is a year that no man, Black or White, cares to speak of’.²⁶ The political situation in India at this time therefore was considerably different from that in Africa, and this difference shows up in Kipling’s writing. In Kipling’s India, unlike Buchan’s or Haggard’s South Africa, we gain little sense of the exhilaration of conquest or the romance of exploration in exotic climes. Instead Kipling focuses more on the daily workings of Imperial administration, and generally shows it to be a thankless task. And, in marked contrast to the rolling South African veldt, India often appears cramped and constrictive. For instance, Kashima in ‘A Wayside Comedy’ is described bluntly as a ‘rat-pit’ (*MWK*, p. 66) and the story as a whole effectively conveys the sense of tedium and frustration that can build up in Anglo-Indian life.

²⁶ Rudyard Kipling, *The Man who would be King and Other Stories*, ed. by Louis Cornell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 231. (Henceforth designated in the text as *MWK*.)

Of course there are also stories in which Kipling does engage with the exotic – often in the sense of the strange and terrible (a point taken up in the final chapter). Also, a story like ‘On the City Wall’ features glamorous ‘Oriental’ figures like the beautiful courtesan Lalun and the old-time rebel Khem Singh. And most famously there is *Kim*, which paints a vibrant spectacle of a land whose appeal is all the more enhanced for being filtered through the eyes of a young boy ready to embrace all he sees, his childish enthusiasm infusing the whole. And the continuous movement depicted along the Grand Trunk Road offsets the choking, claustrophobic atmosphere of earlier stories like ‘A Wayside Comedy’. Roger Sale has commented: ‘It is such a seductive book because every detail is real, authentic, yet its aim is romance, adventure’.²⁷

It might be questioned, though, whether Kipling’s aim, even in *Kim*, is purely romance and adventure. Rather one could argue that he shows how Kim’s boyish exuberance, which can take both the solemnities of ‘sublime prophecy’ and the sheer fun of a ‘stupendous lark’²⁸ equally to its heart, does not – cannot – last; that he builds up a glowing picture only to deflate it. Kim has to be weaned off his youthful naivete; the ‘happy Asiatic disorder’ might all be very well but it suits only the needs of ‘a *simple* man’ (*K*, p.64 (ch. 4) emphasis added) and this, in the end, as is shown, does not prove to be enough for Kim. When he begins living life as a Sahib he has to aim for something more.

And so, subtly, the change begins to creep in; Kim is adopted by the soldiers of the ‘Red Bull’ and reaps the benefits of Western education, and furthermore takes on an important role as a Secret Service agent helping to foil the enemies of the British empire

²⁷. Roger Sale, *Fairy Tales and After: From Snow White to E. B. White* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp.219-220.

²⁸ Rudyard Kipling, *Kim*, ed. by Alan Sandison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, repr. 1991), p. 83 (ch. 5). (Henceforth designated in the text as *K*.)

in the country. And rendering service to the imperial cause gives him a moment of supreme satisfaction: ‘For the first time in his life Kim thrilled to the clean pride [...] of Departmental praise [...] praise from an equal of work appreciated by fellow-workers. Earth has nothing on the same plane to compare with it’ (*K*, p. 219 (ch. 12)). This is almost in the nature of a revelation – and it may be noted that revelation of any kind was *not* forthcoming at an earlier stage when he tried to induce it, Oriental fashion, by pondering his own identity (*K*, p. 185 (ch. 11)). And although he subsequently resumes his journey with the lama, and ‘slip(s) back to thinking and dreaming in the vernacular’ (*K*, p. 212, ch. 12)) he does not slip back entirely. For instance, during arduous mountainous treks with the lama, he appears to be well on the way to becoming the model of the ideal, fit Western schoolboy type as the strenuous exercise helps him burn off the more deleterious effects of a native diet:

Then did Kim [...] take joy in the day’s march – such joy as a boy of St Xavier’s who had won the quarter mile on the flat might take in the praises of his friends. The hills sweated the *ghi* and sugar suet off his bones; the dry air [...] firmed and built out his upper ribs; and the tilted levels put new hard muscles into calf and thigh. (*K*, p. 232 (ch. 13))

It only remains for his mind to catch up with his physical development, and he finally attains a moment of clarity; although only after undergoing a spate of something of soul-sickness.

Things that rode meaningless on the eyeball an instant before slid into proper proportion. Roads were meant to be walked upon, cattle to be driven, fields to be tilled, and men and women to be talked to. They were all real and true – solidly planted upon the feet – perfectly comprehensible – clay of his clay, neither more nor less. (*K*, p. 282 (ch. 15))

This much-quoted passage (with its interesting variant upon the Biblical phrase, ‘flesh of my flesh’) would appear to indicate that finally Kim has learnt to accept the face of reality as he sees it all around him, the world of logic and hard fact; and this realization endows him with a new, firm sense of responsibility. After all the talk of enlightenment, figured as the lama’s journey, both physical and spiritual, with Kim as his dutiful companion, it seems that true enlightenment is simply a matter of opening one’s eyes to, or rather focussing one’s eyes properly on, the world of here-and-now. Kim comes to accept Western values (the work ethic, most importantly) as opposed to the delightful indolence and romantic peregrinations of his early years; he acquires a new rational perspective on India. In relation to this, another passage following on closely to the one just quoted above, is worth looking at:

The ground was good clean dust – no new herbage that, living, is half-way to death already, but the hopeful dust that holds the seed of all life. [Kim] felt it between his toes, patted it with his palms, and joint by joint, sighing luxuriously, laid him down full length [...] And Mother Earth was [...] faithful [...] She breathed through him to restore the poise he had lost lying so long on a cot cut off from her good currents. His head lay powerless upon her breast, and his opened hands surrendered to her strength. (K, p.283 ch. 15))

The concept of ‘Mother Earth’ is, arguably, used here simply to represent the essentially plain and sober business of keeping one’s feet on the ground, remaining, as the saying goes, ‘down-to-earth’, in order to engage productively with the everyday world. Of course Kipling has injected mythological overtones into this particular passage and spins them out at length; and in conjunction with this one might consider the story ‘The Judgement of Dungara’,²⁹ in which he introduced a deity of his own, the ‘Dungara’ of

²⁹ Reprinted in *The Man who would be King and Other Stories*.

the title otherwise known as 'The God Of Things As They Are'. Kim's Mother Earth could almost be Dungara's female counterpart.

The imagery of the Wheel, dominant throughout the novel, functions as yet another version of Things As They Are. On one level, it figures as a religious symbol, the endless cycle of birth and death to which all living creatures are subject and from which the lama in his spiritual quest seeks release. However the image takes on more mechanical overtones in specific regard to Kim. Just before his instant of enlightenment (described above) Kim feels out of sync: 'his soul was out of gear with its surroundings – a cog wheel unconnected with any machinery' (*K*, p. 282 (ch. 15)); then at the critical moment it is said that 'the wheels of his being lock up anew on the world without' (*K*, p.282 (ch. 15)). At this point he appears almost to be part of some machinery in himself. Louis Cornell, in a useful study of Kipling's early literary career, describes his India as being 'a vast mechanical contrivance of admirable power and speed', whose 'course' no individual has the power to 'influence'.³⁰ The word 'admirable' reminds us that Kipling did indeed admire such things, engines as well as engineers, and could even regard them as constituting a new kind of romance – for instance in his poem 'The King' he refers to the generally unheeded romance of modern transport: ('all unseen/ Romance brought up the nine-fifteen').³¹ But what strikes the reader, in the first instance, is the sense of a 'mechanical', and non-human – if not quite *inhuman* – force; and this is what comes across most strongly at the crucial moment of Kim's enlightenment. From this point on, one feels Kim can indeed continue to function efficiently as a Sahib, in the service of colonial government.

³⁰ Louis Cornell, *Kipling in India* (London: Macmillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. 54. (Henceforth designated in the text as *KI*.)

³¹ Rudyard Kipling, 'The King', in *Rudyard Kipling's Verse* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940; repr. 1941), pp. 376-377.

The particular reading of *Kim* that has been outlined in this chapter might appear unsympathetic but it is justifiable.³² While there is no denying the colourful appeal of the book, with the warmly-drawn figure of the lama and more especially the portrayal of the sincerely affectionate bond between him and Kim, in the end Kipling seems to be saying that there is little to be gained in Kim's India other than the appreciation of good old-fashioned hard work. In this respect therefore the novel's exoticism might be regarded as somewhat misleading. The final word, it is true, goes to the lama; but only so that he can describe how he renounced his transcendent vision and returned to once more take his place in the here-and-now. The fact that he does so in a spirit of loving sacrifice for the sake of his young disciple, whom he continues to encourage – 'Certain is our deliverance. Come!' (*K*, p. 289 (ch. 15)) – does not altogether eclipse the feeling that the ending is something of a triumph for the Wheel of Things As They Are.

The 'vast mechanical contrivance' which Louis Cornell describes Kipling's India as being is seen to break down in 'The Bridge-Builders', a story from his 1898 collection, *The Day's Work*. It seems plausible to suggest that the potential wrecking of the bridge (due to unforeseen flooding) and the subsequent vision vouchsafed to Findlayson, the overseer, of ancient Indian deities, undermines the whole notion of Western imperialist expansion and technological innovation. However one might ask if this is truly the case. Even if the gods appear contemptuous of human endeavour, it hardly seems accurate to say that British work in India is, in the end, discredited. Questions are certainly raised as to its durability, but that is not the same thing as challenging its validity. In fact Krishna, the god most well-disposed towards human beings, even remarks that the 'fire-carriages' and railways and telegraphs and bridges and all the rest are actually avatars of

³² It is a reading that is accepted, in its essence, by many post-colonialist critics. See, for example, Edward. W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), pp. 171-174.

‘new Gods’ altogether, of a different essence from the old.³³ Though this causes not a little alarm among some of the others, Indra, the king of the gods, in his final judgement resolves all things into a harmonious whole: ‘When Brahm ceases to dream the Heavens and Hells and Earth disappear. Be content. Brahm dreams still. The dreams come and go, and the nature of the dreams changes, but still Brahm dreams [...] and till He wakes the Gods die not’ (*DW*, p.33).

Indra seems to hold little fear that the new gods imported from the West will displace the old. But neither will the old wholly prevail over the new; instead, both will exist with, or within, each other as part of an ongoing process, the fundamental order of things – here cast as the dream of Brahm, the great, original Creator in the Hindu pantheon. Therefore the achievements of the British Raj (or at any rate of its engineers), although they inevitably appear somewhat dwarfed at this high level, are at the same time effectively subsumed into an exalted myth. And one can also stress the point that it is a *Hindu* myth, which would appear to demonstrate Kipling’s conviction that despite the setbacks it may have to endure from time to time, the work of the British (aided by knowledgeable, hard-working Indians like Peroo) does have a relevant place in India.

On a more human level, too, Findlayson is never shown to be anything less than dignified, even when he succumbs to opium in the midst of his trials; he does, after all, takes it chiefly as a guard against fever; and rather than having any truly adverse effect it helps vouchsafe him this splendid vision. Then he becomes every inch the conscientious engineer once more, completely focussed on the task ahead – ‘there was no room for a man to think of dreams of the dark’ (*DW*, p.34) – anxious first and foremost not for himself but for his bridge, the project so close to his heart, and so vital to the work of empire.

³³ Rudyard Kipling, *The Day’s Work*, ed. by Thomas Pinney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, repr. 1991), p. 32. (Henceforth designated in the text as *DW*.)

It might be said, then, that Findlayson is granted a vision that ultimately vindicates his actions and that of his colleagues by enshrining them in a mythological framework. However, bridge-building is only one aspect of British work in India. Findlayson and others of his ilk rank high in the colonial establishment. He commands a considerable degree of respect from those around him (although he also worries about how his professional peers might judge him in the event of his failure; the story is not simply about imperial endeavours as such but also draws upon the favourite Kipling theme of earning the respect of one's working colleagues); and he takes part in undertakings which create visible marks on the face of the land. However, in other stories Kipling is more concerned with depicting the lives of unsung heroes striving to do their bit in the most appalling conditions and often dying or breaking down as a result. This, from the British point of view, is the real downside of imperialism, and Kipling is determined to expose it.

Kipling's agenda therefore is markedly different from that of the likes of Buchan, in Africa; he stresses the sheer drudgery of colonial administration rather than noble plans for the future of Imperialism. (Also, in contrast to Buchan's fine, upstanding colonial leaders he provides instances of colonialist corruption, for example in the *Departmental Ditties*.) He probably took his cue from newspaper reports of breakdowns and suicides taking place among the Anglo-Indian population. Indeed, one article of 1883 strongly appeared to suggest that insanity had become virtually an occupational hazard of Anglo-Indian working life.³⁴

Even in *Kim*, it is observed that the brightest of young men out in India suffer a 'half-collapse' by the age of 'twenty-two or twenty-three' (*K*, p.124 (ch. 7)). Then there is the plight of a lowly civil servant as described in 'The Education of Otis Yeere'. Yeere is

³⁴ See B. J. Moore-Gilbert, *Kipling and 'Orientalism'* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 139-142. Moore-Gilbert notes that Kipling belongs to a 'long tradition' which 'sees India as destructive of the strongest spirits' (p. 142).

one of the rank and file who are ground up in the wheels of the Administration; losing heart and soul, and mind and strength, in the process [...] used up, expended, in the mere mechanical routine [...] They are simply the rank and file [...] sharing with the *ryot* and the plough-bullock the honour of being the plinth on which the State rests.

[...] Otis was unfeignedly thankful to lay down his work for a little while and escape from the seething, whining, weakly hive, impotent to help itself, but strong in its power to cripple, thwart, and annoy the sunken-eyed man who, by official irony, was said to be 'in charge' of it. (*MWK*, pp. 92-93)

The mordant tone employed by Kipling here demonstrates the strength of his feelings about Anglo-Indian working conditions. It is the ironic antithesis of the optimistic expansionism of Buchan; here, it is the land that conquers the man. And while the 'Administration' presents a mechanical face, Yeere's immediate Indian surroundings are presented in more organic terms with the image of the 'hive'. In both instances Kipling's purpose is to create a certain de-humanizing effect and to highlight the powerlessness of the individual in relation not only to an unsympathetic government but also among his supposed inferiors. (Kipling's use of the hive image here is thus quite different from that in his allegory 'The Mother Hive' – in *Actions and Reactions* – where he is concerned to show the need for England to function efficiently as a state.) This is the reality for most of Kipling's colonial administrators, faced as they are with governing an almost ungovernable country of alien peoples and customs and a ravaging climate.

The tedious day-to-day grind of things is also vividly brought home in 'The Man who would be King', with its drawn-out description of the stifling press-office in which the narrator works – the scene to which Carnehan and Dravot's grand adventure is deliberately counterpoised. And from the first the narrator maintains a sceptical attitude towards these two comically grotesque, larger-than-life characters who invade his premises. It is not surprising that they 'have decided that India isn't big enough' for

them and so plan to ‘go away to some other place where a man isn’t crowded’ and where, indeed, they can be ‘Kings’ (*MWK*, p. 252). And in spite of all the narrator’s discouragements, they go off to Kafiristan,³⁵ experiencing traditional adventure-story fare on the way (such as disguising themselves in order to fool the natives). Moreover, in Kafiristan they actually manage to establish the kingdom they dreamed of. And although it does all go disastrously wrong – when their subjects turn on them having realized that their divinity is a sham – their final reversal has often been seen in a noble light, for instance by Louis Cornell who deems it ‘tragic’ (*KI*, p. 162), while Phillip Mallett calls it ‘quasi-tragic’.³⁶ (Mallett’s analysis however becomes rather too involved with imperialist considerations, declaring that Kipling applauds Dravot, as a white man, for setting himself up over the natives but condemns him ‘implicit[ly]’ for forgetting his superior status so far as to want to marry a native girl (*KC*, p. 103)).

Overall, though, Dravot and Carnehan do appear more ridiculous than tragic, certainly in their general bearing; and Kipling’s crowning touch is to relay the story of their great adventure through the mouth of the shattered Carnehan. And Carnehan bestows a series of highly undignified epithets on Dravot: ‘big red devil’, ‘jackass’, ‘stuck pig’ (*MWK*, pp. 273-275). Such descriptions serve to diminish, if not actually demolish, any sense of the truly tragic. Of course, there is something worthy in Dravot and Carnehan’s attempt to create some space for themselves, and one also applauds the unflinching manner in which Dravot goes out to meet his death. But one need not go much further than this. In any event, the melodramatic flourishing of Dravot’s severed head in the Press office by Carnehan shows how emphatically their dreams have been destroyed. (It should be noted, too, that the narrator recognizes the head as merely belonging to the man of ‘Marawar Junction’ (*MWK*, p. 278) and not to any former king.)

³⁵ For more information on the historical Kafiristan, see, for example, Robert Fraser, *Victorian Quest Romance* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), pp. 50-52. (Henceforth designated in the text as *VQR*.)

³⁶ Phillip Mallett, ‘Kipling and the Hoax’, in *Kipling Considered*, ed. by Phillip Mallett (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989; henceforth designated in the text as *KC*), pp. 98-114 (p. 105).

Dravot and Carnehan therefore pay a heavy price for their presumption, and the story is wound up in the most abrupt fashion; this brusque termination of events is all the epitaph that they are allowed. They are, finally, no great heroes for Kipling; the real heroes are the people who get on with the drudgery of their daily lives, toiling in the service of the Indian Government and facing up to the God Of Things As They Are, rather than dreaming of romantic self-fulfillment in strange and exotic lands.

iv) 'Captives of the islands': Stevenson and Conrad

Away from the great continental land-masses of India and Africa and other such places, islands (usually tropical) also feature strongly in the fiction of this period. Islands can be regarded as small, self-contained worlds, hidden away from the mainstream – secret, private, and full of potential.³⁷ But unlike such illustrious precedents as Crusoe's island, or even the Coral Island, islands in the fiction of this period, although they may seem to promise much to begin with, often turn out sour. One thinks of the debased realm of Dr Moreau, or even Stevenson's Treasure Island – a hotbed of adventure and excitement perhaps, but also, in itself, a singularly unpleasant place, as is revealed in Jim Hawkins's very first glimpse. And there is Conrad's Malay archipelago, with its ill-assortment of traders, failed idealists, and desperadoes.

Disillusionment is the main pattern that surfaces in Conrad's island fiction. His story 'A Smile of Fortune' deals with the theme in straightforward fashion. It begins with the vision of a veritable 'pearl' emerging from the shimmering heat-haze of the Indian Ocean to meet the eager gaze of the narrator (a ship's captain) who describes it as 'the

³⁷ For some general observations on the island as literary and cultural symbol, see Gillian Beer, 'Discourses of the Island', in *Literature and Science as Modes of Expression*, ed. by Frederick Armine (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), pp. 1-28.

astral body of an island risen to greet me from afar'.³⁸ One might compare the first appearance of Attwater's island, in *The Ebb-Tide* (Attwater is also a 'pearl-fisher'), which is described as the 'scarce-believed in' and looks incredibly 'strange and delicate' on approach.³⁹

However, such visions are soon tainted. In Conrad's tale, the narrator's delightful reverie is interrupted by 'horrid thoughts of business [...] I was anxious for success' (CSF, iv, 143). The dichotomy between romantic indulgence and mercenary reality in this story is obvious. And the title is ironic: the captain, what with one thing and another, ends up dejected so that

the remembered vision at sea, diaphanous and blue, of the Pearl of the Ocean at sixty miles off; the unsubstantial, clear marvel of it as if evoked by the act of a beautiful and pure magic, turned into a thing of horrors [...] Was this the fortune this vaporous and rare apparition had held for me in its hard heart, hidden within the shape as of fair dreams and mist? Was this my luck? (CSF, iv, 193-194)

Note the shift here from the more elevated concept of 'fortune' to merely 'luck' – a modulation mirroring the narrator's disillusionment. On coming to the island of the Pearl he has also found the girl of his dreams, but failed to gain her; and ultimately all else is supplanted by the unsavoury considerations of business and commerce. 'Unsavoury' is an especially apposite description in this case, as the disparity between reality and romance comes to be symbolized by the odour emanating from a glut of potatoes rotting on board ship: 'Whiffs from decaying potatoes pursued me on the poop, they mingled with my thoughts, with my food, poisoned my very dreams' (CSF, iv, 199-200). Potatoes upstage pearls; a foul smell succeeds the narrator's first fair vision of

³⁸ Joseph Conrad, *The Complete Short Fiction*, 4 vols, ed. by Samuel Hynes (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1992-1993; henceforth designated in the text as CSF), iv, 143.

³⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Ebb-Tide*, in *Tales of the South Seas: Island Landfalls; The Ebb-Tide; The Wrecker*, ed. by Jenni Calder, Canongate Classics, 72 (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1996), p. 73 (ch. 7). (Henceforth designated in the text as ET.)

the island; and his disaffection at the end is so complete that he resigns his ship's command and decides to go home in a more prosaic manner, 'as passenger by the Suez Canal' (*CSF*, iv, 203).

The theme of disillusionment is also predominant in Stevenson's two most searching accounts of South Sea exploration and exploitation, 'The Beach of Falesa' and *The Ebb-Tide* (the latter co-written by Lloyd Osbourne). It is a theme at odds with Stevenson's personal reaction to life in these islands, where so often his enthusiasm shines through – for example in the following picturesque description which amounts almost to a vision of perfection:

The mountains abruptly overhang the port with every variety of surface and of inclination, lawn, and cliff, and forest. Not one of these but wore its proper tint of saffron, of sulphur, of the dove, and of the rose [...] Meanwhile [...] along the beach men and women, lads and lasses, were returning from the bath in bright raiment, red and blue and green such as we delighted to see in the coloured pictures of our childhood.⁴⁰

The place appears exotic, beautifully and brightly coloured. However, when considering the wider context of Stevenson's island writings, we might pay closer attention to the explicit linking of this bewitching scene with childhood, a state of naivete where, if any part of the world can appear as a wonderland, there also remains the grim threat that time and experience will expose it to be a sham. At the very beginning of *The Ebb-Tide* this has already happened to the three men, Herrick, Huish and Davis, who are all said to be 'on the beach' (*ET*, p. 8 (ch. 1)). The phrase may have pleasurable connotations of wandering leisurely about on sun-kissed tropical shores but here it means that these men have reached the end of their resources. The South Seas, as is so often the case with Kipling's India, appear here as a trap.

⁴⁰ Robert Louis Stevenson, from 'The Marquesas', reprinted in *Island Landfalls*, pp. 41-42.

This feeling of entrapment is also conveyed at the end of ‘The Beach of Falesá’, with Wiltshire moored on his island with a native wife and half-caste children – unwilling to leave, yet also at the same time sounding reluctant to commit himself wholly in spirit to the place:

My public house? Not a bit of it, nor ever likely; I’m stuck here, I fancy; I don’t like to leave the kids you see; and there’s no use talking – they’re better here than what they would be in a white man’s country [...] there’s nobody thinks of half-castes less than I do; but they’re mine, and about all I’ve got; I can’t reconcile my mind to their taking up with Kanakas, and I’d like to know where I’m to find them whites?⁴¹

In this, the closing paragraph of his narrative, we see that Wiltshire remains the practical realist that he has been throughout the story: he would prefer to be back running his own establishment in England but he accepts that there is no likelihood of his ever returning. However, it is interesting to note that here it is England which becomes the subject of daydreams and fantasies (albeit wholly vain ones); and this is also true of *The Ebb-Tide*. Herrick for example, to pass the time, tells a tale of being magically transported to London, dressing it up like a scene from the *Arabian Nights* (*ET*, pp.13-15 (ch. 1)); while Davis cherishes what are actually very modest aspirations for himself and his family – in the unlikely event of his acquiring some measure of wealth – of securing a foothold in the respectability of English middle-class life. But due to the intensity of his longing these aspirations take on the quality of starry-eyed visions of splendour: ‘He was installed in a villa, semi-detached; the name, *Rosemore*, on the gateposts. In a chair on the gravel walk, he seemed to sit smoking a cigar, a blue ribbon in his buttonhole, victor over himself and circumstances, and the malignity of bankers’ (*ET*, p. 124 (ch. 11))

⁴¹ Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘The Beach of Falesá’, in *Island Landfalls*, pp. 163-232 (p. 232).

However the tone of this passage is undercut by the very next paragraph: ‘He aspired after the realization of these dreams, like a horse nickering for water’ (*ET*, p. 125 (ch. 11)). A kind of verbal puncturing does sometimes occur in this text. Consider, for instance, what happens in the following passage:

‘Shall I have sold my honour for nothing?’ [Herrick] thought; and a heat of rage and resolution glowed in his bosom – rage at his comrades and resolution to carry through this business if it might be carried; pluck profit out of shame, since the shame at least was now inevitable; and come home, home from South America – how did the song go? – ‘with his pockets full of money’. (*ET*, p. 47 (ch. 5))

Such sentiments are all very well but the rhythm of the ‘rage and resolution’ which sustain Herrick at this point is broken by the dash; in the next part of the sentence his determination to ‘pluck profit out of shame’ sounds praiseworthy but is rather dampened by the crisp observation which immediately follows that the ‘shame’ is ‘inevitable’. (It is worth bearing in mind however the view that Stevenson expresses elsewhere, that ‘Honour can survive a wound’ and that a man naturally goes on fighting even when all is lost.)⁴² And in the final clause there is again a break, interrupting the flow into ‘song’ and the image of the adventurer returning home having achieved riches and success at last.

In *The Ebb-Tide*, then, the three men are already at a dead end to begin with; and although they get the chance to move out further to Attwater’s island this does them little good. And in the description of their approach to this island, it seems at times as if they are moving without really getting anywhere: ‘the isle continued to unfold itself in joints, and to run out in indeterminate capes’ (*ET*, p. 74 (ch. 7)). And again: ‘the lagoon continued to expand its *empty* waters’ (*ET*, p.75 (ch. 7) emphasis added). These

⁴² Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas,’ in *Stevenson on Fiction*, pp. 117-125 (p. 124).

quotations serve to symbolize the general plight of these men – how all their movement and struggle, their reaching out for something better, is ultimately fruitless, leading precisely nowhere.

One can profitably compare the above with a remark from ‘A Smile of Fortune’, which echoes Thomas Hobbes: ‘the further one ventures the better one understands how everything in our life is common, short, and empty; that it is in seeking the unknown in our sensations that we discover how mediocre are our attempts and how soon defeated!’ (CSF, iv, 198). At this point the narrator is feeling jaded due to personal circumstances, and a touch of theatricality cannot be discounted. However, this observation sums up what Conrad often seemed to feel about the general human condition. In his island fiction, one of the most interesting variants on this theme is to be found in the figure of Heyst in *Victory* who flits aimlessly around a ring of islands in the Far East. It is true that at one point he does set out consciously to be a drifter, ‘altogether and literally, body and soul’⁴³ but the islands themselves also appear to be capable of casting a ‘spell’ over their inhabitants: ‘The islands are very quiet. One sees them lying about [...] in a great hush of silver and azure, where the sea without murmur meets the sky in a ring of magic stillness’ (V, p. 68 (Part ii ch 3)). Like Herrick, Huish, and Davis, Heyst is, in effect, trapped – a true ‘captive of [the] islands’ (V, p. 68 (Part ii ch. 3)).

v) Conrad and the end of the world

The idea of the enchanted island, or islands, is not uncommon in Conrad’s fiction; and it is often not just a case of deceptively fair appearances, such as that worn by the Island

⁴³ Joseph Conrad, *Victory* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, repr. 1985), p. 87 (Part ii, ch. 3). (Henceforth designated in the text as V.)

of the Pearl in 'A Smile of Fortune'. In *Victory*, certainly, a deeper force seems to be at work. Of course one might simply regard such 'enchantment' as the emblem of human inertia – if not quite physical, then certainly mental, in the case of Conrad's characters who have failed to take an efficient grasp on life and are thus rendered incapable of really 'getting on', like the seamen in the port described in an early chapter of *Lord Jim*: 'They were attuned to eternal peace of Eastern sky and sea [...] They shuddered at the thought of hard work [...] in their persons [...] could be detected the soft spot, the place of decay, the determination to lounge safely through existence'.⁴⁴ However, this is not to disregard the possibility that such inertia may well be engendered by external rather than by wholly internal causes. For these enchanted islands – the whole Far Eastern region – do often appear in Conrad to represent the end, or the edge, of the world in a physical sense; beyond, there is nothing but the incomprehensible Void.

One might also in this context consider examples from a writer like Buchan, who deals with the extremest regions of the north (rather than those of the east). These places, cold, blustery, and grey, are of a different hue from the languorous tropical realms which feature in Conrad's island (and African) fiction. But if Conrad often displays a sense of the Void in his fiction, then Buchan also at times seems to sense something of an emptiness in the far northerly regions of the world. For instance in his final novel, *Sick Heart River*, the Arctic waters present a terrifying anonymity to the dying Leithen on his final adventure in the Canadian wilds: 'It was like no ocean he had ever seen, for it seemed to be without form or reason [...] here the Demiurge had let this creative vigour slacken and ebb into nothingness'.⁴⁵

Then (closer to home) there is 'Skule Skerry':

⁴⁴ Joseph Conrad, *Lord Jim* (London: Dent, 1946, repr. 1948), p. 11 (ch. 2).

⁴⁵ John Buchan, *Sick Heart River*, in *The Leithen Stories: The Power-House; John Macnab; The Dancing Floor; Sick Heart River*, Canongate Classics, 93 (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2000), p. 52 (Part i, ch. 14). (Henceforth designated in the text as *SHR*.)

By some alchemy of nature, at which I could only guess, [Skule Skerry] was on the track by which the North exercised its spell, a cableway for the magnetism of that cruel frozen Uttermoest, which man might come to but could never subdue or understand [...] this isle was the edge of the world. Birds knew it, and the old Northmen who were primitive beings like the birds, knew it [...] The old Church knew it, and had planted a chapel to exorcise the demons of darkness.⁴⁶

However, in the extract from *Sick Heart River* there is at least still a sense of a demiurge, even if he may have withdrawn from his creation; while the passage from 'Skule Skerry' gives way to a standard form of the gothic, bringing to mind some passages in Stevenson's island tale 'The Merry Men', and also (to widen the net further) the work of nineteenth-century Norwegian author Jonas Lie, who often conjured up bleak northern shores and supernatural denizens of the sea in his writings.⁴⁷ The phrase 'demons of darkness' in particular opens the way for the appearance of a strange creature upon the island (although this turns out to be a wounded walrus).

Buchan, then, does not appear to endorse a sense of the true void. There is a passage in *The Ebb-Tide* though, which comes close to doing so, when Davis entertains a vague idea of putting out 'to sea at a venture' to maybe 'perish at the hands of cannibals on one of the more obscure Paumotus', as this would at least be a more fanciful end than 'rotting' away on board the stricken *Farallone* (ET, p. 117 (ch. 11)). But the prospect which is actually before him seems to admit of no further passage or escape into such notions. Contrary to the spirit of much romance down the ages, from *The Odyssey* to *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, there is actually no more hope of venturing, or ad-

⁴⁶ John Buchan, *The Runagates Club* (London: Nelson, 1930), p. 260. (Henceforth designated in the text as RC.)

⁴⁷ See, for example, Lie's story 'Elias and the Draug', collected in *Roald Dahl's Book of Ghost Stories* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985).

venturing, out to sea:

His eye moved swiftly over sea and sky in quest of any promise of wind, but the fountains of the Trade were empty. Where it had run yesterday and for weeks before, a roaring blue river charioting clouds, silence now reigned; and the whole height of the atmosphere stood balanced (the palms) drooped to their stable images in the lagoon like things carved of metal. (*ET*, pp. 117-118 (ch. 11))

There is an unmistakable feeling here of an invincible calm which aborts movement, stifles enterprise. It is a pretty scene, with sea and sky and palms, and some of the language – the ‘roaring blue river charioting clouds’ – is not far from great Romantic paeans like Shelley’s ‘Ode to the West Wind’. But it is deceptive. Even the palms themselves are described as being like ‘metal’ (and the idea of their images being ‘stable’ even in the water is a particularly effective touch) while the ‘promise’ of the wind too has faded into complete stillness, and, perhaps, emptiness.

This sense of an appalling calm is only ever hinted at, in *The Ebb-Tide*, but it is forcefully developed in Conrad’s work. Several of Conrad’s unfortunate characters seem to come literally face-to-face with the stillness which seems to mark the endpoint of all things – for instance Willems in *An Outcast of the Islands*:

he tried to find a promise of release in the vivid glitter of innumerable suns reflected by the running wavelets of the stream. The world seemed to end there [...]

He had a terrible vision of shadowless horizons where the blue sky and sea met; of a circular and blazing emptiness where a dead tree and a dead man drifted together endlessly, up and down, upon the brilliant undulations of the straits.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Joseph Conrad, *An Outcast of the Islands*, seventh edn (London: Fisher Unwin 1925) pp. 350-352 (Part vi, ch. 3).

Note the phrase, 'shadowless horizons': the prospect is all too horribly clear. The light of day appears more inimical as a rule than even the heart of darkness, in Conrad. Consider 'The Shadow-Line', that fine tale with its conscious echoes of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*; the 'impenetrable blackness' that at one point overhangs the ship at least exerts a certain fascination: 'it seemed that by thrusting one's hand over the [ship's] side one could touch some unearthly substance. There was in it an effect of inconceivable terror and of inexpressible mystery'.⁴⁹ This nightscape is terrifying but at least in retaining a sense of 'mystery' it leaves room for some manoeuvre of the mind if not the body, and as such is preferable to the kind of day-scene frequently found in Conrad's work which is dominated by a blazing, pitiless sun. There is, in the final analysis, nothing quite so appalling as a complete void, and this is what the glare of sunshine – tropical sunshine – in Conrad seems often to represent. And this extends to regions other than the Far East: consider 'An Outpost of Progress' where Kayerts and Carlier, 'the two pioneers of trade and progress' in the heart of Africa, sit day after day in 'their empty courtyard in the vibrating brilliance of vertical sunshine' (*CSF*, i, 43-44). There is no meaning in such a place: 'nothing [was] intelligible. Things appeared and disappeared before their eyes in an unconnected and aimless kind of way. The river seemed to come from nowhere and flow nowhither' *CSF*, i, 42-43).

Kayerts and Carlier are finally crushed by the inhuman wilderness that surrounds them, all the more emphatically because, as the narrative coldly and clinically makes clear, they have no unusual strength of character to begin with. (One might note that the terse style which Conrad employs in this story contrasts markedly with the more lyrical manner of *Heart of Darkness*, although the two stories deal with the same themes of colonial exploitation, violence, and madness in Africa.) Consider, too, the fate of Decoud in *Nostramo* who survives a night-time journey with the Capataz through the

⁴⁹ Joseph Conrad, *The Shadow-Line*, ed. by Jeremy Hawthorn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, repr. 1991) p. 108. (Henceforth designated in the text as *SL*.)

unceasing crushing blackness of the Placid Gulf only to finally succumb some days later, at sunrise, to 'the glory of merciless solitude'.⁵⁰ This soul-destroying emptiness robs the world of all meaning; in the above-quoted extract from *An Outcast of the Islands*, the image of the dead tree and dead man drifting together endlessly up and down, is almost Beckettian in its essential futility.

However, there is very definitely another side to Conrad. Although he often brings his characters to the brink of the void that sucks all vitality out of the world, he does not, or cannot, leave it at that. Instead he is frequently drawn back to the idea that perhaps there still remains a degree of mystery, rather than meaninglessness, at the heart of all things (as seen above in 'The Shadow-Line'). Cedric Watts speaks of Conrad as being the 'patron of janiform texts'⁵¹ while Samuel Hynes notes his 'repeated contradictions'. Hynes goes on:

For [the modern] world Conrad is the great, the perfect writer: not consoling, not moralizing, testifying to the world and man's unrest [...] Conrad's own unrest had its historical and biographical location: he belonged to his time, as every artist does. But his stories of unrest reach out beyond his moment in history, to reach us now, in our own restless time. They will move men and women while human restlessness goes on. (CSF, i, p. xx)

This is a sample of fairly standard Conrad criticism, but it is interesting to observe how many times Hynes draws on the concept of 'restlessness'. Conrad was indeed very

⁵⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Nostromo*, ed. by Martin Seymour-Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, repr. 1990) p. 415 (Part iii, ch. 9). *Nostromo* is an interesting variant on the Conrad texts previously considered in this chapter; in this novel, as F. R. Leavis notes, the void is to be found not in wild places but rather in the midst of a supposedly modern civilized state, with the consciousness of Decoud, the intellectual sceptic, appearing to 'permeate' the entire story, giving rise to a sense of not only the 'surrounding' but also 'underlying gulfs' of all human 'achievement'. See F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), p. 200. (Henceforth designated in the text as *GT*.)

⁵¹ Cedric Watts, *A Preface to Conrad* (London: Longman, 1982), p. 7.

restless, unable to finally settle in any one philosophical position; in a letter of October 14, 1899, he told Cunninghame Graham, 'I live in a perpetual state of intellectual funk'.⁵² This is one reason why his work has proved fertile ground for literary analysis. Critics over the years have painstakingly attempted to re-construct the terms of his philosophy (or lack of it). Some emphasize his political aspects, in view of the grim realities of his early years in a country suffering from a tyrannical imperial yoke (which has such devastating repercussions in his own family).⁵³ Others cite fairly obvious influences such as Darwinism or Schopenhauer⁵⁴ or – perhaps most interestingly of all – the new ideas that emerged in physics at the turn of the century, which form the basis of one of Conrad's letters to Edward Garnett (dated September 29, 1898).

The secret of the universe is in the existence of horizontal waves whose varied vibrations are at the bottom of all states of consciousness [...] the various vibrations of waves (electricity, heat, sound light, etc) [...] [gives] birth to our sensations – then emotions – then thought [...] there is no space, time, matter, mind as vulgarly understood, there is only the eternal something that waves and an eternal force that causes the waves – it's not much. (*CLC*, ii, 94-95)

It might be said that this scientifically-backed concept of the 'waves' is what Conrad imitates in many of his writings: the continuing oscillation of movement which however never leads anywhere, which is in its very nature non-progressive.

Waves are an appropriate image to use in relation to Conrad, considering his years spent at sea – that vast element which has frequently served mankind as a convenient symbol for the unknown. However in a work like *The Mirror of the Sea* he displays a strong tendency to anthropomorphose it; and, in fact, not only the sea but also the wind,

⁵² *Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ed. by Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1983-; henceforth designated in the text as *CLC*), ii: 1898-1902 (1983), 206.

⁵³ See, for example, Eloise Knapp Hay, *The Political Novels of Joseph Conrad: A Critical Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963)

⁵⁴ See, for example, Redmond O'Hanlon, *Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin: The Influence of Scientific Thought on Conrad's Fiction* (Edinburgh: The Salamander Press, 1984).

and ships, as well. This kind of thing would appear to have little in common with most modern, or modernist sensibilities; nowhere is Conrad's use of old romantic forms and ideas more clearly demonstrated. In *The Mirror of the Sea* he constructs a drama out of sea, wind and weather. Most memorable are the opposing characters assigned to the winds: the West Wind is volatile but magisterial while the East Wind, by contrast, is cool and crafty and murderous. The sinister calm of which Conrad is so often aware is portrayed here in terms of a villainous presence which could be straight out of any old adventure-tale: 'the thin lipped intruder [that] puts the impress of his cold and implacable spirit upon the sky and sea'.⁵⁵ And as with the east wind, so with the sea: And I looked upon the true sea – the sea that plays with men till their hearts are broken, and wears stout ships to death [...] To love it is not well' (*MS*, p. 182).

Conrad frequently inclines to the melodramatic mode; Martin Green labels his style 'highly operatic' and continues: 'people are presented in striking postures and gestures that are held unchanging over several pages and were very theatrical to begin with' (*DAE*, pp. 308-309). Allan Hunter says of his letters to Cunningham Graham that they are 'consciously self-dramatizing'.⁵⁶ But it may be that his 'dramatizing' is part of his predilection towards the old world of mystery and romance. And in *A Personal Record* (which like *The Mirror of the Sea* is autobiographical) the sea appears overall to be something that commands an almost religious faith, rather than a blind, uncaring void: 'the murmur of the great sea [...] must have somehow reached my inland cradle and entered my unconscious ear, like that formula of Mohammedan faith the Mussulman father whispers into the ear of his new born infant'.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea: Memories and Impressions*, fifth edn (London: Methuen, 1915), p. 116). (Henceforth designated in the text as *MS*.)

⁵⁶ Allan Hunter, *Joseph Conrad and the Ethics of Darwinism: The Challenges of Science* (London: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 12.

⁵⁷ Joseph Conrad, *A Personal Record* (London: Dent, 1919), p. 209 (ch. 6).

In the end, Conrad cannot decide, one way or the other. As Martin Green remarks, 'His ambivalence is total' (*DAE*, p. 316). If he feels the threat of nothingness, he also often hears a voice from the void. It may be no more than an indistinct 'murmur', but still, he hears it. This unlikely juxtaposition of 'voices' and the 'void' occurs most strikingly in 'Karain', one of his significantly-titled 'Tales of Unrest'. This story provides an intriguing instance of Conradian duality: here, instead of continually fluctuating between two opposite poles, as he often seems to do elsewhere, he appears to execute a sudden volte-face in the middle of the proceedings.

To begin with, the silence enveloping Karain's little kingdom is so complete that it is as if the place were somehow existing in its own vacuum:

looking at that place, landlocked from the sea and shut off from the land by the precipitous slopes of mountains, it was difficult to believe in the existence of any neighbourhood. It was still, complete, unknown, and full of life that went on stealthily with a troubling effect of solitude; of a life that seemed unaccountably empty [...] It appeared to us a land without memories, regrets, and hopes; a land where nothing could survive the coming of the night, and where each sunrise, like a dazzling act of special creation, was disconnected from the eve and the morrow. (*CSF*, i, 63)

Again, human sound and movement is lost, 'stifled' in sunshine: 'Nothing moved. The sun blazed down into a shadowless hollow of colours and stillness' (*CSF*, i, 64). In fact, the place has all the characteristics, the 'suspicious immobility of a painted scene' (*CSF*, i, 65).

And yet, into this impasse, this almost unbearable quiescence, Conrad introduces, quite unexpectedly, the sense of 'a silent tumult of contending shades' (*CSF*, i, 65) surrounding Karain's domain. This phrase is ambiguous, but extremely significant as it

conveys the idea that the stillness *can* be filled, and indeed *is* filled, with something – intangible certainly, but there. Up till this point, there has really been nothing to suggest that the void is anything other *but* a void. Now, it suddenly appears to take on more ghostly properties.

Conrad famously disavowed all belief in the supernatural in his note to a 1920 edition of ‘The Shadow-Line’, declaring that life itself was mysterious enough to be deemed ‘an enchanted state’ (*SL*, pp. xxxvii). However, it seems he could not dispense with phantoms altogether. And the change comes as a preliminary to Karain’s revelation that he is being pursued by a spectral voice. He comes to the white men for sanctuary, maintaining that their ‘unbelief’ drives the spirits away (*CSF*, i, 77, 90).

Of course the narrator and his companions are seen to remain aloof from such superstitions; Hollis remarks, with an inevitable touch of condescension, that ‘These Malays are easily impressed – all nerves, you know’ (*CSF*, i, 93). But even so Karain, when he arrives to tell his tale, appears, unconsciously, to cast an eerie influence over them: ‘he had the power of the possessed – the power to awaken in the beholders wonder, pain, pity, and a fearful near sense of things invisible, of things dark and mute, that surround the loneliness of mankind’ (*CSF*, i, 76). Karain, like Brown in *Lord Jim*, appears to exert a sinister influence. The low hypnotic tones of his voice affect his listeners, so much so in fact that when Hollis opens the box of white men’s charms with which to beguile the distraught chieftain, his fellow whites also fall under the spell: ‘when Hollis threw open the lid of the box his eyes flew to it – and so did ours. The quilted crimson satin of the inside put a violent patch of colour into the sombre atmosphere – it was something positive to look at – it was fascinating’ (*CSF*, i, 92).

Hollis’s actions initially appear to have something of a *Boy’s Own*-ish flavour – the superior white man duping a gullible native with his box of tricks – but this impression is not sustained. Consider the following:

Amulets of white men! Charms and talismans! Charms that keep them straight, that drive them crooked, that have the power to make a young man sigh, or an old man smile. Potent things that procure dreams of joy, thoughts of regret; that soften hard hearts and can temper a soft one to the hardness of steel. Gifts of heaven – things of earth. (*CSF*, i, 93)

The opening exclamations here might conceivably be spoken with a scoff in the tone; but thereafter the passage moves into more lyrical mode. The motley collection of objects produced by Hollis are seen to wield a very real, emotional power – ‘gifts of heaven, things of earth’ – and so the words trail off into what one feels to be an eloquent, rather than an empty, silence.

These charms help to put to rest the one voice that torments Karain, but they also raise a whole host of others. Now, the air seems full of a noiseless activity:

the cabin [...] was becoming filled with a stir invisible and living as of subtle breaths. All the ghosts driven out of the unbelieving West by men who pretend to be wise and alone and at peace – all the homeless ghosts of an unbelieving world – appeared suddenly round the figure of Hollis bending over the box; all the exiled and charming shades of loved women; all the beautiful and tender ghosts of ideals, remembered, forgotten, cherished, execrated; all the cast out and reproachful ghosts of friends admired, trusted, traduced, betrayed, left dead by the way – they all seemed to come from the inhospitable regions of the earth to crowd into the gloomy cabin, as though it had been a refuge and, in all the unbelieving world, the only place of avenging belief. (*CSF*, i, 93-94)

Admittedly, this feeling lasts only a ‘second’ (*CSF*, i, 94) or so the narrator says. But it seems as if something has shifted; that a crack has appeared in the wall of silence, and also in the fortress of the white men’s ‘unbelief’. A comparison of two descriptions of the bay and its surroundings, one of which occurs prior and one subsequent to the central event of Karain’s talismanic ‘cure’, illustrates this. In the first, it appears as a harsh and ‘bottomless pit of intense light’ (*CSF*, i, 64); but in the second a

transformation has taken place: there has been a softening of attitude, with the sky now said to be of a '*tender* blue', bathing the whole scene in the '*caress* of its light' (CSF, i, 96, emphasis added). Not only this: the silence too is dissolved as the cries of Karain's followers – triumphant human sounds – fill the air. 'The boats far off took up the cry of greeting; a great clamour rolled on the water; the hills echoed it' (CSF, i, 96). At last the whole bay seems to be 'waking up' (CSF, i, 97).

'Karain' can be usefully compared with another of Conrad's Tales of Unrest, 'The Lagoon'. Here again we are given what appears to be a realm unto itself – the lagoon and its immediate environs – which appear so deadly calm that it is described as being 'a land from which even the '*memory* of motion' has 'forever departed' (CSF, i, 24, emphasis added). However, as in 'Karain', when night falls, Arsat begins to tell his story (these two things – darkness and the murmur of the storyteller's voice – often go together in Conrad, Marlow upon the darkening Thames in *Heart of Darkness* being the best known example). And again, as he talks, a change creeps in: 'the earth enfolded in the starlight peace became a shadowy country of inhuman strife, a battlefield of phantoms terrible and charming, august or ignoble, struggling ardently for the possession of our helpless hearts' (CSF, i, 29). Here, once more, 'phantoms' begin to encroach upon the scene (and we recall that at the beginning of the tale, the lagoon is said to have a 'ghostly reputation' among the natives (CSF, i, 26). In fact it becomes a whole 'shadowy [...] mysterious country' of all these ghosts of 'inextinguishable desires and fears' (CSF, i, 29). The word 'inextinguishable' is telling, as it lends a rather odd air of permanency to these phantoms, which are not 'homeless', as in 'Karain'. They do not come crowding in from outside from 'inhospitable regions'; instead, it is as if this *is* their region, this 'mysterious country' which the world of the lagoon becomes after nightfall and under the spellbinding tones of the storyteller.

But, unlike 'Karain', it seems as if this effect does not survive the coming of day and the onset of 'merciless sunshine' in which only the sound of 'unconscious' life thrives and which renders the darkness of human sorrow 'dumb' (*CSF*, i, 36). In fact this ghostly effect fades even before the night is over, when the white mist breaks up 'into 'thin flying wreaths' leaving the lagoon 'polished and black, in the heavy shadows and the foot of the wall of trees' (*CSF*, i, 35). Here, it seems that the wall does not crack, and the awful stillness is resumed. Yet the final image is that of Arsat, positioned towards the darkness: 'He stood lonely in the searching sunshine; and he looked beyond the great light of a cloudless day into the darkness of a world of illusions' (*CSF*, i, 37).

Illusions are all they may be, in the end, but in both 'Karain' and 'The Lagoon' a whole army of phantoms is certainly summoned. Conrad may feel that there is nothing more to be done with them; he may suspect that there is no room in the modern world for any kind of idealism, that the only thing left to do is to face resignedly up to the grimness of life's daily round. However, although he may have arrived at the end of the world, to peer fearfully over into the gulf, it seems that the edge is still rather a tantalizing place to be; he can still dream that something does exist, in the great beyond.

Chapter Two

i) Haggard: a re-appraisal

In the previous chapter, we have noted how imperial British expansion of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided an opportunity, and a ready market, for tales of adventure which helped foster a revival of romance writing. We have also seen, however, that the romantic concept of imperial adventure, although received enthusiastically by the likes of Buchan, was undercut by writers like Kipling and Conrad. The latter in particular has been regarded as a prime subverter of imperialism in his fiction, for example in *Heart of Darkness* with its depiction of European crimes in the Congo and its central image of Kurtz going native. Therefore, although recognized as working within the formulas of imperial romance Conrad is often seen to rise above the simplistic plots, characters, and ideals normally attributed to this branch of fiction.¹

Of course, Conrad too has had his detractors, a well-known example being Chinua Achebe who denounced him as a racist.² Others meanwhile have pointed up more purely literary shortcomings in his work, like F. R. Leavis who criticizes *Heart of Darkness* for its often extravagantly romantic style, borrowed 'from the arts of the magazine-writer'³ (GT, p. 180). However, in the case of a writer like Haggard, one of the most consciously 'exotic' of all writers of the period, a balanced approach has not

¹ See, for example, Linda Dryden, *Joseph Conrad and the Imperial Romance* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000). See also Andrea White, *Joseph Conrad and the Adventure Tradition: Constructing and Deconstructing the Imperial Subject* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). (Henceforth designated in the text as CAT.)

² Chinua Achebe, 'An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*', in *Heart of Darkness*, ed. by Robert Kimbrough, third edn (New York: Norton, 1988), pp. 251-262.

³ Elaborating upon the point made here by Leavis, Bart Westerweel discusses the measure of Conrad's literary indebtedness to the likes of Haggard in his article 'Rider Haggard's *Heart of Darkness*', in *Exhibited by Candlelight: Sources and Developments in the Gothic Tradition* ed. by Valeria Tinkler-Villani and Peter Davidson, *Studies in Literature*, 16 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 255-270.

often been evident. Haggard is all too often seen as exemplifying every one of the failings of the typical imperial adventure tale – and not very much else.

Haggard is still remembered first and foremost as a man who was in the business of empire; and this factor seems to cloud the judgement of many of his critics. For example Wendy Katz expatiates at some length upon his spiritualism, yet still insists on marrying this aspect of his life to the ideology of imperialism which she sees as being dominant throughout his work (*HFE*, pp. 108-130). Other critics, however, have recognized that he is maybe not so straightforward a case after all. One biographer, Peter Berresford Ellis, acknowledges the 'contradiction' embodied in his life and work, between the service that he rendered to Empire and the concerns which he often expressed about the imperial enterprise in his writings (*HVI*, p. 7) (although Ellis adds rather deprecatingly that he was maybe not aware of this contradiction himself.) There is also Alan Sandison who speaks of the 'tensions' within Haggard's writing;⁴ and Sandison remains one of the relatively few critics who are prepared to admit that imperialism was not necessarily the be-all and end-all as far as Haggard was concerned.

It is enough for most however that Haggard, a member of the English landed gentry, was for a number of years closely involved with the process of colonial settlement in Africa and in fact helped run up the British flag over the Transvaal after it was annexed in 1877. Consequently his literary output has often fallen under the purview of post-

⁴ Alan Sandison, *The Wheel of Empire: A Study of the Imperial Idea in Some Late Nineteenth-Century and early Twentieth-Century Fiction* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. vii.

colonialist criticism,⁵ which of course is often allied to feminism in its exploration of themes of oppression, exploitation, and imperial/ masculine power (and the perceived threats to this power).⁶ But while this is a valid approach, it seldom seems to allow for proper recognition of certain elements in Haggard's work, which are better served by leaving political and imperialist considerations largely to one side. Haggard may not have been a great writer; but if one takes romance-writing seriously at all, there is much in his work that is of lasting interest.

In the first instance, it is important to remember how not a few of Haggard's contemporaries lauded him for helping to revive a genre that appeared to have been somnolent in recent years in the face of the literary 'realism' which peaked in the mid-Victorian age. Lang, for instance, wrote an enthusiastic (if not particularly accomplished) set of dedicatory verses in which he paid tribute to Haggard, and to Stevenson before him, for putting romance back on the literary map, ending with the ringing proclamation that 'King Romance is come indeed!'⁷ Lang of course was bound to be, if anything, over-enthusiastic, siding so firmly as he always did with the 'catawumpus' of Romance as opposed to the 'crocodile' of Realism.⁸ But he helps serve as a barometer to gauge some of the attitudes of his time. If Haggard had many detractors – like George Moore, who caustically remarked that although 'he may be made a knight or a lord' he would never achieve any measure of 'literary esteem'⁹ – then he also had admirers, like Lang, for propagating the cause of full-blooded,

⁵ See, for example, Wendy Katz, *Rider Haggard and the Fiction of Empire*; also Linda Dryden who makes numerous references to Haggard throughout her book *Conrad and the Imperial Romance*.

⁶ Feminist interpretations of Haggard's work include Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1988-1994) ii: *Sexchanges* (1989), ch. 1 (pp.3-46).

⁷ Quoted in *A Voice From the Infinite*, p. 119.

⁸ See *Rudyard Kipling to Rider Haggard: The Record of A Friendship*, ed. by Morten Cohen (London: Hutchinson, 1965), p. 15. (Henceforth designated in the text as *KHF*.)

⁹ Quoted in D. S. Higgins, *Rider Haggard: The Great Storyteller* (London: Cassell, 1981; henceforth designated in the text as *HGS*), pp. 112-113.

adventurous, story-telling. If Stevenson had begun it all, Haggard carried it on.

ii) Failing and fallen empires

Few readers however – either in Haggard's time or since – have picked up on the feeling, often present in Haggard's work, that even as he is 'blazoning' forth the banner of romance, this is something which cannot ultimately be sustained. On the simplest level, this goes back to his melancholic temperament, his sense of the transience of things, the passing of nations and empires. No one in this period creates, or re-creates from history, world after world as insistently as does Haggard; but the splendours of the empires and civilizations which he portrays appear at odds with life as it really is, certainly in the modern age. And in many cases the worlds which he evokes have already long been consigned to dust and he is left to conjure up (with varying success) something of their former grandeur.¹⁰

As far as musing over fallen greatness is concerned, Haggard begins at home. Although he spent considerable time abroad, he was also much preoccupied with domestic rural issues and produced several books on agriculture, including *Rural England*, from which the following extract is taken.

The Englishmen of the past were land-dwellers, and their deeds are written large in history. If through the neglect or indifference of this age they are to become city-dwellers, what will the history of coming centuries have to tell of them?

Few study these dull, slow-fruited problems, and theirs are but voices crying in the wilderness which echo slowly into emptiness and silence. Well, if so, so it must be. Yet it is sad to see the tide of ruin

¹⁰ For more on lost worlds and lost civilizations as a literary theme, see, for example, Samuel H. Vasbinder, 'Aspects of Fantasy in Literary Myths about Lost Civilizations', in *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*, ed. by Roger C. Schlobin (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press; Brighton: Harvester, 1982).

creeping over so much of the land of England.¹¹

Haggard, having exhaustively analyzed the sorry state of modern English agriculture in this vast work, is left to bemoan the decline of what he at least is convinced was a formerly great nation. For others it may be a 'dull' matter, but for him it is a fitting subject for elegy. To this end he employs a clichéd Biblical phrase – 'voices crying in the wilderness' – in a quite effective (if also unbiblical) manner, conveying the sense of these voices slowly fading away, unheard.

However, Haggard is not only keening a lament for past glories: he is also concerned with pressing home the urgency of the situation, as like many of his contemporaries he was extremely anxious about his country's potential weaknesses in the case of a European war. Such worries were manifested in a spate of 'invasion' novels in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and tied in with fears of race degeneration, sparked by such factors as the continuing growth of cities and urban slums which were seen as breeding grounds for weak, unmanly individuals.¹² (This fear of the effects of living in a modern urban environment is amply evident in the above quote from *Rural England*, as Haggard frets over the gradual transformation of the English people from 'land' to 'city-dwellers'). And the worrying parallel with ancient Rome was never far from English minds in this period (as is evident for instance in the case of Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the Scout movement);¹³ and altogether the Romantic practice of meditating over dead empires (for example in Shelley's 'Ozymandias') appeared to take on an altogether new and awful relevance to the state of England itself.

¹¹ Rider Haggard, *Rural England*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1902), ii, 553.

¹² For a summing-up of these prevailing fears at the turn of the twentieth century, see John Batchelor, *The Edwardian Novelists* (London: Duckworth, 1982), pp. 5-8.

¹³ As noted by, for example, Linda Dryden in *Conrad and the Imperial Romance*, p. 33.

Haggard's friend Kipling was also much concerned with the possible fate of England and Empire around this time, as witness the solemn pronouncements of 'Recessional' which acted as something of a check upon Diamond Jubilee celebrations, and then, following the dismal and dishonourable spectacle of the Boer War, the more savage invective of poems like 'The Lesson' and 'The Islanders'. One can also draw attention to two Kipling stories from the 1904 collection *Traffics and Discoveries*: 'The Army of a Dream' outlining plans for improved British military training, and 'Below the Mill Dam' with its satirical portrayal of Arthur Balfour as the idly complacent Grey Cat.

Haggard was less inclined by temperament to be as strident as Kipling in 'The Islanders', but the exigencies of the situation concerned him no less. Therefore in *Rural England* he is undoubtedly being as patriotic as a Henry Newbolt; his anxiety over the future of a nation is clearly spelt out. However, in much of his fiction he has no such concerns; he simply laments over once-glorious, and long-fallen, states, like Kor in *She*.

How beautiful it was, and yet how drear! We did not dare speak aloud. Ayesha herself was awed in the presence of an antiquity compared to which even her length of days was but a little thing [...] Bright fell the moonlight on pillar and court and shattered wall, hiding all their rents and imperfections in its silver garment, and clothing their hoar majesty with the peculiar glory of the night. It was a wonderful sight to see the full moon looking down on the ruined face of Kor. It was a wonderful thing to think for how many thousands of years the dead orb above and the dead city below had gazed thus upon each other, and in the utter solitude of space poured forth each to each the tale of their lost life and long-departed glory.¹⁴

Haggard here attempts to capture something of the essence of an age so long past that even a woman some two thousand years old is overwhelmed by it. Despite the overbearing patches of purple prose, he succeeds in making his point effectively with his use of the moon image. This is not in the sense of having the whole scene bathed in

¹⁴ Rider Haggard, *She*, ed. by Daniel Karlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.263 (ch. 23). (Henceforth designated in the text as *S*.)

its ghostly radiance (a standard and over-used ploy) but through his depiction of it as being a 'dead orb' in itself, hinting at its 'lost life and long-departed glory' and therefore evoking (if only dimly) things lost even further back in time than Kor, and displaced across the gulf of space.

iii) Pitfalls and the flickering flame: *She*

The passage quoted above, in which Holly and his companions Leo and Job stand and view the still-majestic remnants of a once mighty empire, is indicative of only one level at which the concept of a 'lost world' applies to *She*. The whole world of the Amahagger, which leads directly onto the House of She, the ruins of Kor, and the cave of the Flame of Life, is presented as one that is, to all intents and purposes, cut off from the world at large. Brian V. Street has remarked that 'The approach to [Haggard's] inland paradises is always along devious, hidden routes'¹⁵ (although of course the land of the Amahagger hardly qualifies as a paradise). Holly, Leo and Job manage to penetrate into this world, but their journey reveals how difficult it can be. To begin with they have to traverse a 'region of eternal swamp' (*S*, p. 76 (ch. 6)) and then encounter a succession of features like cup-shaped hills, huge plains, and yet more quagmire, before finally reaching the abode of the mysterious She, in the 'bowels' of a forbidding mountain (*S*, p. 129 (ch. 11)), travelling blindfold so that they might not learn of the secret way that leads there, into 'the dead heart of the rock' (*S*, p.130 (ch.11)).

Subterranean journeyings are a significant element of Haggard's work as a whole, as Graham Greene acknowledges.

¹⁵ Brian V. Street, *The Savage in Literature: Representations of 'Primitive' Society in English Fiction 1858-1920* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 122.

The poetic element in Haggard's work breaks out when the control fades. Because the hidden man was so imprisoned, when he does emerge from the tomb, it is against enormous pressure and the effect is one of horror, a risen Lazarus – next time he must be buried deeper. Perhaps that is why some of his early readers found his work obscene.¹⁶

This passage clearly draws upon Freudian notions of the hidden/repressed self – although Greene utilizes the kind of language that Haggard himself often does, the imagery of the 'tomb' rather than the classic terminology of psychoanalysis. Similarly, in more recent times Robert Fraser has remarked that *She* 'flows like lava from subterranean depths which the imperialist in him could not, and perhaps would not, control' (*VQR*, p.46). Such comments may appear hyperbolic but they demonstrate the impact that *She* has had on readers and critics over the years. Haggard in this novel might have been articulating turn-of-the-century anxieties, particularly male anxieties, over such facts as the emergence of the New Woman;¹⁷ but the general consensus remains that he also succeeded in genuinely tapping into something deeper than this.

In his depictions of underground vaults, burial chambers and corpses, Haggard invites comparisons with the likes of Poe; the subterranean journeyings also recall isolated precedents in the adventure-story vein like Verne's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. Not that Haggard, in *She*, really makes a point (as do Verne's heroes) of descending straight down, to almost unimaginable depths; the movement is horizontal rather than vertical. But once inside the realms of *She*, it seems hard to escape. One might even say that Holly and Leo's arduous attempts to navigate their way back out again (following Ayesha's annihilation) symbolizes their efforts – theirs and Haggard's own – to extricate themselves from what Haggard once termed the 'terrors and pitfalls' of the

¹⁶ Graham Greene, 'Rider Haggard's Secret', in *Collected Essays* (London: Lane, 1969; henceforth designated in the text as *CEG*), pp. 209-214 (p. 210).

¹⁷ As is the opinion of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, for example. See *Sexchanges*, p. 21.

imagination.¹⁸ It is imaginative curiosity, pricked initially by Holly's furtive midnight visitor in his rooms at Cambridge, which has led him and Leo thus far; Ayesha herself states that she rules an 'empire of the imagination' (*S*, p. 175 (ch. 15)). And it is, of course, Haggard's own imagination that has fashioned the entire set-up; and he leaves his heroes for a time trapped beneath it.

On the face of it, there seems to be no irresistible movement into this fantastic realm, as in, for example, in *Allan Quatermain* where the travellers are pulled in towards Zuvendis on the current of a fast-flowing underground river; no feeling (to invoke Poe once again) of 'descending into the maelstrom'. Yet there is in some measure a sense of being sucked in (although not, strictly speaking, 'into the depths'). Patrick Brantlinger has talked of Haggard's 'visceral' fantasies of being swallowed by the dark places of the earth; in this same discussion he also discusses the wildly 'fantastic' and 'gothic' elements in Haggard's stories which he says veer 'towards dreams and the subliminal reaches of the mind' (*RD*, p. 245). All of those adjectives, 'visceral', the 'gothic fantastic', 'subliminal', and most of all the idea of being swallowed up in dark places, would seem to apply to *She*.

Much of this is due to the power of Ayesha herself. Holly and Leo often appear to be helplessly in thrall to her – Holly comments that they are 'like confirmed opium eaters' in this respect (*S*, p.242 (ch. 21)) – and after her death they appear for a time to sink into a kind of lethargy: 'We rarely spoke, our hearts were too heavy for speech, we simply stumbled about, falling sometimes and cutting ourselves, in a rather dogged sort of way. The fact was that our spirits were utterly crushed, and we did not greatly care what happened to us' (*S*, p. 301 (ch. 23)). It is almost as if they have reached one of the 'pitfalls' of the imagination. But in making the giant leap back over the chasm they

¹⁸ In the Dedication which appears in the 1902 novel, *The Brethren* [online]. Available: <http://ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext01/brthn10.txt>.

finally leave behind the allure of Ayesha and her 'empire of the imagination', and return to more everyday affairs – at least for a time, before the next, Tibetan, adventure, as referred to in the Introduction (S, pp.4-5).

However, Haggard continues to exhibit a fascination with gloomy subterranean regions which host the remains of lost civilizations, treasures and tombs, all the way through to *When the World Shook* (1919). This is a fairly preposterous tale, although in a diary entry of March 30, 1917, Haggard noted with approval that Kipling liked it, being a man of 'imagination' and 'vision' and thus able to appreciate that 'Romance may be the vehicle of much that is not apparent to the casual reader'.¹⁹ It is a variation on the Atlantis theme, with its depiction of a sunken civilization which once ruled the world, a civilization vastly superior in every sense, boasting not only awe-inspiring palaces and temples but also refinements in telepathy and air-travel. And the reasons for its demise are explained in terms of its leader Oro's power to change the very balance of the globe – a drastic measure to which he resorted in order to confound his enemies, thus causing the submerging of the whole ancient world.

The narrator, Arbuthnot, and his two companions first encounter Oro, and his daughter Yva, in underground tombs, in a self-induced sleep which apparently has lasted for two hundred and fifty thousand years; but on waking Oro plans to change the axis of the earth back again, which will result in the obliteration of the modern world and bring back (as Oro hopes) the lost world of his kingship. If Yva is equal to Ayesha in her feminine beauty and grace, then her father is more than Ayesha's match in his cruel determination and ambition (just as the gyroscope in the heart of the earth – described as a 'fire-mountain'²⁰ – is obviously envisaged by Haggard as being even more splendid and terrible than the Flame of Life).

¹⁹ Extract from Haggard's diary, quoted in *The Record of a Friendship*, p. 94.

²⁰ Rider Haggard, *When the World Shook* [online]. Available: <http://ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext98/wtwwsh10.txt>; ch. 25. (Henceforth designated in the text as *WWS*.)

However, Oro's schemes fail (thwarted at the last moment by the self-sacrificing Yva). Haggard thus acknowledges that the modern world will continue; that the lost worlds of antiquity are not to be resurrected wholesale. In view of this, Arbuthnot's and his companions' state of mind as they leave the scene of their adventures – 'sore at heart because of all we had found and lost again' (*WWS*, ch. 26) – might be construed as being rather more poignant than appears at first glance. Haggard engineers the whole story rather clumsily, but the basic premise is the same as in *She*: the past can be mourned but not reclaimed. Oro's plans likewise fail to come to fruition; he is not destined to emerge into the mainstream, just as the centuries-old hopes of the imperious She are snuffed out, although one might catch a whiff of immortality from her vaults.

And 'whiff' of immortality seems right – for, in spite of the climactic moment of the three adventurers attaining to the place of the Flame, there is, overall, a fitful quality in *She*, less a sense of seeing clearly than of merely catching a 'glimpse of the possibilities of life' (*S*, p. 244 (ch. 21)). Broadly speaking, this arises from the intersection of two differing elements throughout: the presence of Ayesha, a paragon of feminine beauty and grace, with her exalted notions of everlasting love, against the grim background of the Amahagger and the dark strain of necrology that runs throughout the story²¹ (as well as the spectacle of the perfectly-preserved Kallikrates there are scenes of burning bodies among the Amahagger and Billali's story, related in Chapter 9, of a beautiful female corpse with whom he fell in love). But also, if one takes extra-textual factors into account, this flickering quality may be taken as a reflection of Haggard's rather unsystematic set of beliefs about the nature of existence and the world.

Like not a few of his contemporaries, without officially spurning orthodox Christianity Haggard had (certainly he often expressed) rather a rag-bag of philosophies generally of a spiritual/psychical colouring. These ranged from his belief (which seems largely to

²¹ This duality in *She* has often been recognized, for example by Bart Westerweel (see note 3, above) who comments on its 'strange mixture of high idealism and low impurities' (*Exhibited by Candlelight*, p. 262).

have resulted from a vivid dream about the death of a pet dog) in the essential 'oneness' of all animal life including man (*HVI*, p. 169) to a hazy concept of 'the Eternal War between the Flesh and the Spirit' and the 'initial separation from God' and 'the slow upward climb through the ages' back to rejoin the 'Divinity'.²² Most of all, though, Haggard adhered to a vague belief in 'Love Eternal' (to quote the title of one of his novels, first published in 1918) and concomitantly in some form of reincarnation, and claimed in 1923 to have converted Kipling to a similar point of view.²³ (Kipling had in fact used the theme many years before for 'The Finest Story in the World', from the 1893 collection *Many Inventions*; it is also hinted at in the story 'Wireless', from *Traffics and Discoveries*.)

Such ideas stemmed from the general receptiveness of the age to eastern religions and mysticism, and to all forms of the occult; and a willingness to forge new beliefs from many different sources was much in evidence.²⁴ Theosophy is a case in point. The Theosophists' central doctrine of reincarnation, in the sense of a gradual human perfection attained through a series of rebirths, could be linked to 'ancient occult traditions leading back to Pythagoras, the philosophic and religious teachings of the great Eastern faiths [...] or the impact of evolution on contemporary thought' (*OW*, p. 169). Clearly, Haggard's vague idea of the 'slow upward climb through the ages' had some affinity with Theosophy; and also with the 'eternally progressive future' as envisaged by at least one branch of the Spiritualists (*OW*, p. 94). However, his interest in reincarnation seems largely to have been (or to have become) the obverse of a fascination with death, stimulated by the opening up of Ancient Egyptian tombs. Haggard was intrigued by Ancient Egypt, as Morton Cohen observes (*KHF*, pp. 76-77);

²² Extract from Haggard's diary, quoted in *Record of a Friendship*, p. 125.

²³ See extract from Haggard's diary, quoted in *Record of a Friendship*, p. 122.

²⁴ For a full discussion of this particular cultural phenomenon, see Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). (Henceforth designated in the text as *OW*.)

he visited many of its newly-excavated sites, used its history and culture as the basis for several novels and wrote in rather fulsome terms of the supposed unmatched wisdom of its ancient people 'who in these latter days arise from their holy tombs to instruct us in the tenets of love and faith'.²⁵

Of course Haggard was far from being alone in such interests, as the discovery of the Rosetta Stone and the subsequent deciphering of Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs ensured that the work of Egyptologists remained high-profile all throughout the nineteenth century and beyond.²⁶ And the unearthing of the preserved remains of kings, queens, and priests thousands of years old naturally led to literary engagement with themes of bodily resurrection, reincarnation or (at the very least) re-animation. This ranged from Poe's dryly comic treatment in 'Some Words with a Mummy' through to pieces by Conan Doyle, 'Lot 249'²⁷ and 'The Ring of Thoth'.²⁸ 'Lot 249' features a mummy which is revived purely in the mechanical sense, and solely for the purpose of carrying out its villainous master's demands, while 'The Ring of Thoth' is more conspicuously 'Haggardian', dealing as it does with the idea of love surviving down the ages. These two stories neatly illustrate the two main diverging paths that interest in the subject could, and did, take; and Haggard draws both on its obvious gothic potential as well as on more august notions of prolonging life, and even more love, over the centuries, in *She*.

But, in the end, Haggard really only offers a tantalizing 'glimpse', as Holly says. This is entirely in keeping with his own lack of a truly coherent philosophical system, his uncertain beliefs in the face of the darkness of what might finally be termed his

²⁵ In the Dedication which appears in his 1918 novel *Morning Star* [online]. Available: <http://ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext01/mstar10.txt>.

²⁶ For background information see, for example, John David Wortham, *British Egyptology 1549-1906* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1971).

²⁷ From the 1894 collection *Round the Red Lamp: Being Facts and Fancies of Medical Life* (London: Methuen, 1894).

²⁸ In *The Captain of the Polestar and Other Tales* (London: Longmans, Green, 1890).

agnosticism. In Kipling's 'Wireless', the signals from the past, another dimension, are scrambled up by those coming through from the world of everyday; but at least they do break through for a time. In *She*, by contrast, although Holly and Leo can carry the memory of their singular experiences back with them to England, Haggard effectively leaves all secrets of the dead buried with the dead. Ayesha's dominions remain closed off, inaccessible to the outer world – the path to the Place of Life is said to be 'hermetically' sealed up by a fall of rock, at the end (*S*, p. 305 (ch. 27)) – for as Holly explains, with a touch of conventional morality:

Ayesha locked up in her tomb waiting from age to age for the coming of her lover worked but a small change in the order of the World. But Ayesha strong and happy in her love, clothed in immortal youth and goddess beauty, and the wisdom of the centuries, would have revolutionized society, and even perchance have changed the destiny of Mankind. Thus she opposed herself against the eternal law, and, strong though she was, by it was swept back to nothingness – swept back with shame and hideous mockery! (*S*, p. 295 (ch. 26))

As the cognizant young Bengali scholar Grish Chunder observes, in 'The Finest Story in the World', 'the door is shut'.²⁹ The 'finest story', composed of memories of past lives which unconsciously inspire the young writer Charlie Mears cannot finally be told. Similarly, although she is certainly revived for a sequel (the generally poorly-received *Ayesha: The Return of She* in 1905), Ayesha in her audacious defiance of time cannot be allowed to impact upon the world at large. But maybe this is due less to Haggard's sense of an affront to 'eternal law' than simply to his own resigned feeling that the romance which she embodies, with its suggestive mixture of the strange, the terrible, and the exalted, can have really nothing to do with the ordinary world.

²⁹ Rudyard Kipling, *Many Inventions*, uniform edn (London: Macmillan, 1893; repr. 1916), p. 122.

iv) Frozen in time: *King Solomon's Mines*

King Solomon's Mines, Haggard's first notable literary exploit, comes to espouse much the same position concerning the world of romance as does *She*. At first glance, this claim might appear questionable, as, along with *Treasure Island*, *King Solomon's Mines* was, in the most obvious sense, one of the foremost trailblazers of romance and adventure of its time (helped by the advertising blitz launched by its original publishers, Cassells). But although it is generally regarded as being more straightforwardly untaxing juvenile fare than either *She* or *Treasure Island*, it can be argued that it contains a subtext concerning the nature of romance and its place, or rather lack of it, in the modern world.

Like the realms of *She*, Kukuanaland in *King Solomon's Mines* is very much closed off from the outer world. Haggard emphasizes the sufferings and hardships that Quatermain and his companions have to endure before finally gaining access to Kukuanaland – circled in by mountains on no less than three sides – and all its wonders. However, rather than Kukuanaland itself it is the actual mines that exert the most fascination. Situated at the end of the great 'Solomon's Road', and beyond the awesome giant effigies known as the 'Silent Ones', these mines are steeped in a chilling stillness and silence – as C. S. Lewis has testified in his essay, 'On Stories', when comparing a film version unfavourably with Haggard's original. In the film, which features eruptions and earthquakes, he says that

I lose [...] the whole sense of the deathly (quite a different thing from the simple danger of death) – the cold, the silence, and the surrounding faces of the ancient, the crowned and sceptred, dead. You may say if you please, that Rider Haggard's effect is quite as 'crude' or 'vulgar' or 'sensational' as that which the film substitutes for it. I am not at present discussing that. The point is that it is extremely different. The

one lays a hushing spell on the imagination; the other excites a rapid flutter of the nerves. In reading that chapter of the book curiosity or suspense about the escape of the heroes from the death-trap makes a very minor part of one's experience. The trap I remember for ever: how they got out I have long since forgotten. (*TOW*, p. 28)

Lewis's distinction between these two versions of *King Solomon's Mines* goes to the very heart of his theory of romance. For Lewis, at least, Haggard's original romance leads to genuine imaginative involvement and as such it is to be sharply differentiated from the shallower kind which simply causes a superficial excitement, like the general run of boys' adventure stories at the turn of the twentieth century (or most 'blockbuster' films today). The former holds in thrall, the latter merely seeks to thrill. And the sense of the 'deathly' pinpointed by Lewis in Haggard's story is partly due to the presence of the 'burial' motif once more – 'We were buried in the bowels of a huge snow-clad peak', Quatermain sombrely reminds his readers³⁰ – but there is something more than just that, an extra dimension. For a start, the whole arrangement of the treasure-chamber is rather ingenious. Quatermain goes on:

Thousands of feet above us the fresh air rushed over the white snow, but no sound of it reached us. We were *separated by a long tunnel and five feet of rock even from the awful chamber of the Dead*; and the dead make no noise. The crashing of all the artillery of earth and heaven could not have come to our ears in our living tomb. We were cut off from every echo in the world – we were as already dead. (*KSM*, pp. 286-287 (ch. 18) emphasis added)

Despite the conventional reference to the 'living tomb', this particular treasure house can be said to be not merely the place of death but a place *beyond* death, as the great chamber of the White Death has already been passed through. And it shares the strange

³⁰ Rider Haggard, *King Solomon's Mines*, ed. by Dennis Butts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 286 (ch. 18). (Henceforth designated in the text as *KSM*.)

immobile quality of the stalactite cave – a quality enhanced by the seated posture of the three adventurers.

Seated, immobile figures recur time and again in Haggard's fiction. In this particular story he has already given us the Silent Ones, the mummified kings in their cold chamber of the White Death and earlier, inaugurating the whole trend, the body of the Portuguese explorer, Silvestre. It is useful to bear in mind Haggard's remarks concerning the story he was told as a boy by his instructor, the Rev. A. J. Graham, about a friend who stumbled upon mummies sitting round a table in some ancient Peruvian tomb: 'The story made a deep impression on my mind', he comments, 'and in fact, turned it towards Romance'.³¹ Haggard first encounters Romance in static form; and this is the quality most evident at the centrepiece of what remains, except for *She*, his most famous work. And one can argue that it is to be found elsewhere *King Solomon's Mines*. As an adventure yarn, the story is kinetic, featuring long treks and rousing battles; but in another respect it can be regarded as a series of tableaux (of which the treasure chamber is merely the last, if also the most fabulous), ranging from the description of the glorious country surrounding the mountains known as 'Sheba's Breasts' – a provocative name to feminist and post-colonialist critics – to the spectacle of the eclipse and the last stand of the 'Greys'.

King Solomon's Mines, then, can be viewed as a succession of elaborate setpieces – a judgement which seems hardly applicable to *Treasure Island*, to which it was written in direct response.³² Both involve a quest for treasure; but, in Stevenson's tale, in contrast to Haggard's, attention is not really directed to the treasure for its own sake. Stevenson is more interested in playing up other romance motifs, like the test of initiation for the

³¹ Quoted in *The Great Storyteller*, p. 5.

³² For Haggard's own account of how *King Solomon's Mines* came to be written, see his autobiography, *The Days of My Life*, ed. by C. J. Longman, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1926), i, 220. (Henceforth designated in the text as *DML*.) For his daughter's more embellished account, see Lillias Rider Haggard, *The Cloak that I Left: A Biography of The Author Henry Rider Haggard, K.B.E., by his daughter* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1951), pp. 121-122.

young hero, and also focuses more on the theme of charismatic evil as embodied in Silver. The treasure itself comes to appear almost incidental by the end; the same could not be said of the diamond mines of Solomon.

Solomon's Mines, it seems likely, will retain their virtually mythic status. Their state of almost perfect enclosure is shown up all the more plainly when compared to some other treasure troves in Haggard's fiction, for instance in *Queen Sheba's Ring* (first published in 1910). Again, this is a tale saturated with marvels of African antiquity; and again there is the (almost obligatory) exploration underground culminating in the revelation of hidden treasures complete with relics of ancient monarchs – an amalgamation of the palace of the White Death and the treasure house in *King Solomon's Mines*. However, this place of fabulous riches, belonging to the lost city of Mur, is less awe-inspiring than Solomon's Mines. In fact when the narrator, Richard Adams, and his companions are taken to see it (led by one Maqueda, a fairer female guide than Gagool) they end up becoming rather tired of the whole business: 'From monarch to monarch we marched on till at length we grew weary of staring at bones and gold'.³³ Finally the long line of corpses simply peters out.

the kings in their chairs were surrounded by fewer and fewer attendants and women, and [...] the offerings at their feet were of an ever-lessening value. Indeed, after we had passed another five or six of them, their murdered retinues dwindled to a few female skeletons [...] At length there were none at all, the poor monarchs, who now were crowded close together, being left to explore the shades alone, adorned merely with their own jewellery and regalia. Ultimately even these were replaced by funeral gold-foil ornaments [...] The last of the occupied chairs, for there were empty ones beyond, contained bones which from their slenderness [...] I saw at once had belonged to a woman who had been sent to the grave without any companions or any offerings at all. (*QSR*, ch. 10)

³³ Rider Haggard, *Queen Sheba's Ring* [online]. Available: <http://ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext01/sheba10.txt>; ch. 9. (Henceforth designated in the text as *QSR*.)

There is not the same principle at work here as in *King Solomon's Mines*, where the great treasure trove and the stalactite cave are static, fixed, maybe even for all time. The ancient hoard of wealth, and human relics in *Queen Sheba's Ring*, by contrast, appears to have run down.

Of course this dwindling hoard is associated with a degenerate people: Maqueda's people, the Abati, who apparently are the descendants of Solomon and Sheba. Of such ancient lineage, the Abati have become effete, dwelling only on pleasure and living off the memory of past glories, and are constantly under attack from the Fung, who by contrast are fierce and proud and as such resemble the inhabitants of Kukuanaland. But it is the weak, threatened race, and not the strong one, that Haggard is most concerned with in this story. Wendy Katz views the entire story as an extended allegory of Edwardian England, in its time seen as vulnerable to attack by other, belligerent powers, principally Germany (*HFE*, pp. 46-49); and Haggard does make explicit the comparison at one point, when the Fung's armies begin to advance, prompting panic among the Abati: 'It was as though we English had learned that a huge foreign army had suddenly landed on our shores and, having cut the wires and seized the railways, was marching upon London' (*QSR*, ch. 15). But however far one may wish take the political implications of the tale, the comparison and contrast with *King Solomon's Mines*, especially as regards the respective treasure chambers, is of at least equal interest.

The underground chambers of Mur are further subjected to a physical assault, when dynamite is used to blow them open, thus 'scatter[ing]' bones and ornaments everywhere (*QSR*, ch. 19). Haggard therefore allows this particular ancient place to be desecrated; and although a familiar scenario follows of his heroes being trapped awhile within, there is no real corresponding sense of the 'deathly' to be found in this instance. This underground treasure chamber and mortuary combined appears less capable of

absorbing the adventurers who have the temerity to break into it than do Solomon's Mines, and even suffers the indignity of having its contents rigorously catalogued by Adams's scientifically-disposed companion Professor Higgs (*QSR*, ch. 19).

The underground chambers of Mur, then, are vulnerable to modern-day, outside influences; Solomon's Mines, however, will in all likelihood remain cut off from the world (although sealed permanently, perhaps, in some corner of the reader's imagination). Quatermain at least seems assured that no mere mortal will ever again have the chance to penetrate through to them, as the secret of the 'marvellous bit of mechanism' (*KSM*, p. 301 (ch. 19)) which activates the entrance has been lost for ever with the Gagool's demise; and he places little faith in the ability of anyone in the future to crack this particular Open Sesame code. Moreover, the king of the region, Ignosi, is determined not to even let anyone try:

None shall ever seek for the shining stones; no, not an army, for if they come I will send a regiment and fill up the pit, and break down the white columns in the caves and choke them with rocks, so that none can reach even to that door of which ye speak, and whereof the way to move it is lost. (*KSM*, p. 306 (ch. 19))

The mines are wholly removed from the conditions of everyday life – as indeed is all of Kukuanalaland, if to a somewhat lesser degree. Ignosi pledges to safeguard not only the mines from all interference in future, but also his whole kingdom:

No other white man shall cross the mountains, even if any may live to come so far [...] If a white man comes to my gates I will send him back; if a hundred come, I will push them back; if an army comes, I will make war on them with all my strength, and they shall not prevail against me. (*KSM*, p. 306 (ch. 19))

Although Haggard seeks to impress his readers with an accumulation of wonders in this tale, it should be borne in mind that his fictionalized Africa and the ordinary world

are seen to have no bearing upon each other; and Quatermain, Curtis and Good are not seen to impinge upon the world at large. There is no heroes' welcome for them upon their return to England, and in fact, Quatermain appears disinclined to return to England at all (he is only persuaded to do so by Curtis). He is probably right in this, as their return seems to be such a sober, even dull, affair. The amazing diamonds which they bring back with them are absorbed into the commercial market by degrees and so become the source for vast but also rather mundane wealth – money to buy an ordinary English country house (as Curtis advises Quatermain to do). The lustre of Solomon's treasure is effectively extinguished; of the great adventure nothing really remains but the memory.

v) Fade-out: *Allan Quatermain* and *The Virgin of the Sun*

In view of the flat nature of the return to England at the end of *King Solomon's Mines* it is not surprising that the beginning of the sequel finds the three friends longing to get back to Africa once more. One thing that might be overlooked in the first book is that the quest for the mythical mines is actually grounded in the more prosaic search instigated by Curtis for his long-lost brother (and Quatermain's reasons for going along also seem largely to be of a practical nature, as Curtis provides him with a financial incentive). The motive for voyaging out in *Allan Quatermain*, on the other hand, is alienation from the home country. Quatermain, in his grief at having just lost his only son, the only member of his family who remained to him (and as such effectively his last true link with England) takes the opportunity to launch into a long and rambling repudiation of modern civilization and subsequently declares that he is headed once

more for his 'native wilds';³⁴ but Curtis's more condensed remarks upon the subject are of greater interest.

I'm tired of it [...] dead-tired of doing nothing more except play the squire in a country that is sick of squires. For a year or more I have been getting as restless as an old elephant who scents danger. I am always dreaming of Kukuanaland and King Solomon's Mines. I can assure you I have become the victim of an almost unaccountable craving. I am sick of shooting pheasants and partridges, and want to have a go at some large game again. There, you know the feeling – when one has tasted brandy and water, milk becomes insipid to the palate. That year we spent together up in Kukuanaland seems to me worth all the other years of my life put together. I dare say that I am a fool for my pains, but I can't help it; I long to go, and what is more, I mean to go ... After all, why should I not go? I have no wife or parent, no chick or child to keep me. If anything happens to me the baronetcy would go to my brother George and his boy, as it would ultimately do in any case. I am of no importance to any one. (*AQ*, p. 17 (ch. 1).

This animus demonstrates how isolated the handsome and heroic Sir Henry Curtis actually is in his own country. It seems easier to ascribe such sentiments as those expressed above, professing rootlessness and friendlessness, to the lonely, grizzled old hunter Quatermain, than to the baronet. However, in this passage, his disaffection seems to be just as complete as that of Quatermain's. At first glance, he simply appears bored – although not in any profound philosophical sense; he is not suffering from ennui but from the tedium of life as an English country squire. But he also seems to feel that there is just no place for him any more in England, a country which, according to him, has become 'sick of squires'. Of course one cannot altogether ignore the socio-political implications of all of this: the turn of the twentieth century was a time of change for the landed classes whose influence was in decline, and Haggard, of the squirearchy himself, was not financially secure to begin with. As D. S. Higgins remarks, it was one of the

³⁴ Rider Haggard, *Allan Quatermain*, ed. by Dennis Butts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 18 (ch. 1). (Henceforth designated in the text as *AQ*.)

reasons why he took up the 'potentially lucrative career' of writing (*HGS*, pp. 53-54). Curtis, though, generally steers clear of politics in this speech. Instead he talks more in terms of a general dis-ease and actual disease; if the country is 'sick' of his kind, he says, then he too is 'sick' in his turn, having sipped too long at the ever-increasingly flavourless milk of the land of his birth. Therefore, getting away seems to have become a necessary remedy for him.

Compare, too, what he has to say at the end of the story, when he has become ruler of Zu-Vendis, land of the lost white race.

I intend to devote myself to [...] the total exclusion of all foreigners from Zu-Vendis. Not, indeed, that any more are ever likely to get here, but if they do, I warn them fairly that they will be shown the shortest way out of the country. I do not say this from any sense of inhospitality, but because I am convinced of the sacred duty that rests upon me of preserving to this, on the whole, upright and generous people the blessings of comparative barbarism. Where would all my brave army be if some enterprising rascal were to attack us with field-guns and Martini-Henrys? I cannot see that gunpowder, telegraphs, steam, daily newspapers, universal suffrage, etc., etc., have made mankind one whit happier than they used to be, and I am certain that they have brought many evils in their train. I have no fancy for handing over this beautiful country to be torn and fought for by speculators, tourists, politicians, and teachers, whose voice is as the voice of Babel, just as those horrible creatures in the valley of the underground river tore and fought for the body of the wild swan; nor will I endow it with the greed, drunkenness, new diseases, gunpowder, and general demoralization which chiefly mark the progress of civilization amongst unsophisticated peoples. (*AQ*, pp. 281-282 (ch. 23))

Like Ignosi at the end of *King Solomon's Mines*, Curtis firmly resolves to keep his country free from all types of incomers in the future; indeed he conceives it his 'sacred duty' to do so. More particularly, he seems determined to keep the canker of modern civilization from getting into Zu-Vendis: 'gunpowder, telegraphs, steam, daily newspapers, universal suffrage'. Of course, his plans for Zu-Vendis do still appear in the nature of a colonialist manifesto: he has just finished outlining his proposal to create

a new central authority in the country and to curtail the immoderate power of the priests, and perhaps at a later date to institute Christian worship. This colonialism is not the aggressive kind that generally prevailed among European powers around the turn of the twentieth century, and which Curtis speaks out against in this passage: the ‘enterprising rascal[s]’ ‘with field-guns and Martini-Henrys’; nevertheless, it is still colonialism, no matter how benevolent. And as well as regarding Curtis as a paternalistic colonialist one might also align him with several figures in literature in this period who set up their own private kingdom in the wilds, emulating the real-life example of Colonel James ‘Rajah’ Brooke in Sarawak – Conrad’s ‘Lord Jim’ in Patusan, Dravot and Carnehan in ‘The Man who would be King’, Attwater in *The Ebb-Tide*.

Yet, in spite of this, Curtis’s wish to safeguard his country from the rest of the world may not wholly be due to imperialism (of whatever kind) on his part, but also because he does not want the beauty of Zu-Vendis to be contaminated or destroyed through contact with the noisome outer world, like the white swan being fought over by ravening beasts (this rather florid image refers to an earlier adventure in the novel). But, as he admits himself, no one from the outside is ‘ever likely’ to arrive, because Zu-Vendis, even more than Kukuaneland, appears to be completely cut off and out of reach – a realm unto itself. Trying to leave, we are informed in an enumeration of the country’s laws and customs, is a crime punishable by death (*AQ*, p. 159 (ch. 8)); and the three Englishmen who go there, with their French companion Alphonse, do not return. Quatermain dies, Curtis and Good (as Curtis’s brother George remarks) are by the end as good as dead; while Alphonse, the only one to start on the way back, puzzlingly seems to disappear. And the final word is from George, as he waits for some word from the Frenchman, but waits in vain with his hopes becoming ‘fainter day by day’ (*AQ*, p. 283 (ch. 24)). There is by the end of this book an unmistakable sense of things just fading away, of loss – far more so than in *King Solomon’s Mines*. In fact, we might say

that this feeling runs as a disguised current through the entire novel, when we remember that Quatermain is writing the story on his deathbed; it is, as Margery Fisher observes, his 'valedictory narrative'.³⁵ But it is easy to forget this in the course of the novel (just as in *King Solomon's Mines* it is easy to forget that the real object of the quest is Sir Henry's missing brother, rather than the mines).

To further accentuate this feeling of melancholy, unlike the case of Kukuanaland which appears to be under no threat of dissolution of any kind at the close of *King Solomon's Mines*, a splendidly saturnine fate for the state of Zu-Vendis is predicted in the legend that springs up in connection with the warrior Umslopagaas. Umslopagaas dies in a supremely heroic attitude³⁶ at the height of battle, 'holding the Stair' against his enemies (contrast the death of his friend Quatermain, also from a wound sustained in war but in far more lingering manner) and after death is transformed into yet another of Haggard's seated, frozen figures.

There he sits [...] keeping his grim watch beneath the spot he held alone against a multitude [...] [A] new legend of prophecy has arisen in the land [...] According to this saying, so long as the old Zulu sits there, looking down the stairway he defended when alive, so long will the New House of the Stairway, springing from the union of the Englishman and Nyelptha, endure and flourish; but when he is taken from thence, or when, ages after, his bones shall at last crumble into dust, the House will fall, and the Stairway shall fall, and the Nation of Zu-Vendis cease to be a Nation. (*AQ*, p. 268 (ch. 22))

Umslopagaas, having already fulfilled one legend in smashing the sacred stone, which symbolizes that a new, alien strain has come to rule Zu-Vendis, thus becomes involved in another, which looks forward not merely to a change of rule but the eventual demise of the land. This image of 'crumbling into dust' shows how once again the sense of

³⁵ Margery Fisher, *The Bright Face of Danger* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1986), p. 201.

³⁶ For a fuller discussion of Umslopagaas's (and also Quatermain's) heroic traits, see, for example, *The Bright Face of Danger*, pp. 198-211.

things passing away is paramount, in relation not only to the nation but also to the man: the eventual disintegration of the body of Umslopagaas is assumed. Haggard here entertains no fantasies of corporeal preservation over the ages, as in *She*. Perhaps that would be inappropriate, given the general sense of fade-out at the end of *Allan Quatermain*, with the heroes all dropping beyond the horizon for good, and, in their different ways, passing the point of no return.

The sense of fade-out at the end of *Allan Quatermain* is pushed to extremes in a novel which was published only a few years before Haggard's death and which therefore falls well outside the period of what might be called 'classic' Haggard (if such a term has ever been thought of): the 1880s up to the outbreak of the First World War. This is *The Virgin of the Sun* (1922). It is worth looking at *The Virgin of the Sun* as a kind of case study in order to trace the development of some of Haggard's most characteristic themes.

The main action in *The Virgin of the Sun* takes place in pre-Columban South America, a region which, due to its main topographical features – high mountains, deep valleys, precipitous roads – has often proved a convenient location in which to locate fantasy worlds. This was the case even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, despite the general sense at this time of geographical frontiers closing down all over the world. One thinks of the secluded Andean valley in Wells's 'The Country of the Blind' (1904) whose inhabitants have been able to persist for generations in an utter ignorance of the whole outer world. Or there is (closer to *The Virgin of the Sun* in a chronological sense) Buchan's 'The Shut Door',³⁷ which affords a mere glimpse of a lost South American race (supposedly the most ancient race of all) before the door is forever closed once more, due to the wartime death of the man to whom the vision was

³⁷ Collected in *John Buchan: The Complete Short Stories*, ed. by Andrew Lownie, 3 vols (London: Thistle, 1996-1997; henceforth designated in the text as *BCS*), iii.

vouchsafed. (Buchan also creates, in *The Courts of the Morning*, a South American country of his own, as does, of course, Conrad in *Nostramo*; however, both of these are recognizably modelled on Latin American states). Probably the best-known example, certainly in this period, is Conan Doyle's prehistoric realm in *The Lost World* where Roxton, clearly something of a South America enthusiast, waxes lyrical about all the possibilities that the land may hold: 'Man has just made a track here and there in the maze' (*LWT*, p. 61 (ch. 6)).

However it is not just the geography of South America that draws Haggard; he is also fascinated by the great civilizations which once reigned there, principally the Inca, just as he had made a foray into another part of the Americas to explore the lives of the Aztecs thirty years earlier in *Montezuma's Daughter*. Thus *The Virgin of the Sun* is conceived on a part-historical basis; although Haggard right from the start, when writing to an old acquaintance, makes it clear that he is working more in the realm of 'legend' than of fact.

Some five-and-thirty years ago it was our custom to discuss many matters, among them, I think, the history and romance of the vanished Empires of Central America. In memory of those far-off days will you accept a tale that deals with one of them, that of the marvellous Incas of Peru; with the legend also that, before the Spanish Conquerors entered on their mission of robbery and ruin, there in that undiscovered land lived and died a White God from the sea?³⁸

The land of the Inca – Haggard insists on calling it by its Indian name, Tavantisuyu, throughout – appears impossibly hard to reach, even by the normal standards of a Haggard romance. Hubert, the main character, originally from Hastings, and his guide Kari, an Inca prince, spend some nine months travelling towards it, with Hubert

³⁸Rider Haggard, Dedication to *The Virgin of the Sun* [online]. Available: <http://ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext02/tvots10.txt>. (Henceforth designated in the text as *VS*.)

growing ever more weary of the 'endless quest' (*VS*, Book ii, ch. 2). And when they finally come within sight of the place they find themselves marooned on a 'barren' little island inhabited by 'crawling turtles', which they are obliged to live on (*VS*, Book ii, ch. 2). From this island they have no way of cutting across to the mainland which they can so tantalizingly see, day after day, but not touch, the vision of the 'gateway' to Tavantisuyu between two mountain peaks, which appears 'more distant than Heaven itself'. And so, Hubert remarks, 'we lived from moon to moon in that desert place, till I thought I should go mad with loneliness and despair' (*VS*, Book ii, ch. 2).

This island, which forms a kind of desolate antechamber to the Promised Land, serves as a reminder that Haggard, although best-known for his depiction of richly colourful, exotic realms, could also at times create places of a very different spirit and hue. And this is something not necessarily synonymous with his depiction of desolation (and more especially death) as some kind of awful and august presence in the heavily rhetorical description of the White Death in *King Solomon's Mines*, and in the hoary temples of Kor. The turtle-haunted island is a more sordid place. A similar gritty quality is also detectable in, for example, the depiction of the Zulu execution ground in *Finished*, aptly titled 'The Valley of Bones'. Quatermain, who is once again the narrator, gives us a relatively spare description of the region: 'There is nothing particularly imposing about the place; no towering cliffs or pillars of piled granite as at the Black Kloof. It is just a vale cut out by water'.³⁹ The only things to be seen (apart from human remains) are rocks and 'shrivelled' vegetation. The whole place is 'dank and miserable', according to Quatermain. Note his choice of adjectives: 'dank', and 'miserable', rather than impressively dark and sinister, like the 'Black Kloof', home of the sorcerer Zikali.

³⁹ Rider Haggard, *Finished* [online]. Available: <http://ibiblio.org/gutenberg/etext99/fnshd10.txt>; ch. 14.

The rocky island in *The Virgin of the Sun* is similarly a hard, bare place; it is also a place of entrapment. We have already seen how islands figure as traps in the exotic fiction of Conrad and Stevenson; in relation to Stevenson one can also cite the incident in *Kidnapped* when a forlorn David Balfour finds himself marooned on Erraid, a tiny islet off Mull, where he endures ‘the most unhappy part of [his] adventures’.⁴⁰ There is an element of bathos in this episode when he realizes that he need never have been stranded at all (as getting away from Erraid is merely a matter of crossing over when the tide is out); but the three days which he spends there are unrelentingly grim. It is, in effect, a period of solitary confinement, the reverse of the self-sufficiency of a Crusoe; unlike other island castaways David has no materials at all to hand which he can use to supply his wants. This is also the mood which informs the island episode in *The Virgin of the Sun*.

However, Hubert and Kari do eventually arrive in Tavantisuyu, and also in the city of the Chanca people – which, incidentally, is said to be situated in a ‘cup-like plain’ (*VS*, Book ii, ch. 5), thus imparting a certain sense of enclosure (compare similar landscapes featured in *She*). But these places are not to be Hubert’s final destination, after all. His story breaks off abruptly (the whole thing is cast in the form of an old manuscript) when he is preparing to move even further out, along with all of the Chanca people, in flight from the Incas – his chief bond with them being his love for their queen Quilla, or to use her more fanciful title, ‘Daughter of the Moon’. The sense of fade-out, palpable at the conclusion of *Allan Quatermain*, is even stronger here. This is in spite of the fact that, if we return to the very beginning of the manuscript, we find that the Chancas apparently do reach the place they seek, the ‘City of Gold’; it is the place in which Hubert is writing his story (*VS*, Book i, ch. 1)). But we learn virtually nothing about it, and in any case the Incas are apparently still in pursuit. Therefore when we finish reading the book

⁴⁰ Robert Louis Stevenson, *Kidnapped*, ed. by Donald McFarlan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994), p. 91 (ch. 14).

we carry away the impression of Hubert and the Chancas still on the move, and the feeling that there is no definite end-point reached.

It is illuminating to compare the ending of *The Virgin of the Sun* to that of *Montezuma's Daughter*, Haggard's Aztec romance. Like Hubert, the central protagonist, Thomas Wingfield, goes to America in less than happy circumstances (he is tracking down the villainous Spaniard who murdered his mother), and again, like Hubert, he is there accepted as a god by the natives; and although he marries 'Montezuma's daughter' and has a family, it all ends in catastrophe when his wife and children are killed. *Montezuma's Daughter*, written only months after the death of Haggard's only son, displays the same bleakness of spirit as does *The Virgin of the Sun*. However, the ending is crucially different, as Wingfield returns to England, and even marries his childhood sweetheart. Therefore, in marked contrast to *The Virgin of the Sun*, there is finally a sense of peace and restoration, and a definite sense of closure.

The feeling of indeterminacy at the end of *The Virgin of the Sun* is augmented not only by the abrupt breaking-off of Hubert's story but also by the version of his ultimate fate as offered by Mr. Potts, the recluse with Spiritualist leanings in whose shop the manuscript is first unearthed. Mr. Potts is given to understand in a vision that Hubert eventually died in battle, 'covered with glory and conquering' (*VS*, Introduction). However as no further details about this battle are supplied, this piece of information remains tenuous in the extreme. And the Editor is seemingly mistrustful of it in any case: 'what is the worth of dreams and visions?' he asks (*VS*, Introduction).

Certainly the overtly martial aspect of this particular ending, if such it is, would appear to be at odds with the presiding tenor of the story. This is not to say that Haggard eschews the usual complement of battles and the spectacle of noble warriors; but the overall impression is that this is a tale about a man who is worn out and seeking repose. 'There comes a time to most men when above everything they desire rest, and now that

hour was with me, the exiled and the desolate', Hubert says at one point (*VS*, Book ii, ch. 8). And, arguably, this applies to the whole period of his life in the Americas – ever since those earliest days of wearisome travel with Kari. The sense of world-weariness is central to the story; in fact it seems to be Hubert's permanent state of mind from the moment that he is violently (and melodramatically) uprooted from his once-comfortable domestic existence in England. Thereafter the erstwhile 'prosperous merchant of London town' becomes something in the nature of a homeless wanderer, suffering from a kind of soul-sickness:

Oh! I wearied of this strange land with its snowclad mountains and rich valleys, its hordes of dark-skinned people with large eyes, smiling faces, and secret hearts; its great cities, temples, and palaces filled with useless gold and silver; its brilliant sunshine and rushing rivers, its gods, kings, and policies. They were alien to me, every one of them, and if Quilla were taken away and I were left quite alone, then I thought that it would be well to die. (*VS*, Book ii, ch. 5)

In sharp contrast to the likes of Zu-Vendis, this particular 'brilliant' and beautiful New World excites no real admiration, far less love; behind it all there appears only a void.

Rather would I have lived out my life as the humblest fisherman on Hastings beach, than be made a king over these glittering barbarians with their gold and gems which could buy nothing that I needed, not even a Book of Hours to feed my soul, or the sound of the English tongue to comfort my empty heart. (*VS*, Book ii, ch. 8)

Of course part of this feeling is simply *homesickness*, for the land he has left behind; there is no one around him who speaks his language. But the sense of spiritual malaise goes further than this. Hubert leaves England in the first instance only because he is forced to flee for his life following his hot-blooded slaying of a nobleman involved with his wife (*VS*, Book i. ch. 6). Thereafter he never seems to recover his peace of mind,

despite finding the second love of his life in Quilla. He finds the golden glittering world of Tavantisuyu to be as sterile as the rocky little island which lies outside its borders, where once he was trapped. In *Allan Quatermain*, the city of Milosis is said to look sometimes like a 'supernatural' city (*AQ*, p. 137 (ch. 11)), with no more substance than that of a dream. The splendours of Tavantisuyu would also appear to be illusory, in a rather different sense.

One can, perhaps, detect a moral here, as in the case of some other gilded realms which turn out to be hollow, or rotten at the core, and which have to be recognized for what they really are, like the Bower of Bliss and the House of Busirayne in *The Fairie Queene*. A more modern example is William Morris's story of *The Glittering Plain* which depicts the enticing land of the ever-living; but this place, as C. S. Lewis notes, turns out only to be a 'gorgeous prison' for those who seek it.⁴¹ All that glitters is found to be lacking in true value in such stories. (We should remember, however, that Tavantisuyu is not the only place that appears unwelcoming to Hubert; he seems to find nowhere congenial once he sets out on his travels).

At the very end of *The Virgin of the Sun*, or rather at the point where the manuscript breaks off (or more accurately, becomes indecipherable), Hubert is with Quilla as she addresses the Chancas, who are being hunted down by the armies of the Inca (she has only narrowly been rescued from being sacrificed by the Inca herself, as 'the virgin of the sun'). In this speech she invokes their ancestral homeland, the legendary City of Gold, which lies 'far away, beyond the forest [...] hidden within a ring of mountains' and discloses a special vision which has been granted her:

⁴¹ C. S. Lewis, 'William Morris', in *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 219-231 (p. 228).

While I sat in despair and blindness in the Convent of the Sun at Cuzco [...] I prayed to my Mother, the Moon, for light and help. Long and often I prayed, and at length an answer came. One night the Spirit of the Moon appeared to my soul as a beautiful and shining goddess, and spoke to me. "Be brave, Daughter," she said, "for all that seems to be lost shall yet be found again [...] Be not afraid, moreover, for the Children of the Chancas who bow to me," went on the shining Spirit of the Moon, "since in the day of their danger I will show them a path towards my place of resting in the west. Yea, I will lead them far from wars and tyrannies back to that ancient city whence they came, and there they shall sleep in peace till all things are accomplished [...]" People of the Chancas, I am your Queen to-day and my counsel to you is that we flee from this land before the Inca's net closes round us and the Inca's spears pierce our heart, to seek our ancient home far in the depths of the western forest. (*VS*, Book ii, ch. 13)

Amid the stylized diction, the usual trademark of a Haggard romance, there are several things of note here. Firstly, there are the opposing figures of sun and moon – a common enough conceit, admittedly, but it is interesting to observe just what these figures represent, in this instance. Of all the old civilizations of South America it is that of the Inca, the largest and most powerful at the time of the Spanish Conquest, which has received the fullest glare of history's spotlight – the people who sacrificed to the Sun. At the end of this particular tale, however, Haggard throws his lot in with the Chancas, also a historically-documented people but generally less well-known, whose presiding deity appears to be that of the Moon.⁴² The common reader will come to the story mindful of how the Incas themselves were displaced by the Europeans; the Chancas, who in their time were marginalized by the Incas, seem even further away. And Haggard turns his gaze with them to that misty indeterminate region where history dissolves into myth, with the story of the pristine 'City of Gold' which sits concealed within its 'ring of mountains', and the prophecy of a mystical return thither.

⁴² For a brief historical account of the empire of the Incas (and their defeat of the Chancas), see Jean-Francois Bouchard, 'The Incas', in *Americas Lost, 1492-1713: The First Encounter*, ed. by Daniel Levine, (Paris: Bordas, 1992), pp. 75-88.

Haggard is here playing upon an ancient motif, which is found, for example, in the *Aeneid*, when Aeneas and his followers are told by the gods to seek out Italy, the land to the west. But Aeneas's descendants are of course destined to found Rome, a city which, as one of the great imperial powers of the Ancient World comes to feature very strongly within the visible boundaries of history, as opposed to myth – while the Chancas are about to retreat out of sight. The moon image helps to further this sense of remoteness; all may be shining in its beneficent light, but the connotations of darkness remain inevitable.

Secondly (as in the *Aeneid*) there is the movement westward, which has been the main thrust of Hubert's travels from the start, when he initially ventures across the Atlantic. In the purely literal sense this correlates with the general migrations of Europeans to the Americas over the centuries. But in relation to *The Virgin of the Sun* it is more interesting to consider the idea of 'going west' in its euphemistic sense of dying, which seems especially relevant in this case as it is coupled with the idea of 'rest': the 'place of resting in the west'. If 'rest' is what Hubert has been striving for all along it now appears that he is being drawn towards it, in the shape of death (whether in conflict with the pursuing Incas, or otherwise). At this point it is worth recollecting a much earlier exchange between himself and Kari, when still in England, about Tavantisuyu: 'Of one thing [...] he was always certain, namely, that he would return to his country Tavantisuyu of which he thought day and night, and that *I should accompany him*. At this I laughed [...] and said that if so it would be after we were both dead' (*VS*, Book i, ch. 4).

Lastly, there is in this passage a reference to the 'City of Gold'. Again, there is nothing original in such a concept, and of course the Incas were renowned for having an abundance of this most precious of metals. But one is reminded of the legendary 'El Dorado' and his realm of fabulous wealth, rumours of which were rife among native

peoples at the time of the Spanish Conquest and which fastened upon the imagination of many of the early Europeans in America – some of whom mounted lengthy and costly expeditions in search of it. Conrad pokes rather spiteful fun at these people in his essay ‘Geography and Some Explorers’: ‘I feel a malicious pleasure at the many disappointments of those pertinacious searchers for El Dorado who climbed mountains, pushed through forests, swam rivers, floundered in bogs, without giving a single thought to the science of geography’ (*LE*, p. 5). But then a little later, in the same essay, he turns towards the more symbolic sense of the concept when he paints a picture of the dying Livingstone with his desire to locate the source of the Nile unfulfilled – for, of course, since these days when the conquistadors attempted to locate an actual physical ‘Eldorado’, the word has come to denote an unattainable region of mere desire and longing. Not that, in the example of Livingstone, the source of the Nile was held to be mythical; but Conrad is interested in how his seeking after it, his hunger to find it, wholly vain as it proved for him, turned him at the last into a ‘restless wanderer [...] refusing to go home any more’ (*LE*, p. 24).

Poe, in his poem ‘Eldorado’, remarked that one should seek for this fabled land ‘over the mountains/ of the moon,/ Down the valley of the shadow’, putting these words, significantly, into the mouth of a ‘shade’.⁴³ These lines appear to fit in perfectly with the mood of Hubert as he is about to embark upon his final journey (if it is his final journey) actually as the consort of the Daughter of the Moon. He is, in effect, about to disappear into the land of dreams, having never truly settled upon any part of the habitable globe. Many of Haggard’s worlds of romance are, in one sense or another, lost – lost to time, sacrificed to the onward rush of modernity, locked in impenetrable

⁴³ Edgar Allan Poe, ‘Eldorado’, in *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. by Thomas Ollive Mabbott, 3 vols (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969-1978), i: *Poems*, 463.

mountain ranges or buried deep in earth, but maybe none appears quite so lost, so far away, as this City of Gold.

vi) Fadeout: the wider perspective

It has already been remarked that the ending of *The Virgin of the Sun* enlarges upon the sense of fade-out that is discernible at the close of *Allan Quatermain*, written over thirty years earlier; and so one might look at this issue in greater depth – and in relation not only to Haggard but also to romance at large. We might begin with Andrea White's perception that Allan Quatermain's desire to return to Africa and leave England for good, is 'ungeneric' (*CAT*, p. 94). White's analysis is grounded chiefly within a fairly specific literary historical matrix: that of British travel-writing and adventure-fiction in and around the nineteenth century; and in the particular case of Haggard, she dwells mainly on his enduring aristocratic, and military, values. Therefore she is content to explain his heroes' desertion of modern England for Africa solely in terms of his desire, as expressed through his main characters (principally Quatermain and Curtis) to return to an idealized feudal society, as represented, in large measure, by Zu-Vendis. White is persuaded that Curtis simply wishes to fashion Zu-Vendis into a model specimen of the kind of society that once existed in England, and that it is only their anti-capitalist and anti-commercialist bias that drive the likes of Quatermain and Curtis away (*CAT*, pp. 82-99).

There is something in White's argument, and one remembers Quatermain's plaint against a world in which money is the primary motivating interest (*AQ*, p. 275 (ch. 23)). But it is not the whole picture. When White uses the word 'ungeneric' to describe Quatermain's refusal to settle down in England permanently after his African outing in *King Solomon's Mines*, she seems to have in mind only the immediate context of

nineteenth and early twentieth-century adventure fiction, whereby colonial heroes, having made their pile and exercised their resourcefulness and taste for excitement abroad, return to establish themselves in their home country. But one can also relate Haggard's variant on a common theme to romance at large – and in fact, in the first instance, look all the way back to the story of Odysseus.

In Homer's poem, of course, the homecoming of the hero is central to the tale; no matter what other adventures he may have, the important thing is that he return to Ithaca to re-establish his rule and put right the various wrongs that have been engendered in his long absence. However, there is Tiresias's prophecy that even in after-years he will once again go adventuring in unknown lands, to the place where people know nothing of the sea;⁴⁴ and these latter-day adventures are the focus of the lost epic, the *Telegony*.⁴⁵ Similarly, in medieval times Dante treated of the later, indeed terminal, stages of Odysseus's career.⁴⁶ In the Dantean version, Odysseus, or Ulysses, is an elderly, decrepit man (like his father Laertes in Homer's poem), as are all his companions; and this is reflected in their laboured progress up to the Pillars of Hercules.⁴⁷ But at this point, at the limit of the known world, the mood changes – signalled by Ulysses' rallying speech to his comrades to extend the bounds of civilized learning and knowledge (*I*, xxvi, 112-120); and this is followed by a final exhilarating 'mad flight' (*I*, xxvi, 121-135 (125)) into the unknown.

⁴⁴ Homer, *The Odyssey*, transl. by Richmond Lattimore (New York: Harper Row, 1968), xi. 121-125.

⁴⁵ For more details on the contents of the *Telegony*, see, for example, Edward Tripp, *Classical Mythology* (London: Collins, 1988), p. 419.

⁴⁶ For more details of various representations of Odysseus/Ulysses throughout literature, see W. B. Stanford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study in the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1954). Of especial relevance to the present discussion is Chapter 14, 'Ulysses as Wanderer' (pp. 175-210).

⁴⁷ Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Vol I: The Inferno*, transl. by Mark Musa (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), xxvi, 103-111. (Henceforth designated in the text as *I*.)

Consider, too, Tennyson's more mellifluous treatment of the theme in 'Ulysses', which ends in a lofty celebration of these 'heroic hearts/ Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will/ To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield'.⁴⁸ But Tennyson's poem, rather than depicting an actual journey (as in Dante) resolves into a romantic daydream: 'all experience is an arch wherethrough/ Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades/ For ever and ever when I move'. These two adjectives, 'gleams' and 'fades', play effectively off one another here; and the 'untravelled world' which alluringly 'gleams' only to fade whenever one approaches it is a perfect image of the yearning for the unattainable. It is also highly static, as recognized by Matthew Arnold when he says of these lines that 'by themselves [they] take up nearly as much time as a whole book of the *Iliad*'.⁴⁹

These two poems, then, differ markedly in style and emphasis; but they similarly show Ulysses as a man who responds to the lure of the unknown – a man who is unable to settle. Thus he appears to be obeying T. S. Eliot's stipulation that 'Old men ought to be explorers [...] still and still moving/ Into another intensity/ For a further union, a deeper communion'.⁵⁰ He is drawn back to a life of adventure, towards an ultimate, ill-defined point somewhere in the great beyond, past 'the baths/ of all the western stars', or in the 'unpeopled' lands 'behind the sun' (*I*, xxvi, 117) (although of course in the latter case the journey suffers an abrupt termination in death).

Haggard, too, was concerned with the post-Ithacan career of Odysseus, and, together with Andrew Lang, conceived a series of final adventures for him in Egypt with Helen

⁴⁸ Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 'Ulysses', in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. by Christopher Ricks, second edn, 3 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1987), i, 613-620.

⁴⁹ Matthew Arnold, 'On Translating Homer', in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by R.H. Super, 11 vols (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960-1978), i: 'On the Classical Tradition', pp. 97-216 (p. 147).

⁵⁰ T. S. Eliot, 'East Coker' in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber, 1972), Part v, 202-206.

of Troy in *The World's Desire*. But it is more illuminating to re-consider the case of Sir Henry Curtis – in particular that notable speech near the beginning of *Allan Quatermain*, outlining his desire to return to Africa. In particular, one should look again at his remarks concerning brandy and water: ‘when one has tasted brandy and water, milk becomes insipid to the palate’. Although he enthuses over it earlier in the passage, he is not just out for big-game hunting once more, as opposed to merely shooting pheasants and partridges (although that is an added bonus). Nor is he simply being squeezed out of the country in a political sense. Instead, like Tennyson’s and Dante’s Ulysses, he has got the taste for adventure, and he must satisfy it; and in this sense his decision is proactive, rather than being merely a matter of escape, or withdrawal.

Another factor which links the Dantean/Tennysonian Ulysses with some of Haggard’s characters, most notably Quatermain, is that of age. The first time we see Quatermain, at the start of *King Solomon’s Mines*, he is already over fifty. And this, as Dennis Butts comments,⁵¹ is a distinct variant on the traditional adventure-romance format, from Ballantyne to Buchan, which features decidedly youthful protagonists at its centre. We can look more closely into the possible reasons behind this.

In the first place, it is as well to remember that Haggard’s years spent in Africa constituted a phase of his life which was already over for good by the time he came to his first major literary undertaking. It would not be surprising if, in later years, he felt a nostalgia for those early days of adventure which had rescued him from unsuccessful attempts to forge some sort of career for himself in England – and which of course also furnished him with such plentiful material for his successive literary endeavours. D. S. Higgins remarks of his melancholic dedication to *Allan’s Wife* as follows:

⁵¹ In the Introduction to *King Solomon’s Mines*, p. xiv.

These are not, as they might seem, the words of an old man. When Haggard wrote this dedication, steeped as it is in nostalgia and discontent with the present, he was only thirty-two. Yet, although Haggard has always been popularly regarded as a man of action, he had left Africa nearly eight years earlier. That period he had spent, apart from his holidays in Egypt and Iceland, almost unceasingly writing in his study or reading for the Bar. Few office workers could have had a less active or less adventurous life. (*HGS*, p. 130).

Higgins touches on an important point here. In later years Haggard still had plenty of occasion to travel to far countries, whether on his 'holidays' or in his role as public servant, serving on various Royal Commissions; but essentially he became settled in his role of country squire which, notwithstanding his love for the English countryside, to a certain extent locked him into a world which in so many respects was on the decline. However such circumstances as these gave him the chance, while still a relatively young man, to display the kind of nostalgic regret which is more generally characteristic of greater age. Furthermore it should be stressed that his work colleagues in Africa were all considerably older than himself – as indeed were the majority of his friends and acquaintances from 'boyhood', and this directly influenced his choice of hero for his adventure tales; he remarked that he found younger men 'somewhat difficult to draw', as opposed to the older Quatermain (*DML*, i, 216-217).

By his own admission, then, Haggard found it easier to identify with older rather than younger men, certainly for the purposes of writing fiction. This helped ensure that he brought something different to the juvenile adventure tradition of the latter nineteenth century. Of course this is not to say that he set about revolutionizing it; and *King Solomon's Mines*, at least, is conventionally dedicated to boys (although, admittedly, 'big' boys as well as 'little'). And while Quatermain is not a youthful hero, neither is he frail or decrepit, any more than Haggard himself was when he wrote *King Solomon's Mines*. However, the sense of *feeling* old, the twilight element which pervades

Haggard's work, is distinctive, as we also saw in the first chapter. Instead of looking ahead with Henty's or Buchan's bright young colonists of the future, his characters mourn over ruined empires and muse upon death and mutability. In this sense, much of his fiction can be said to belong to a different order of romance from the juvenile adventure tradition in which it is so often, and perhaps rather too conveniently, categorized; from this point of view, Quatermain's age would not appear as an anomaly.

On the subject of old age and romance, we can once again return to the *Odyssey*. The aged figure of Odysseus in later modifications of Homer's poem has already been discussed, but it is also interesting to consider what has been said of the *Odyssey* itself, by the second-century critic Longinus, who emphasizes the fact that it is the work of an old man. Longinus remarks that the *Odyssey* lacks the true drama of the *Iliad*: that it is mere narrative, descending into garrulity, 'the characteristic mark of old age'.

One may therefore compare the Homer of the *Odyssey* to a setting sun, which retains its magnitude without its intensity. For here he no longer keeps up the high pitch of those efforts in the *Iliad*, he does not maintain his flight at that lofty level which never sinks; nor is there the same rapid outflowing of passions and emotions, or the same tense and realistic energy, with all its condensed and convincing imagery [...] we see ebbings of his greatness, and he becomes lost in the fabulous and incredible.⁵²

For Longinus, then, the first great romance of Western literature exhibits the characteristic failings of old age: loss of energy, talent, and (although he does not specify) intellect, which leads to a disengagement with 'realistic' modes and concerns. For these reasons the *Odyssey* compares unfavourably with the *Iliad*, in his view. (This preference for the realistic, the tragic and ironic, over the 'fabulous', is one that has generally prevailed in the history of criticism, as Northrop Frye notes; of course Frye, as

⁵² Longinus, *On Elevation of Style*, transl. by T. G. Tucker (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1935), p. 24.

one of the most prominent romance critics of recent times, labels himself as an ‘Odyssey’ rather than an ‘Iliad’ critic).⁵³

The image invoked by Longinus of the setting sun, however, is noteworthy. Many centuries after Longinus applied it to Homer, we find this image being used in relation to another well-known romancer, Walter Scott, by his biographer J. G. Lockhart. Lockhart notes what Scott said of one of his own creations, the aged king Rene in *Anne of Geierstein*:

A mirthful man he was; the snows of age
Fell, but they did not chill him – Gaiety,
Even in life closing, touch’d his teeming brain
With such wild visions as the setting sun
Raises in front of some hoar glacier,
Painting the black ice with a thousand hues.⁵⁴

Lockhart, having quoted these lines, goes on to remark that they can equally apply to the ageing author himself.⁵⁵ As for Rene, it is not just that he has grown old, but also that his political power has faded; indeed he is on the edge of utter ruin: ‘his daughter is dethroned, his dominion crumbling to pieces, his family on the verge of becoming extinct, his grandson lurking from one place to another, and expelled from his mother’s inheritance’ (*AG*, p. 328 (ch. 30)).

We might compare, and contrast, Rene with other figures in Scott who feel the pressure of the historical moment, like Hugh Redgauntlet. Following the defeat of the Jacobites Hugh Redgauntlet’s virility and intensity is dispelled; he finally earns the

⁵³ Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective: the Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 1-2.

⁵⁴ Walter Scott, *Anne of Geierstein*, ed. by J. H. Alexander (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), p. 317 (ch. 29). (Henceforth designated in the text as *AG*.)

⁵⁵ J. G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott* (London: Black, 1893), p. 700.

‘respect’⁵⁶ of his (comparatively dull) nephew and niece but that is not quite the same thing as exciting an avid admiration, as many old heroes of romance might be expected to do. However, he cuts a dignified figure, which Rene does not – at least in the eyes of the young Englishman Arthur, who scorns him for ‘find[ing] amusement in [...] fopperies’ (*AG*, p. 238 (ch. 30)) when faced with hard-headed political realities. In this respect he is the opposite of Redgauntlet: he still retains energy but squanders it on seemingly vain pursuits, and so forfeits the ‘respect’ of the young protagonist. Therefore, as in the passage from Longinus, the old man is seen to be, or to have become, something of a foolish figure (although no one, not even Arthur, disputes his goodness of heart).

In spite of this, the setting-sun image remains a resonant one, symbolic as it is of the energy and the life which is soon set to dissipate, in the face of inevitable and fast-approaching death. Frye points out its connection with the ‘elegiac’ strain in myth, in the stories of dying gods, and also in romance, in the tales of dying heroes who, although not divine (or not wholly so), have an intimate sympathy with nature. Frye also remarks that ‘the elegiac is often accompanied by a diffused, resigned, melancholy sense of the passing of time, of the old order changing and yielding to a new one: one thinks of Beowulf, looking, while he is dying, at the great stone monuments of history that vanished before him’ (*AC*, pp. 36-37). This is the tradition that Haggard properly belongs to; and Graham Greene picks up on it, in his essay ‘Rider Haggard’s Secret’. In this essay Greene remarks upon the ‘melancholy end’ of every Haggardian adventure which one never noticed as a child and also

Haggard’s own ‘melancholy end, with falling royalties and the alienation of the Norfolk lands which he loved, departing the doomed house to the operation he guessed would be final [...] It is not the sound of

⁵⁶ Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 397 (ch. 23).

Umslopagaas's axe that we hear, cracking the marble monument in the moment of his death, so much as the sound of trees falling, the strokes of the axe far away in the orchard. (CEG, p. 210).

Greene here deftly shifts emphasis from the ringing sound of the dying hero's weapon to the more muffled sounds of the axe chipping away in the orchard, an image which recalls Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard* and likewise conveys the sense of a slow process of decay. Greene adds that Haggard's sad demise comes closer to 'adult literature' than any of his books (CEG, p. 214); but the melancholy element which he detects, the sense of fade-out, also has its place in romance. And, as seen in the examination of texts from both the beginning and the end of his career, this theme always remained central to Haggard, from the lingering death of Quatermain (from the first a mature and seasoned hero) in *Allan Quatermain* to Hubert disappearing in the direction of the mythical City of Gold in *The Virgin of the Sun*.

vii) The displacement of romance

Stevenson's essay 'A Gossip on a Novel of Dumas' (the novel in question being *The Vicomte de Bragelonne*) succeeds in drawing together many of the strands of the discussion concerning Haggard and 'elegiac' romance. This is in spite of the fact that Dumas's swashbuckling romances, concerned with historical intrigue and boasting some characters who might be deemed psychologically more interesting than the likes of Curtis – Stevenson picks up on the devious Fouquet in this respect (SF, pp. 123-124) – appear to be of a generally different kind from Haggard's. Stevenson however remarks on a similarly pensive note in *The Vicomte de Bragelonne* – what he calls 'a pleasant and tonic sadness' (SF, p. 25). He continues:

Upon the crowded, noisy life of this long tide, evening gradually falls; and the lights are extinguished, and the heroes pass away one by one. One by one they go [...] the young succeed them in their places [...] but for us and these old men whom we have loved so long, the inevitable end draws near and is welcome. To read this is to anticipate experience. Ah, if only when these shadows fall for us in reality and not in figure, we may hope to face them with a mind as quiet!

But my paper is running out; the siege guns are firing on the Dutch Frontier; and I must say adieu to my old comrade fallen on the field of glory [...] Yet a sixth time, dearest d'Artagnan, we shall kidnap Monk and take horse together for Belle Isle. (*SF*, p. 125)

The 'tonic and pleasant sadness' with which Stevenson is concerned differs in emphasis from the cloying gloom or stoical resignation so often displayed by Haggard; but Stevenson likewise acknowledges that all things draw to a close. Not that he is talking about empires and nations, like Haggard: instead he is talking about the experience of reading fiction, a very private experience as he paints it in this essay, presenting himself sitting alone, on a Scottish winter's evening, engrossed in a world of adventure (*SF*, p. 119). But he acknowledges too that eventually the book must be shut, the story must end, the actors grow old and finally cease (although others will take their place). And he makes explicit the connection between the fading of the romance which so engages him, and the ending of life itself: 'to read this is to anticipate experience'. *The Vicomte de Bragelonne* is thus seen to have a healthy moral purpose (consider again Stevenson's use of the word 'tonic') in its play upon the 'respite finem' theme.

However, Stevenson moves beyond moral concerns and goes back to considering the *Vicomte* simply as a good, entertaining tale, and his own joy in reading and re-reading it. He says that he is running out of paper (compare Hubert in *The Virgin of the Sun* whose words, in a manner of speaking, are left hanging off the page). But rather than a sense of complete fade-out and acceptance of closure (whether in life or in story) there is at the very end of this essay, a sense that things are continuing – or will continue. 'Yet a sixth time, dearest d'Artagnan, we shall kidnap Monk and take horse together for

Belle Isle'. Compare the end of *The Virgin of the Sun*, where the adventures continue off-stage, beyond the endpoint of Hubert's manuscript. Of course, in Stevenson's essay, the act of re-reading confers the sense of a kind of cyclic immortality; the emphasis is not quite the same as at the end of the Haggard novel. But in both the crucial point is that the story is seen to continue; fade-out does *not*, in these two cases, equal extinction.

The romance of *The Virgin of the Sun*, however, is ultimately displaced to a very distant point. It is in the first instance relayed through a centuries-old manuscript; it deals with the story of a people consigned to the periphery of history, and eventually moves out to a place even further away, a place of myth; and, if Mr. Potts's spiritualist vision is to be trusted, finally to a nebulous region beyond death. In fact, it all becomes so vague and insubstantial that it might be said it is scarcely worth having, in the end. It might even be seen as amounting to nothing more than sheer escapism – as indeed Haggard's life-long engagement with the romance genre might be. Alternatively, Haggard may have genuinely felt that romance really could only ultimately survive at a very far remove, and in a manner largely hidden from the conditions of the everyday world; hence the sense of fade-out, but not actual dissolution. This can be correlated with his general emphasis on death and decay while retaining a kind of belief in reincarnation, some sort of survival of the spirit.

Haggard's stylistic fallibilities – the sometimes overbearing rhetoric, and the like – have helped deter many critics from making a properly rounded appraisal of his work (the case of Stevenson, as another romance writer of the period, provides a useful contrast here). The present discussion has sought to redress the balance and to direct attention to the more neglected aspects of his fiction; and to give a better picture of how he stands in relation to the romance genre as a whole. Haggardian romance is not simply a matter of exotic lands and great battles, of dark magic and beautiful queens,

but is wedded to a sense of transience. It might even be said that, for him, romance was of itself a lost world, accessible to the modern age really only through the medium of a vivid and compulsive imagination (like his own) and even then only fitfully – but that it *was* still a world, and one that could be actively sought.

Chapter Three

i) The lost worlds of England: Doyle

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Doyle locates his Lost World in the hidden, unexplored regions of South America: a world of prehistoric monsters, contained in its ancient self-sufficient plateau. However, this world is less 'lost' than most of Haggard's. Doyle brings it into the modern age by placing it firmly under the purview of contemporary science, and also popular journalism; and it is no mere flight of fancy, but predicated upon well-attested geological discoveries. But the scientific too can admit of the marvellous; as the Duke of Durham pronounces at the concluding conference, 'Apparently the age of romance was not dead, and there was common ground upon which the wildest imaginings of the novelist could meet the actual scientific investigations of the searcher for truth' (*LWT*, p. 194 (ch. 16)). And as Doyle shapes his tale to the requirements of a quest romance, the Lost World frequently takes on all the characteristics of a fantasy wonderland: at the actual moment of entrance, it is deemed a 'fairyland' (*LWT*, p. 78 (ch. 8)) by Malone. And this idea is conveyed not only by the impressionable young reporter but also by Professor Challenger:

The secret opening is half a mile onwards upon the other side of the river. There is no break in the trees. That is the wonder and the mystery of it. There where you see light-green rushes instead of dark-green undergrowth, there between the great cotton woods, that is my private gate into the unknown. Push through, and you will understand. (*LWT*, p. 78 (ch. 8))

This romantic kind of discourse is also evident in many later scenes, for instance in the first discovery of the iguanodons in which we are given an image of Summerlee and Challenger in 'silent ecstasy', holding hands 'like two little children in the presence of a

marvel' (*LWT*, p. 113, ch. 10); while at a later stage Malone fancifully refers to the great central lake as 'the mother of strange monsters' (*LWT*, p. 190 (ch. 15)).

Nevertheless, in many ways the keynote of the story seems to be scientific discussion, or scientific squabbling, especially between Summerlee and Challenger – something which Doyle obviously envisaged as an opportunity for comedy, but it becomes rather tiresome. Summerlee and Challenger's disputations however reflect what is seen to happen in the scientific world at large, as witness the events of the meeting of the Zoological Institute in Chapter 5 and the rowdy lecture-hall scenes towards the end, where Summerlee, Challenger and Malone return triumphant to deliver confirmation of their astounding journey – most memorably in shape of the pterodactyl, whose emergence is the high point of Challenger's showmanship. Challenger's taste for springing dramatic surprises (which he shares with his author's more famous creation Sherlock Holmes) thus leads to the irruption, or the uncovering, of the primeval into the heart of modern London (a theme taken up in the next chapter.) *The Lost World* is a subject to be hotly debated by erudite, and highly excitable, men, and not merely to be wondered at and dreamed over.

It may be, indeed, that Doyle is trying to do too many things in *The Lost World*, and that whenever he modulates from one level to another he does so awkwardly – never more so than upon the adventurers' final exit from Maple White Land. At this point, apropos of really nothing that has gone before, Malone states ponderously that 'our souls are chastened by what we have endured. Each is in his own way a better and deeper man' (*LWT*, p. 190 (ch. 15)). However, the reader does not feel that the three men have undergone any kind of genuine transfiguring experience. Doyle thus treats the traditional romance motif of the test of initiation very cavalierly; this pretence at a weighty seriousness would have been far better left out of a novel which works best as a light and fast-paced adventure-story.

The Lost World, then, never really progresses beyond the level of pure adventure narrative and scientific debate – and popular journalism, the crucial link here being provided, of course, by Malone. This ensures that the story will be broadcast worldwide, and there is no doubt of the stir it causes; one has only to look at the title of the final chapter, ‘A Procession! A Procession!’ Both Malone’s presence and Challenger’s showmanship are, ultimately, designed to impress a crowd. *The Lost World* actually becomes the ‘new world’, and the property not only of scientists but also of a (rather raucous) ‘general public’ (*LWT*, p. 191-192 (ch. 16)).

In his short story ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’,¹ Doyle brings this prehistoric realm, or a piece of it, to England in quite a different way. In fact the premise of this story is that the Lost World is already to be found within England. In *The Lost World*, when the three adventurers chance upon iguanodons on the plateau, Summerlee remarks that ‘You’ll find their footmarks all over the Hastings sands, in Kent, and in Sussex. The South of England was alive with them when there was plenty of good lush green-stuff to keep them going. Conditions have changed, and the beasts died’ (*LWT*, p. 113 (ch. 10)). In ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’ Doyle presents us with a creature that seems to be of a similarly prehistoric nature (although not a dinosaur) which, bizarrely, has managed to survive in early twentieth-century Britain; it is the story of one beast which has *not* died.

The Lost World and ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’ also share an affinity insofar as both take on something of the features of a quest romance. In the novel, the whole affair begins because Malone sets out resolved to impress his fair lady (although such exalted notions are comically upended when he returns from his great adventure to find that she has wed another, and a very unprepossessing type). And in the course of the story Doyle sometimes remembers to revert to this pattern, for instance when Malone goes off on his own at one point, unheeding of the danger, carried away by the thought of the glory he

¹ Collected in *The Lost World and other Thrilling Tales*.

may achieve: 'Suppose I stole softly away, suppose I made my way down to the central lake, suppose I was back at breakfast with some record of the place [...] Then [...] we should return to London with first-hand knowledge of the central mystery of the plateau, to which I alone, of all men, would have penetrated' (*LWT*, p. 137 (ch. 12)).

In 'The Terror of Blue John Gap', the protagonist, Dr. Hardcastle, undertakes on a smaller scale his own particular quest in search of the prehistoric creature which terrorizes the locals with its nightly depredations. The exact nature of the creature is left unspecified: the nearest mundane approximation that Hardcastle can come up with is that it is some kind of gigantic cave-bear. But whatever else it may be it is in some degree, monstrous; and this leads naturally on to the idea of doing battle with the monster, a challenge which Hardcastle finally spurs himself to take up – a twentieth-century version of the knight setting out to confront the dragon.

And Hardcastle confronts the creature not only for the sake of the 'common good' (*LWT*, p. 314), but also to appease his own curiosity. He meditates thus: 'I think of the old- world legends of dragons and of other monsters. Were they, perhaps, not such fairy-tales as we have thought? Can it be that there is some fact which underlies them, and am I, of all mortals, the one who is chosen to expose it?' (*LWT*, p. 312). There is an undercurrent of excitement here, rather solemn but nonetheless excitement, that perhaps he has been 'chosen' for some great work – to 'expose' a 'fact', he says, but it seems his thoughts are indeed straying into the realm of 'fairytale', and 'legend'. Certainly his diction at this point begins to make the whole thing appear like something out of an old romance or adventure tale, with himself as the one who has been 'chosen' to accomplish a difficult task. It should be noted that 'task' is precisely the word he uses, at the close of his narrative (*LWT*, p. 319).

However, in complete contrast to Malone, Summerlee and Challenger, Hardcastle's heroic efforts go unrecognized. From the first he appears extremely isolated. In fact, at

the start he refers to himself as a 'superfluous man', a fitting male counterpart to the two old maids who board him, two of the period's 'superfluous women' (*LWT*, p. 304). (The idea of 'the superfluous man' has inevitable connotations of the likes of Turgenev, although it is difficult to tell to what extent Doyle intended to evoke these connotations, if indeed at all). And in the written statement of events which he draws up (in the time-honoured fashion of characters in fiction who undergo experiences not likely to be believed), he firstly directs reference outwith the frame to an absent friend (who has failed abjectly to support him, it seems), and not to a general audience. The fact that this referent is unable to be located serves to further emphasize his isolation. Finally, having been repudiated by his peers (his medical colleague refers him, without his knowledge, to 'the best mad doctor in Derbyshire' (*LWT*, p. 312)) and ridiculed by the local police, he realizes that if anything is to be done he will have to do it himself.

But although he does not seem to feel any real kinship with the countryfolk amongst whom he has retired, by the end he has effectively aligned himself with them: 'The educated and the scientific [...] may smile at my narrative, but the poorer folk of the countryside never had a doubt as to its truth' (*LWT*, p. 317). Unfortunately, these particular folk have no verbal version of events to offer; all they do is silently fill up the tunnel entrance through which the creature first emerged (*LWT*, p. 318).

Hardcastle's seclusion contributes to a vital aspect of the tale: the sense of the buried deeps. He comes to appear almost as solitary as the creature itself, and his story gives a whole new meaning to the notion of 'being buried in the depths of the countryside'. He encounters a part of a long-submerged world and seems to almost become part of it. And it seems that, unlike *Maple White Land*, this world will always remain 'lost': it is buried so deep so as to offer negligible evidence, as a rule, of its continuing existence. In this it differs from some other fictional underground realms, like that in Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race*, published over thirty years earlier. Obviously in Bulwer-

Lytton's tale the vital difference is that the subterranean world is peopled by sentient beings, with the means and the will to break out, rather than by shaggy indeterminate beasts. The whole story is conceived as being a ruthlessly utopian vision of the future (the first of many such visions to appear in English literature). And, although the inherent, and often wearisome, tendency in utopian writings to detail all aspects of the imagined future society – social, political, aesthetic, economical – is much in evidence in this novel, Bulwer-Lytton does achieve a certain frisson with the central image of these 'inevitable destroyers' who, in the manner of the narrator's own, unidentified illness, although at present giving 'little pain and no perceptible notice of [...] encroachment may at any moment be fatal'.²

In Doyle's story, by contrast, there is no threat of large-scale apocalypse; and the portal to the subterranean world is blocked up fairly securely at the end. However, a residual sense of unease remains, the feeling that one can never tell what may be lurking (to use that favourite Gothic term) just below the surface in the sleepy English countryside.

In 'The Terror of Blue John Gap', then, the primitive stratum, except for one solitary creature, remains submerged. Elsewhere in Doyle's fiction – in some of the Holmes stories for instance – it lies much closer to the surface; indeed it is actually *on* the surface, thus attaining a far greater degree of visibility. This is the case in the late Holmes story, 'The Adventure of the Devils Foot', where the focus is on a bleak (if still picturesque) stretch of Cornish land, comprising 'rolling moors, lonely and dun-coloured', interspersed with 'traces of some vanished race which had passed utterly

² Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Novels and Romances*, 28 vols (London: Routledge, 1876-1877), iii: *The Coming Race* (1877), 248 (ch. 29).

away'.³ Here, the primitive is plain to see; and it takes on full grim splendour in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, with the depiction of Dartmoor. Doyle gives us an effective portrayal of a dark and brooding landscape, studded with the remains of prehistoric human dwellings, and the forbidding Grimpen Mire. And these moors are envisaged as being the perfect setting for a drama of atavistic regression, featuring the bestial fugitive Selden and Stapleton who is apparently a criminal throwback to his ancestor, the fearsome Hugo Baskerville of legend.

Things come to a head in the final stages with the eerie, all-engulfing mist and the introduction of the hound, which, if not truly spectral, stretches credibility almost as much as if it were. Correspondingly, the moor with its 'dark void spaces' becomes a place of wholly sinister enchantment, the stage for a 'supreme adventure'.⁴ The story plainly strains towards the supernatural (and according to the Dedication, it owes its inspiration to a ghostly legend). But although he was later to become an enthusiastic, and much derided, advocate of Spiritualism,⁵ at the time of writing *The Hound of the Baskervilles* Doyle was still far from any wholesale commitment to the realm of unseen forces. The darkest secrets of the moor are ferreted out, or at any rate Holmes is confident enough to remark: 'I do not know that this place contains any secret which we have not already fathomed' (*CSH*, p. 760 (ch. 14)). It is true that one cannot get a solid footing in the marshland, which claims a succession of living creatures in the course of the novel (the moor pony and Dr. Mortimer's spaniel as well as Stapleton). Yet, ultimately, Doyle's Grimpen remains of this world.

³ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981; henceforth designated in the text as *CSH*), p. 955.

⁴ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, in *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 667-766 (*CSH*, p. 754 (ch. 14)).

⁵ Some recent biographies of Doyle give greater weight to the Spiritualist issue than many commentators have done in the past, and make an effort to trace his earliest interest in the subject, rather than conveniently dismissing it as a falling away in the last phase of his life and career. See, for example, Daniel Stashower, *Teller of Tales: The Life of Arthur Conan Doyle* ([n.p.]: Holt, 1999; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000).

ii) The return of the primitive

Holmes's scientific and rationalist principles, then, are brought to bear on the mystery of Dartmoor, so that, while Hardcastle in 'The Terror of Blue John Gap' seems to be left little choice eventually but to descend to the level of the 'yokels' of Derbyshire (*LWT*, p. 311), Watson is wholly vindicated in his conscious refusal to sink to the superstitious level of the Dartmoor 'peasants' who avidly believe in the phantom hound and seek to further embellish its credentials (*CSH*, p. 727 (ch. 10)). But even in 'The Terror of Blue John Gap', despite a certain ambivalence of presentation as regards the 'cave-bear' (and the fact that, unlike the fearsome hound, it is not finally exposed and satisfactorily categorized), the scientific element remains prominent. Early in his narrative Hardcastle wishes to convey the peculiar splendours of the part of the countryside to which he has retired, talking of its 'weird solitudes' and likening it to something out of the *Arabian Nights* (*LWT*, p. 304); but he closes with a rather dry, matter-of-fact explication of the whole subterranean world:

My view is [...] that in this part of England there is a vast subterranean lake or sea, which is fed by the great number of streams which pass down through the limestone. Where there is a large collection of water there must also be some evaporation, mists or rain, and a possibility of vegetation. This in turn suggests that there may be animal life, arising, as the vegetable life would also do, from those seeds and types which had been introduced at an early period of the world's history, when communication with the outer air was more easy. This place had then developed a fauna and flora of its own, including such monsters as the one I had seen, which may well have been the old cave-bear, enormously enlarged and modified by its new environment. For countless aeons the internal and the external creation had kept apart, growing steadily away from each other. Then there had come some rift in the depths of the mountain which had enabled one creature to wander up and, by means of [a] Roman tunnel, to reach the open air. (*LWT*, pp. 318-319)

The 'countless aeons' envisaged by Doyle here of course have a basis in scientific reality; the nineteenth century had seen the steady consolidation of the geological timetable (and the final discrediting of the comfortable notion that the earth was only a few thousand years old). However, Doyle's more engaging stories are those like *The Hound of the Baskervilles* which feature landscapes closer in time than Maple White Land or the underground world of 'The Terror of Blue John Gap', and which, most piquantly, bear traces of a recognizable human presence (no matter how primitive). And this sense of a prehistoric human presence in Britain itself – and not shunted off to far-away 'savage' regions – came sharply into focus for the first time around the mid nineteenth-century, due largely to the rapid development of local archaeology, a development stimulated by such factors as excavations for railway building. At a meeting of the Archaeological Institute in 1876, Pitt Rivers remarked that no one at the institute's first meeting thirty years earlier had had 'the least idea' that the remains of men, thousands and thousands of years old, lay 'at his very feet'.⁶ By the later nineteenth century the opportunities for strange encounters in far-flung places might have appeared to be drying up in the wake of relentless European imperialist expansion; but the unfamiliar had surfaced in Britain itself. It was the sense of an otherness in time, rather than in space.

In his novella *The Croquet Player*, published in 1936, H. G. Wells was able to look back over the advances of the last hundred years or so as follows:

A century ago [...] men lived in the present far more than they do now [...] All [prehistoric human existence] was buried and forgotten and out of life. We lived in a magic sphere [...] And now, in the last

⁶ For an overview of these developments in British archaeology see George W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press, 1987), pp. 69-74. (Pitt Rivers is quoted on pp. 71-72.)

century or so, we have broken that. We have poked into the past, unearthing age after age and we peer more and more forward into the future.⁷

The opening up of the abyss in time – and time projected forwards as well as backwards – while providing a fruitful theme for writers, gave rise to mixed emotions. In his essay ‘On Fairy Stories’, J. R. R. Tolkien uses exactly these words, ‘abyss of time’, in describing the ‘enchantment’ afforded by the Eloi and Morlocks of *The Time Machine* – although he takes points off for the ‘preposterous’ Time Machine itself.⁸ Meanwhile in the other direction C. S. Lewis in *Surprised by Joy* uses a similar phrase, borrowed from *The Tempest*, ‘the dark backward and *abysm* of time’ when talking of the effect wrought upon him in his childhood by the antique worlds evoked by Edith Nesbit in *The Story of the Amulet*.⁹ (Lewis himself went on to use the Nesbit theme of ancient civilizations in *The Magician’s Nephew*, although in a different way, with the dust – purportedly from Atlantis – which has the power to transport one to wholly *other*, and not just ancient, worlds.)

The theme of antiquity is, of course, susceptible to poetic treatment, as witness Lewis once again, in his essay ‘Psycho-analysis and Literary Criticism’.¹⁰ In this essay Lewis points out how imaginatively charged Jung’s language becomes in his discussion of the beginnings and the foundations of the human mind. Lewis goes on to admit he reacts powerfully to such writing and the sense that lies behind it of things stirring in the

⁷ H. G. Wells, *The Croquet Player* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936) p. 49 (ch. 3). (Henceforth designated in the text as *CP*.)

⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, ‘On Fairy Stories’, in *The Monsters and the Critics and other Essays*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983; henceforth designated in the text as *MCE*), pp. 109-161 (pp. 115-116).

⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, in *Selected Books* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), pp. 1239-1382 (p. 1251 (ch. 1)).

¹⁰ C. S. Lewis, ‘Psycho-analysis and Literary Criticism’, in *They Asked for a Paper*, pp. 120-138.

recesses of time and consciousness. The abyss of time in such cases gives rise to a sense of 'enchantment', even exhilaration.

Wells too, is to be found in celebratory mode in 'The Grisly Folk', as he extols the memory of the founding fathers of the human race once long forgotten but now, thanks to the reconstructing work done by scientists, in a sense resurrected. At the beginning of the story we are presented with the single image of dry bones in a museum and the question – reminiscent of Ezekiel 37. 3: 'can these bones live?'¹¹ In answer Wells proceeds to imaginatively re-create a whole primordial realm, enthusing about the 'Great Paladins' that 'must have arisen in that forgotten world' (CSW, pp. 692-693) and paying homage to the epic battles that must have been waged between these first, 'true' men and the Neanderthals (the 'grisly folk') for supremacy. (Compare and contrast the later novel by Golding, *The Inheritors*, where the eventual ascendancy of man over the Neanderthal is associated with a loss of primal innocence.) The achievements of early man are also featured in a story like 'The Knife and the Naked Chalk' by Kipling (in *Rewards and Fairies*) which focuses on the pioneering use of iron, as opposed to flint, knives in order to defeat the wolf, the marauding 'Beast'. (Of course Kipling's approach in conjuring up visions of the ancient past is markedly different from that of Wells in 'The Grisly Folk'; his emphasis is very much local, as opposed to Wells's epic world picture.)

However, in *The Croquet Player* the stark awareness of the vast primordial past and man's wholly primitive beginnings leads, as in Hardy, to a sense of cosmic despair, and therefore is cause for concern rather than celebration. This theme had of course been given eloquent expression much earlier in *The Time Machine*. But in *The Croquet Player* the tone is different. In *The Time Machine* the Eloi and Morlocks represent brutishness in different ways: the Eloi in their slothfulness, the Morlocks in their

¹¹ *The Complete Short Stories of H. G. Wells*, ed. by John Hammond (London: Dent, 1998; repr. London: Phoenix Press, 2000), p. 684. (Henceforth designated in the text as CSW.)

cannibalistic savagery. In *The Croquet Player* the emphasis is on the latter type, which is hardly surprising given the increasing urgency of the world situation at that time – the violent spectacle of Fascism and Nazism on the Continent, and the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. For Wells, such events furnished sufficient proof that man cannot escape his savage origins – except by some monumental effort to build a genuinely improved civilization, a task which he enjoins upon his fellow humans in book after book in the latter stages of his literary career.

Although he has an undoubted admonitory purpose in *The Croquet Player*, Wells adopts an interesting approach to his material. *The Croquet Player* begins as a kind of ghost story as told to the narrator, Frobisher (the ‘croquet player’ of the title) by one Dr. Finchatton. It is ‘the haunting of a whole countryside’ (CP, p. 2 (ch. 1)) centring on a village called Cainsmarsh, where Finchatton says he has lately been staying. On the face of it there is nothing very remarkable about the place; but Finchatton remarks, significantly, that ‘It is in just such a flat, still atmosphere perhaps [...] that things lying below the surface, things altogether hidden in more eventful and colourful surroundings, creep on our perceptions’ (CP, p. 19 (ch. 1)). As Finchatton describes it, there is in Cainsmarsh a strong impression of things lying just below a seemingly calm surface – not literally, as in ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’, but in the sense of dark primitive instincts barely concealed by a superficial appearance of civilization. These dark forces manifest themselves in a series of violent incidents, and some of the inhabitants, as happens to the narrator at the end of Wells’s Swiftian allegory, *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, actually begin to look like brutes to the confused Finchatton (CP, p. 35 (ch. 2)).

This apprehension of criminal savagery in remote rural places is also evident in a writer like Doyle, as witness Holmes’s well-known observation in ‘The Adventure of the Copper Beeches’, that

the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside [...] The reason is very obvious. The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish [...] But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser. (CSH, p. 323)

And, as we have already seen, there are the criminal figures of Stapleton and Selden in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, who blend into a suitably sinister landscape. The Grimpen Mire also invites comparison with Cainsmarsh which is described at one point as a sort of 'fairyland fenland' (CP, p. 69 (ch. 4)), or 'butterfly-land' (CP, p. 68 (ch. 4)). (We recall that in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* Stapleton is an entomologist, out chasing butterflies when first Watson meets him.) It is in this swampy kind of place that the pernicious influence of the primitive appears most palpable; Cainsmarsh is a 'magic marshland into which a man might go sane and confident, admiring the butterflies and the flowers, and out of which presently he would come running again, with fear and rage' (CP, p. 64 (ch. 4)).

Interestingly, Cainsmarsh is eventually revealed to be largely the invention of Dr. Finchatton, a fiction within a fiction. But through both Wells intends to expose what he, at least, felt to be a terrible reality. The spirit of savagery which Finchatton detects is *not* imagination; it is the lasting legacy of man's earliest and most brutish progenitors, which he cannot with any degree of ease shake off – although this is what the clear-thinking Dr. Norbert urges Frobisher finally to do. But Frobisher, a comically effeminate character, hardly seems the type to be able to succeed. (He can in fact be seen as representative of the Eloi type of animality, too feeble and powerless to do anything against the more violent, bloodthirsty Morlockian kind.) Wells warns us

against the return of the primitive; but in works like *The Croquet Player* he tacitly acknowledges that his warnings are unlikely to prove effective.

iii) Deities and demons: Machen

The sense of the primitive in lonely places is used to good effect by Wells and Doyle; but although the stories discussed above shade easily into sinister gothic mode, they do not involve the truly supernatural. However, other writers around the turn of the twentieth century were more willing to ascribe the workings of not only primitive but also properly supernatural forces to various places throughout the British Isles. In so doing they moved from the evocation of *old* worlds to truly *other* worlds, in the fullest sense of the term.

Arthur Machen is one example. Coming from a fairly impoverished rural background, Machen moved to London at an early age in order to make a living and spent several years doing various odd jobs such as cataloguing and translating while also trying to make a name for himself as a writer (a part of his life that he recalled almost obsessively in his later writings) before finally managing to establish himself as a purveyor of sensationalist, often macabre fiction. He made enough of a mark to merit the odd honorary dinner in later years – as recalled, for instance, at the beginning of his autobiography, *Far off Things*,¹² and as well as his ghoulish tales he also earned some slight notice as a literary critic, particularly in his spirited defence of Rabelais against the common charge of vulgarity in *Hieroglyphics*. But he made less of an impression in Britain than in the United States, which adopted him as something of a cult horror writer during his lifetime. This began with a single 1917 article by Vincent Starrett which then seemed to provoke a procession of curious visitors from the other side of the

¹² *Works of Arthur Machen*, vol. viii: *Far Off Things*, 3-4. (Henceforth designated in the text as *FOT*.)

Atlantic to see the man who was seen to be carrying on certain American literary traditions.¹³ These were traditions represented most fully by Hawthorne and Poe, involving dark brooding landscapes – for instance the forest in Hawthorne’s ‘Young Goodman Brown’ (which might be seen as a later, and distinctively American, version of Dante’s dark wood of sin) or the spectacle of dissolving human forms as in Poe’s ‘Monsieur Valdemar’ (a more ‘modern’ phenomenon insofar as it is seen to be the result of scientific experimentation).

However, Machen’s kinship with such gothic writers as Hawthorne and Poe has tended to obscure his links to other, very different, traditions: as Aidan Reynolds and William Charlton observe, he was more indebted to the seventeenth-century hermeticist Thomas Vaughan than to Poe for his portrayals of human reduction to a kind of original matter (*MLW*, p. 46). And like Thomas Vaughan and Thomas’ brother Henry he hailed from Wales (Henry Vaughan’s fellow-poet and fellow-visionary Thomas Traherne also came from the Welsh border country); and from the first he appears to have been in thrall to the manifold beauties of the place. ‘Anything I may have accomplished in literature is due to the fact that when my eyes were first opened in earliest childhood they had before them the vision of an enchanted land’ (*FOT*, p. 7). This sense of ‘enchantment’ seems to have been real for Machen, and much of his writing career was taken up with the attempt to transfer this ‘vision’ onto the printed page. In a modification of the Stevensonian idea that certain places cry out for their own particular stories, he says in his autobiography that

I should put it thus: this group of pines, this lonely shore, or whatever the scene may be, has made the soul thrill with an emotion intense but vague in the sense in which music is vague; and the man of letters

¹³ See Aidan Reynolds and William Charlton, *Arthur Machen: A Short Account of His Life and Work* (London: Baker, 1963), pp. 127-128. (Henceforth designated in the text as *MLW*.)

does his best to realize – rather than, perhaps, to actualize – this emotion by inventing a tale about the pines or the sands. (*FOT*, pp. 23-24)

The reference to music recalls the ‘decadent’ or ‘eighteen-nineties’ writers and their views upon the nature and function of art, in particular the idea deriving, in part, from Walter Pater that all art is consistently ‘aspiring towards the principle of music: music being the [...] ideally consummate art’, where form and content are inseparable.¹⁴ In no true sense though was Machen ever allied to any particular ‘movement’. ‘Although the atmosphere of the age and the opportunity to experiment had something to do with the themes he chose for his own stories,’ observe Aidan Reynolds and William Charlton, ‘he followed no fashion and clung to no coterie. He had few literary friends’ (*MLW*, p. 42).

Rather than labelling Machen conveniently as a ‘decadent’ (he went on writing far beyond that particular period for one thing), one should perhaps first consider his Welsh heritage. He spoke little Welsh himself but he always appeared full of enthusiasm for Welsh literature, maybe less for its concrete achievements than for its supposed innate quality which, he says,

does not exist in Anglo-Saxondom. It is diffused, no doubt, and appreciative rather than creative, and lacking in the sterner, critical spirit which is so necessary to all creative work; still it is there, and it is delighted with the rolling sound of the noble phrase. It perceives the music of words and the relation of that music to the world. (*FOT*, p. 89)

¹⁴Walter Pater, ‘The School of Giorgione’, in *The Renaissance*, pp. 102-122 (pp. 104 –105).

The 'sterner critical spirit which is necessary to all creative work' approximates to what Donald Davie (drawing upon the critical writings of Pater and Hopkins) has defined as 'masculinity' – 'an energy of apprehension which, far from running wild, seeks out of itself the structures to control it'.¹⁵ Machen remarks that Welsh literature lacks this, as a rule; but his personal preference seems to be for words that 'roll' along unhindered, like a musical torrent. This musicality is for him the essence of the Celtic spirit, which he strives – for good or for ill – to capture in his own writings.

A large part of Machen's fascination with the place of his birth, then, stems from its rich Celtic traditions, and its historical and legendary associations in general – most of all the story of Arthur and, in particular, the 'Quest of the Sangraal'. We can look more closely at Machen's use of the Grail theme as it provides one of the main sources of 'other-worldliness' in his fiction, outside of his gothic concerns.

As part of the Arthurian Revival (only one facet of the whole medieval revival which stemmed from the later eighteenth century), the Grail legend featured strongly in Victorian art and literature.¹⁶ For instance there were the famous Tennyson poems: 'Sir Galahad' in 1842 and the altogether bleaker 'The Holy Grail', one of the 'Idylls' of 1870. Also there were lesser-known poems such as 'The Quest of the Sangraal' by Cornish vicar R. S. Hawker (1865). And interest in the legend extended in more scholarly form into the twentieth century with the 1909 study, *The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal* by A. E. Waite (fellow-member of Machen's in 'The Order of the Golden Dawn'), and Jessie Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) which argued that the Grail story springs entirely from ancient pagan ritual and not, as might be thought, from Christian romance. (Weston's anthropological approach to myth and legend had of

¹⁵ Donald Davie, 'Poetry of Sir Walter Scott,' in *Older Masters: Essays and Reflections on English and American Literature* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1992), pp. 276-289 (p. 282).

¹⁶ For further details of the Grail legend in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries see, for example, *The Grail: A Casebook*, ed. by Dhira B. Mahoney (New York: Garland, 2000); the Introduction, pp. 1-115 (pp. 41-78); Debra N. Mancoff, 'Pure Hearts and Clean Hands: the Victorians and the Grail', pp. 447-464; and Raymond H. Thompson, 'A Sacred Symbol in a Secular Age', pp. 545-560.

course been anticipated by the likes of Sir James Frazer in his monumental work, *The Golden Bough*.)

Machen, too, had occasion to research the legend in the British Museum during a period in the nineties, and draws on it most notably in the novels *The Great Return* (1915) and later, *The Secret Glory* (1922). In both of these he places the legend firmly, indeed exclusively, within the nexus of Welsh tradition. His approach is therefore similar to that of Hawker, who concentrates upon his native Cornwall in 'The Quest of the Sangraal'; in both cases the Grail is attached to a particular locale, so that its entire significance is limited to that one place and its inhabitants. But in addition Machen is also virtually the first to place the appearance (or re-appearance) of the Grail in the modern age.

In *The Great Return* the otherwise undistinguished little town of Llantrisant suddenly begins to experience wonderful visions of a divine host bearing the Grail in its midst; it has, for a brief period of time, 'returned' to its earthly homeland, and leaves joyous blessings in its wake. However Machen's treatment of the theme is more intriguing in *The Secret Glory*. Here the Grail reveals itself not in a heavenly vision but rather as a solid, physical object, stowed away in an old Welsh farmhouse and revealed to the adoring eyes of the young Ambrose Meyrick. (Compare Charles Williams's novel *War in Heaven*, in which the Grail turns up among the church vessels in a little English village.) Ambrose later muses thus: 'in that dark cell beneath many locks, beneath wood and iron, concealed in golden, glittering veils, lay hidden that glorious and awful cup, glass of wonderful vision, portal and entrance of the Spiritual Place' (SG, p. 83 (ch. 2)). Portal to another, greater world it may be; yet its existence is in the main not even suspected. In this version of the legend there is no need for this most revered of chalices to 'return', because it has never been away; instead Machen suggests that it has always existed, in secret, handed down from generation to generation within a family in a

remote corner of Wales. And after the death of the last hereditary keeper, Cradock, custody passes to Ambrose, whose ultimate task it is to take the Grail, in the manner of the old heroes, to a far-off place – a task in which he achieves martyrdom, as on the way back he falls foul of modern-day Muslim infidels, ‘Turks, or Kurds’, as related in the Epilogue (SG, pp. 247-250).

Machen, then, chooses to give his young hero a glorious destiny (although, interestingly, those final events are only summarily related in a distanced, even ironic, manner). With such a fate in store, it is perhaps little wonder that Ambrose grows up with a very strong sense of the sacred, which infuses the whole landscape around his home, ‘the land of the old saints’ (SG, p. 55 (ch. 2)). Indeed, in an early section of the book the landscape seems to become transfigured. It opens with Ambrose standing in a land which ‘rose and fell in dull and weary undulations, in a vast circle of dun ploughland and grey meadow, bounded by a dim horizon without promise or hope, dreary as a prison wall’ (SG, p. 49 (ch.2)). But then a little later, he has a vision of a great star and drinks from a holy well and everything is changed: he finds himself ‘on a hillside [...] on the verge of a great wood’ and goes forth into the ‘green world of the leaves’ (SG, p. 53 (ch. 2)). The change from the dreary grey hopeless ploughland to the fertile green wood is quite marked; it is as if the land has become enriched by the power of religious sanctity.

Glen Cavaliero draws attention to the ‘sacramental’ aspects of Machen’s world-view, as articulated in works like *The Secret Glory*.¹⁷ But the ‘sacramental’ qualities of *The Secret Glory*, at least, have generally not loomed large in the minds of readers and critics; it is remembered, if it is remembered at all, chiefly for the picture of Lupton, the public school where Ambrose is severely tried. The culpability lies with Machen, for the book is a hotch-potch, unevenly comprising vignettes of the countryside and of school-

¹⁷ Glen Cavaliero, *The Supernatural and English Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 79.

life and also life in the city (when Ambrose later goes to London). Also, in the latter stages, it concentrates on Ambrose's literary opinions, which affords Machen the chance to expound upon his favourite authors like Rabelais who extol the joys of drinking. In fact, the notion of the Grail itself seems almost to become transmuted into a symbol of a great drinking-vessel, the 'Eternal Cup' of 'a high and blissful and everlasting Tavern' (*SG*, p. 248 (Epilogue)) which detracts from the sanctity of Machen's original conception. He never really gets to grips with the idea, that he starts out from, of having his young protagonist become the Keeper of the Graal, and privy to the most holy and ancient mysteries.

Yet, from another angle, this particular fault appears as an unexpected strength. The Grail maybe does not readily attach itself to any particularly strong or memorable narrative in the modern age, but its very appearance, unveiled so unexpectedly in the old farmhouse, is just enough to remind one of other worlds, other dimensions. It may be a 'secret' glory but it is a glory nonetheless. In the final analysis, Machen's handling of the Grail image does not quite answer to his sense of the numinous in the Welsh landscape. However, if nothing else, it conspires to lend at times a rather intriguing air of oddity to the assembled material of the text.

Having considered some of Machen's writings in which the other-worldliness of the Welsh countryside appears in a beneficent light, we can now turn to his more well-known – indeed notorious – works, where the fields and woods and most of all the hills of his homeland appear more sinister than sanctified, and in fact become a series of 'hieroglyphics' (to use his own preferred term) for all things unhallowed. This is the case in *The Hill of Dreams*, which like *The Secret Glory* chronicles the life of a young boy growing up in rural Wales; but Lucian Taylor is even more profoundly affected by

the sheer beauty and wildness of his surroundings than Ambrose Meyrick. The Welsh landscape never appears quite so lush, and as lurid, as through his eyes.

Lucian sets out 'resolved to lose himself, to discover strange hills and prospects',¹⁸ and his explorations at first just seem to be in the nature of splendid boyish adventures. But ultimately he loses himself altogether, and is never able to claw his way back. To begin with he strays far afield quite deliberately: 'he found himself, as he had hoped, far and forlorn; he had strayed into outland and occult territory' (*HD*, p. 4 (ch. 1)). Even here there is a hint that he is beginning to go too far: he has ventured not merely into 'outland' but also 'occult' territory; he appears to be edging closer into forbidden realms. And then one day the change occurs: 'Suddenly, he knew that he was alone. Not merely solitary; that he had often been amongst the woods and deep in the lanes; but now it was a wholly different and very strange sensation' (*HD*, p. 18 (ch. 1)). Soon after there follow his experiences by the old Roman fort, the awakening of primal, indeed bestial, instincts. In *The Great Return* and *The Secret Glory* Machen invokes the past glories of the early Celtic, pre-Roman, church, with which he himself identified; in *The Hill of Dreams* the theme of Celtic antiquity appears in darker guise, in the image of the 'little people', Lucian's 'far-off ancestors', the ancient inhabitants of hill and dale, hovering on the edge of history (*HD*, p. 60 (ch. 2)). (The theme of the 'little people' consistently haunted Machen's imagination, surfacing in works as far apart in time as 'The Novel of the Black Seal' in *The Three Impostors* (1895) and the short novel *The Green Round*, published in 1933.)

Lucian so allows himself to fall under the sway of strange places that at a later date, after he has removed to London and is bidding to become a writer (mirroring Machen's own early futile attempts to break into the urban literary world), he recalls the 'weird suggestion that had once beset him, that his very soul was being moulded into the hills,

¹⁸ *Works of Arthur Machen*, vol iii: *The Hill of Dreams*, 3 (ch. 1). (Henceforth designated in the text as *HD*.)

and passing into the blank mirror of still waterpools' (*HD*, p. 148 (ch. 5)). The idea of complete absorption into the landscape as expressed here is rather disturbing. Lucian's fear is of being reduced to a state of un-being, certainly in human terms – of passing into a '*blank*' mirror.

Of course, one can say that Lucian is suffering from a deluded and disordered imagination; but in *The Hill of Dreams* Machen generally succeeds in portraying a landscape in which an active malevolence seems to be present. This is a trait which Machen shares with the likes of Algernon Blackwood, who also portrays unsettlingly animistic landscapes in his fiction (although Blackwood often uses settings outwith the British Isles; two of his best-known stories, 'The Wendigo' and 'The Willows', take place in Canada and Central Europe respectively). Lucian's fear of being absorbed into the landscape finds resonance in a Blackwood story like 'The Transfer', in which a peculiar patch of garden literally sucks the life out of human beings.

Consider also 'The White People' – one of Machen's best-known, and best, stories – which relates many peculiar goings-on in strange places. Machen provides an explanatory framework (of a sort) with the figure of the reclusive Ambrose, who expatiates upon the nature of sin. Ambrose is concerned with real sin, sin in its essence, as opposed to 'mere social misdoing'¹⁹ with which, he says, it is all too often confused, for example in the case of the 'average' murderer who from Ambrose's point of view is less a genuine sinner than a 'wild beast' (*WP*, p. 125). Ambrose goes on to explain how true sin and true saintliness alike are concerned with matters outwith the everyday world, both being attempts to penetrate into other spheres. Holiness appears the more accessible of the two because 'it works on lines that were natural once; it is an effort to recover the ecstasy that was before the Fall' (*WP*, p. 128). But sin is an attempt to gain what has never been man's lot at all, that is to say 'the ecstasy and the knowledge that

¹⁹ *Works of Arthur Machen*, vol vi: *A Fragment of Life; The White People*, 131. (Henceforth designated in the text as *WP*.)

pertain alone to angels' (*WP*, p. 128). Therefore – and this is crucial – sin appears fundamentally *un-natural*. This un-natural (because truly other-worldly) quality lies at the heart of Ambrose's argument.

Ambrose however does not appear to condemn true sin any more than he does true holiness. Rather *both* are construed as being in the nature of an escape from, or maybe transcendence of, the deadening 'materialism' of the present age which has rendered the majority of people so inert and 'comfortable' that they 'have no inclination for either ascents or descents' (*WP*, p. 133).

T. S. Eliot's assessment of Baudelaire comes fairly close to all of the above. For Eliot, Baudelaire's supposed 'Satanism' was less an affectation in the manner of Swinburne and Swinburne's 'disciples', the 1890s decadents – who generally regarded evil as being 'good fun'²⁰ – than an uncertain groping towards the greater truths of Christianity, as a whole. Essentially, for Eliot, this meant that his (Baudelaire's) business was nothing to do with the ordinary world: that he was always, like Ambrose's great saints and sinners, looking beyond. 'He rejects always the purely natural and the purely human [...] Either because he cannot adjust himself to the actual world he has to reject it in favour of Heaven and Hell, or because he has the perception of Heaven and Hell he rejects the present world'.²¹ Baudelaire's kind of suffering, entailed in his quest for the outer realities, is presented by Eliot as being more than a welcome 'relief' from the banalities of the contemporary age: 'damnation itself is an immediate form of salvation from the ennui of modern life, because it at least gives some significance to living' (*SEE*, p. 427).

²⁰ T. S. Eliot, 'Baudelaire in Our Time', in *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1928), pp. 86-116 (p. 92).

²¹ T. S. Eliot, 'Baudelaire', in *Selected Essays*, third edn (London: Faber, 1951), pp. 419-430 (p. 423). (Henceforth designated in the text as *SEE*.)

Ambrose however in a sense goes even further than Eliot when he says that not only are people nowadays too rooted to a dull, wholly uninspiring level of things, but also that ‘convention and civilization and education’ have so dulled their senses that they have become incapable of even recognizing true goodness and true evil (*WP*, p. 129). (However he makes an exception for women and children, as being supposedly less civilized (*WP*, p. 129). – it should be no surprise therefore that the narrator of ‘The White People’ manuscript is a young girl.) One might say that ‘The White People’ attempts to effect a re-awakening of the modern individual’s senses, that it endeavours to jolt the reader back into an awareness of things beyond the world of everyday.

As to the actual manuscript itself, the first thing to notice is how the style differs so markedly from the ornamented prose of *The Hill of Dreams* and *The Secret Glory*. Consider, for example, the passage in which the narrator relates her experiences as she sets forth, alone, into strange places on the momentous ‘White Day’.

I went up and up long way, till at last [...] I came out [...] just under the top of a big bare place, where there were ugly grey stones lying all about the grass, and here and there a little twisted, stunted tree came out from under a stone, like a snake. And I went up, right to the top, a long way. I never saw such big ugly stones before; they came out of the earth some of them, and some looked as if they had been rolled to where they were, and they went on and on as far as I could see, a long, long way. I looked out from them and saw the country, but it was strange. It was winter time, and there were black terrible woods hanging from the hills all round [...] it all looked black, and everything had a voor over it [...] the sky was heavy and grey and sad, like a wicked voorish dome in Deep Dendo. I went on into the dreadful rocks. There were hundreds and hundreds of them [...] I went on among them, though they frightened me, my heart was full of wicked songs that they put into it; and I wanted to make faces and twist myself about in the way they did, and I went on and on a long way till at last I liked the rocks, and they didn’t frighten me any more. (*WP*, vi, pp. 139-140)

There is a peculiarly downbeat emphasis here, a minimalist approach in terms of description, as witness the use of such phrases as ‘big bare place’. Yet the syntax – the

long but elementary sentences piled one on top of the other, the repeated use of ‘and’ – results in a cumulative effect of horror, the feeling that the narrator is going on and on, in a curiously dogged fashion, and getting drawn deeper and deeper into this appalling new world. She doesn’t stop to question, or analyze – she merely presses on; and what comes across most strongly is some measure of that ‘un-natural’ quality which is made so much of in the Prologue.

One notable aspect of the above passage is the sense of greyness which permeates the whole. In *The Secret Glory* Ambrose Meyrick dreams of ‘that land where flame was the most material substance; whose inhabitants dwell in palpitating and quivering colours or in the notes of a wonderful melody’ (SG, p. 120 (ch. 3)). Here, by contrast, it seems as though all colour has been drained away. A little later the narrator talks of having reached the end of the world where ‘[t]here was nothing but the grey, heavy sky and the sides of the hollow; everything else had gone away’ (WP, p. 146). We gain a certain sense of the vitality being sucked out of things, so that nothing is left but the ‘hollow’ which becomes ‘the whole world’ (WP, p. 146).

There are greyish landscapes described elsewhere in Machen’s fiction, for instance Meirion in the 1915 novel, *The Terror*. Meirion is said to be ‘drooping in a slow decay, sleepy and grey with age and forgetfulness’.²² But Machen is here describing, in fairly conventional terms, a neglected countryside; and one can see how in ‘The White People’ the spirit of grey desolation is taken to un-natural extremes. (It should be remembered however that *The Terror* also relates un-natural events: the revolt of the animals against mankind, as manifested in sporadic incidents in rural communities all over Britain.)

We might also compare ‘The White People’ with a Lovecraft story, ‘The Colour out of Space’. This tale concerns a portion of the New England countryside that is tainted by

²² *Works of Arthur Machen*, vol 7: *The Terror; The Bowmen and other Legends of the War; The Great Return*, 16 (ch. 1). (Henceforth designated in the text as *TT*.)

an inscrutable force – ‘a piece of the great outside’²³ – which comes down unexpectedly out of the sky in the shape of a meteorite but which appears essentially to be a colour, not known on earth. Initially the foulness which it induces in the nearby vegetation is monstrously disguised as ‘gloss’ (*HDT*, p. 245); in parts of ‘The White People’ manuscript too, bright colours in the earth are described (*WP*, p. 143). But eventually everything, including the ironically-named Gardners’ farm, is sucked dry and left horribly grey and brittle in appearance. Of course, the literal disintegration of the Gardner family (like so much in Lovecraft’s fiction) verges almost wholly on the ridiculous. But otherwise the visual aspect of this tale, the change to a shockingly defamiliarized landscape, most of all in terms of colour, is not unimpressive, and comparable to the effect achieved by Machen in stories like ‘The White People’. While many of Machen’s characters are thoroughly alienated from the ordinary run of things, relatively few of his landscapes are as truly alienized as that of ‘The White People’.

Indeed, it is the whole world of ‘The White People’ which appears so alien to the modern reader, a world from which familiar elements have been siphoned out; and, despite the figure of Ambrose in the frame, Machen does little to elucidate. Instead he presents us with rather a jumble of material, with the portrayal of the mysterious ‘white people’, dim evocations of hilltop dancing and witches’ sabbaths, references to ‘earth-children’ (*WP*, p. 145) and the rendition of old fairy, or folk-tales. Once the reader is introduced into this world he is left to make of it what he can. Machen does not supply nearly enough adequate signposting (even Ambrose elaborates only slightly on certain details of the manuscript, in the Epilogue). The reader is, therefore, effectively abandoned to the guiding consciousness of a child who seems little inclined to explanation of any sort, as seen in the passage cited above where she gives no hint as to what the likes of ‘Deep Dendo’ might mean. At other times it is as if she is bound by

²³ H. P. Lovecraft, *Omnibus 3: The Haunter of the Dark and other Tales* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 243. (Henceforth designated in the text as *HDT*.)

some code of secrecy: 'I must not write down the real names of the days and months which I found out a year ago [...] I must not say who the Nymphs are, or the Dols, or Jeelo, or what voolas mean' (*WP*, p. 136).

Vagueness on Machen's part is something that has often irked critics. For instance Peter Penzoldt remarks that 'Machen asks the reader to imagine such horrors as he himself cannot describe' so that 'all his normal reader can do is either to grow bored, or accept, as if he were a child, that there are really some ultimate horrors which he is not 'grown up' enough to know about'.²⁴ Such complaints seem eminently justified in the case of a work like *The Great God Pan*, where Machen insists to an inordinate degree on horrors which he will not show; his narrative strategy distances the demoniacal figure of Helen Vaughan throughout and conspires in the end to give a rather weak, pallid effect. In 'The White People' manuscript, however, as he does not insist on anything but simply gives a flat narration of events, this technique is more successful.

Whether all these obscuring elements in the text can be regarded as being part of a wholly conscious overall design by Machen (which would argue a degree of literary sophistication that critics are normally not too willing to ascribe to him), or otherwise, the net effect is that we, the readers, are pitched into a world in which we struggle to find our bearings. But to some extent this might simply be the price we have to pay for our lack of knowledge of those ancient occult traditions which, as Ambrose pointedly remarks at the end, still exist 'in unabated vigour' in some parts of the country (*WP*, p. 182).

It is important not to underestimate the role of old and primitive rural traditions in Machen's work as a whole. Consider 'The Novel of the Black Seal', one of the inset

²⁴ Peter Penzoldt, *The Supernatural in Fiction* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952; repr.: Humanities Press, 1965), p. 205.

stories from *The Three Impostors*. As this tale involves an unscrupulous scientist-figure questing to push back the boundaries of knowledge and also features a case of physical human dissolution, it is easily classed with the likes of *The Great God Pan*. And like *The Great God Pan* it appears to articulate anxieties of the age regarding the dangers of scientific excess while also playing upon contemporary evolutionary themes – physical human regression, as Julia Briggs, among others, has pointed out,²⁵ can readily be seen as a kind of reverse evolutionary process. The ‘Little People’ are also given an evolutionary gloss in this story when they are described as having fallen behind the ‘grand march’ of more advanced races.²⁶ However, contemporary scientific debate is really only a nominal context; the true imaginative engagement of ‘The Black Seal’ is with the ‘olden world of mystery and dread’ (*TI*, p. 103). In order to conduct his experiments Professor Gregg is obliged to remove himself from London to a remote country backwater, and to carefully pick his subject from a community which seemingly has had, and continues to have, regular intercourse with occult forces. Gregg’s subject, the half-witted boy Jervase Cradock, was apparently fathered by one of the ‘Little People’, and this makes him an unusually fit subject for an experiment which concerns the reduction of man ‘to the slime from which he came’ (*TI*, p. 119).

‘The Black Seal’, then, involves a deliberate physical retreat from a modern urban setting to a remote world of obscure traditions; and it should be stressed that Gregg, in his attempt to penetrate this world, appears more akin to some old-time alchemist than to a modern-day scientific investigator, as he seeks to decipher ancient secrets inscribed on a mysterious stone. In contrast, Dr. Raymond in *The Great God Pan* at least has something like the bearing of a modern-day doctor when, for example, he delivers a lecture concerning the intricate workings of the brain. A more important distinction

²⁵ Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber, 1977), p. 72. (Henceforth designated in the text as *NV*.)

²⁶ *Works of Arthur Machen*, vol. ii: *The Three Impostors*, 109. (Henceforth designated in the text as *TI*.)

between the two stories is that, no matter what happens to her as a result of the brain-surgery which Raymond performs on her, the girl Mary is perfectly ordinary to begin with – whereas in ‘The Black Seal’ Jervase is *already* seen to be abnormal. Raymond unleashes a new force (or releases an old one) by dint of his ‘modern’ experiment, while all Gregg does, in effect, is to tap into a rural world which has always been co-existent with all manner of strange and occult happenings. And it is this world, mediated through Gregg’s researches in ‘The Black Seal’, which overwhelms us, the readers, in ‘The White People’. It is, perhaps, a world from which we have grown away through being over-civilized; if it appears so extra-ordinary to us, it may be that, in a sense, the fault lies as much with the beholders as with that which is beheld.

iv) Watchers by the threshold: Buchan

In Machen’s writings, then, some parts of Britain, especially Wales, are seen to have retained an air of indelible strangeness well into the modern age. The same applies to some places in Scotland, and England, as they appear in Buchan’s fiction. ‘Place is integral to plot and theme in Buchan,’ observes Andrew Lownie, ‘often personifying the border between the primitive and the civilized’.²⁷ Buchan does not tend to extremes, as does Machen; his tone is more urbane, and in some respects he has a different agenda – certainly in his post-war romances such as *Midwinter*.

Being equally sensitive to the spells of time and of space, to a tract of years and a tract of landscape, I tried to discover the historical moment which best interpreted the ethos of a particular countryside, and to devise the appropriate legend. Just as certain old houses, like the inns at Burford or Queensferry, cried out to Robert Louis Stevenson to tell their tales, so I felt the clamour of certain scenes for an interpreter. (MHD, p. 196)

²⁷ Quoted in *John Buchan: The Complete Short Stories*, ii (1997), 4.

Thus Buchan, rather than opting for full-blown strangeness or supernaturalism as does Machen, enlarges upon the Stevensonian idea that something must once have happened in a particular place, a particular scene once enacted, which has left an ineradicable flavour to the present day.

Like Machen, however, Buchan was much influenced by the beautiful Border countryside in which he grew up: 'From that countryside', he writes, 'an older world had not quite departed' (*MHD*, p. 25). At this point he is concerned with the human level of things, his main intention being to evoke the world of the old-time drovers and shepherds, as depicted by Hogg and Scott. And in his autobiography there is really only the sense of an 'older' world but not an '*elder*' world²⁸ which is a more suggestive phrase; the Borders do not quite become the Borderlands. However it is a very different matter in his fiction.

It is in his short stories that Buchan engages most profitably with the theme of the supernatural, especially as manifested in landscape, and also in the country house. In this he obviously follows the tendency of the age towards the short-story form, due as much to the proliferation of literary magazines as to the influence of Continental writers like Chekov and Maupassant. And the supernatural seems peculiarly suitable to this form, a major reason being that it is hard to maintain the same degree of suspense, or suggestion, over the whole course of a novel. Therefore the country house, with all the secrets of its past, Buchan can allow to dominate a short story (as will be seen in 'Fullcircle') while in a novel it is only one of many other things (for example Fosse Manor in *Mr Standfast*). And the Scottish landscape never appears quite so menacing in Buchan's fiction as in 'The Watcher by the Threshold'. Though it is not quite the *tour*

²⁸ John Buchan, 'The Watcher by the Threshold', in *John Buchan: The Complete Short Stories*, ii, 24. The shorter and less well-known version of the story appears in this collection.

de force of horror and suspense it might have been, Buchan nevertheless succeeds in creating a genuine sense of unease.

To begin with, we might consider the whole collection of Buchan stories which have the same title. It is worth bearing in mind what Buchan says in his dedication of this book to an old friend:

Scotland is a wide place to travel in for those who believe that it is not bounded strictly by kirk and market-place, and who have an ear for old songs and lost romances. It is of the back-world of Scotland that I write, the land behind the mist and over the seven bens, a place hard of access for the foot-passenger but easy for the maker of stories.²⁹

To some extent one can say that Buchan is here merely trading in on his native land's well-established reputation (certainly since Scott) for mystery and romance. But there is a degree of rich suggestion in all of this, in the idea of travelling in 'a wide place' beyond the conventional bounds of 'kirk' and 'marketplace'. Most striking is the phrase 'back-world', which conveys a sense of another realm, only dimly apprehended, lying behind the ordinary appearance of things – a realm neglected, if not wholly forgotten, by the modern mainstream world. And all the stories which follow, in one way or another (and with varying degrees of success) portray strange places in and around Scotland. They move from the sinister registers of the title story, 'The Outgoing of the Tide' and 'No-man's Land' through to the 'sad, elemental world' (*WT*, p. 228) described in 'Fountainblue' and the enticing regions of 'The Far Islands'.

But it is really only in the title story that we get a sense of something strange and inscrutable lying at the heart of the narrative. Buchan, while never specifying the exact nature of this dark unseen force, provides plentiful hints as to what it might be; and the

²⁹ John Buchan, *The Watcher by the Threshold* (London: Nelson, 1922, repr. 1931), p. v. (Henceforth designated in the text as *WT*.)

reader is left to sift through these. We are, for instance, offered a naturalistic explanation by the narrator for Ladlaw's affliction, 'hallucination born of physical pain' (*WT*, p. 140). An explanation of this kind, with its distinct psychological tinge, is perhaps all too readily offered in the age which saw the birth of the modern science of psychoanalysis. Not that a psychological reading need exclude altogether all premises of the supernatural, if one considers the idea that Ladlaw's mental breakdown (if such it is) has resulted in the creation of a separate, disconcertingly uncanny form; in a word, his alter ego (the word 'familiar' is explicitly used by his friend the narrator on at least one occasion when referring to his singular malady (*WT*, p. 150)). And of course in the nineteenth century, literary doubles, doppelgangers, demonic second selves, were much in evidence; one thinks of Poe's 'William Wilson', le Fanu's 'The Familiar', or the unfortunate history of Dorian Gray. Also, in view of Buchan's Scottish, and Calvinist, background it is especially pertinent to mention Stevenson's Jekyll, and Hogg's *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. The theme of dual personality in this work, and the suggestion that Wringhim's alter ego, Gil-Martin, is actually the devil find an echo in 'The Watcher by the Threshold,' especially with regard to the fact that the continuous presence which haunts Ladlaw is always on his left side, traditionally the devil's preferred position.

And in traditional style it is the minister who is brought in to despatch this unseen force. In this respect the story has obvious similarities with its famous predecessor 'Thrawn Janet', where the Rev. Soulis's rationality, as manifested in his humanitarian attitude towards the persecuted Janet, is gradually undermined. This is also what happens to the Rev. Oliphant – although he retains a certain comic element which in 'Thrawn Janet' is confined to the brief framing preface and wholly absent from the actual relation of events. (Buchan draws much more directly on 'Thrawn Janet' in 'The

Outgoing of the Tide', which is similarly rendered in dialect – although there is too much self-conscious 'devilry' going on in this tale for it to be as effective).

But in 'The Watcher by the Threshold' there is the additional suggestion that Ladlaw might be possessed by the spirit of the Emperor Justinian, which reflects Buchan's interests in the history of Byzantium, which he studied for a time at Oxford. Buchan builds up an effective picture of the man who was master and legislator of a great civilizing empire yet had his mind on a 'half-world' of strange things (*WT*, p. 135). This is a contrast which he would probably not have been able to highlight so well had he chosen to work within a purely Scottish context. The 'classical' element in Buchan marks a major departure from Stevenson, Hogg and purely 'Scottish' tradition. It is even more explicit in the later tale, 'The Wind in the Portico' (in *The Runagates Club*), which deals with strange goings-on deep in rural England apparently attributable to the sinister cult of an ancient Roman (or Romanized) deity, as practised by Dubellay, a modern-day devotee.

One should of course draw attention to the fact that Ladlaw, like Dubellay, is an antiquary; in Buchan this seems to be a rather hazardous occupation which frequently leaves one open to unwelcome and unwholesome influences. (An obvious point of comparison here is the fiction of M. R. James which, as a reflection of the author's real-life interests, features several characters like Dennistoun in 'Canon Alberic's Scrapbook' who eagerly peruses a centuries-old folio only to find that an ancient demon has materialized by his study-table.) But apparently – in contrast to Dubellay – Ladlaw's involvement in this particular field, up to the time of his affliction, has been only 'mild' (*WT*, p. 126). Furthermore, it seems that normally Ladlaw is the unimaginative type: the narrator comments on his 'dull, bourgeois rationalism' (*WT*, p. 141), which can be differentiated from the more intelligent rationalism of the narrator (or even from the more foolish kind displayed by the minister). It is therefore difficult to

see how Ladlaw's particular brand of antiquarianism could have any dangerous side-effects in itself. Also, it does not seem as if his trouble stems from any specific incident: it seems merely to start growing upon him of its own accord. All we are told, vaguely, is that he succumbs to some kind of 'influenza' for a long while and is left feeling 'listless and weary' (*WT*, p. 140).

One might speculate, therefore, that it is some dark, primal force exuding from the land itself, around his home, that affects Ladlaw (and maybe his antiquarian studies, although slight, have helped tip the balance). The sense of darkness which colours the whole landscape around More seems actually *ingrained* into that landscape. Its most disagreeable aspect, according to the narrator, is that nothing appears clear-cut:

this accursed country had always given me a certain eeriness on my first approaching it [...] It was sheer physical dislike of the rich deep soil, the woody and antique smells, the melancholy roads and trees, and the flavour of old mystery. I am aggressively and wholly Philistine. I love clear outlines and strong colours, and More with its half-tints and hazy distances depressed me miserably. (*WT*, p. 127)

This place – like the muffled, 'cloudy' landscape of 'The Wind in the Portico' (*RC*, p. 121) – shades into strangeness and, finally, into the inexplicable. Consider also Ladlaw's dilations upon the primitive nature of the surrounding land:

If I could explore the secret of these moors, I would write the world's greatest book. I would write of that prehistoric life when man was knit close to nature. I would describe the people who were brothers of the red earth and the red rock and the red streams of the hills [...] I would show you the hideous, shrieking mystery at the back of this simple nature. (*WT*, pp. 133-134)

This passage, with its invocation of nature's 'hideous shrieking mystery', is strongly reminiscent of the likes of Machen. But Buchan is careful to put this notable speech in

the mouth of a man who is supposed to have lost his mental balance; also, of course, it is filtered through the rational figure of the narrator.

Speaking of Buchan's narrators, we may observe that the general run conform to the conventions of many 'supernatural' stories. We, the readers, are given to understand that they are not normally inclined to fears and fancies; consequently we are inclined to agree that anything which strikes them as being out-of-the-way must be strange indeed. But also we might say that Buchan's narrators are ancillary to the central experience of the story: in 'The Watcher by the Threshold', 'The Wind in the Portico' and 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' they look on in wonder as another character – Ladlaw, Dubellay, Lawson – appears to lose his wits.

Buchan's narrators do not merely observe, however: they also tend to be scholars of one kind or another, thus bringing a genuine spirit of intellectual inquiry to the proceedings. In 'The Watcher by the Threshold', when he is persuaded that an ancient spirit of some kind is somehow talking through Ladlaw during their drive out together, the narrator is (for a while at least) agog at the thought of the immense historical discoveries that might ensue from this. Consider, too, 'No-man's Land', which features a written statement by the rather too-aptly named Graves, specialist in Northern Antiquities, concerning his discovery of a brand of 'little people', whom he calls the Folk, in the land beyond 'Farawa' (it reads almost like 'far away') out in the Scottish wilds. Although he represents himself as initially setting out blithely 'into the unknown', (*WT*, p. 11 (ch. 1)) the reader feels that, unless driven by some subconscious desire, Graves did not really expect to actually stray into eldritch places. (We should note however that his experiences do not, strictly speaking, involve the occult; the dark primitive forces at work in this story are not intangible.) But although he is traumatized by his encounter with the Folk and suitably repelled by them, he also displays all the inflamed 'ardour of the scholar' (*WT*, p. 42 (ch. 4)) when he realizes he has come upon

the country's living past. So there is a conflict in this tale between straightforward 'wild fancy' (as Buchan himself described it)³⁰ and academic interest. And it is academic interest which finally prevails, in the concluding exhortations by the editor of Graves's narrative (who is also an historian) for 'some young archaeologist, with a reputation to make' (*WT*, p. 85 (ch. 8)) to take up the challenge and to discover more about the Folk.

Buchan's scholarly narrators have in essence the same function as Doyle's doctor and detective, Hardcastle and Holmes respectively – and also Malone, the voice of popular journalism. (One thinks, too, of the journalistic presence in some of Kipling's tales, for example 'A Matter of Fact', from the collection *Many Inventions*, in which a peculiar sea-beast is witnessed by three reporters.) These characters are all representative of modern forces which although in some instances may be combative towards the ancient and the unseen also help, collectively, to widen the angles of investigation. On the other hand, in a writer like Machen there is relatively little modernity. It is true that stories like *The Terror* and *The Great Return* are related by narrators who approach strange events in something like an investigative, journalistic spirit (reflecting Machen's own experiences as a reporter around that time). But more often his tales feature characters who are all-too eager to imbue themselves with the spirit of mystery, being either young, unformed and uninformed (at least upon all things rational) like the young girl in 'The White People', or, alternatively, doctors and professors given to fearful experimentation in the Frankenstein/Jekyll tradition, as in *The Great God Pan*.

However, the distinctions are not always clear-cut: Buchan's apparently straightforward scholar-narrator figure in 'The Watcher by the Threshold' lets slip at one point that he too has 'dabbled' in the occult in his time (*WT*, p. 146). Although he may have done no more than 'dabble', and that in the past, it does undermine his earlier claim that he is 'aggressively and wholly Philistine'.

³⁰ Quoted in *John Buchan: The Complete Short Stories*, ii, 184.

v) 'Haunted' houses: Buchan and Kipling

Another element that could be examined more closely in 'The Watcher by the Threshold' is the House of More itself, and, stemming from this, the role of houses – principally country estates – in Buchan's fiction as a whole. Very often they do not appear very homely at all. Not that he ever quite gives us a Gothic ruin; the nearest he gets to this perhaps is Dubellay's ramshackle abode in 'The Wind in the Portico'. But the House of More appears almost as unwelcoming as the House of Usher (although Buchan dispenses with the creaking gothic machinery that surrounds Poe's dusty, decaying mansion). It assimilates the sinister colouring of its environs, and in the shorter version of the story presents an overwhelmingly threatening image at the close of the narrative.

We might also consider the manor house of Scaip in 'Ho! The Merry Masons' (a story published in 1933).³¹ Interestingly this is a house where the forces of darkness appear to have literally been built into the very walls and foundations. The place is a magnificent relic of the Middle Ages but has also retained the legacy of the more unseemly activities on part of its builders; there are suggestions aplenty of medieval secret societies, devilish bargains, unholy midnight gatherings. In fact the malignancy of this place appears to be such that at one point Buchan switches to full Lovecraftian mode: "Suddenly, I seemed to be looking into a gulf of unimaginable evil [...] Things had been wrought here – in these walls and in this room which came from the nether Pit, things aeons removed from the common trivial wickedness of mankind' (*BCS*, iii, 285).

Buchan is more subtle in 'Fullcircle', a story from *The Runagates Club* collection, which features a house steeped in its past (the 'Fullcircle' of the title) which however doesn't appear to be malign, but rather quite the opposite. It is described variously as

³¹ Collected in *John Buchan: The Complete Short Stories*, iii.

being full of sunshine, gracious, and altogether delightful, and it more than satisfies its present owners, the Giffens, a pleasant, ordinary enough young couple. But it exerts control, a control so gentle and gradual that it can hardly be noticed. Mrs. Giffen comments how well she and her husband have settled into the house and adds that ‘it’s a house on which you can lay your own impress’ (*RC*, p. 321). The narrator, though, has already begun to wonder if it isn’t the reverse, and after a few years have elapsed there no longer seems to be any doubt.

My hosts seemed to be automata, moving about at the orders of a masterful stage manager, and yet with no sense of bondage. And as I looked on, they faded off the scene, and there was only one personality – that house so serene and secure, smiling at our modern antics, but weaving all the while an iron spell around its lovers. (*RC*, p. 329)

Things never go as far in ‘Fullcircle’ as in (for example) the disconcerting story by Saki, ‘The Cobweb’, in which a young couple’s future plans for the old farming estate which they inherit are destroyed by the untimely demise of the husband. However (in contrast to the likes of ‘The Merry Masons’ with its ostentatious piling-on of horror) it can ultimately be ranked as one of Buchan’s more unsettling stories. Of course, it may be that the changes which the Giffens undergo are merely signs of how well they adapt to rural life: Mr. Giffen taking up fishing while Mrs. Giffen eases into the role of country wife. But the latter’s conversion to Roman Catholicism is unexpected, and seems to hark back to the founder of the house in the seventeenth century who had ‘anticipated the King, his master, by some years in turning Papist’ (*RC*, p. 315).

Mrs. Giffen’s conversion is one of the things that most strongly suggests the spellbinding power of the past over the present; and even over such people as the Giffens who initially appear to be a bright, frankly modern type of couple, ‘[i]n revolt against everything and everybody with any ancestry’ (*RC*, p. 317). At Fullcircle,

however, all this is seen to change. The rather chilling thing about the transformation is that they remain so completely unaware of what is happening themselves. Their prize dwelling is said to lie 'open to a clear sky' (*RC*, p. 332), but in fact it is a trap; the very name 'Fullcircle' carries a suggestion of complete enclosure. In fact, such a description as the one above, of the house being light and airy, tallies exactly with that of Vaunus's temple in 'The Wind in the Portico' which is presented as being unequivocally sinister, for all its eminently gracious appearance – a 'prison' (*RC*, p. 144).

It is worth pointing out that it is specifically *England* in which Buchan often portrays this all-enfolding, and perhaps dangerous, peace. Many of his Scottish characters feel at odds with this kind of embedded centuries-old serenity and security, which seems alien to them. The restless roving Sandy Arbuthnot, Buchan's most conspicuously 'romantic' hero, comments on the difference. An Englishman, he says, can 'live for' his home, and be 'quite content to grow old in it', but, historically, this has not been the Scottish 'way': 'Our homes were only a jumping-off ground. We loved them painfully and were always homesick for them, but we were very little in them. That is the blight in us'.³² Although Arbuthnot's tone here is apologetic, we feel he is being disingenuous; in many respects this inability to remain tied down to any one spot can be viewed as a strength rather than a failing of the Scottish national character. Certainly this would seem to be the case in Buchan's historical novel *Midwinter*, when Alistair comes to the grand old English manor, so different from the dwelling of any Scottish gentleman which would be merely 'a stone tower, looking out on moor or sea, with a huddle of hovels round the door'.³³ Initially, he feels like an unwelcome interloper. But, crucially, his perspective soon changes, and he begins to feel glad to have 'chosen the life of toil

³² John Buchan, *The Courts of the Morning* (London: Nelson, 1931) p. 24 (Prologue).

³³ John Buchan, *Midwinter* (London: Nelson, 1925), p. 41 (ch. 2)). (Henceforth designated in the text as *M.*)

and hazard and enterprise', as opposed to the 'drugged and sleeping world' of the English country house (*M*, p. 56 (ch. 2)).

What helps to change Alistair's outlook is the glimpse of the still-wild country outlying the house, which reminds him of his own harsher but also more bracing native land (*M*, p. 54 (ch. 2)). This is where the circumstances differ from that in 'Fullcircle' where the piece of Cotswold countryside in which the house is situated seems to partake of much the same quality of ease, but can similarly be considered as being a trap. It gives the illusion of space but is actually closed in, so that a person there, 'though his view was but half a mile on any side, would yet have the sense of dwelling on uplands and commanding the world' (*RC*, p. 314). Smilingly, this land draws one in unsuspecting, with almost the same invincible power (although in less obtrusive form) as that wielded by the implacable forces in 'The Watcher by the Threshold' and in so much of Machen. There is no suggestion of the *primitive* here, but it is still a land in thrall to its past.

The view of the Cotswold region in 'Fullcircle' is rather different from that which is projected in, for example, *Mr Standfast*, when Hannay is taken by a fit of solemnity as he gazes from his high vantage point at the land round Fosse Manor and reflects 'what a precious thing this little England was, how old and kindly comforting, how well worth striving for'.³⁴ He seems to sense nothing but a 'deep and holy and ancient peace' in these surroundings. However it is not difficult to read into all of this a kind of propaganda exercise for *Mr Standfast* is primarily a tale of action and adventure set in the middle of war – in contrast to the short story, which takes a more searching look at the actual nature of this 'holy and ancient peace'.

³⁴ John Buchan, *Mr. Standfast*, in *The Complete Richard Hannay*, pp. 349-655 (p. 360 (Part i, ch. 1)).

Kipling is another writer in this period who engages with the theme of ‘ancient English peace’; and one might compare ‘Fullcircle’ to a Kipling short story, ‘An Habitation Enforced’ (in *Actions and Reactions*). There are obvious similarities: a couple become enamoured of an old house set deep in the English countryside and over time, as they live there, become wholly attuned to a more staid and contented way of life than they have hitherto known. But in contrast to the Giffens this couple are in need of some kind of healing process, which their new life at Friars Pardon affords: the story opens with the husband, George Chapin, suffering some kind of mental breakdown. Furthermore, they are American – in effect, European exiles; and their removal to England is seen as a return to their roots; Sophie Chapin finds out (rather too coincidentally) that her ancestors hailed from the part of the country in which Friars Pardon is situated. This is where the couple finally find their anchor after a time of drifting around aimlessly in no less than ‘forty-three’ hotels,³⁵ just as the Giffens come to rest at Fullcircle.

One way in which Friars Pardon differs from Fullcircle though is that it has not been kept up over the years but has long fallen into disuse by the time that the Chapins come to it. The same can be said of the whole surrounding countryside, which is described as ‘an all-abandoned land’ (*AR*, p. 8). It is a place that has been forgotten by the modern world. There is often in Kipling a strong sense of this hidden, mute element to the English rural landscape – although its quietude can be rudely invaded by the forces of modern civilization, notably the motor-car, for instance as portrayed in ‘Steam Tactics’: ‘[The car] whooped into veiled hollows of elm and Sussex oak; she devoured infinite perspectives of park palings; she surged through forgotten hamlets, whose single streets gave back, reduplicated, the clatter of her exhaust’.³⁶ Although it is a light-hearted tale,

³⁵ Rudyard Kipling, *Actions and Reactions* (London: Macmillan, 1909), p. 5. (Henceforth designated in the text as *AR*.)

³⁶ Rudyard Kipling, *Traffics and Discoveries* (London: Macmillan, 1904), p. 205. (Henceforth designated in the text as *TD*.)

this passage conveys the ruthless power of the machine, giving the impression that it tears into everything it comes across, with such verbs as 'whooped' and 'devoured'.

In another story from the same collection as 'Steam Tactics', the better-known 'They', the narrator, although he too is a motorist, proceeds in gentler mode:

I found hidden villages where bees, the only things awake, boomed in eighty-foot lindens that overhung grey Norman churches; miraculous brooks diving under stone bridges built for heavier traffic than would ever vex them again; tithe-barns larger than their churches, and an old smithy that cried out aloud how it had once been a hall of the Knights of the Temple. (*TD*, p. 303)

There is in this story, if not in 'Steam Tactics', a sense of the discovery (or re-discovery) of place. The title of the collection in which both these stories are to be found, 'Traffics and Discoveries', is one which Kipling borrows from Hakluyt; but unlike Hakluyt it would seem that his 'discoveries' are not to be made in far lands but rather within England itself.

However one might ask to what extent – if indeed at all – these secluded, sleeping parts of the English countryside can be revitalized. David Trotter opines they cannot, pointing out how in the Puck books Kipling requires the agency of 'magic' and an audience restricted only to children, to effect a re-awakening.³⁷ And so, Trotter says, although the 'signs' (*KC*, p. 67) of the past are still there, they are no more than signs, and there is really nothing more to be done with them. By this argument, the Chapins cannot hope to truly re-vivify Friars Pardon. Instead, what seems to happen is that *they* begin to get sucked into the surrounding quiet, as in 'Fullcircle'. In this connection, one might look again at the title: 'an habitation *enforced*', which has a slightly ominous sound, almost giving the impression of some sort of trap, like the one with which the story opens, George Chapin's sick-room. Consider, too, the words spoken by George in

³⁷ David Trotter, 'Kipling's England: The Edwardian Years', in *Kipling Considered*, pp. 56-70 (p. 67).

the very last line of the story: 'We can't get out of it' (*AR*, p. 50). He is referring to the bridge-building job on hand, but these words might have wider implications: that the Chapins are now grounded for life at Friars Pardon and can never leave.

The Chapins' rustication certainly seems to be a thoroughgoing and also irreversible process. However there is nothing *sinister* in it; the story if anything veers towards sentimentalism. Friars Pardon not only soothes the once-fractured nerves of the American couple, but its 'stolidity' also 'steadie[s]' them (*AR*, p. 20), suggesting that it is a bedrock on which they can re-build their lives. In this respect the story is often compared with another Kipling piece, 'My Son's Wife' (in *A Diversity of Creatures*) in which a formerly sickly London intellectual is seen to draw strength from the rural estate which he inherits.

In 'An Habitation Enforced', then, there is no suggestion of any active force upon the part of the house to enslave, and eventually perhaps even paralyze, its new owners, as there is in 'Fullcircle', or in 'The House Surgeon' (a story from the same collection as 'An Habitation Enforced'). But even in 'The House Surgeon' the dark depression which afflicts Holmescroft is finally dispelled. The name 'Holmescroft' is not accidental: 'The House Surgeon' becomes a detective-story where the cause of the depression is traced to the guilty feelings experienced by a previous inhabitant. This is a spell which can be tracked down and exorcised – unlike that of Fullcircle. As for 'An Habitation Enforced', it provides an illuminating counterpiece to the likes of 'Fullcircle' and helps to show how Buchan lends a decided edge to the idea of peaceful retirement in the English countryside.

vi) A chequered landscape

Many parts of the countryside in Buchan's fiction, then, are seen to remain stubbornly outwith the pale of twentieth-century knowledge and rationalism. 'England is full of patches which the tide of modernity have somehow missed,' he wrote in his autobiography (*MHD*, p. 188). And 'patches' is exactly right. A lot of the time in Buchan's writings there is the feeling that his characters stumble, more or less randomly, across little pockets of strangeness dotted all around Britain. It is as if the 'back-world' to which he refers intrudes upon the world of everyday in a quite *concrete* sense. In relation to this it is interesting to note that these 'patches' seem often to be marked off quite sharply from less haunted land. For example in 'The Watcher by the Threshold' the land on one side of the river More appears strikingly different from the other in character. On the one side the forces of darkness seem assembled, while the other is said to be altogether 'clearer' and 'softer' (*WT*, 173) and this, significantly, is where the actual exorcizing of Ladlaw's demons takes place.

This idea of 'patches' of strangeness in Buchan's work is of no little importance and it is one of the ways in which he diverges from some other 'supernaturalist' writers like Machen. For one thing, it seems one does not need a wealth of occult knowledge (as in 'The White People') to have access to (and to be able to appreciate) strange places. But there is another kind of difference, as borne out by *The Hill of Dreams*. As David Punter notes, a kind of slippage occurs in this story, a 'sideslip of vision' which reveals 'the real and awful faces of [...] demons'³⁸ to Lucian as he explores the countryside around his home. In *The Hill of Dreams*, as in Machen generally, it seems to be a matter of

³⁸ David Punter, *The Literature of Terror: A History of Gothic Fictions from 1765 to the Present Day* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 265.

perspective; elsewhere (in *The Great God Pan*) he talks of the lifting of the 'veil'³⁹ and (in *The Great Return*) the twitching aside of the 'curtain' (*TT*, p. 193) which reveals a more terrible or more beautiful world lying behind the ordinary appearance of things. In Buchan, it is more a matter of breaching invisible dividing lines (he explores the idea of invisible delineation from a pseudo-geometrical angle in the short story 'Space', from *The Moon Endureth*).

It is instructive to look at the historical novel *Witch Wood* in this connection. *Witch Wood* represents, along with *The Dancing Floor*, Buchan's most sustained treatment of the *temenos* or 'strange-place' theme; the ancient Black Wood, Melanudrigill, is an obvious sinister presence throughout. However, its outlines appear to be pretty sharply defined. While walking through it David Sempill, the minister-hero, finds at one point that the trees close in thickly with a startling suddenness, 'as if he had stripped and dived into a stagnant pool'.⁴⁰ And from then on the road which he has been following appears to lose all sense of 'purpose [...] slinking furtively, as the Wood gave it leave, with many meaningless twists, as if unseen hands had warded it off' (*WW*, p. 23 (ch.2)). But a little later we are told that 'at one step the Wood ceased, and he was among meadows' (*WW*, p. 24 (ch. 2)). Melanudrigill makes a noticeable blot, or 'blotch' on the landscape which at a later time David can see lying to one side, while on the other 'all' is 'kindly and golden' (*WW*, p. 28 (ch. 2)).

In view of all this, it appears as though the Black Wood is quite self-contained; although it may well be that (as David is sometimes tempted to believe) it exudes its evil influence into the surrounding atmosphere. The common-sense view, of course, would be that it really does nothing of the sort: that it merely serves as a useful symbol

³⁹*Works of Arthur Machen*, vol i: *The Great God Pan; The Red Hand; The Inmost Light*, 5 (ch. 1). (Henceforth designated in the text as *GGP*.)

⁴⁰ John Buchan, *Witch Wood*, Canongate Classics, 17 (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988), p. 23 (ch. 2). (Henceforth designated in the text as *WW*.)

for the abominations practised in secret by the depraved (and finally demented) Ephraim Caird and his followers, who spread corruption throughout the parish of Woodilee. And towards the end of the novel a certain flatness of tone is detectable: the closing scene is that of a 'bleak' morning (*WW*, p. 289 (Epilogue)) with David leaving his sacred calling and preparing to go and fight as a mercenary in wars abroad. There is no longer any sense of the sinister, only of exhaustion. However, when one turns back to the Prologue, one is reminded that the Black Wood has left its mark well into the twentieth century. Even under the veneer of modern civilization that particular bit of land can still look like a 'thing antique and wolfish, tricked out [...] with a sheep's coat' (*WW*, p. 3). Its mystery cannot, it seems, be finally eroded.

Ultimately there is in Buchan a tacit acknowledgement of the existence of these patches of 'strangeness'; and a refusal either to explain them away or to fall wholly under their sway. Instead he simply recognizes that they still persist, alongside (or within) the contemporary world. And he is willing to propitiate the old gods to some slight extent – as witness his 1911 poem 'Wood Magic', which is not a particularly brilliant piece of work, but succeeds in making its point.

Wherefore to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,
 Mary the Blessed Mother, and the kindly Saints as well,
 I will give glory and praise, and them I cherish the most,
 For they have the keys of Heaven, and save the soul from Hell.
 But meantime I will spare for the Lord Apollo a grace,
 And a bow for the Lady Venus – as a friend and not as a thrall.
 Tis true they are out of Heaven, but some day they may win the place;
 For the gods are kittle cattle, and a wise man honours them all.⁴¹

⁴¹ John Buchan, 'Wood Magic', in *The Moon Endureth: Tales and Fancies* (London: Nelson, 1912; repr. 1930), pp. 225-226.

Buchan will not penetrate right into the heart of the mystery, but once the dividing line is crossed he views what lies beyond with more than a modicum of respect. And this show of respect – not wholesale endorsement, nor repudiation – is perhaps the healthiest response to the idea that other-worldliness may yet remain, and maybe will always remain, within the bounds of the most modern civilization.

Chapter Four

i) London: The primitive and the poetic

As Doyle brings the Lost World from South America to England in ‘The Terror of Blue John Gap’, so Machen, in *The Great God Pan* (which probably remains his best-known work) transposes ancient mysteries into the heart of the modern metropolis with the shadowy figure of Helen Vaughan – whose mother was blasted out of her senses by ‘seeing the great god Pan’ – flitting about the streets. ‘It is an old story,’ declares Villiers, ‘an old mystery played in our day and in dim London streets instead of amidst the vineyards and the olive gardens’ (*GGP*, p. 75 (ch. 7)).

Something similar is seen to occur in a less familiar Machen story, ‘The Red Hand’, best characterized as a somewhat weak detective tale, featuring Dyson (a character who appears in more than one Machen story) as a rather feeble imitation of Holmes, on the track of a murder committed in a shady London street. The idea of ‘the Red Hand’ initially puts one in mind of political secret societies (compare ‘The Red Circle’ from the Holmes canon); but when the killer, Selby, is finally snared, the truth of the matter turns out to be quite different. Selby reveals that both he and the victim originally hailed from the West Country, where they happened to stumble upon an ancient treasure hoard guarded by ‘the little people’ – whose symbol is that of the Red Hand (*GGP*, pp. 173-185 (ch. 5)). Thus dark primitive forces brought in from outside, from the mysterious West Country, are finally revealed to be connected to this particular London crime.

The most memorable thing in this story, though, is the picture that Machen gives us of London, which is as strange and arresting as any of his rural landscapes. The opening in particular is strong on atmosphere, as Dyson and his friend Phillipps set out, more or

less on Dyson's whim, on an expedition to unearth the primitive stratum which Dyson says must surely exist in the modern city.

They dived yet deeper into the maze of brickwork [...] now the quarter seemed all amorphous, without character; here a decent house with sufficient garden, here a faded square, and here factories surrounded by high, blank walls, with blind passages and dark corners; but all ill-lighted and unfrequented and heavy with silence.

Presently, as they paced down a forlorn street of two-story houses, Dyson caught sight of a dark and obscure turning.

'I like the look of that,' he said; 'it seems to me promising'. (*GGP*, 142 (ch. 1))

We should note here the sense not only of darkness, and general seediness, but also of shapelessness. The crucial word is 'amorphous'; this part of London seems to have no fixed shape or 'character'. Machen excels at describing 'amorphous' regions of London. For instance, in 'The Inmost Light', there is the suburb of Harlesden which (according to Dyson) 'all melts away' with startling suddenness as one passes through it, in an instant changing 'from town to country' (*GGP*, p. 96 (ch. 1)). In his autobiography, too, Machen cites Harlesden as being 'strange and terrible', a 'sudden and violent irruption of red brick in the midst of a green field' (*FOT*, p. 126). There is a rather confusing inter-mingling of different elements here, a certain quality of instability.

Machen transfers this quality from the fringes of the city to its heart in 'The Red Hand'. And eventually Dyson and Phillipps come upon the body of a murdered man in 'a dark and formless' by-way, 'a vague shape, dark, framed by surrounding darkness, dropped strangely on the pavement' (*GGP*, p. 143 (ch. 1)). Again, the manner of description is suggestive: the ill-defined – perhaps even shape-shifting – quality of the street seems to be transferred to the corpse. The image of the corpse bolsters the sense, in this part of the story, of the city as being virtually a kind of organic growth which (like not a few of Machen's unfortunate human characters) might possibly revert to

some kind of original, primordial slime. It is almost as if these streets are in the process of decomposition; and so it is not surprising to find a corpse, similarly an object of decay, in their midst. Machen's use of the word 'amorphous' to describe parts of London thus seems to extend far beyond the simple sense that certain areas of the city do not present a unified aspect – residential, industrial, or the like; he pushes the idea to an extreme. Compare a passage from *The Three Impostors* in which Burton (one of the 'impostors' of the title) describes himself as walking through 'protoplasmic streets' (*TI*, p. 145).

The primitive, and more especially the 'protoplasmic', is of course a favourite theme of Machen's, as seen in many of his tales set in remote rural areas. However in stories like 'The Red Hand' he is not only, in a sense, transferring these concerns from the countryside to the city but can also be seen as tapping into a certain discourse which had grown up in the latter nineteenth century revolving round the concept of degeneration,¹ supposedly seen in most virulent form in urban spaces, particularly the London slums.. These denizens of London's 'nether world' (to borrow the title of Gissing's 1889 novel) were viewed not only as 'sub-races' (*DCN*, p. 38) but also in non-human terms, as part of the city's waste, or even as a kind of 'quagmire'² underlying the city structure and threatening to pollute it.

Machen's portrayal of the city in the opening pages of 'The Red Hand' clearly has something in common with such references. And one can draw especial attention to the notion of a 'sub-species' which harmonizes with Machen's enduring theme of the 'little people' (although there is a major difference in that Machen's little people are

¹ For a comprehensive discussion of this prevailing theme around the turn of the century, see William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). (Henceforth designated in the text as *DCN*.)

² William Booth, quoted in *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel*, p. 51.

seemingly a very ancient race whereas the sub-races of urban London were generally seen as 'new degenerate energies' (*DCN*, p. 38), the product of a modern urban environment). But it is Machen's sense of the city itself as some kind of primitive and degenerating entity that is the most striking. Or it is more accurate to say that there are certain parts of the city which appear in his fiction thus – while in Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, the whole of London comes in for similar treatment.

The Secret Agent projects a grim view of modern urban life; but the touches of the fanciful, not to say fantastic, along the way are noteworthy. In this novel the chief element of London appears to be water:

[The Assistant Commissioner's] descent into the street was like the descent into a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off. A murky, gloomy dampness enveloped him [...] when he emerged into the Strand out of a narrow street by the side of Charing Cross Station the genius of the locality assimilated him. He might have been but one more of the queer foreign fish that can be seen of an evening about there flitting round the dark corners.³

In this kind of sodden environment, it is not surprising to come across creatures such as Mrs Neal, the charwoman, who can be found 'scrubbing the floor [...] on all fours amongst the puddles, wet and begrimed, like a sort of amphibious and domestic animal living in ashbins and dirty water' (*SA*, p. 177 (ch. 9)). Water becomes the transforming medium through which people appear as fish, and which renders the London sun 'bloodshot' (*SA*, p. 51 (ch. 2)) so that in its pale, diffused gleams a constable apparently surges out of a lamppost, and houses, in Dickensian fashion, wander away without being noticed (*SA*, p. 53 (ch. 2)). In this world, nothing is solid or rooted; things flow into one another.

3. Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*, ed. by Martin Seymour-Smith (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, repr. 1990) pp.150-151 (ch. 7). (Henceforth designated in the text as *SA*.)

It is true that at some points in *The Secret Agent* London appears as a solid, rather than as a fluid mass, ‘impervious’ to all things (*SA*, p. 103 (ch. 5)); and the maze of streets through which Ossipon walks towards the close of the novel, appear inflexibly unyielding and ‘monotonous’ (*SA*, p. 262 (ch. 12)). (Contrast the ‘protoplasmic streets’ referred to in *The Three Impostors*, which dwindle away into ‘waste, and pits, and rubbish heaps’ (*TI*, p. 146)). But, overall, we gain something of the sense of a massive, sluggish place slowly decomposing in the cold dark rain. Winnie appears condemned to a watery grave long before she throws herself into the sea: as she emerges into the streets having stabbed her husband to death we are told that ‘This entrance into the open air had a foretaste of drowning; a slimy dampness enveloped her’ (*SA*, p. 239 (ch. 12)). In addition Winnie reflects how ‘the street frighten[s] her’ as it leads ‘either to the gallows or the river’ (*SA*, p. 239 (ch. 12)). In the London of Conrad’s *Secret Agent*, a veritable waterworld, all streets, it would seem, ultimately lead to the river. Indeed they already appear to be waterways in themselves – fluid and slowly dissolving.

Although London in *The Secret Agent* takes on some intriguingly peculiar characteristics, ultimately – as in Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* – it is seen to have no redeeming features; life in the capital seems to be a bleak and hopeless affair. Machen’s depiction of London in the early passages of ‘The Red Hand’ is scarcely more appealing – yet Dyson remains alive to a sense of possibility in even the gloomiest of urban surroundings. When, during their walk, Phillipps remarks of a certain street that he has never seen anything more ‘unpleasant’, Dyson, by way of contradiction, retorts that he has never seen anything more ‘mysterious’ (*GGP*, p. 142 (ch. 1)); and as they turn off into this street they find the body of the murdered man and a crime to solve.

In the stories in which he features Dyson generally never fails to talk up the sense of mystery in London’s streets and the thrill of London life:

I admit a general appearance of squalor [...] Yet we have our advantages: before us is unfolded the greatest spectacle the world has ever seen – the mystery of the innumerable, unending streets, the strange adventures that must infallibly arise from so complicated a press of instincts. Nay, I will say that he who has stood in the ways of a suburb, and has seen them stretch before him all shining, void, and desolate at noonday, has not lived in vain. Such a sight is in reality more wonderful than any perspective of Bagdad or Grand Cairo. (*TI*, pp. 142-143 (ch. 5))

Dyson does not deny ‘a general appearance of squalor’, but in stark contrast to *The Secret Agent* London here presents a mighty, rather than a mean, ‘spectacle’; indeed (to Dyson’s way of thinking at least) it is ‘the greatest spectacle the world has ever seen’.

Machen of course was far from being alone in this period in eulogizing London. For instance the decadents, with whom he is so readily associated, spoke out in praise of the very artificiality of the urban scene, artifice being a prized asset for many of the decadents as an improvement upon the ‘natural’.⁴ But Machen in the above passage praises London less for its artificial aspects than for its sheer scale and grandeur, which invites comparison with half-legendary cities of the East; and this is not the only occasion on which he invokes consciously eastern and exotic elements in relation to the modern metropolis. For example, when recording in his autobiography his sense of excitement upon setting out for the great city for the first time, he remembers how ‘London loomed up before me, wonderful, mystical as Assyrian Babylon’ (*FOT*, pp. 65-66). At other times, in his fiction, he uses this exotic frame of reference to produce a picture of apocalyptic gloom, when modern London appears deserted and desolated in the manner of ancient, fallen cities, as in the following extract from *The Hill of Dreams*.

⁴ As briefly discussed in, for example, *Poetry of the 1890s*, ed. by R. K. R. Thornton and Marion Thain, second edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1997) pp. 3-4.

[These were] the waste avenues of a city that had been ruined from ages. It had been splendid as Rome, terrible as Babylon, and for ever the darkness had covered it, and it lay desolate for ever in the accursed plain. And far and far the grey passage stretched into the night, into the icy fields, into the place of eternal gloom. (*HD*, p. 244 (ch. 7))

‘Apocalyptic London’ was not an uncommon theme in the fiction of this period; one thinks of Jefferies’s *After London*, or Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*.⁵ Furthermore, this picture of London as a place of ‘eternal gloom’ clearly owes much to Machen’s own experiences; in the second volume of his autobiography he remembers himself like Lucian, ‘wander[ing] day by day, week after week, month after month through the *inextricabilis error* of the London streets [...] tread[ing] a grey labyrinth whose paths had no issue, no escape, no end’.⁶ Machen is here drawing upon some painful memories of that period in his life when he was struggling to make any kind of headway in the great city; the description effectively conveys a sense of one doomed to wander hopelessly for ever in some kind of Dantean hell, or – to quote James Thomson – ‘a city of dreadful night’.

Machen, then, in *The Hill of Dreams*, draws upon exotic and eastern references to paint a picture of grim and fallen splendour. Elsewhere in his fiction he deploys such exoticizing techniques to somewhat different effect, for instance in *The Three Impostors* where, in a manner reminiscent of, if not entirely derivative from, de Quincey bewailing the ‘stony heart’d stepmother’ that is Oxford Street,⁷ the would-be scholar Joseph Walters ironically addresses the British Library Reading Room as the ‘far-lifted and mighty dome, Mecca of many minds, mausoleum of many hopes’ (*TI*, pp. 197-198 (ch.

⁵ For further discussion of this theme see, for example, Alexandra Warwick, ‘Lost Cities: London’s Apocalypse’, in *Spectral Readings: Towards a Gothic Geography*, ed. by Glennis Byron and David Punter (Basingstoke, Macmillan; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999) pp. 73-87.

⁶ *Works of Arthur Machen*, vol. ix: *Things Near and Far*, 113. (Henceforth designated in the text as *TNF*.)

⁷ Thomas de Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, ed. by Alethea Hayter (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971; repr. 1986), p. 67 (part ii).

7)). But the most interesting use which Machen makes of oriental references relates to his sense of urban potential, certainly in the case of London – the ‘mystery of [its] innumerable unending streets’, to quote Dyson once more. This propensity to ‘strange adventures’ Machen associates with the *Arabian Nights*, or more accurately the *New Arabian Nights*, the book by Stevenson for which, as he says in his autobiography, he harboured a ‘vast respect’ (*TNF*, p. 100). He admits that *The Three Impostors* was directly influenced by the *New Arabian Nights* but this also seems true of several other of his stories, like ‘The Red Hand’ and *The Great God Pan* which are constructed on a similar pattern of ‘incidents’, adventures and strange encounters taking place in the street. In fact Machen recalled a time in his own life when ‘incidents’ of this kind began to happen to him with uncanny regularity, quite in the ‘Arabian manner’ (*TNF*, p. 146). The most remarkable of these was ‘the Incident of the Bulldog’, in which he was summoned to an unknown lady in a flat by an equally strange man whom he met during a walk, for no apparent reason other than that his pet bulldog should be admired (*TNF*, pp. 142-145). It is generally a rather mysterious period in his life which he himself does little to clarify, although he remarks upon its likeness to his own work in *The Three Impostors* (*TNF*, pp. 146-147).

Although such incidents (particularly if they are seen to be of no practical consequence whatever, like the bulldog episode) could conceivably appear disconcerting, the probability that they might occur, at any moment, in a vast area of teeming millions such as London, might also be conducive to a sense of splendid expectation. This is certainly the case with Dyson, and Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich in ‘The Adventure of the Hansom Cabs’ in the *New Arabian Nights*. Rich and Dyson walk about the streets in the manner of *flâneurs* – although Machen and Stevenson, unlike Zola and Baudelaire in France, or Dostoevsky in Russia, or even Poe, in ‘The Man of the Crowd’, are not so concerned with the psychological implications of city-walking, of the interior situation

of the individual alone in, or against, the crowd. Rich and Dyson at any rate simply enjoy the feel of life all around them in the city. And they expect things to happen, for it seems to them inconceivable that *nothing* can happen, in such a place. 'I must be drawn into the eddy before long', thinks Rich confidently to himself (*NAN*, p. 66) while Dyson, as already seen, revels in the prospect of 'the strange adventures that must infallibly arise from so complicated a press of instincts'.

Sherlock Holmes, in *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle*, puts it in the following terms: 'those whimsical little incidents which will happen when you have four million human beings all jostling each other within the space of a few square miles. Amid the action and reaction of so dense a swarm of humanity, every possible combination of events may be expected to take place' (*CSH*, p. 245). Not *might* happen, but *will*; all manner of wonderful happenings are presented here as being the outcome of a logical inevitability; such a phrase as 'the action and re-action' is redolent of a purely scientific discourse.

But although more 'scientific', the central tenet of Holmes's argument is exactly the same as in Dyson's more fancifully-rendered appraisal of the city scene, and his reference to the adventures that '*must infallibly* arise' therein. The extra-ordinary is assumed in both cases to occur as a matter of course, in urban life – certainly in London which, more than most cities, contains many different elements. Both Dyson and Holmes therefore distance themselves from the idea, current in many other quarters, of the de-humanized Malthusian masses; instead they see in the vast agglomeration of the London crowds endless possibilities.

ii) Adventures in hansom cabs

London then, in the fiction of this period (in spite of the alarmist views so often expressed on the subject of urban deprivation and degradation) often appears as a place of stimulation for the senses and the imagination. Even a hansom cab becomes something more than just a simple functional item. In his book on Dickens, Chesterton decrees that: ‘There is no need for a Frenchman to go to look at Westminster Abbey as a piece of architecture; it is not in the special sense a piece of English architecture. But a hansom cab is a piece of English architecture, a thing produced by the peculiar poetry of our cities’ (*CD*, p. 120). Even from the altogether grimmer perspective afforded in *The Secret Agent* it would seem that the hansom cab is not devoid of poetry; one such conveyance, at least, earns the appellation ‘Cab of Death’ and is ironically applauded for being ‘a perfection of grotesque misery and weirdness of macabre detail’ (*SA*, p. 167 (ch. 8)).

The role of the hansom cab in detective fiction might also be considered. A phenomenal best-seller of the age was the Australian novel, *The Mystery of a Hansom Cab* by Fergus Hume, which proved a bigger success on its publication in London than in its home country – although the mystery in question is simply to do with a murder which takes place inside a hansom cab, rather than attaching to the cab itself in the strict sense. But in several Holmes stories rides in cabs produce some strange effects. Consider for instance what happens to Watson as he sits with Miss Morstan (soon to be his wife), speeding towards a mysterious destination:

The situation was a curious one. We were driving to an unknown place, on an unknown errand [...] I endeavoured to cheer [Miss Morstan] by reminiscences of my adventures in Afghanistan; but, to tell the truth, I was myself so excited at our situation and so curious as to our destination that my stories were slightly involved. To this day she declares that I told her one moving anecdote as to how a musket looked

into my tent at the dead of night, and how I fired a double-barrelled tiger cub at it. At first I had some idea as to the direction in which we were driving; but soon, what with our pace, the fog, and my own limited knowledge of London, I lost my bearings and knew nothing save that we seemed to be going a very long way. (*CSH*, p. 99 (ch. 3))

This seems as close as Watson ever gets to losing his grip on his faculties. It may be that he is not yet used to having adventures (*The Sign Of Four*, in which this passage occurs, was only Doyle's second stab at a Holmes story). Nevertheless, the effect is notable. And something similar happens a short time later, only this time Watson's companion is the less agreeable Thaddeus Sholto.

I [...] sat [...] deaf to the babble of our new acquaintance. He was clearly a confirmed hypochondriac, and I was dreamily conscious that he was pouring forth interminable trains of symptoms [...] I trust that he may not remember any of the answers which I gave him that night. Holmes declares that he overheard me caution him against the great danger of taking more than two drops of castor-oil, while I recommended strychnine in large doses as a sedative. However that may be, I was certainly relieved when our cab pulled up with a jerk and the coachman sprang down to open the door. (*CSH*, pp. 105-106 (ch. 4))

The journey is over; Watson recovers his senses.

There are other disorienting, not to say disturbing, cab rides in the Holmes stories: in 'The Adventure of the Engineer's Thumb' and 'The Greek Interpreter', for instance. In each of these the characters involved end up in unknown surroundings, and in considerable danger. They could conceivably have fared better however, if they had been more open to a sense of adventure, like Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich who takes rather kindly to being whisked off to a completely unknown destination in a 'London gondola' (*NAN*, p. 66) – it is raining at the time.

Of course Lieutenant Rich comes to London full of expectations of adventure, and that is perhaps that is why he finds one so easily. But the hansom cab acts as a means of

transition from the everyday to the mysterious. In the writings of Stevenson and his fellow-romancers one can never be sure what may happen when one steps into a London hansom: it seems often to provide a direct passage to adventure.

iii) The trouble with reason: The Holmes stories

When looking at the Holmes stories, one might note in the first instance that Holmes, who is so concerned with the variety of human life, in himself presents several different facets. Sometimes he is full of energy (almost ridiculously so). At their very first meeting, in *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson is 'considerably surprised at his enthusiasm'.⁸ Yet in a much later story, 'The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone', he appears almost Byronic when, as he is no longer sharing rooms, Billy, 'the young but very wise and tactful page' is introduced in a bid to 'help [...] a little to fill up the gap of loneliness and isolation which surround[s] the saturnine figure of the great detective' (*CSH*, p. 1012). However, a couple of pages later in this same story, and in his own words, he takes on the guise of something approximating to a Wellsian Martian: 'My [...] tobacco [...] has to take the place of food these days [...] I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix' (*CSH*, p. 1014). Even in the eyes of his faithful friend he can occasionally appear quite grotesque, as in the following description from 'The Adventure of Dancing Men': 'His head was sunk upon his breast, and he looked from my point of view like a strange, lank bird, with dull grey plumage and a black top-knot' (*CSH*, p. 511). He seems capable of taking on many different appearances, therefore (and his apparently amazing talent for disguise underlines this). He is alternately the languid dreamer (and drug-user, most prominently in *The Sign of Four*) the virtually infallible reasoner, and man of action. And it is in London that such a figure is to be

⁸ Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, in *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 13-86 (p. 18 (Part i, ch. 1)).

found, not to mention his evil opposite Professor Moriarty and several striking characters in between, ranging from the colourful and exotic (the outrageously-attired King of Bohemia, for example, in 'A Scandal in Bohemia', the very first Holmes short story) to the criminally degenerate (Latimer in 'The Greek Interpreter', or the malicious 'Norwood builder' Jonas Oldacre).

Likewise, the nature of the adventures varies widely. 'The Crooked Man' and the well-known 'The Speckled Band' have Indian connections, while other stories feature dark crimes irrupting into London from equally far-flung places: America in 'The Five Orange Pips' and Russia in 'The Adventure of the Golden Pince-nez'. (The storms with which both these stories open effectively symbolize trouble coming in from outside.) There are also dangers which surface from below, from the grim underbelly of the city itself; although the sense of an urban underworld is really only more pronounced in the latter tales, as in 'The Adventure of the Illustrious Client'.

At the other end of the scale, however, there is the frivolous episode of 'The Red-Headed League' which leads to a remarkable spectacle within London when a whole mass of red-haired men converges in answer to an advertisement. Things at first seem innocuous enough, if highly eccentric – although ultimately, it turns out, an ingenious bank robbery is being planned (thwarted, of course, by Holmes). But the predominant tone remains light-hearted. This is certainly the attitude Holmes unfailingly takes towards Wilson; at one point he and Watson laugh unceremoniously at Wilson's expense. However he is no less invigorated by the prospect of investigating a case so 'refreshingly unusual' (*CSH*, p. 182). Anything at all out-of-the-way is to be welcomed, stimulating both mind and body: 'I was [...] tingling with that half-sporting, half-intellectual pleasure which I invariably experienced when I associated myself with [Holmes] in his investigations', Watson reveals at one point, in 'The Crooked Man' (*CSH*, p. 419).

In fact there are times when Watson appears elated to a quite startling degree – for example in ‘The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton’, when he is as eager as Holmes to burgle a man’s house, in the interests of chivalry. ‘I thrilled now with a keener zest than I had ever enjoyed when we were the defenders of the law instead of its defiers [...] I understood the joy which it gave [Holmes] to be confronted with this green and gold monster, the dragon which held in its maw the reputations of many fair ladies’ (*CSH*, p. 578). Although this becomes slightly ridiculous (the ‘green and gold monster’ in question is the safe which the villainous blackmailer Milverton keeps the incriminating secrets of his hapless clients) Watson’s exalted state of mind is notable. In fact, both men appear unduly attracted by the very idea of housebreaking in itself, with Holmes proudly flourishing an up-to-date and extensive burgling kit and declaring it is ‘the chance of a lifetime’ to act as a criminal (*CSH*, p. 579). Even if Doyle is being facetious in all of this, it seems to come close to the idea expressed in Wells’s humorous 1898 story ‘Mr Ledbetter’s Vacation’ that ‘The burglar [...] is the only true adventurer left on earth’ in ‘his singlehanded fight – against the whole civilized world’ (*CSW*, p. 499). And Mr Ledbetter, afire with this thought, proceeds to break into an empty villa for the sheer thrill of it, with predictably disastrous results. (One can also cite Chesterton’s 1912 novel, *Manalive*, in which the principal character, Innocent Smith, breaks into his own home⁹ – only one of several things he does in an attempt to recapture some of the excitement of living.)

Watson also appears unusually exhilarated in a much later, and quite different kind of case, that of ‘The Creeping Man’, alias the aged Professor Presbury who in a bid to restore his physical capabilities resorts to injecting an animal serum, which has degenerative side-effects. In focussing upon Holmes’s gloomy moralistic reaction to

⁹ G. K. Chesterton, *Manalive* (London: Nelson, 1912), pp. 229-290 (part ii, ch. 2).

such a state of affairs one is liable to pass over Watson's more immediate response when the name of the man who has developed this serum is revealed:

Lowenstein! The name brought back to me the memory of some snippet from a newspaper which spoke of an obscure scientist who was striving in some unknown way for the secret of rejuvenescence and the elixir of life. Lowenstein of Prague! Lowenstein with the wondrous strength-giving serum, tabooed by the profession because he refused to reveal its source. (*CSH*, p. 1082)

There is not the least trace of condemnation here. Instead, Watson sounds almost overwhelmed with admiration as he conjures up the romantic picture of the 'obscure' individual 'striving' alone in a quest for the secret of life. It is left to Holmes to point out the more sobering implications:

When one tries to rise above Nature one is liable to fall below it [...] When I have written to this man and told him I hold him criminally responsible for the poisons which he circulates, we will have no more trouble. But it may recur [...] Consider, Watson, that the material, the sensual, the worldly would all prolong their worthless lives [...] It would be the survival of the least fit. What sort of cesspool may not our poor world become? (*CSH*, pp. 1082-1083)

However he snaps out of this mode quickly enough, briskly summing up the case and turning his attention to the practical business of catching an early 'train' back to 'town' and having some 'tea' beforehand (*CSH*, p. 1083). 'Train,' 'town', 'tea': all reminders of the civilisation that still endures.

Holmes's frightening prediction of what might happen in the future as a result of widespread experimenting with drugs edges the story in the direction of science-fiction; it is also important to note that he not only draws upon the main fear voiced by the degenerationists – that of the 'least fit' eventually rising to the top – but also employs the same terminology. As William Greenslade notes, London was often described as a

'cesspool', a vast sewer (*DCN*, p. 49); and in fact Watson also labels it as a 'cesspool', at the very beginning of the very first Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet* (*CSH*, p. 15 (Part i, ch. 1)) when he returns to England from Afghanistan. He does fall 'irresistibly' under the pull that the great city exerts (*CSH*, p. 15 (Part i, ch. 1)), and is sucked into the vortex much in the same way that Lieutenant Brackenbury Rich anticipates being sucked into the 'eddy'; but in contrast to the Stevenson story the tang of romance is conspicuously absent. As Greenslade observes, London as a diseased whirlpool, drawing in all manner of outsiders (and eventually draining the life-blood out of them) was, a favourite trope of the degenerationists (*DCN*, p. 41); and this is what Doyle seems to have in mind here. And at first, in London, Watson has really nothing to do at all. Nor does his inactivity carry any flavour of fashionable decadence about it. He is simply bored, frustrated by penury and poor health.

Of course, all this is before he falls in with Holmes; but even when the adventures do finally get underway, one still feels that a spirit of anti-romance continues to creep into the proceedings. *A Study in Scarlet*, for all its melodrama of doomed love and dark vengeance finally exacted in London's streets (by a man with a very real sense of poetic justice), strikes a rather bleak note at times. Consider for example the descriptions of two different houses in the early chapters – the house in which Drebber is found murdered, and the dwelling of John Rance the constable. The latter is to be found 'in the dingiest and dreariest' of streets, in 'a narrow slit of dead-coloured brick' with 'dirty children' and 'discoloured linen' all around (*CSH*, p. 34 (Part i, ch. 4)). More important is the house in which Drebber meets his end, as it is the starting-point of the whole investigation.

(There were) three tiers of vacant melancholy windows, which were blank and dreary, save that here and there a 'To Let' card had developed like a cataract on the bleared panes [...]

A vulgar flaring paper adorned the walls, but it was blotched in places with mildew, and here and there great strips had become detached and hung down, exposing the yellow plaster beneath. Opposite the door was a showy fireplace, surmounted by a mantelpiece of imitation white marble [...] The solitary window was so dirty that the light was hazy and uncertain, giving a dull grey tinge to everything, which was intensified by the thick layer of dust which coated the whole apartment. (CSH, pp. 27-29 (Part i, ch. 3))

Note the sense of ‘covering over’, of putting a sheen on things in order to conceal their true coarseness: the ‘flaring’ paper which however is now peeling away, a ‘showy’ fireplace, ‘imitation’ marble. But the essential colour of the place is ‘grey’; or rather there is a lack of true colour. One might even stretch this idea to cover the entire story, and consider the title to be a mere overlaying of romance, which lends a vivid hue to events that are in themselves generally sordid. Holmes himself remarks that it is a borrowed term from the world of art, and goes on: ‘There’s the scarlet thread of murder running through the *colourless* skein of life’ (CSH, pp. 36 (Part is, ch. 4), emphasis added).

‘The Adventure of the Retired Colourman’ is another case in point. Just as *A Study in Scarlet* was the first Holmes story to be published, ‘The Adventure of the Retired Colourman’, though not actually the last Holmes story that Doyle wrote, comes right at the end of *The Casebook*, the final collection. And the setting is once more in a cheerless part of London. The house belonging to villain Josiah Amberley is described by Watson as being ‘a little island of ancient culture and comfort’ tucked away within ‘monotonous brick streets’ and ‘weary suburban highways’ (CSH, p. 1114), but subsequently he admits that he would not have been able to distinguish it from its drab neighbours had he not asked his way. Also, when launching upon a lengthy description of the place he is told ‘severely’ to ‘cut out the poetry’ by Holmes (CSH, p. 1114); and the story as a whole seems rather more determined to cut down on the poetry than many of its predecessors.

This is not to say, however, that it lacks exotic and imaginative touches. At the start Holmes casually refers to the case he has got on hand, that of ‘the two Coptic Patriarchs’ (*CSH*, p.1114); and the moment when Amberley attempts suicide is dramatic enough. But one can argue that in the main there is a sense of bleakness. For example music is now construed by Holmes as being an escape not from darkly sinister events, or even from less serious ones, as in ‘The Red Headed League’ – ‘violin-land, where [...] there are no red-headed clients to vex us with their conundrums’ (*CSH*, p. 185) – but merely from ‘this weary workaday world’ (*CSH*, p. 1116).

More importantly, there is overall a greater emphasis on serious police work being done, rather than on the colourful exploits of Holmes or the out-facing of the likes of Lestrade and Gregson, as in the past. The official police appear fairly competent for once: ‘Don’t imagine,’ Inspector Mackinnon tells Holmes, ‘that we had not formed our own views of this case, and that we would not have laid our hands on our man’ (*CSH*, p. 1119). He still needs the case spelt out to him at the end but it is important to notice the nature of his reactions. Apart from the one time when he remarks ‘it is masterly’ in ‘awed’ tones (*CSH*, p. 1120) he seems less ‘awed’ by Holmes’s cleverness than many others have done in the past. Contrast the colonel at the end of ‘Silver Blaze,’ for example, who contributes little more than a series of exclamation marks to Holmes’ summation of the case, and who rounds it all off by exclaiming ‘Wonderful!’ (*CSH*, p. 350). Mackinnon on the other hand uses the adjective ‘workmanlike’ rather than ‘wonderful’ (*CSH*, p. 1122). Finally, there is the presence of Barker, another ‘irregular’ detective like Holmes, who apparently reaches the same conclusions on his own – with the result that Holmes doesn’t appear quite as unique, and quite as brilliant, as before.

Critics have sometimes pointed to a increasing sense of weariness, and dreariness, in the latter Holmes stories, particularly in *The Casebook*, citing post-war disillusionment

on the part of Doyle as a reason.¹⁰ Certainly his preface to *The Casebook* ends on a wistful note, when he requests his readers to finally bid 'farewell' to Holmes at the end of a long career, adding that he hopes he has managed to reward their past 'constancy' by providing a little 'distraction' from the 'worries of life', 'which can only be found in the fairy kingdom of romance' (CSH, p. 984). Also, it is natural to assume that he was by that time running out of ideas in relation to the great detective. But, as discussed above, such elements surface from the beginning. The city itself often appears in an unattractive light; for instance in 'A Case of Identity', one of the earliest stories, there is reference to 'a dull, neutral-tinted London street' (CSH, p. 192); and in the later 'Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist' Watson unfavourably, if conventionally, contrasts the city's 'duns and drabs and slate-greys' with the fresh tints of the countryside (CSH, p. 533). Its principal shade, like that of the room in which Enoch Drebber is found, would seem to be grey – as described in 'The Adventure of the Red Circle': 'the gloom of a London winter evening had thickened into one grey curtain, a dead monotone of colour' (CSH, p. 907).

Of course, much of the gloom in the city stems from its well-nigh permanent condition of fog, the Dickensian particular which is as pervasive in literature as in life in this period. It takes on different aspects, ranging from the watery substance that is found in *The Secret Agent* to the ethereal mist which covers a silent and sleeping city in *The Hill of Dreams*:

In that white and solitary midnight of the suburban streets, he experienced the curious sense of being in a tower, remote and apart and high above all the troubles of the earth. The gas-lamp [...] shone in a pale halo of light, and the houses themselves were merely indistinct marks and shadows amidst that palpable whiteness, shutting out the world and its noises. The knowledge of the swarming life that was so still,

¹⁰ See, for example, Joseph A. Kestner, *Sherlock's Men: Masculinity, Conan Doyle, and Cultural History* (Brookfield, Vermont: Ashgate, 1997) pp. 177-178. (Henceforth designated in the text as SM.)

though it surrounded him, made the silence seem deeper than that of the mountains before the dawn. (*HD*, p. 160 (ch. 5))

Lucian's impression of a fog-bound night in London is appropriate to his sense of awesome mystery, such as he also feels in the Welsh countryside; and indeed the silence of the streets which masks the 'swarming life' of the city, now temporarily stilled, is seen to be even more profound than that of the sunrise among the hills.

As well as in the purely descriptive sense, fog can also be used to make a point. If Dickens in *Bleak House* uses it to symbolize the obfuscation of judicial processes (and perhaps all social processes in general), then Doyle, in a passage from *The Sign of Four* seems to use it as a metaphor for human life itself:

a dense, drizzly fog lay low upon the great city. Mud-coloured clouds drooped over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement. The yellow glare from the shop windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air and threw a murky, shifting radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghostlike in the endless procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of light – sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. Like all humankind, they flitted from the gloom into the light and so back into the gloom once more.¹¹

The inclusion of a universalizing impulse – 'like all humankind' – lends weight to the notion that we are being presented here with a symbolic landscape, a picture of the general condition of mankind, of human beings flitting from gloom to light and back again: from birth, through a brief passage of life, and eventually onto death. (It is reminiscent of the famous image of agnosticism used by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical*

¹¹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Sign of Four*, in *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 87-158 (p. 98 (ch. 3)).

History: that of a sparrow flying in at one door, and then out at another, ‘out of the wintry storm and into it again’.)¹²

At other times though, in the Holmes canon, for instance in a late story like ‘The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans’, the fog merely seems clogging and burdensome: after four days of seeing ‘the greasy, heavy brown swirl’ outside the window it is said that Holmes can ‘endure this drab existence no longer’ (*CSH*, p. 913).

In short, London often appears as a dull and heavy place in the Holmes stories. One may ask, however, what exactly constitutes ‘dullness’. It may be a relatively superficial matter of colour and appearance, or it might suggest a more fundamental quality, as in Pope’s *Dunciad*, in the eighteenth century. In this context, one might look at a certain description of the city streets from the story, ‘The Man with the Twisted Lip’.

we dashed away through the endless succession of sombre and deserted streets [...] across a broad balustraded bridge, with the murky river flowing sluggishly beneath us. Beyond lay a dull wilderness of bricks and mortar, its silence broken only by the heavy, regular footfall of the policeman [...] A dull wrack was drifting slowly across the sky, and a star or two twinkled dimly there through the rifts of clouds. (*CSH*, p. 233)

Although Holmes and Watson are said to be ‘dashing’ along to adventure, this is an uninspiring scene. Obviously, the word ‘dull’ is repeated in this passage, but also of interest is the reference to the policeman’s ‘heavy regular footfall’. This helps to convey a sense of a tedious conformity in London’s streets, underscored by the use of the adverbs ‘slowly’ and ‘sluggishly’. And in this particular case of ‘the man with the twisted lip’, as in virtually all of Holmes’s cases, the mystery will soon be completely cleared up. Many critics have noted the paradox that although he has such a keen sense

¹² Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of The English People: The Greater Chronicle; Bede’s Letter to Egbert*, ed. by Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) p. 95 (Book ii, ch. 13).

of unusual happenings, Holmes's talents are normally applied to the extinguishing of such events. Frederick L. De Naples, for instance, remarks upon Holmes's 'knack for transforming sensation into ratiocinative exercise',¹³ while Richard Lehan comments how he uses the power of rationality – the greatest legacy of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment – 'to help safeguard another enlightenment legacy: the imperial city'.¹⁴

Lehan spends some time in his wide-ranging study discussing the rapid expansion of London as an imperial centre in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a process which as he notes owed much to the ascendancy of merchant-class values of commercialism and practical good sense, following on from Baconian notions of empiricism (among other things) and epitomized in Defoe (*CL*, pp. 27-35). This is the context in which he discusses the Holmes tales; and at times he seems somewhat to exaggerate his claim that the sole and express purpose of Holmes is to defend the modern imperial city – to the extent that he can even posit the staunch individualist Jefferson Hope as actively working towards this same end (*CL*, p. 88). But it is true that this is the ultimate effect that Holmes's investigations are seen to have; and Lehan in the same chapter goes on to contrast Doyle's attitude with that of certain other writers of the period, most notably Stoker's in *Dracula*. Lehan comments how *Dracula* plans to turn London into the centre of another kind of empire, the empire of the Undead; but, even more than this, he points out how such a strike against the very heart of the modern rationalist imperialist world is best countered by a kind of supra-rationality: that Stoker fully recognizes a knowledge of the Dark Powers is needed in order to combat these powers (*CL*, pp. 95-98). It is implied that in such a case Holmes's powers would be exposed as being limited; but within his own sphere, where the supernatural does not

¹³ Frederick L. de Naples, 'Unearthing Holmes: 1890s Interpretations of the Great Detective', in *Transforming Genres: New Approaches to British Fiction of the 1890s*, ed. by Nikki Lee Manos and Meri-Jane Rachelson, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1994), pp. 215-235 (p. 216).

¹⁴ Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 84. (Henceforth designated in the text as *CL*.)

threaten (or it might be more accurate to say is not *allowed* to threaten, by Doyle) he functions more than effectively as the protector of the modern imperial city.

Holmes's rationality, then, at least within the perimeters laid down by Doyle, proves devastating. All the same, one should not ignore the fact that it is coupled with a sense of excitement, and indeed, with a sense of the artistic – as witness his comments to a member of the official police force in *The Valley of Fear*.

Watson insists that I am the dramatist in real life [...] Some touch of the artist wells up in me, and calls insistently for a well staged performance. Surely our profession [...] would be a drab and sordid one if we did not sometimes set the scene so as to glorify our results. The blunt accusation, the brutal tap upon the shoulder – what can one make of such a denouement? But the quick inference, the subtle trap, the clever forecast of coming events, the triumphant vindication of bold theories – are these not the pride and the justification of our life's work? At the present moment you thrill with the glamour of the situation and the anticipation of the hunt. Where would be that thrill if I had been as definite as a timetable?¹⁵

Holmes here mixes the language of scientific deduction ('the quick inference', and 'bold theories') with suggestions of the hunt ('the subtle trap') and even a touch of the psychic (the 'forecast' of the future). And the combination of all these is seen to add 'glamour' to any police case. In essence he is stating a variation on the doctrine 'art for art's sake'; the dispensation of justice does not seem to come into the equation at all. This is what he lives for.

But once the excitement evaporates – as it is always bound to do – at the close of a case, boredom sets in. And Holmes frequently professes to be bored, for instance in *The Sign of Four* when he strikes a deliberately formal pose of decadent languor, and, furthermore, injects conscious echoes of *Hamlet* into his speech.

¹⁵ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Valley of Fear*, in *The Penguin Complete Sherlock Holmes*, pp. 767-866 (p. 809 (ch. 7)).

Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-coloured houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers, Doctor, when one had no field upon which to exert them? Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon this earth. (*CSH*, p. 93 (ch. 1))

In 'His Last Bow', he puts a more scientific spin upon the matter when he says that his mind 'is like a racing engine, tearing itself to pieces because it is not connected up with the work for which it was built' (*CSH*, p. 870). On still another occasion, in 'The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans', his disaffection appears to be of the 'querulous' kind, like that of a 'sportsman whose game has failed him' (*CSH*, p. 913); here, Doyle reverts back to the image of the hunt.

The retort is possible that Holmes appearing bored so often is merely a narrative device, because whenever he is griping about things not happening, something turns up. But in the final analysis such an interpretation appears altogether too simplistic. At the same time (stories like *The Sign of Four* notwithstanding) there is no real need to go all the way to the other extreme and to read in the great detective all the classic signs of ennui associated with the decadents. At any rate, it seems hardly accurate to say, as Joseph Kestner does, that Doyle primarily intended to show him as retreating into a state of 'solipsistic interiority' (*SM*, p. 61) whenever he has no stimulating case on hand. Ultimately, though, one can say that he is to an extent trapped by his own rationality, which compels him to take much of the mystery out of life, and out of London's streets. In view of all this, his final query on the human condition in 'The Adventure of the Retired Colourman' – 'is not all life pathetic and futile?' (*CSH*, p. 1113) – might be more generally symptomatic than Watson assumes, and not due simply to a pose or a passing mood.

If we consider the Holmes canon as a whole, we might say that what Doyle does in the first instance, at the start of the opening story, *A Study in Scarlet*, is to rescue the capital city from contemporary negative representations – the great cesspool or whirlpool into which Watson finds himself, along with all other ‘loungers and idlers of the Empire’, being ‘drained’ (CSH, p. 15 (Part i, ch. 1) – and turns it into a place of excitement and adventure. And the Holmes stories undoubtedly did much to contribute to the popular image of turn-of-the-century London as fog-shrouded, gas-lit, and mysterious. Of course Doyle did not systematically set out to create such a picture, but succeeded in doing so by a process of accumulation, as readers demanded a continuing series of Holmes stories over the years; and it is a picture that has lasted to this day.

However, by the end, Sherlock Holmes’s London appeared to have exhausted many of the possibilities for romance. In ‘The Adventure of the Retired Colourman’ it no longer appears as a fog-veiled mystery – nor is it presented in sensationalist terms, as a centre of crime and vice. Rather the undistinguished, and indistinguishable, streets among which Amberley’s house is set appear all too commonly mundane. It would seem that the ‘colourman’ has indeed ‘retired’.

iv) The Chestertonian crusade

Another well-known writer of detective fiction in this period, Chesterton, also feels the threat of drabness in London streets; at least in some parts of the city.

The vast blank space of North London [...] its immensity and its meanness. It was, as it were, a base infinitude, a squalid eternity, and we felt the real horror of the poor parts of London, the horror that is so totally missed and misrepresented by the sensational novelists who depict it as being a matter of narrow streets, filthy houses, criminals and maniacs and dens of vice. In a narrow street, in a den of vice, you do

not expect order. But the horror of this was the fact that there was civilisation, that there was order, but that civilisation only showed its morbidity, and order only its monotony. (*CQT*, pp. 53-55 (ch. 2)).

Chesterton thus introduces the idea of an ‘immensity of meanness’ and goes on to elaborate it further: not only an ‘immensity’ but an ‘infinitude’ of meanness. And the particular streets which Chesterton talks of in this passage are contrasted with ‘those genuine slums which lie around the Thames and the City, in which nevertheless a real possibility remains that at any chance corner the great cross of the great cathedral of Wren may strike down the street like a thunderbolt’ (*CQT*, p. 55 (ch. 2)). In *A Study in Scarlet* Holmes remarks that ‘where there is no imagination there is no horror’ (*CSH*, p. 37 (Part i, ch. 5)), but these streets described by Chesterton appear devoid of imaginative possibility. Consequently, the only horror which remains is that there *is* no horror, nor any likelihood of it; these places are seen to be a product of ‘something worse than barbarism [...] a fourth-rate civilisation’ (*CQT*, p. 54 (ch. 2)).

We can compare Chesterton’s critique to the newspaper article which Machen says he was once asked to write explaining why a modern mean street was ‘so hideous and appalling’:

I said the chief horror of the modern street was not to be sought in the poverty of the design [...] but in the fact that in the street of today each house is a replica of the other, so that the effect to the eye is, if the street be long enough, the prolongation of one house to infinity, in an endless series of repetitions. (*TNF*, p. 93 (ch. 7))

Machen also expands at several points in his autobiography upon the sad fact that the charm and variety of very many old London streets has disappeared even in his own lifetime, to be replaced by an altogether more modern, ‘blatant’ quality (*TNF*, p. 22 (ch. 1)).

It is such things that Chesterton fights against – indeed one could properly say crusades against, and never more violently than in his early novel, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*. Here, to begin with, he imagines the worst possible scenario (certainly from his own point of view): a Future in which the forces of dullness have multiplied, to the complete exclusion, it would seem, of all that is vital:

it happened that everything in London was very quiet. That vague and somehow depressed reliance upon things happening as they have always happened, which is with all Londoners a mood, had become an assumed condition. There was really no reason for any man doing anything but the thing he had done the day before.¹⁶

The last part of this excerpt in particular – that in this world there is no *reason* for any man doing anything new, no reason to begin afresh – constitutes Chesterton's own nightmare of the future, as terrifyingly grim, to his way of thinking, as any Orwellian vision.

Of course, all of this feeds into Chesterton's special quarrel with the decadents. In this connection one should particularly bear in mind the set of verses he dedicated to E. C. Bentley at the beginning of *The Man who was Thursday*, recalling what he felt had been the peculiarly grim and depressing atmosphere towards the close of the nineteenth century (*MWT*, p. 4). Chesterton thus engages with the forces of dullness in a special intellectual sense which is lacking in Doyle (in spite of the occasional decadent overtones in the Holmes stories), and differs too from the heavy material dullness of Conrad's city thoroughfares in *The Secret Agent*. Also one might say that Conrad perceived dullness and a sense of futility to be in many ways the essential condition of human life, while Chesterton read such things as the mark of a specific cultural and

¹⁶ G. K. Chesterton, *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, ed. by Bernard Bergonzi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 12 (Book i, ch. 2). (Henceforth designated in the text as *NNH*.)

historical current, which could be superseded. In the verses to Bentley he notes with thankfulness that that time is now over; and in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* he sets up the grey world of a future London only to bring it tumbling down again.

Not that he allows it to happen immediately, but the change, once it begins, with the extraordinary shift in perspective experienced by Quin, a small, meek Government clerk, while walking down the street in the wake of two of his colleagues, is irresistible.

So the short Government official looked at the coat-tails of the tall Government officials, and through street after street, and round corner after corner, saw only coat-tails, coat-tails, and again coat-tails – when, he did not know in the least why, something happened to his eyes.

Two black dragons were walking backwards in front of him. Two black dragons were looking at him with evil eyes [...] The eyes which he saw were, in truth, only the two buttons at the back of a frock-coat: perhaps some traditional memory of their meaningless character gave this half-witted prominence to their gaze. The slit between the tails was the nose-line of the monster: whenever the tails flapped in the winter wind the dragons licked their lips. It was only a momentary fancy, but the small clerk found it imbedded in his soul ever afterwards. He could never again think of men in frock-coats except as dragons walking backwards. (*NNH*, p. 13 (Book i, ch. 2))

This kind of movement of the mind, which reveals new possibilities in everyday things, is very important to Chesterton. At its most extreme, it could conceivably lead to insanity (as seems to be the case with Machen's *Lucian*). But generally in Chesterton, changes in mental habit are seen to be very refreshing: 'If we say "a man is a man" we awaken no sense of the fantastic [...] but if we say [...] that "man is a two-legged bird, without feathers" the phrase does, for the moment, make us look at man from the outside and give us a thrill in his presence'.¹⁷

¹⁷ G. K. Chesterton, *Robert Browning* (London: Macmillan, 1951), p. 151.

To heighten the impact of the change experienced by Quin, Chesterton dresses it up in fanciful language. ‘Now, there is a law written in the darkest of the Books of Life, and it is this: If you look at a thing nine hundred and ninety-nine times, you are perfectly safe; if you look at it the thousandth time, you are in frightful danger of seeing it for the first time’ (*NNH*, p. 13 (Book i, ch. 2)). Furthermore, the little clerk’s first name is revealed to be ‘Auberon’, which of course is very like ‘Oberon’, the fairy king of folklore. The world, or certainly London, has been allowed to sink into a pit of dreariness; but the impish Quin energetically sets about his task of changing it. And in fact things go much further than even he intended, with the arrival of Adam Wayne; Wayne’s passion and intensity ensures that the process of change does not stop until the city has been laid waste. Chesterton’s particular brand of medievalism in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* – in Quin’s words, ‘the revival of the arrogance of the old medieval cities as applied to [modern] suburbs’ (*NNH*, p. 39 (Book ii, ch. 1)) – which leads to this final annihilation, contrasts markedly with some more idyllic medievalist visions of the age, most notably in Morris’s *News from Nowhere*. And the two figures, Auberon and Wayne, representing the two vital aspects of human nature – in essence, ‘laughter and love’ (*NNH*, p. 163 (Book v, ch. 3)) – are left to begin anew in the world at large, in a manner reminiscent of Adam and Eve setting forth at the close of *Paradise Lost*.

Elsewhere in his fiction, Chesterton simply insists stubbornly on the innate poetry of life, life in modern urban surroundings; and he paints the city in vivid colours and creates some startling images. One of these is the ‘sapphire sun’ in *The Club of Queer Trades* (*CQT*, p. 216 (ch. 6)), to account for the extraordinary blueness of twilight in the streets, as enhanced by the neon lamps. Likewise, there is the scene in *The Man who was Thursday* where the Thames Embankment takes on the semblance of an alien planet (*MWT*, p. 48 (ch. 4)), and another in which the streets are radically transformed by a snowfall. ‘Under the white fog of snow high up in the heaven the whole atmosphere of

the city was turned to a very queer kind of green twilight, as of men under the sea' (*MWT*, p. 77 (ch. 7)).

Chesterton, then, often dresses up the city in strange shades and colours which, as in the passage above, conduces to a notably de-familiarizing effect. Similarly, in his detective fiction he frequently dresses up a situation with many (as he says himself in 'The Queer Feet') 'rococo excrescences'¹⁸ which help to obscure the truth of the case. This of course is hardly an uncommon strategy in the detective story. But Chesterton is frequently at pains to create a truly gross sense of the grotesque, the unnatural, and the prodigious. Consider for instance the over-ripe decadence of the suburban house belonging to the poet Leonard Quinton in 'The Wrong Shape', with its monstrous effulgence of tropical colours (*FB*, pp. 108-109). Or there is the splendid rhetoric of Kalon, the self-styled priest of Apollo who lives in his high-rise temple of the sun above 'the singular smoky sparkle, at once a confusion and a transparency which is the Thames' (*FB*, p. 142)

For Chesterton, at least, the heightened feel and colour which he imparts to many of the scenes in the Father Brown tales are answered in no small measure by the significance of the human characters who inhabit them. As far as he is concerned, human desires, passions and actions are never mean or trivial. These stories generally follow the same melodramatic pitch as, for example, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which is filled with garish pictures of urban life. However there are times in Wilde's novel (very few and far between, perhaps, but still there) when the mode of heightened colour and theatricality falters and a sense of something like genuine weariness is perceptible. One such moment occurs when Dorian sees the face of James Vane (whose sister he has wronged) at a window and is terrified at the thought that vengeance might be closing in upon him. But then he goes on to reflect that

¹⁸ G. K. Chesterton, *Father Brown: A Selection*, ed. by W. W. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 59. (Henceforth designated in the text as *FB*.)

perhaps it had only been his fancy that had called vengeance out of the night, and set the hideous shapes of punishment before him. Actual life was chaos, but there was something terribly logical in the imagination [...] It was the imagination that made each crime bear its own misshapen brood. In the common world of fact the wicked were not punished, nor the good rewarded. Success was given to the strong, failure thrust upon the weak. That was all.¹⁹

Dorian here contemplates the possibility that there is no divine, poetic sense of retribution after all, only a 'common world of fact' where the strong triumph and the weak go to the wall. This is the one time when he appears to subscribe to the Darwinian ethos (one can also draw attention to the Biblical echoes of this passage, in the jaundiced reversal of the lines from Ecclesiastes 9. 11). More importantly for the purpose of the present discussion he accepts that the human imagination is essentially a falsifying element, which glorifies human actions, drawing them out and setting them up for punishment or reward, attaching significance to them where none exists, and thus glossing over the banal realities of existence. There is an empty finality about the phrase, 'that was all'.

Chesterton, however, never seems to feel as Dorian does here, at least not in the *Father Brown* stories. In 'The Wrong Shape' the title refers not only to a vital clue (the shape of the paper on which Quinton's apparent suicide note is written) but also to wrongness in a metaphysical sense. This is something which Father Brown sombrely declares he can see manifested in Eastern art (the victim, Quinton, being a decadent poet, is seen to dabble in Eastern images and forms): 'I have seen wicked things in a Turkey carpet' (*FB*, p. 112). (Chesterton's attitude to Eastern art is a timely reminder of how the Orient, as well as being a source for all manner of exotic wonders and marvels, most

¹⁹ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, ed. by Peter Ackroyd (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 237 (ch. 18).

visibly in the *Arabian Nights*, was also perceived to have a dark side, with its strains of cruelty, inordinate luxury, hedonism and un-Christian practices – as exemplified in William Beckford's eighteenth-century novel *Vathek*.) Yet, for all this, the crimes involved in tales such as 'The Wrong Shape' and 'The Eye of Apollo' might well appear, to an objective eye, to be mean and sordid, and certainly not out-of-the-way in any sense; in the first, a man is stabbed to death by his wife's lover, in the second a vulnerable blind girl is disposed of for the sake of her money.

In *The Club of Queer Trades*, featuring 'star-gazer' and 'mystic' Basil Grant (*CQT*, p. 7 (ch. 1)), Chesterton is also concerned to show human actions and desires in an extraordinary, indeed bizarre, light, although generally in more light-hearted fashion than in the Father Brown tales. There is for instance the amazing case of Professor Chadd who appears to lose his speech in a fit of insanity; it turns out he is devising a new kind of language which requires him to communicate through extravagant leg gestures rather than through verbal speech. Or there is the equally astounding episode in which Lieutenant Drummond Keith, having given his address as 'The Elms, Buxton Common', seems to vanish off the face of the earth – only for Basil to discover that he is literally living in an elm-tree, on the outskirts of London, in an 'arboreal villa' sold to him by a house agent who specializes in this unusual line of real estate.

William J. Scheik specifically contrasts *The Club of Queer Trades* with the Holmes cycle: 'In contrast to [the] reliance on mundane facts and empirical reason in the Sherlock Holmes stories, Basil time and again demonstrates how unreliable is the commonplace path of thought, which cannot fathom the sort of alternative 'fantastic' reality informing the antics of *The Club of Queer Trades*'.²⁰ In such cases as these, (unlike many of the Father Brown stories) even when the matter is laid bare the truth

²⁰ William J. Scheick, *The Ethos of Romance at the Turn of the Century* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), p. 103.

still appears astonishing. Chesterton thus shows how the most amazing things can go on in the heart of the modern metropolis – even if unsuspected by the public at large.

v) Gothic Representations: Impostors and Mr Hyde

As already seen in ‘The Red Hand’, Machen too wrote detective fiction, or what might be loosely classed as such, although there is no classic detective-figure in his books (Dyson is probably the closest he gets). But he shares the concerns of the genre in depicting mysterious crimes and strange happenings in London’s streets which are finally tracked down and explained, or at any rate exposed. This is the pattern followed by ‘The Red Hand’, *The Great God Pan*, and also *The Three Impostors* – at the end of which Dyson, out on one of his customary ‘aimless walks’ (*TI*, p. 217 (ch. 8)) through the city unwittingly follows in the footsteps of the ill-fated Joseph Walters and comes at last upon his mutilated body in a grim old house. By dint of this discovery, coupled with the explanatory manuscript by Walters which earlier chanced to fall into Dyson’s hands, some of the workings of the sinister secret society which Walters was naïve enough to join, are finally unearthed.

It is interesting to look at the structure of *The Three Impostors* more closely. As already remarked, it is modelled on Stevenson; like *The New Arabian Nights* and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* it is presented as a series of ‘incidents’, separate adventures, and occurrences. Of course Jekyll’s story is also presented as a whole ‘case’ (albeit a ‘strange’, aberrant one) and critics have fruitfully pondered the legal, and more especially the medical, connotations of this ever since.²¹ In *The Three Impostors*, too, a larger design is revealed in the end. But the focus is very much on the long-winded tales

²¹ See, for example, Robert Mighall’s essay, ‘Diagnosing Jekyll: The Scientific Context to Dr. Jekyll’s Experiment and Mr. Hyde’s Embodiment’ in *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde and other Tales of Terror*, ed. by Robert Mighall (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2002; henceforth designated in the text as *JHT*), pp. 143-161.

that are related as a result of (seemingly) chance encounters in the street. These range from lynchings and dark deeds in North America in 'The Novel of the Dark Valley' (this recalls, to some extent, the second half of both *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Valley of Fear*) to sinister goings-on closer to home taking place in the West Country and among the London streets, in 'The Novel of the Black Seal' and 'The Novel of the White Powder' respectively. Yet it seems that in the end all these tales are merely a cover for, or more accurately the prelude to, a crime which is certainly repugnant (Walters being tortured to death) but not very much else.

It is Dyson who helps put us on the wrong track, when in the Prologue he stands in front of the run-down old house in which Walter's body is later discovered, and makes a conscious surrender to all manner of fancies: 'I yield to fantasy; I cannot withstand the influence of the grotesque. Here, where all is falling into dimness and dissolution, and we walk in cedarn gloom, and the very air of heaven goes mouldering to the lungs, I cannot remain commonplace' (*TI*, p. 7). Dyson's declamation follows immediately on from a terse opening in which we, the readers, are plunged into a situation which we can as yet only dimly apprehend; but Dyson contrives to bring in an air of gothic mystery which has an affiliation with the elaborate tales woven by the impostors but not with the actual crime that takes place at the centre of the novel. The more stolid Phillipps muses elsewhere on his friend's talent for making a 'romance out of the commonplace' (*TI*, p. 53) and this talent is nowhere more evident than here. And the reader is likely to follow Dyson's example in some measure and similarly yield to what turns out to be a mistaken persuasion.

Of course, as already remarked, it is generally the aim of the detective tale to mislead and even confuse the reader. But one might ask why Machen does it so extravagantly in this particular work. In one way, it might be taken as literary sophistication, of a kind – following on from Stevenson. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in particular has in the past been

flagged as an exemplary modernist text on account of its complex, multi-layered structure, for instance by Alan Sandison. Sandison makes much of Stevenson's use of doors and 'enclosures' – documents within documents; and argues that, having played with the reader's expectations throughout, the author does not finally allow the whole story to be told, after all. Sandison concludes that ultimately the door which is opened in the text is one leading into the twentieth century and to modernist practices.²² One might prosecute this line of criticism to the point where *The Three Impostors* could conceivably be pronounced as being even more of a 'modernist' text insofar as the elaborate narratives woven by the impostors ultimately lead nowhere at all, as it seems likely they are all entirely made up (although we are never expressly told this). As in *Jekyll*, there are doors to break down, (in 'The Novel of the White Powder') and final statements to be read (that of Professor Gregg in 'The Novel of the Black Seal' which clearly owes much to *Jekyll*'s). However, it seems there is nothing behind them at all.

According to Julia Briggs, the 'great strength' of *The Three Impostors* lies in its multiple narrative structure which 'permits a variety of levels of irony and self-mockery, and allows Machen's humour and scepticism to come into play as they seldom do elsewhere' (*NV*, p. 73). Certainly Machen seems at times to pretty deliberately undercut the horrors which he relates in this particular text. Briggs points out how the narrator of 'The Novel of the White Powder' ends up with a burst of unrestrained laughter (*NV*, p. 73) while in 'The Novel of the Black Seal' there is, as Robert Mighall remarks, the 'supreme bathos'²³ of the moment when the writhing piece of slime which was once the country boy Jervase Cradock lifts up a tentacle to carefully move the bust of Pitt from the dresser to the table (*TI*, pp. 21-22).

²² Alan Sandison, *Robert Louis Stevenson and the Appearance of Modernism: A Future Feeling* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 216.

²³ Robert Mighall, *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 157.

It might be, however, that Machen does not intend to be overweeningly clever in *The Three Impostors*, and simply strings together a whole lot of different episodes linked by one elaborate scheme, episodes which reflect his usual interests (the ‘little people’, for one); while the insertion of the minor character Edgar Russell, the struggling, would-be writer, once more gives him an opportunity to ventilate his thoughts on literary labours (*TI*, pp. 152-156). And the stories recounted by the three impostors gather momentum of their own; they can be discussed entirely in their own right. The fact that they are actually titled ‘novels’ emphasizes their detachability from the main narrative frame.

The device of multiple narratives and narrators was often used by gothic and sensationalist writers of the nineteenth century, from Wilkie Collins to Bram Stoker. But the various statements in *The Woman in White* and the manifold transcripts in *Dracula* clearly tend towards a unified end; while in the *Arabian Nights*, or in another older and elaborate series of different narratives like *The Canterbury Tales*, one remains generally mindful of the frame. In *The Three Impostors*, however, the frame is stretched so thin so as to become almost invisible. Indeed the net result is that, like Machen’s later novel, *The Secret Glory*, the whole becomes something of a mish-mash.

And when it is all done, when ‘the farce is played’ (*TI*, p. 4) – or alternatively, ‘the mystery play’ has been ‘enacted’ (*TI*, p. 195) – there is left only a certain flatness both of feeling and of tone. This is underlined by the stilted closing line, spoken by Dyson, in which he identifies the body in the old house as being that of the elusive ‘young man with spectacles’, finally run to ground (*TI*, p. 223).

In the end, there is nothing really mysterious, or even particularly engaging, left at the core of *The Three Impostors* once all the gothic architecture is dismantled. This is where it contrasts with the likes of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* which, if it is ‘modernist’ in form, is rather less so in content. For instance the supreme moment of transformation, as witnessed by the appalled Lanyon, is couched in language which puts the reader in mind

of the old mythic romance of Faust, or of Frankenstein: of science bordering on dark magic, and the quest to push back mortal limits. All of this is cast up to Lanyon who, clearly, has always been a more conventional type of late-Victorian physician than his old friend:

a new province of knowledge and new avenues to fame and power shall be laid open to you, here, in this room, upon this instant [...] your sight shall be blasted by a prodigy to stagger the unbelief of Satan [...]. And now, you who have so long been bound to the most narrow and material views, you who have denied the virtue of transcendental medicine, you who have derided your superiors – behold! (*JHT*, p. 53 (ch. 9))

Yet, even when one strips away all the rhetoric, there *is* still something left at the very centre of the text, a mystery and a horror not readily explained.

Generally, discussions of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* focus upon atavistic regression, criminality and sexuality;²⁴ one might also consider a cluster of other themes such as the father/son relationship with Jekyll as the father figure and Hyde the rebellious son. But there is one passage which seems to point beyond all of these considerations to something even deeper, something even more disturbing than the idea of man's reversion into beast. It occurs towards the end of Jekyll's final statement:

Jekyll [...] had now seen the full deformity of that creature that shared with him some of the phenomena of consciousness, and was co-heir with him to death: and beyond these links of community, which in themselves made the most poignant part of his distress, he thought of Hyde, for all his energy of life, as of something not only hellish but inorganic. This was the shocking thing; that the slime of the pit seemed to utter cries and voices; that the amorphous dust gesticulated and sinned; that what was dead, and had no shape, would usurp the offices of life. And this again, that that insurgent horror was knit to him closer than a wife, closer than an eye; lay caged in his flesh, where he heard it mutter and felt it struggle to be

²⁴ See again Robert Mighall (note 21, above); also Stephen Heath, 'Psychopathia Sexualis: Stevenson's Strange Case' in *Reading Fin De Siecle Fictions*, ed. by Lyn Pykett (London: Longman, Addison, Wesley, 1996) pp. 64-79.

born; and at every hour of weakness, and in the confidence of slumber, prevailed against him, and deposed him out of life. (*JHT*, p. 69 (ch. 10))

In this densely-textured passage Hyde takes on many different forms and provokes a range of responses. We gain a sense, in the first instance, of something vague and inchoate stirring and making its presence felt: something which is represented in full gothic-horror mode as ‘the slime of the pit’, but also takes on a different resonance with the image of the ‘dust’ from which, in Biblical tradition, man came, and to which he is fated to return. This is followed by the invocation of another gothic motif, the mainstay of vampire lore – the stirring of the ‘dead’ (although, admittedly, ‘dead’ in this case seems to denote that which has formerly been inanimate rather than at any time alive). And then comes the shift of the external dust/slime inward into the body of Jekyll himself, so that it begins to appear part of his very fabric of being, ‘knit closer to him than a wife, closer than an eye’. The phrase ‘caged in his flesh’ evokes the image of a wild beast – a ready metaphor for those bestial, primitive instincts that humanity has never quite been able to subdue, which again suggests that this is an intrinsic part of Jekyll’s nature. But Stevenson also bring in the feminizing image of giving birth, which lends emphasis to the notion that this thing which Jekyll has been nurturing inside his body must inevitably break free, or be expelled, so that it takes on an external and separate form.

The overall impression is that of a being (which ultimately escapes definition) slowly rising up against Jekyll, and assuming control of him, ‘usurping’ and eventually ‘deposing’ him. It is something which initially ‘had no shape’ but which metamorphoses into human likeness, while retaining its essential un-naturalness (Hyde’s chief feature is ‘the haunting sense of unexpressed deformity’ (*JHT*, p. 25 (ch. 4)) which no witness can ever quite pin down).

What we have in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, in effect, is the reverse of the process of decomposition. It is a process that can relate to the city itself as well as to individuals, as seen in 'The Red Hand', or *The Secret Agent*. However, Stevenson's tale, as well as reversing the process also achieves a sense of chilling unease.

Horror is also the effect that Machen aims for, in his use of this particular theme. But it is more potent in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* because it is more restrained. The idea of primordial slime is only once ever alluded to in the whole of the text, but it is just enough to deepen the sense of mysterious horror at the very centre to the point where it becomes irreducible. It is a different matter in *The Three Impostors*, in which the gothic excesses related by the impostors turn out to be just that – imposturing; a cover for crimes shocking but not mysterious. Joseph Walters is simply unfortunate enough to get mixed up with some very bad company – a kind of occult society perhaps. However, there is nothing occult about his eventual fate; he may have been horribly tortured but he is not dissolved. Compare, too, a story like 'The Red Hand'. As discussed above, Machen effectively evokes a sense of the strange and the primitive in this tale, especially in his depiction of the city streets. Yet, despite this, and despite Selby's dark mutterings about the subhuman race, which guard the ancient treasure hoard in the West Country, the actual crime committed is very much of a commonplace nature. Selby simply kills the man who would have killed him for the sake of this treasure.

In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by contrast, a sense of mystery remains very much at the heart of the tale; and that is why this work has been remembered primarily over the years not as a detective story or as a medico-legal case but as a horror classic. Being much the more accomplished writer Stevenson manages to convey more effectively than Machen the sense of something dark and shapeless and utterly primitive lurking in the heart of London's streets. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is far from being an empty text. There is rather less left at the centre of *The Three Impostors*, or in most of the Holmes

stories, and even the detective fiction of Chesterton – if one does not readily share Chesterton's sense of the innate wonder of human life and the world.

vi) A new approach: Buchan and the thriller

The thriller, a genre closely related to the detective story, similarly began to flourish towards the end of the nineteenth century; and Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* remains the work for which he is best remembered. But although this work features 'the most famous man-hunt of all time' (to quote the back-cover blurb to *The Complete Richard Hannay*), it opens with a picture of Hannay reduced by life in London to a state of utter boredom. And Hannay's boredom is even more pronounced than that of Watson at the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet*. From the outset – and interestingly not unlike his close counterpart Carruthers in *The Riddle of the Sands*, who describes London as a 'dead and fermenting city'²⁵ – he appears acutely afflicted with yawning sickness; for him, London is so exasperatingly inane that it is not long before he is on the point of repudiating 'the Old Country' altogether.²⁶ But then comes the meeting with Scudder, and the commencement of adventure and intrigue.

In particular, it is the climactic moment when Hannay comes upon Scudder's butchered body that signals the change. Hannay is actually shocked beyond measure by the discovery: 'I had seen men die violently before,' he says, 'indeed I had killed a few myself in the Matabele War; but this cold-blooded indoor business was different' (*CRH*, p. 16 (ch. 2)). His choice of words here is significant: 'this cold-blooded *indoor* business'. This understated phrase succeeds in capturing the sense of danger suddenly coming home to roost in the dullest of surroundings, of being lodged 'indoors', and no longer displaced to far-away countries (South Africa, for instance, for which Hannay

²⁵ Erskine Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1952), p. 17 (ch. 1).

²⁶ John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, in *The Complete Richard Hannay*, pp. 1-103 (p. 6 (ch. 1)).

has probably been pining up till now). In an instant, his mundane urban surroundings are transformed, a new element is added – without, however, actually breaking the surface appearance of things.

Not that Hannay remains in London for long, once the wheels of the plot are set in motion; it is really only the starting point of his adventures. In another of Buchan's thrillers however, written around the same time, London, and its streets and thoroughfares, are very much the main focus throughout: in *The Power House*. This work has long been remembered for arch-villain Andrew Lumley's dictum that the difference between 'civilization' and 'barbarism' is merely 'a thread, a pane of glass',²⁷ and little else. This is undeserved, for Buchan evokes (and manages to sustain, for the best part of the novel) an unsettling sense of the unknown, and even of the uncanny, percolating into ordinary, everyday London life.

In the first place, through the medium of Lumley, Buchan points out how easily modern civilization, for all its apparent security, can be undermined:

Consider how delicate the machine is growing. As life grows more complex, the machinery grows more intricate, and therefore more vulnerable. Your so-called sanctions become so infinitely numerous that each in itself is frail. In the Dark Ages you had one great power - the terror of God and His Church. Now you have a multiplicity of small things, all delicate and fragile, and strong only by our tacit agreement not to question them. (*PH*, p. 29 (ch. 3))

This trenchant observation on the nature of modern civilization finds an echo in one of the best-known social novels of the period, *Tono-Bungay*:

Civilization is possible only through confidence, so that we can bank our money and go unarmed about the streets. The bank reserve or a policeman keeping order in a jolting multitude of people are only [...]

²⁷John Buchan, *The Power-House*, in *The Leithen Stories*, p. 29 (ch. 3).

impudent bluffs [...] they couldn't for a moment 'make good' a quarter of what they guarantee was demanded of them [...] it seems to me that it all drifts on to [...] disaster.²⁸

Of course, elsewhere, in several of his scientific romances and short stories, Wells was fond of demonstrating how easily modern civilization can be swept away, virtually at a single stroke – most famously in *The War of the Worlds* where the Martians' deadly calculated strikes result in 'the swift liquefaction of the social body'²⁹ (even if things are restored, in a token sort of way, by the end). In *Tono-Bungay* however the dissolution of civilization appears much more protracted in nature (as signalled by the verb 'drifted' in the above passage). This slow decay is represented in several different ways in the text, ranging from the social symbol of the old aristocratic hide-bound estate of Bladesover (whose name, as Michael Draper notes, suggests the poised sickle of Father Time)³⁰ to the 'science-fiction' image of the radioactive substance known as 'quap'. The quap in fact comes to figure in George Ponderevo's mind as a metaphor for the slow disintegration not only of London, or England, or even civilization as a whole, but of all life on earth: like the Time Traveller in *The Time Machine* he envisages 'the end of our planet' (*TB*, p. 284 (Book iii, ch. 4)).

A novel such as *Tono-Bungay* goes far beyond the scope of *The Power House* in assessing the fallibility of modern civilization; but it lacks such a figure as Lumley who is single-mindedly bent on exploiting these weaknesses to the utmost. With Lumley, Buchan taps into urban fears of the period concerning the activities (real and imagined) of all types of subversives, particularly in London which had become a refuge for anarchists and social revolutionaries, whether from Europe or America – in fact in the

²⁸ H. G. Wells, *Tono-Bungay* (London: Pan, 1964), pp. 191-192 (Book iii, ch. 1). (Henceforth designated in the text as *TB*.)

²⁹ H. G. Wells, *The War of the Worlds*, in *The Time Machine; The Island of Dr. Moreau; The Invisible Man; The First Men in the Moon; The Food of the Gods; In the Days of the Comet; The War of the Worlds* (London: Heinemann, 1984; henceforth designated in the text as *W*), pp. 713-828 (p. 770 (Book i, ch. 16)).

³⁰ Michael Draper, *H. G. Wells* (London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 89.

later nineteenth century the city had played host to major international anarchist congresses.³¹ Lumley though is an English gentleman, suave and sophisticated. As such, he is distinct from other anarchists in the fiction of the period, who are more seedy, run-down characters (and furthermore viewed with a more ironical eye), like the lugubrious man in the cab in Wells's 'The Stolen Bacillus', and the generally sorry, and grotesque, lot who appear in *The Secret Agent* – the only dangerous one being the Professor in his single-minded focus upon 'death' (*SA*, p. 93 (ch. 4)).

Of course society as a whole in *The Secret Agent* appears so dreary and corrupt that it hardly seems worth saving from its enemies; and Conrad once actually declared his 'respect' for 'extreme anarchists'³² on the grounds that society was merely organized viciousness and selfishness – these two things being the natural condition of man – and therefore inherently criminal in itself. In contrast, Buchan might point out society's pretences but he would never go so far as to deem it criminal, and thereby virtually indistinguishable from the criminal activities of those who plot to bring it down. And *The Power-House* is not, of course, a satire like *The Secret Agent*; nor is it primarily concerned with social analysis, like *Tono-Bungay*. But the essential fragility of modern civilization is vividly illustrated in the course of the narrative when Leithen, having initially dismissed Lumley's claims as 'the kind of paradoxical, undergraduate speculation which grown men indulge in sometimes after dinner' (*PH*, p. 28 (ch. 3)) finds himself at the mercy of unknown forces as he walks the London streets; he feels the threat but is unable to comprehend the nature of it.

John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg observe that the enemy in Buchan, the mysterious 'they', 'are not simply another ambiguous political force different only in

³¹ See H. Oliver, *The International Anarchist Movement in Late Victorian London* (London: Croom Helm, 1983).

³² In a letter to Cunninghame Graham, dated February 8, 1899. See *The Collected Letters of Joseph Conrad*, ii, pp 157-159 (translation from the original French, p. 60).

degree from 'us': they are an alien civilization which threatens the very continuation of 'our' way of life'.³³ Certainly, in *The Power House*, this is the kind of effect achieved; Wells's Martians are superfluous to requirements here. And Leithen realizes that all the amenities of civilization cannot protect him, and that appearances are deceptive: 'I won't forget that walk home in a hurry. It was a fine June twilight. The streets were full of the usual crowd [...] all the flotsam of a London summer. You would have said it was the safest place on earth' (*PH*, p. 63 (ch. 6)). But it proves to be anything but safe, for Leithen; and the word 'flotsam' effectively conveys the essential flimsiness of the scene.

And Leithen on this particular memorable walk soon finds himself 'being skilfully edged away [...] into the shadow [...] I couldn't make out who the people were who hustled me. They seemed nondescripts of all sorts' (*PH*, p. 63 (ch. 6)). The most effective thing about such passages as these is the feeling of a shadowy, secretive, and sinister world which never quite comes into focus, but which is all around. And this is not the case simply in the night-time, or during twilight, but even in the full blaze of daylight, so that Leithen finally ends up one day running for his life, 'running like a thief in a London thoroughfare on a June afternoon' (*PH*, p. 72 (ch. 7)). This is what impressed Graham Greene. 'Buchan,' he notes approvingly, 'prepared us in his thrillers better than he knew for the death that may come to any of us as it nearly came to Leithen, by the railings of the Park or the doorway of the mews'.³⁴ Of course one should bear in mind that these comments came in a review written during wartime. But it was also Greene who made the well-known observation that 'Buchan was the first to realize the enormous dramatic value of adventure in familiar surroundings happening to unadventurous men' (*CEG*, p. 223).

³³ John A. Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg, *The Spy Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 42.

³⁴ Graham Greene, 'The Last Buchan', in Greene, *Collected Essays*, pp. 223-225 (p.223).

The contrast between Buchan's approach in *The Power House* and, for example, the Holmes stories, is obvious. Buchan makes little or no attempt to romanticize the city, but it acquires a potential for the strange and the terrible all the same. Its streets and houses begin almost to take on a ominous life of their own; there is one building whose 'every stone' comes to appear as a 'threat' to Leithen (*PH*, p. 62 (ch. 6)). And Leithen, before proceeding with his narrative, takes care to point to the central irony of the whole affair: 'the joke of it was that the man who went to look for adventure only saw a bit of the game, and I who sat in my chambers saw it all and pulled the strings' (*PH*, pp. 5-6 (Preface)). He is referring to his friend Tommy Deloraine, who journeys out to far-flung lands while he himself stays in London, and who comes back at the end enthusing over his various experiences which, so he declares, were 'like a chapter out of the Arabian Nights, with a dash of Fenimore Cooper' (*PH*, p. 86 (ch. 9)). This sounds, and clearly is meant to sound, formulaic and tired. The real interest of the story is centred on the everyday and not on the exotic (although in a way it could be said that Buchan to some degree collapses the distinction between the two).

The Power House exemplifies what Martin Rubin has to say on the nature of the thriller, in a discussion which is film rather than literature-based but which incorporates several useful insights in relation to the genre as a whole.

A crucial condition for the thriller is a strong sense of contrast between two different dimensions. On the one hand, there is the ordinariness of the initial context, encompassing such factors as the hero's lifestyle, and the sociohistorical background (e.g. modern urban life, modern mass warfare). On the other hand, there are those ingredients (a murder, a monster, a vital secret, supernatural forces) that invade the ordinary context transforming it into something adventurous and charged with a sense of the

marvellous...but not completely, not permanently. There still remains a sense of tension that is not completely erased by the presence of the transforming elements.³⁵

Rubin sums up his observations by saying that the thriller gives us the sense of a 'double world' (*T*, p. 18). He also refers to Northrop Frye's scheme of criticism (*T*, pp. 18-21) which postulates that the thriller is a form of comedy close to the mode of romance, and essentially a form straining towards a loftier domain. As Rubin points out, however, it can equally be said that the thriller is a version of degenerated 'heroic romance' (*T*, p. 21).

Michael Denning takes a more specifically historical approach in his overview of British espionage fiction, suggesting that the spy story was the natural successor to the colonial adventure tale. 'If the adventure tale was the energizing myth of English imperialism,' he writes, 'the thriller became a compensatory myth of the crisis of imperialism'.³⁶ He is reacting chiefly to the comprehensive study of adventure fiction by Martin Green which, as he discusses (*CS*, pp. 38-39), belittles the spy thriller somewhat, labelling it as an exhausted version of the classic imperial adventure tale – the shift from one to the other supposedly reflecting the decrease of confidence in Empire beginning around the turn of the century. Denning however is more prepared to meet the genre on its own terms, recognizing that it exists with a properly formulated set of conventions, which turn mainly on the idea of the 'enemy outside' (*CS*, p. 41) always threatening to break in. It is an idea that might well have fed off the jingoism and xenophobia of the period: these sentiments apparently being the most virulent in the lower middle classes, the main readers of this type of fiction (*CS*, pp. 41-42). But also it can conduce to the sense of a dark world outlying, and sometimes interpenetrating the

³⁵ Martin Rubin, *Thrillers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 17-18. (Henceforth designated in the text as *T*.)

³⁶ Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 39. (Henceforth designated in the text as *CS*.)

modern, usually urban, world. The British no longer go out and conquer: instead the strange, and the threatening, is brought closer to home.

In a wider sense, too, one might say that the thriller is a characteristically modern type of romance. No longer does one require to travel to far-away places to meet with adventure, as in the *Odyssey*, or in the classic nineteenth-century imperial adventure tale. Nor does one have to go out actively seeking a challenge in lonely forests, or castles, like the knights-errant in medieval times – or indeed like others in more modern times who venture out to remote places within the British Isles which still seem to wear an air of impenetrable mystery well into the twentieth century. There is no longer even any need to attempt to dress up the modern metropolis in fanciful colours, in the manner of a Chesterton, or a Machen. Instead, in stories like *The Power House*, the supposedly secure modern urban world is in an instant seen to become not so much changed as charged, infused with a sense of mystery, of the unknown. Even in the twentieth century, and even while keeping up the most mundane of appearances, the great metropolis is maybe not as safe – and as dull – as one might be led to expect.

Chapter Five

i) Secret worlds: Doyle, Chesterton, and Machen

The Power House effectively demonstrates the potential of the thriller-genre in its evocation of a dim but dangerous world lying all around what would outwardly appear to be the most ordinary and well-regulated of London's streets. However there is another sense in which the meanest-looking street can take on new dimensions: it can happen simply when one pushes through the door of each house of that street, to see what lies beyond, or within.

Doyle provides a startling instance of this in *The Sign of Four*, when the wholly unlooked-for wonders of Thaddeus Sholto's apartment are suddenly revealed to Watson's astonished gaze.

We had [...] reached a questionable and forbidding neighbourhood. Long lines of dull brick houses were only relieved by the coarse glare and tawdry brilliancy of public-houses at the corner. Then came rows of two-storied villas, each with a fronting of miniature garden, and then again interminable lines of new, staring brick buildings [...] At last the cab drew up at the third house in a new terrace [...] On our knocking [...] the door was instantly thrown open by a Hindoo servant, clad in a yellow turban, white loose-fitting clothes, and a yellow sash. There was something strangely incongruous in this Oriental figure framed in the commonplace doorway of a third-rate suburban dwelling-house [...]

We followed the Indian down a sordid and common passage, ill-lit and worse furnished, until he came to a door upon the right, which he threw open. A blaze of yellow light streamed out upon us, and in the centre of the glare there stood a small man with a very high head [...] Nature had given him a pendulous lip, and a too visible line of yellow and irregular teeth [...]

"Your servant, Miss Morstan," he kept repeating in a thin, high voice. "Your servant, gentlemen. Pray step into my little sanctum. A small place, miss, but furnished to my own liking. An oasis of art in the howling desert of South London."

We were all astonished by the appearance of the apartment into which he invited us. In that sorry house it looked as out of place as a diamond of the first water in a setting of brass. The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly mounted painting or Oriental vase. The carpet was of amber and black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss. Two great tiger-skins thrown athwart it increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which stood upon a mat in the corner. A lamp in the fashion of a silver dove was hung from an almost invisible golden wire in the centre of the room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odour. (CSH, pp. 99-100 (ch.s 3-4))

In this passage, Holmes and Watson move from dubious, 'questionable' lower-class regions of London, which appear consciously grim and 'forbidding', to a suburb which, though less squalid, is no more inspiring; and it is here that the miraculous transformation takes place. The contours of the grim outer world, the 'lines' of the 'dull brick houses', fade away, to be replaced by a wonderful vision. And there is an interesting play on lights and colours throughout; the 'coarse glare' of the mean streets previously traversed – even the 'glare' which strikes the visitors through the doorway as they stand in the corridor outside – softens into the beguiling illuminations within the apartment, while the various, rather squalid yellows (the colour of Sholto's teeth, for example) mellow into voluptuous gold. Perhaps the scene is rather too luxurious, with the soft carpet and the various 'Oriental' appurtenances; the story undeniably shades into decadence, an impression greatly enhanced by the framing figure of Holmes as cocaine-user. (It should be noted though that the theme of decadence, or more properly degeneration, is in this story most fully represented in the stunted, ferocious little figure of Tonga, the Andaman islander.)

Of course it is little surprise that Thaddeus Sholto should be a connoisseur of Eastern luxuries, as the plot of *The Sign of Four* revolves round a consciously 'oriental' motif: the great 'Agra treasure'. The interesting thing, however, is that the strain of exoticism in this novel is less visible than one might think. Consider, for instance, the exotically-

named 'Pondicherry Lodge', the Sholto family residence where Bartholemew, brother of Thaddeus, still lives (and is murdered). Although said to be 'full of Indian curiosities' (*CSH*, p. 114 (ch. 6)) there is virtually no hint of them in the descriptions we are given of the interior. Described as 'prosaic' on the outside (*CSH*, p. 107 (ch. 5)) it appears equally so, on the inside – in stark contrast to the new lodgings which Thaddeus has taken up in a mean little London suburb.

Moreover, the Agra treasure never actually appears in the novel, as the villain Jonathan Small, to prevent the authorities from seizing it, throws it all into the river; the fabulous riches of the East are thus swallowed up in the 'dark ooze at the bottom of the Thames' which also claims Tonga, 'that strange visitor to our shores' (*CSH*, p. 139 (ch. 10)).

Of course, Small does go on to unfold a story of India which is replete with danger and excitement and intrigue; but overall in *The Sign of Four*, the exotic does not obtrude very much on the reader's notice. The focus is more on the minutiae of detective work, which take Holmes and Watson through some very dingy parts of London – for example a creosote yard (in chapter 7). Therefore, the wonders of Thaddeus Sholto's apartment become all the more striking. We might draw upon Thaddeus's own words when he speaks of his little place as being an 'oasis' 'in the howling desert of South London' and say that the description of his apartment is an oasis of exoticism in what is otherwise (and this is despite the subject-matter) a fairly un-exotic narrative. The entire 'oriental' flavour is distilled in one episode; the outer and inner realms – the grim streets outside and Sholto's secret glowing world within – are sharply differentiated.

Chesterton's Basil Grant, in *The Club of Queer Trades*, is another who, unknown to most, is the possessor of a secret world:

Few people knew him, because, like all poets, he could do without them [...] He lived in a queer and comfortable garret in the roofs of Lambeth. He was surrounded by a chaos of things that were in odd contrast to the slums around him: old fantastic books, swords, armour – the whole dust-hole of

romanticism. But his face, amid all these quixotic relics, appeared curiously keen and modern – a powerful, legal face. And no one but I knew who he was. (*CQT*, pp. 7-8 (ch. 1)).

The phrase, ‘dust-hole of romanticism’, gives an antiquarian flavour to the scene. But we are forcibly reminded in this passage that Basil himself is a ‘modern’, and even more a ‘legal’, presence among the ‘relics’ which fill his room; he might be reclusive but he is not a crank. He has, in effect, become a modern advocate for romance – even if he has to keep this as a secret from the world at large. Certainly, from the outside, there is no hint of its existence: the garret is located in a particularly ‘sombre pile of workmen's flats’, at the top of a ‘wearisome wooden staircase’ (*CQT*, p. 116 (ch. 3)).

Although the image of the garret is rather clichéd, it is interesting to consider Basil's position as a whole. At first glance his life appears to have taken the opposite path to that of Quin in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*, in that he goes from being a highly visible figure (as a distinguished judge) to being virtually unrecognizable in public: the result of his sensational, indeed ‘grotesque’, departure from his venerable office (*CQT*, p. 8 (ch. 1)). However, he still operates the considerable side-interest of the Club of Queer Trades, with which he can indulge his passion for all sorts of eccentric goings-on, as exemplified in the riotous banquet at the end over which Basil presides as a kind of modern-day Lord of Misrule: ‘the king of [...] capering idiots’ (*CQT*, p. 260 (ch. 6)).

The whole of this organization, though, is essentially clandestine in nature, and likely to remain so; the headquarters of the Club of Queer Trades are actually located underground, as Swinburne and Rupert Grant finally discover. With a touch which parodies that stolid chronicler of London adventure, Dr. Watson, Swinburne declares that ‘I should expand this story for ever if I explained how ultimately we ran this strange entity to its lair’, and remarks that the strangest experience of his life was coming out of ‘rambling, sightless, and seemingly hopeless passages into the sudden splendour of a sumptuous and hospitable dining-room, surrounded upon almost every

side by faces that I knew' (*CQT*, pp. 257- 258 (ch. 6)). It may be a 'sumptuous' place; but it is even more well-concealed than Basil's attic. In fact in this respect it rather resembles the hideouts, or supposed hideouts, of anarchists and others hostile to society; in a specifically Chestertonian context, *The Man who was Thursday* comes to mind. And although there is an apocalyptic dimension in the final chapters of *The Man who was Thursday* quite lacking in *The Club of Queer Trades*, with the wild pursuit and final unmasking of Sunday and also the final blackness that comes to encompass Syme before he wakes from his dream, or vision, there is similarly a sense of apprehension and disorientation being erased when Sunday is revealed to be the 'peace of God' (*MWT*, p. 187 (ch. 15)). Basil is no more ominous than the closing revelation of Sunday proves to be; but he does have to remain somewhat secretive, hidden away from the world at large either in his attic or underground.

Auberon Quin in *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* also has splendid chambers of his own which are seen to be even more out of step with the general surroundings than Basil's; in defiance of a world where utter dullness has become the norm, his rooms, as his work-colleague Barker testifies, are like the inside of an 'amethyst' (*NNH*, p. 16 (Book i, ch. 2)). But unlike Basil he is able to impart the colour of his inner world to the city at large, through the external circumstance of his being appointed king: the vibrant visions of his own life spill onto the larger stage. This is imaged primarily through the diffusion of colour. At the start of the tale the malady of colour-blindness – as described in a later Chestertonian novel, *The Return of Don Quixote*¹ – appears to have become all-pervasive (certainly in London). But Quin takes his cue from the Nicaraguan President who in order to obtain the red which he needs for his flag cuts his own hand to let some of the colour that is literally inside him to seep out.

¹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Return of Don Quixote* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927), pp. 133-134 (ch. 9).

Quin's bejewelled private apartments are representative of his rich inner life. One could hardly say the same though in the case of Thaddeus Sholto, who is little more than a stereotypical figure in a story of adventure; consequently one does not really feel that he has any significant inner life. And when we turn to a writer like Machen, we find that he has something in common with both Doyle and Chesterton in this respect. On the one hand, Machen gives us Dyson whose chambers, like Quin's, reflect his colourful interests, as described in 'The Inmost Light' (*GGP*, pp. 111-112 (ch. 3)), and whose name might well be intended to recall the word 'dye', but who comes across as a rather bland figure. He is no more interesting, psychologically, than Sholto. On the other hand, we also find in Machen's fiction a character like Lucian in *The Hill of Dreams*, who lives almost entirely inside his own head.

Lucian palpably lacks the material resources to dress up his room after the manner of a Sholto, or even a Dyson. Nevertheless, his room is his one refuge in the whole of London, where he is free to try to put some of his wonderful visions into writing; so that at one point when settling down to his labours after a series of purposeless wanderings outside, he feels 'as if he had passed from the black skies and the stinging wind and the dull maze of the suburb into all the warmth and sunlight and colour of the south' (*HD*, p. 164 (ch. 5)).

Unfortunately Lucian's endeavours prove fruitless; he is powerless to convey anything of the world inside his head. This is evident in the crisp conclusion which is provided after his death. Up to this point, we have been given the story solely from Lucian's perspective. Now we are presented with an outside view, which brings home the reality of the 'shabby' room, where the only visible evidence of Lucian's efforts is a pile of mere 'illegible hopeless scribblings' (*HD*, p. 246 (ch. 7)). The room now functions as an index of its former occupant's failure in the world at large.

Yet some hints of Lucian's vision remain, for instance in the descriptions of the woman who comes into the room, who clearly had some sort of liaison with Lucian at some stage, as a result of which he had tried to elevate her to the status of some kind of dread goddess 'in whose eyes were all the mysteries' (*HD*, p. 197 (ch. 6)). Now she appears in a rather more common light, but the 'argent gleam' is still in her eyes, the curls of hair upon her neck are still 'like golden work upon marble' (*HD*, p. 246 (ch. 7)). More importantly, it seems that the light within Lucian has not finally been extinguished, after all. The lamp upon his desk is described as shining 'through the dead eyes into the dying brain' to meet an answering 'glow within', like 'great furnace doors being opened' (*HD*, p. 248 (ch. 7)). This image of furnace doors opening is also present at the very beginning of the novel, where it denotes the fiery glow of a sun-streaked sky over the Welsh countryside which so enchants Lucian. Here, the use of this image furnishes the sense of new dimensions being opened up in the external realm (an idea subsequently borne out in the story when this countryside begins to appear quite unearthly to Lucian). But at the end of the novel it serves to give the impression that a new dimension has opened up within Lucian himself – in the inner, rather than in the outer, realm.

The idea of the 'inmost light', to borrow the title of one of his own stories, intrigues Machen. In fact the image of the opal in 'The Inmost Light' is a useful one in this context. Machen intends it primarily as a symbol of unholy power ('The Inmost Light' is, on the whole, a mediocre horror-story, featuring another dastardly experiment of the kind practised by the unscrupulous Doctor Raymond in *The Great God Pan*); but its radiance is overwhelming. 'Within [the jewel] shone the blue of far skies, and the green of the sea by the shore [...] it seemed aflame as if a fountain of fire rose up, and fell, and rose again, with sparks like stars' (*GGP*, pp. 129-130 (ch. 4)). Such a description suggests that this small object actually contains an entire world, with references to

‘skies’, ‘sea’, and ‘stars’. The opal is the sign of some kind of mystical other-world – which might also be reflected in the inner fire of a Lucian. Machen, as so often, is vague about details, but *The Hill of Dreams* ends on a rather intriguing note – at the moment of entrance, perhaps, to this unseen realm.

ii) From secret worlds to other worlds: Wells

At the opposite end of the social spectrum from the wretched Lucian, but similarly often to be found wandering the London streets with visions of his own – visions which may or may not relate to a truly other world – is Wells’s Lionel Wallace, in ‘The Door in the Wall’. Wallace belongs in that most public of roles – a Cabinet Minister – yet he harbours the most private of fantasies.

Wallace is not the only dreaming, dreamy politician in the fiction of this period. Buchan has some examples, like Maitland in ‘Fountainblue’, who is to all appearances every inch the successful (because ruthless) career-man. However Maitland feels his true home is in nature’s wilds (the fact that he is unable to win his true love does not help his general state of mind either). Or there is the case of the statesman referred to in chapter 10 of *A Lodge in the Wilderness* who lives a second life, as recorded in a private journal, in which he features as the Emperor of Byzantium. Lionel Wallace however does not wish to simply escape into nature, or into the confines of his chambers and private writings. Rather he is haunted by the memory of a beautiful garden, and his story is altogether most intriguing as in the end the location of this garden becomes impossible to define.

At first glance, this garden, which lies behind an elusive, always fascinating ‘door in the wall’, seems fairly straightforward. One might say with confidence that it is completely Wallace’s own private place, which he can begin to speak of only

hesitatingly – the ‘thing’ which is ‘hidden’ in his life (*CSW*, p. 572). This door and garden appear in the nature of a classic escapist fantasy, a product maybe of Wallace’s unconscious mind. One particular feature that would appear to dispose the tale to this kind of explanation are the figures of the fair girl and the dark woman whom Wallace encounters in the garden, both of whom can be linked to his mother who died when he was a child.

Furthermore, it is surely significant that, after the first time, the door seems nearly always to appear to Wallace at moments of critical choice: once when he is a schoolboy anxious to preserve his school record for punctuality, then more importantly when he is on the way to gaining an Oxford scholarship, and again during the time that he is participating in a crucial political debate. From this we might deduce that he does not handle public pressure well, and must needs have an exit route. And in his later years he is seen to become ever more world-weary – although he admits this may be due (at least in part) to what he calls ‘the feeling of forty’ (*CSW*, p. 581). In consequence, he becomes ever more drawn to the door in the wall, his secret escape-valve.

The door in the wall, then, and the garden behind the door, can be taken as representative not so much of willful imagination perhaps as extreme delusion, a mental fixation which, from a purely practical point of view, can even be regarded as a lifelong affliction as it continually distracts him from his important work in the political sphere. But although this internal/psychological explanation is plausible, it can be asked whether Wells excludes entirely the possibility of other readings; and in the end it seems safest to say that he does not. Wallace believes absolutely (and the narrator fully respects this) in the intrinsic reality of the door and garden; and of course this conviction is what results in his death – in the everyday world, at least. The narrator, however, is left non-plussed: ‘My mind is darkened with questions and riddles’ (*CSW*, p. 583). There is at the end a note of puzzlement as well as inquiry when he provides a

summing-up, having weighed all the evidence to try and determine whether or not the supernatural has in some way genuinely been involved. But he is unable to pronounce a final judgement as to whether there was ‘ever any [...] door in the wall at all’ (CSW, p. 583). This is the fundamental question: the focus of the story (as the title of course suggests) is on the door, rather than on the garden beyond.

‘I began a while ago to want the garden quite badly. Yes, and since then I’ve seen it three times.’

‘The garden?’

‘No – the door! And I haven’t gone in!’ (CSW, p. 581)

As the apparent getaway to another realm, the image of the door is in this tale is an extremely tantalizing one. Of course, in romance writing, the transition from one realm to another need not always involve portals of this kind – one well-known example (from the earlier Victorian period) being *Phantastes*, when Anodos’s bedroom begins of itself to change, and so gradually that at first he does not even notice what is happening. But when doors are involved, transition becomes sharply liminal. Even in relatively ordinary circumstances, as seen above in the example from *The Sign of Four*, one cannot always be sure what one may find upon opening a door for the first time; and so in the most extreme instances doors may well be thought of as opening onto truly other worlds. This is a recurrent motif in the Narnian Chronicles, for example. There is, most notably, the stable door in the apocalyptic *The Last Battle* which at the moment of greatest crisis is seen to lead to salvation, from the old, ravaged Narnia to the everlasting Narnia; there are also the doors at the close of both *Prince Caspian* and *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* respectively, which lead back to our world. Both of these are created by Aslan – although, interestingly, they differ quite markedly in character. In *Prince Caspian*, the door is just made out of three sticks, joined together. In contrast, the opening of ‘the door in the air’ in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is surrounded with Biblical

resonances, with the image of the Lamb and the roasting fish; and as in *The Last Battle* there is a sense of the apocalyptic at the actual moment of passage from one world to the other when a terrible light rends the sky. But just as Aslan talks of the ‘chinks’ that still exist (although they have grown rarer) between our world and Narnia in *Prince Caspian*,² here he comments that there are ‘ways’ to his ‘country ‘from all the worlds’.³ And this is demonstrated at the beginning of the very next book in the series, *The Silver Chair* – in the shape of the unassuming little door set in the school boundary wall which Jill and Eustace, in their flight from bullies scramble through, to find themselves atop ‘a very high mountain’,⁴ part of Aslan’s country. This door calls no attention to itself, but it proves to be the entrance to a whole new realm.

Similarly, Wallace’s door, although it does inspire strong feelings in him – he finds himself ‘*coveting*, passionately desiring’ it from the first (*CSW*, p. 573) – in itself seems to have nothing remarkable about it at all. And on the occasion of its first appearance the exceeding ordinariness, indeed dinginess, of its immediate surroundings is stressed – an example of Wells’s ‘genius for binding the commonplace to the most astronomical exploration of fancy,’ as H. E. Bates remarks.⁵ ‘[There were] a number of mean dirty shops, and particularly that of a plumber and decorator with a dusty disorder of earthenware pipes, sheet lead, ball taps, pattern books of wallpaper, and tins of enamel’ (*CSW*, p. 573).

But as attention is repeatedly drawn towards this door, one might begin to wonder whether it is really a point of egress from the London streets into a truly other realm. Perhaps the narrator is fumbling towards a vague endorsement of this, towards the end.

2C. S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (London: Collins, 1980), p. 185 (ch. 15).

3C. S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (London: Collins, 1980), p. 187 (ch. 16).

4C. S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (London: Collins, 1980), p. 19 (ch. 1).

5Quoted in *The Complete Short Stories of H. G. Wells*, pp. x-xi.

‘I am more than half-convinced that he had, in truth, an abnormal gift, and a sense, something – I know not what – that in the guise of a wall and door offered him an outlet, a secret peculiar passage of escape into another and altogether more beautiful world’ (*CSW*, pp. 583-584). The latter part of this remark, in fact, neatly encapsulates the two main interpretations which this story invites: the psychological and the ontological. The phrase, ‘in the *guise* of a wall and door’, suggests that these things never actually existed in themselves; however, the narrator cannot altogether forgo the notion of an actual ‘outlet’ into ‘another [...] world’. We should note his choice of word here: ‘*outlet*’, which points away from the sense that Wallace is merely trapped within his own mind, his own fantasies.

Of course the door and garden are still figured at this point as constituting escape; even if one tries to largely dispense with psychological considerations, one still accepts that this is the main thrust of the story. And, quite apart from the question of delusion, Wallace is liable to attract some criticism for reneging on all his important worldly duties in his attempt to gain the magic world of the garden. In this connection one might return to George MacDonald, to consider a passage which revolves, like Wells’s story, around the idea of doors opening (or not opening) into new realms of possibility. It occurs in *Alec Forbes of Howglen*, one of MacDonald’s ‘Scottish’ or ‘realistic’ novels which generally appears far from the rich suggestive fantasy of *Lilith* or *Phantastes*. But at one point the hero, a countrified lad on the threshold of a college education in the city, is suddenly persuaded that he has got ‘to the borders of fairyland [...] something was going to happen. A door would open and admit him into the secret of the world’.⁶

However, nothing does happen; and MacDonald goes on to explain that ‘the door into life generally opens behind us, and a hand is put forth which draws us in backwards’ (*AFH*, p. 148 (ch. 33)). This door, it would seem, does not appear, far less open, when

⁶George MacDonald, *Alec Forbes of Howglen* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1900; repr. Whitethorn, California: Johannesen, 1995), p. 147 (ch. 33). (Henceforth designated in the text as *AFH*.)

one is consciously seeking after it. And although MacDonald says here that it is the door to 'life', as seen above he is also talking about 'fairyland', which can readily be taken as a generic term for other-worldly glories and beauties such as are found in Wallace's garden. But MacDonald emphasizes that

The sole wisdom for any man or boy who is haunted with the hovering of unseen wings, with the scent of unseen roses, and the subtle enticements of melodies unheard, is *work*. If he follow any of those, they will vanish. But if he work, they will come unsought, and while they come, he will believe that there is a fairyland [...] The idle beat their heads against its walls, and go down into the dark places of the earth. (*AFH*, p. 148 (ch. 33))

There is, unmistakably, something of a moral here: that one should take care to attend to worldly duties, and that it is only when one has fulfilled one's responsibilities that the door of possibility swings open. For the 'idle', however, the 'walls' never yield. And the phrase, 'the dark places of the earth', has strong Biblical overtones: a conflation, in effect, of lines from Psalms 63 and 74, where the 'dark places' appear as some kind of hellish underworld.

Wallace is also seen to eventually fall into one of the dark places of the earth, although a more prosaic one – a railway excavation near a London station. But he can scarcely be called an 'idler', and this is what lends his story a degree of poignancy rather than mawkishness (as might easily have been the case). He may be a dreamer but at the same time he is not very self-indulgent; he keeps the vision in his mind but on numerous occasions is seen to reject the path which would appear to lead him back to it, and instead forces himself to attend to practical realities. Even if he does just want to escape, he does not do so until having rendered many years of service to the uncongenial

common world. It is hard not to sympathize with his increasingly difficult struggle as he fluctuates between two choices – in effect, between two worlds.

Wallace, as a man of vision (or a man with an overpoweringly intense imagination) is only one of the many dreamers and visionaries who populate Wells's writings, although he is certainly one of the best known. These characters can be divided into two broad groups: the 'social/cosmic' dreamers and the 'personal', or maybe 'egotistical' dreamers. The first kind dominate the more proselytizing works of Wells's maturer years while the second are more in evidence in his earlier writings, for instance in many of his short stories. One of these is the story of the Diamond Maker, who is not unlike the Invisible Man in that he is down-at-heel and largely shunned by his fellow human beings yet dreams of fame through a marvellous invention of his own. There is also Skelmersdale, who belongs to the well-documented breed of Wellsian 'small men', hailing from the lower end of the middle-class, usually on the edge of insolvency, ill-educated and semi-articulate (at least in public). Skelmersdale, who thus bears strong resemblance to Lewisham, Polly and Kipps, and is lumbered, like so many of Wells's unfortunates, with a small shop, continues in his day-to-day existence while consumed by a 'longing' (*CSW*, p. 465) simply to return to that 'fairylane' where once, so he relates, he inadvertently found himself. Even if he has not always been a habitual dreamer, his one singular experience has certainly turned him into one.

Much the same can be said of Hinchcliff, the young man at the outset of a teaching career, in 'The Apple'. This piece takes on a comic tone when describing Hinchcliff's various cogitations over what to do with the fabulous Apple – purportedly from the Garden of Eden itself – that has chanced to fall into his hands. Finding it too cumbersome to carry about, he ends by flinging it away. However, he is soon stricken with regret at having done so; and at the end, as in 'Mr. Skelmersdale in Fairylane', the

tale resolves into a sense of loss: when he goes out alone one night to retrieve it from the orchard into which he had thrown it, he finds 'nothing of it there among the dewy grass and the faint intangible globes of dandelion down' (*CSW*, p. 158). The reference to the 'globes' of dandelion down recalls the earlier description of the Apple as 'a strange-looking globe' (*CSW*, p. 155). The word is suggestive of the idea of worlds, perhaps *other* worlds; Hinchcliff at any rate is left to conjecture what world of marvels he might have fallen heir to, had he not tossed away the Apple in a moment of excessive regard for social propriety.

Hinchcliff, in that he seems to come across a fragment of another world, is akin to Mr. Cave, who gains possession of a certain 'crystal egg'. Cave (the name is worth noting) can lay strong claim to being perhaps the most downtrodden of Wells's many downtrodden small men; he is another struggling small trader who furthermore suffers daily oppression from his bullying family. And the 'visionary world' (*CSW*, p. 275) within the crystal which he discovers purely by accident (and which is later identified as Mars) becomes a necessary diversion for him. In effect it serves as a counterpoint to the otherwise unrelieved drudgery of his existence: we are told that 'his vision was most vivid during states of extreme weakness and fatigue' (*CSW*, p. 272). He takes sheer delight in the crystal egg as 'a thing to creep to covertly and peep at, as a child might peep upon a forbidden garden' (*CSW*, p. 275). With the image of the garden we are again reminded of Lionel Wallace; for Cave, too, the crystal egg is very much his own private secret, as he is of a solitary nature (or maybe his external circumstances have made him so).

However Cave does eventually divulge all to the scientifically-minded Wace, who goes on 'to develop the matter systematically' (*CSW*, p. 275). Here, the story begins to diverge from the likes of 'The Door in the Wall'. The crystal egg does not remain an individual's secret; although it is finally lost, the narrator's closing observation that

there may be many more of them dotted about the globe transmitting views from Mars infinitely widens the implications of the affair and wrests it out of the private realm. In fact the ultimate scenario that can be drawn from this is *The War of the Worlds*, a collision of Mars and earth on a gigantic scale. And this full-blown encounter Wells presents less in terms of wonder and of the marvellous than as the result of a cold-bloodedly relentless logic: that of the Darwinian struggle for survival, upped to a cosmic scale. The Martians invade earth simply because they have to, due to the increasingly unsuitable living conditions upon their own, older planet.

In 'The Crystal Egg', then, one can detect two different impulses at work: both a private sense of wonder and also a more hard-edged, scientifically objective view. Cave is vouchsafed a piece of a truly other world which is a source of secret pleasure for him but also in the end is shown to be part of the larger, and factual, scheme of things. Therefore 'The Crystal Egg' becomes a quite different kind of story from 'The Door in the Wall'. Both use the same starting-point – that of the protagonist being granted a very wonderful, if also intensely private, vision – but 'The Crystal Egg' develops into science-fiction, while 'The Door in the Wall' stays more in the realm of fairytale, with the vision of a hauntingly beautiful place which once seen is not so easily found again. In fact in this respect Wallace really has more in common with Skelmersdale than with Cave.

It is also instructive to compare Cave's story with that of another struggling shopkeeper who also suffers from domestic disharmony: perhaps the most celebrated of Wells's small men, Alfred Polly. Despite their surface similarities there is actually (if one might use the phrase) a world of difference between them. Polly is the eternal quester, always on the look-out for better and more beautiful things, no matter how bleak his actual life may be.

Deep in the being of Mr Polly, deep in that darkness, like a creature which has been beaten around the head and left for dead but still lives, crawled a persuasion that over and above the things that are jolly and 'bits of all right', there was beauty, there was delight; that somewhere – magically inaccessible perhaps, but still somewhere – were pure and easy and joyous states of body and mind.⁷

The gradual elevation of tone here is notable: the transition from 'jolly' and 'bits of all right' to 'pure and easy and joyous states of body and mind'. Polly sets out to find these things, on the way destroying his shop, the hated emblem of his old life and emerging anew from the ashes. Thus he achieves self-liberation – what Robert P. Weekes calls 'disentanglement'⁸ – and goes on to discover the charmingly old-fashioned Potwell Inn. And it is in this place, representative of the relatively minor but flourishing genre of the period that had been labelled the 'Thames Valley Romance'⁹ (one thinks immediately of *The Wind in the Willows*, or *Three Men in a Boat*), that he makes his final home.

One might say, then, that Polly finds a new world for himself. But there is that arresting image in the final chapter which makes one pause:

Mr Polly sat beside the fat woman [...] at the back of the Potwell Inn [...] It was one of those evenings serenely luminous, amply and atmospherically still [...] It was as everything lay securely within a great, warm, friendly globe of crystal sky. It was as safe and enclosed and fearless as a child that has still to be born. It was an evening full of the quality of tranquil, unqualified assurance. (*HP*, p. 179 (ch. 10))

The scene is wonderfully relaxing and peaceful; yet there is that striking image used by Wells, effectively a 'womb' image, which confers the sense of an embryo world, still

⁷ H. G. Wells, *The History of Mr. Polly*, ed. by Norman Mackenzie (London: Dent, 1993, repr. 1999), p. 7 (ch. 1). (Henceforth designated in the text as *HP*.)

⁸ Robert P. Weekes, 'Disentanglement as a Theme in Wells's Fiction', in *H. G. Wells: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Bernard Bergonzi (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976), pp.25-31. Weekes argues that this is the central concern of Wells's work as a whole.

⁹ For example by Patrick Parrinder in his short study *H. G. Wells* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1970), p. 83.

waiting to be born. This is not inappropriate if we consider that, on one level, Polly is a kind of aborted revolutionary. There is less explicit social comment in *The History of Mr. Polly* than in many other of Wells's 'realistic' novels – although of course a great deal is implied in the portrayal of Polly's situation. But in one notable instance the anonymous narrator, while debating the rights and wrongs of arson states, quite casually, that 'If our community was anything more than a feeble idiot, it would burn most of London and Chicago [...] and build sane and beautiful cities in the place of these pestilential heaps of rotten private property' (*HP*, p. 174 (ch. 10)). With the Fishbourne fire Polly helps clear the ground, but he lacks the intellect (and will) to build upon this action and instead is displaced to the periphery of society; in fact he becomes a kind of 'ghost' (*HP*, p.179 (ch. 10)). He is not of the stuff of which true Wellsian revolutionaries are made.

However, one might also take the womb image as simply denoting the perfect calm and security which envelops Polly and the fat woman as they sit companionably together as, on a more obvious level, Polly ends his days as the hero of an idyllic romance – something in the tradition of the Dickensian happy ending, as described by George Orwell who writes of 'the strange, empty dream of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century middle bourgeoisie [...] a dream of complete idleness'.¹⁰ Of course, a major difference between those earlier novels and *The History of Mr. Polly* is that Polly sheds rather than acquires his marital bonds by the end of the story. But he is certainly idle; in fact in his final position he seems to be on a perpetual holiday from ordinary life – early on we are told that 'Holidays were his life, and the rest merely adulterated living' (*HP*, p. 54 (ch. 5)). He breaks out – but only to attain to a state of general indolence.

¹⁰ George Orwell, 'Charles Dickens', in *Critical Essays* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951), pp. 1-60 (p. 43).

Cave, on the other hand, never seems likely to break out, and in fact dies within his life-long prison (his shop); however he dies 'clasp[ing]' the crystal egg and smiling (*CSW*, p. 278). The crystal egg has offered him an outlet in the last days of his life; he has been vouchsafed a view of another world which lies a vast distance beyond the walls within which he is confined. For all Polly's blissful content in what might be deemed his final role as the hero of an idyllic (and idle) romance, somehow one feels that in a way Cave gains something more.

iii) Brave new worlds and far islands: Wells and Buchan

Although Polly, upon escaping his straitened personal circumstances, fails to discover, or create, any truly new world for himself, there are many figures in Wells's fiction who dream of creating brave new worlds, and not only for themselves, but for the whole of humanity. Wells's move from the egotistical to the social dreamers was of course deliberate. When discussing 'The Door in the Wall' in his seminal study of Wells's early work, Bernard Bergonzi remarks that the story as a whole effectively serves as a symbol of 'Wells's realization of the death of his original talent' – his purely imaginative gifts which he appeared to deliberately desert in favour of social preaching.¹¹ Certainly, around the time of 'The Door in the Wall's first publication in 1906, Wells was occupying himself more and more with social issues, and the Utopian was rapidly supplanting the likes of Wallace in his fiction. This kind of dreaming may be labelled 'prescriptive', as Wells uses these characters to plug his own ideas for shaping the future.

However, the personal element even in these utopian works remains strong, as Wells's utopian dreamers are generally seen to be extremely isolated, and are thus contrasted

¹¹Bernard Bergonzi, *The Early H. G. Wells* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1960), p. 88.

with the world at large. Rosslynn D. Haynes puts the case in the following 'evolutionist' terms:

[To Wells's way of thinking these visionaries] cannot, or should not, become submerged in the mass of average men, for the masses are yesterday's men, living in the chaotic past and ignorant of the possibilities of the future [...] Every mutant in the history of evolution is an apparent misfit at the time of its first appearance, for it is produced by chance and not in answer to environmental change; only later, under different conditions, may its progeny be selected as the spearhead of the evolutionary advance. These Wellsian heroes of the present have to struggle to maintain their vision in the face of their hostile environment.¹²

Haynes, who comes to Wells as a one-time scientist, draws consciously on biological terminology in her account of Wells's Utopian dreamers: that they are like other 'mutants' in the history of evolution who initially appears as 'misfits' but who are, literally, ahead of their time. And purely within the bounds of scientific speculation it may be possible to temporarily set aside the ominous connotations of the idea that the masses generally have no part to play in the future. Wells had demonstrated a tendency to such speculation from the beginning of his career, as witness such essays as 'The Man of the Year Million'.¹³ Also, of course, Wells's elitism can also be correlated, to a degree, with the general antipathy towards the 'masses' which was exhibited by many writers and intellectuals of the time.¹⁴

However, despite all biological considerations, Wells's approach to his lonely Utopian visionaries is overall more romantic than scientific. These are the people who see

¹² Rosslynn D. Haynes, *H. G. Wells: Discoverer of the Future: The Influence of Science on his Thought* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 157.

¹³ Collected in *Certain Personal Matters* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1897).

¹⁴ See, for example, John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, pp. 118-151 (ch.s 6-7). Carey admits however that Wells never took a very consistent stance as regards the masses and that he was in fact deeply divided against himself in this matter.

clearly on a global, indeed cosmic, scale, but their visions are not widely disseminated. Most of the world is too blind, simply unable to take any new, far-reaching ideas on board. In this connection, 'The Country of the Blind' comes to mind. In this tale Wells provides a searing comment on humanity at large which he came to strongly feel was metaphorically, if not literally, blind, refusing to heed those of clearer understanding. Kipling around this time wrote political fables about the state of England; 'The Country of the Blind' is a fable about the state of the world. And while Kipling strays into the traditional realm of the beast-fable, Wells's story is finely poised between realistic narrative and allegory (although of course in the broadest sense it is also a romance, a 'lost world' adventure story). 'The Country of the Blind' is the most memorable rendering in all of Wells's fiction of what he judged to be the essential position of the man of vision in the world at large – that of almost complete isolation.

The true Wellsian visionary, the man who is all-too aware of what the future might hold for the human race, is instigated in the person of the Time Traveller, in Wells's first major published work. However in two respects this character is unlike most of his later counterparts. Firstly, he is a physical, and not merely mental, time-traveller; and, secondly, he appears unusually pessimistic – we are told that 'he thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind'¹⁵ – and the Morlocks and Eloi seem to confirm his worst fears. In addition, he makes the mistake (if such it can be called) of journeying much too far forward, to the point where, as contemporary physics dictated, all life on earth would end due to the cooling of the sun.¹⁶

The pessimistic strand in Wells was therefore inspired by fashionable late-nineteenth century notions of universal entropy, and also of atavistic degeneration. (Also one should not forget his turn for savage Swiftian satire, most notable in *The Island of Dr.*

¹⁵ H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, in *The Time Machine et al*, pp. 17-73 (p. 73 (ch. 12)).

¹⁶ For more on nineteenth-century fears over the cooling of the sun, see, for example, J. A. V. Chapple, *Science and Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 43-49.

Moreau.) And the pessimistic in Wells vies with the optimistic right from the start, as is evident in *The Time Machine*. The narrator, to counteract the Time Traveller's bleak vision, talks of going forward 'into the manhood of the race'; thus he looks to the future with a measure of hope. However, although he sharply distinguishes his own viewpoint from that of the Time Traveller – 'I say for my own part' – he does in fact appear to acquiesce in the latter's darker vision to some extent; but he still counsels against despair. Even if the Time Traveller is right, he says, 'it remains for us to live as if it were not so' (*W*, p. 73 (ch. 12)). (An obvious point of comparison here is the stoical note which sounds at the end of Stapledon's later novel *Last and First Men*, at a point many millions of years in the future when men have evolved through numerous stages to a high state of development and yet still finds themselves faced with inevitable extinction: 'we shall make after all a fair conclusion to this brief music that is man'.)¹⁷

Although the Time Traveller's unsettling futuristic vision comes to dominate proceedings, the story opens in a relaxed and comfortable setting: the Time Traveller's middle-class, late Victorian home:

The fire burned brightly, and the soft radiance of the incandescent lights in the lilies of silver caught the bubbles that flashed and passed in our glasses. Our chairs [...] embraced and caressed us rather than submitted to be sat upon, and there was that luxurious after-dinner atmosphere, when thought runs gracefully free of the trammels of precision. (*W*, p. 19 (ch. 1))

A sense of warmth and comfort, conducive, it would seem, to a state almost of languor, is in evidence here. But in the very paragraph quoted above, Wells introduces a sense that something in this cosy scene is starting to shift. The fire may be 'burning brightly' enough but in the 'softer' glow of the 'incandescent' lights things begin to appear less well-defined than before, less clear-cut. Following on from this, the visit to the Time

¹⁷ Olaf Stapledon, *Last and First Men* (London: Methuen, 1934), p. 355 (ch. 16).

Traveller's laboratory appears like something out of a dream: 'I remember vividly the flickering light, (the Time Traveller's) queer broad head in silhouette, the dance of the shadows' (*W*, p. 24 (ch. 1)). And finally the Time Traveller's narrative holds all his listeners round the table completely in thrall – a narrative in which the surroundings, and humans themselves, are transformed almost beyond recognition. Yet, at the end of it all, we are still in that homely room. But something has changed, for the vision of a dying world has been brought vividly before us.

The Time Traveller's ingenuity of invention provides a way out of the mundane framework of the story. One might say that a crack appears in this framework, through which we gain the vision of another time, and through which the 'phantasm' of the Time Machine finally disappears for good (*W*, p. 73 (ch. 12)). In this respect a story like *The Time Machine* is very different from the likes of 'The Door in the Wall'. Cracks, unlike doors, are not artefacts, and are far less visible in themselves; nevertheless they can provide as much a means of access to another realm. It is fair to say though that the crack in this particular instance (which of course leads to another time, rather than another place) has to a degree been engineered by the Time Traveller; in other stories they occur rather more simultaneously (as will be seen in a discussion of Kipling).

The Time Machine is typical of many stories in this period in which strange happenings are recounted to guests assembled round the dinner-table or in smoking rooms – whether in comfortable middle or upper-class homes or in clubs. ('Comfort', indeed could be said to be the watchword of the Club, that distinctive masculine locale of turn-of-the-century life and literature, functioning as it did as a place of rest far removed from the busy active world and domestic cares alike.) The telling of tales in this manner can be seen as a modern version of story-telling round the primeval campfire; it also corresponds to what Frye calls the '*penseroso*' phase of romance: the shift from 'active' to 'contemplative' adventure (*AC*, p. 202). And it is of course, a

convenient means of bringing the strange and the unknown into the heart of ordinary surroundings. Even more, it is a way of *containing* the strange and the unknown; the present, mundane framework may be temporarily dislocated, or forgotten, as the story is told: but it is not fundamentally dis-established.

Things are rather different in *The Time Machine*, however. For a start, it relates events which are yet to happen, not those which have happened. More significantly, although the Time Traveller's narrative stands at a vast temporal distance from the frame, spatially there is no distance at all; and this produces an interesting effect. In one sense (since it is, technically, a story within a story) the Time Traveller's narrative may be thought of as occupying the centre of the frame; however, in a way it is more accurate to say that it directly attacks the frame itself. Ostensibly, at the end of the novel, the frame remains in place; but as we have seen it being literally eaten away in the course of the Time Traveller's tale it has relinquished its authority. Its cracks can never heal – unless the Time Traveller's companions, and the reader, are prepared to renounce not only the Time Traveller's story but also the entire business of the future. It is the vision of the desolate beach that stays with us.

The vision of the future world in *The Time Machine* is, in effect, super-imposed upon the world of everyday. Much the same principle is found in works like *A Modern Utopia* (1905), which features Wells's first out-and-out Utopian dreamer, so that the book is concerned with a rather more congenial view of the future (certainly to Wells) than is presented in *The Time Machine*. The book in which he appears is an intellectually discursive work; but, as Wells is at pains to point out in his 'Note to the Reader', he also strove to add some imaginative touches.¹⁸ The Utopian narrator is hindered by the presence of an 'egotistical' dreamer throughout (the botanist who is preoccupied with his own love-story), but he perseveres in his imaginative attempt to

¹⁸ H. G. Wells, *A Modern Utopia* (London: Collins, 1926), p. vi. (Henceforth designated in the text as *MU*.)

construct an ideal world, which has achieved almost perfect order under the rule of the 'Samurai' (a modern equivalent of Plato's Guardians). And at one stage he manages to lose himself completely in his vision; however this makes his eventual return back down to earth all the more intolerable. Only remnants of his vision are left; for instance he sees two ragged tramps seated on a bench and asks himself whether there were 'not two men in green sitting on a marble seat' (*MU*, p. 250 (ch. 11)); significantly, the question is put into parentheses. The impact of the everyday world is almost too much. He raises his voice against it – "I wish [...] I could *smash* the world of everyday" (*MU*, p. 252 (ch. 11)) – but he has to concede that it is not easily done.

The deep-seated destructive drive that existed in Wells does come to the fore in another Utopian novel, *The World Set Free* (1914), which shows a new world slowly emerging from the wrack and ruin of the old, destroyed by war. Compare also the earlier *In the Days of the Comet* where physical contact with extra-terrestrial forces in an instant transforms the world for the better. But although literally 'smashing' the everyday world to make way for a new and better one seems to have been a rather attractive proposition for Wells, one should bear in mind the point that *In the Days of the Comet* and *The World Set Free* are fairly atypical in showing a Wellsian Utopia actually beginning to form. More generally Wells prefers not to show his utopias as a *fait accompli*, or even in the process of evolving, as if in tacit recognition that they belong essentially to the province of dreams and visions – no matter how many ambitious plans he may have had for the destiny of the human race.

All the same, one can at least try to believe that Utopia is the larger reality; and thus the narrator in *A Modern Utopia* is persuaded that he can catch a glimpse here and there of the future for which he so longs:

a student girl, rather carelessly dressed, her books in a carrying -strap, comes across my field of vision. The westward sun of London glows upon her face. She has eyes that dream, surely no sensuous nor personal dream.

After all, after all, dispersed, hidden, disorganized, undiscovered, unsuspected even by themselves, the samurai of Utopia are in this world, the motives that are developed and organized there stir dumbly here and stifle in ten thousand futile hearts. (*MU*, p. 253 (ch. 11))

For him, at least, it seems in the end to be a matter of focus. In the Epilogue to this work, it is said that

I see about me a great multitude of little souls and groups of souls as darkened [...] Yet that is not all I see, and I am not altogether bounded by my littleness. Ever and again, contrasting with this immediate vision, come glimpses of a comprehensive scheme [...] But the two visions are not seen constantly together [...] Nevertheless I cannot separate these two aspects of human life, each commenting on the other. (*MU*, p. 259)

Wells had already shown, in shorter pieces like ‘The Plattner Story’, how superbly he could evoke the dimensions of another world lying all around, and inextricably linked to, the world of everyday – but a world wholly invisible except under exceptional circumstances. Of course, in that tale, and in ‘The Remarkable Case of Davidson’s Eyes’ the protagonists are bewildered by the visions bestowed upon them (through no choice of their own) of other worlds, or, more accurately in Davidson’s case, a very distant part of the ordinary world. But Wells has no sermonizing purpose in these tales; and he moves on to the clear-sighted types, in *A Modern Utopia* and others in later decades from Mr Barnstaple in *Men Like Gods*, to the trio of Dr Stedding, Prof. Keppel, and Joseph Davis in *Star Begotten*. These men are haunted by the vision of a perfect world of the future, whose seeds (they believe) lie dormant in the world all around them (although Barnstaple is really only converted to the idea by an unexpected visit to

Utopia which in this case is imaged as another, separate planet, and apparently only one of many inhabited worlds, and, indeed, universes¹⁹ – a rare example in Wells's fiction of a sense of cosmic plenitude rather than of cosmic emptiness). The majority of Wells's Utopists end up caught between two worlds. Their concern remains with this world, it is true; but it changes so much in their vision that it virtually takes on the semblance of another world. And, as in *The Time Machine*, the framework of the everyday begins to waver; it becomes something that the discerning eye can pierce right through.

- Buchan is another writer in this period who dreams of a better future for the world, although not in any fundamental 'Utopian' sense. But he too has his own version of the leaders that can help improve the world, like the group of imperialist politicians of enlarged understanding and practical good sense who appear in *A Lodge in the Wilderness*. Interestingly, however, his emphasis is also upon those who can discover those leaders and help manoeuvre them towards their role. This is the central concern for instance, in *A Prince of the Captivity*.

A Prince of the Captivity is a late novel which re-captures themes found earlier in Buchan's work. The hero Adam Melfort is, in part, an action-hero, like Hannay; but there is another side to him. Although he works tirelessly towards a vision of the future, he is also sustained by a vision of a very different kind: that of the island known as Eilean Ban, a family possession and his favourite childhood haunt. One might say that in Adam Buchan unites the two visionary strands which in Wells are normally seen to remain disparate: the personal and the social dreamer; it is remarked that while his 'cause' for the common good is 'an anchor to keep him steady', it cannot, like the dream of Eilean Ban, 'give [a] perpetual afflatus of spirit like a May morning' (PC, p. 152 (Book ii, ch. 2)). In its depiction of this island, *A Prince of the Captivity* shares an

¹⁹ H. G. Wells, *Men Like Gods* (London: Cassell, 1923), pp. 45-49 (Book i, ch. 4).

affinity with the much earlier short story 'The Far Islands' (first published in 1899) where the young soldier-hero appears to secure a permanent passage to the elusive western isles, long sought by his forefathers, by way of a bullet in the chest. As well as returning to this early theme, however, Buchan modifies it; Eilean Ban has little of the misty, distant, other-worldly quality of Colin Raden's 'far islands', which in their conception clearly owe a great deal to the 'Islands of the Blessed' motif of ancient Greek myth and Celtic folklore.

But although a real place Eilean Ban, like Lionel Wallace's garden, is a very personal, and treasured secret; and, to begin with, it provokes a similar desperate longing. As a newly-ruined man, Adam desires simply to return to it, 'the dearest thing to him in life' (*PC*, p. 23 (Book i, ch. 3)). At this point it does appear as a place of pure escape – perhaps even regression, especially when one considers its connection with childhood, both through Adam's abiding memory of his dead young son Nigel and the memories of the island from his own earliest years. However, he quickly realizes that going back to that island isn't merely a matter of retreating, that he can do so only once he has proved himself in the world at large. For he now feels that the 'magic' of Eilean Ban for him in the past was

A call to enterprise, nothing less. A summons to go out and do great things in the world [...] The ancient peace was not for the shrinker. It was a paradise from which a man might set out, and to which he might return when he had fought his battles, but in which he dared not pitch his camp till he had won a right to rest. (*PC*, p. 23 (Book i, ch. 3))

With such noble sentiments as these Buchan makes it clear that Eilean Ban is no mere retreat, after all – no 'lotos-eating paradise, where a man squandered his strength in dream' (*PC*, p. 136 (Book ii, ch. 2)). Thus Buchan emphatically denies the charge of escapism that might be levelled at his hero, as at Wallace. Adam has work to do; he is

much a practical man as he is a dreamer – like the politician Maitland in ‘Fountainblue’. But Maitland (like Wallace) eventually abdicates all his responsibilities in the busy world of British politics, to bury himself in far-away Africa. In contrast Adam, once he adopts his role of helping to ensure a better future for the world, never really wavers from his purpose.

Buchan does seem to shift ground in his final novel, *Sick Heart River*, which sees a deliberate facing away from public duties by Edward Leithen, as he re-locates to the Canadian wilderness and is happy to eventually die there (just as Maitland dies in Africa). Of course Leithen’s circumstances in this story are quite different from Adam Melfort’s as he is a dying man, with many years of irreproachable service behind him; and even though he goes off to the wilderness he still remains in touch with the greater world, as he comes to view his fight to save the stricken Hare tribe as being part of a larger battle against evil and despair and general ‘dissolution’, symbolized most potently in the outbreak of the Second World War (*SHR*, p. 171 (Part iii, ch. 15)). All the same, there is a noticeable difference of emphasis in this novel from that in *A Prince of the Captivity*, published only seven years earlier.

The social and political dimensions in *A Prince of the Captivity* thus remain important; indeed, in no other novel does Buchan attempt to mount such a panoramic survey of global issues, following the upheaval of the First World War. Of course his better-known works, the thrillers and spy novels concerning the likes of Hannay, also deal with international affairs, and at times presume to diagnose worldwide modern ills, such as the newly-rampant breed of ‘moral imbeciles’ as identified in *The Three Hostages*.²⁰ However these generally stay closer to the mode of pure adventure-narrative. But *A Prince of the Captivity* is more fundamentally comprehensive in scope, and more oriented towards the world of ideas.

²⁰ John Buchan, *The Three Hostages*, in *The Complete Richard Hannay*, pp. 657-928 (p. 676 (ch. 2)).

It might also be over-ambitious. Even Buchan's faithful advocate David Daniell seemingly concedes this: 'the book does not hang together [...] too many ideas appear to be taken up and then simply dropped'— although he regards this as a praiseworthy 'experiment with the continuity of theme'. But he immediately adds that 'the book becomes most compelling when Adam is most inward in his experience';²¹ and Adam is never more inward than when he is dreaming of his island. And it is the personal element that comes to the fore at the end, with Adam, alone, being hunted down among the mountains — a scenario which recalls the ending of the earlier novel *The Half-Hearted*, but cuts down on the lengthy maudlin musings of Lewis Haystoun as he waits for his enemies to finally close in. Adam's meditations are notably briefer, and culminate in the vision of his beloved Eilean Ban, a place far removed from all the duties and difficulties of the everyday world.

But in stark contrast to 'The Door in the Wall', the beautiful vision in *A Prince of the Captivity* does not require rejection of the present world. Even most of Wells's utopian visions, which exist in a dialectical relationship with the everyday world, involve a certain turning away from it: Wells's real idea is to strip it to its roots and start again. In *A Prince of the Captivity* there is none of this. Adam wishes only to rehabilitate the world, not radically alter it; and Eilean Ban helps rather than hinders his work for the public good.

In 'The Door in the Wall', Wallace's final passage from this world and, perhaps, into his garden, might be labelled as either the 'flight of the deserter', or the 'escape of the prisoner', to quote from Tolkien's essay, 'On Fairy Stories' (*MCE*, p. 148). However neither of these descriptions could conceivably apply to Adam when he attains, or re-claims, Eilean Ban at the moment of death; this is more in the nature of a reward for a job well done. Adam has always invested Eilean Ban with a nostalgic quality which has

²¹ David Daniell, *The Interpreter's House: A Critical Assessment of John Buchan* (London: Nelson, 1975), p. 167.

rendered it paradisaical; from being merely a haven to him in his childhood it does finally seem to become a true heaven, an 'other' world, waiting for him on the other side of death.

iv) The dark world: Kipling

A more sinister order of dreams and visions than the examples already considered can be found in some authors of this period. Kipling is outstanding among them. In his early career he is of course chiefly a colonial writer; and, as we have seen, he examines time and again the detrimental effects of appalling work conditions and other problems such as loneliness and isolation, faced by many English people out in the Indian subcontinent. Many of his characters' well-being in these tales is irretrievably wrecked; not a few are seen to break down entirely. There is, for example, Pansay in 'The Phantom Rickshaw', harried to death apparently by the rather plaintive ghost of the woman he wronged. Of course Pansay (as his doctor does not hesitate to point out) has been greatly overworked. A similar case is that of Hummil in 'At the End of the Passage', who apparently dies of sheer fright. But before this, at one point when he sees the apparition of himself, he is quite capable of taking an eminently rational view, ascribing it either to a physiological or psychological disorder in himself: 'If the thing slides away from me all in one piece, like a ghost, I shall know it is only my eyes and stomach that are out of order. If it walks – my head is going'.²² However after his death his native servant Chuma (as might be expected) appears to put a wholly supernatural slant upon the matter: 'in my poor opinion [...] my master has descended into the Dark

²² Rudyard Kipling, *Life's Handicap*, uniform edn (London: Macmillan, 1899; repr. 1913), p. 206. (Henceforth designated in the text as *LH*.)

Places, and there has been caught because he was not able to escape with sufficient speed' (*LH*, p. 208).

One can incline towards either view, but ultimately Kipling leaves the question hanging. In fact the note of irresolution becomes extremely prominent as Spurstow's attempted summary of the case very quickly begins to flounder: 'As far as I can make out, he died from – oh, anything; stoppage of the heart's action, heat-apoplexy, or some other visitation' (*LH*, p. 209). Spurstow could hardly have been more vague than this. It seems there is no way of pinpointing the exact cause – although the use of the word 'visitation' does tend to accentuate the feeling that it was indeed something that came from outside, which did for Hummil. The story ends very much on a questioning note, with Spurstow's ironical quotation, but his companions Lowndes and Mortram have no answer; and neither, obviously, does Kipling – for anything.

It might be tempting to dismiss those early Kipling tales as being rather too crudely gothic, and imitative of such writers as Poe in their emphasis upon heightened states of mind (in this respect they compare unfavourably with the more subtle supernaturalism of later tales set in England, like 'The Wish House', in *Debits and Credits*.) The Indian setting of course also allows him to hint that it is 'the Oldest Land/Wherein the Powers of Darkness range'²³ while at the same time playing up all the usual hazards of Indian colonial service: fever, overwork, and also opium-taking, all of which, obviously, can conduce to bad dreams, delirium, and hallucination. But if we take into account the broader context of Kipling's life and writings as a whole, we realize that any cursory dismissal of those early stories is unwise. There is in Kipling a proper sense of the 'Dark Places' – no matter how vague. What seems to happen, in effect, is that the fever and delirium experienced by the likes of Hummil and Pansay help open up a gateway to this other realm. The frame narrator of 'The Phantom Rickshaw' expresses it thus: that

²³ From the epigraph to 'In The House of Sudhoo', in *Plain Tales from the Hills*, ed. by Andrew Rutherford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987; repr. 1991), p. 108.

there is a 'crack' in Pansay's head (perhaps induced by the strain of overwork) which has let in a little bit of the 'Dark World' (*MWK*, p. 27). This is a canny description as it inclines towards the supernatural while at the same time admitting that Pansay might be mentally deranged to some degree (in the colloquial sense, 'cracked').

The point about Kipling's 'Dark World' is made clearer when one compares Kipling to another major colonial writer of the time, Conrad. As we have seen, many of Conrad's characters too are seen to break down, generally from the threat of all-crushing emptiness. Indeed, in 'An Outpost of Progress' the manner of description suggests that the void does not merely surround Kayerts and Carlier but actually gets into them, and begins to eat at them from the inside. It is said that they do not quite disappear, but they might as well have done so: 'Kayerts and Carlier [...] remained [...] on this earth, that somehow, they fancied had become bigger and very empty. It was not the absolute and dumb solitude of the post that impressed them so much as an inarticulate feeling that something from within them was gone' (*CSF*, i, pp. 53-54). The end result seems to be that they are emptied out, denuded of personal identity; and so Kayerts feels he might as just be the corpse of Carlier and vice versa.

In Kipling, by contrast, there is no fear of external emptiness – rather the opposite, as Auden perspicaciously remarks.

What is it [...] that makes Kipling so extraordinary? Is it not that while virtually every other European writer since the fall of the Roman empire has felt the dangers threatening civilization come from *inside* civilization (or from inside the individual consciousness), Kipling is obsessed by a sense of dangers threatening from *outside*?

Others have been concerned with the corruptions of the big city, the ennui of the cultural mind; some sought a remedy in a return to Nature, to childhood, to Classical Antiquity; others looked forward to a brighter future of liberty, equality and fraternity: they called on the powers of the subconscious, or prayed for the grace of god to inrupt and save their souls; they called on the oppressed to arise and save the

world. In Kipling there is none of this, no nostalgia for a Golden Age, no belief in Progress, for human civilization is a little citadel of light surrounded by a great darkness full of malignant forces and maintained through the centuries by everlasting vigilance, will-power and self-sacrifice. The philosophers of the Enlightenment shared his civilization-barbarism antithesis, but their weapon was reason, i.e. coming to consciousness, whereas for Kipling too much thinking is highly dangerous, an opening of the gates to the barbarism of melancholia and doubt.²⁴

Auden is right to stress this sense in Kipling of the outside darkness. Other critics have also taken note of the 'externality' in Kipling, for instance Angus Wilson:

he clung to the idea of some outside force [...] because he shrank so sharply from the idea of any deep self-inquiry. It is, perhaps, why he chose to see his creative power as a daemon that descended upon him unsummoned, rather than some amalgam of his own experiences and emotions. Was it that an inner view of despair, or joy, or imagination came too close to the old puritan introspection which his families had inherited and then left behind? Or was it, quite conversely, that this external view of imagination and despair fitted the old Calvinist concept of grace or damnation arbitrarily visiting us from above, which he otherwise so fiercely condemned all his life?²⁵

Wilson thus relates Kipling's outer realm in the main back to the old, discarded Puritanism of his family background; but Auden, perhaps, is wiser in leaving the issue more open.

No doubt his early experiences of India gave him a sense of the danger of Nature which it is hard for a European to realize [...] but these are not sufficient to explain the terror of demons, visible and invisible, which gives his work its peculiar excitement [...] Nor does it matter particularly what the real cause may have been. The 'mirror' that Kipling holds out to us is one in which, if we see anything, we see vague

²⁴ W. H. Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords* (London: Faber, 1973), pp. 352-353. (Henceforth designated in the text as *FA*.)

²⁵ Angus Wilson, *The Strange Ride of Rudyard Kipling His Life and Works* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1977), pp. 269-270.

menacing shapes which can be kept away by incessant action but can never finally be overcome. (*FA*, p. 357)

Again, Auden is astute in realizing that the actual cause of Kipling's 'terror of demons' is not the central issue. The main point is that frequently in Kipling this dark outer world is just there, and Kipling seemingly acquiesces in the acceptance of it – at any rate he does not make much attempt to analyze or judge it.

In his introduction to Kipling's autobiography *Something of Myself*, Richard Holmes declares that 'Kipling finally gives his allegiance [to] a kingdom not of this world'.²⁶ This remark of course echoes John 18. 36; but Kipling generally seems scarcely convinced of the traditional tenets of Christianity. He is a deeply agnostic writer; he is certainly persuaded that there is something 'out there', but he cannot clarify things any more than this – except that whatever is out there appears to be dreadful in nature (certainly this applies to his earliest published fiction).

Whatever one may think of the 'Dark Places' or the 'Dark World' in the two Kipling stories discussed above, naturalistic explanations undeniably figure prominently in these tales. Pansay is suffering not only from overwork but also guilt, while Hummil is plagued by insomnia to an extent that no other character even in Kipling is. However, in 'The Brushwood Boy', another early story much concerned with a vision (and a very long-running one) Kipling takes a somewhat different approach. For a start, it takes place in England as well as in India; and although not altogether immune to the discomforts of the Indian climate during his time there, Georgie, unlike Pansay and Hummil, appears generally trouble-free; he is conspicuously the clean-living, healthy

²⁶Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself: For My Friends Known and Unknown*, ed. by Robert Hampson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987, repr. 1988), p. 26.

athletic type. However he is bemused by his ever-recurring dream, to which he is subjected for so long that he comes to have an absolute and concrete knowledge of its topography.

So thoroughly had he come to know the place of his dreams that even waking he accepted it as a real country, and made a rough sketch of it [...] the permanence of the land puzzled him. His ordinary dreams were as formless and as fleeting as any healthy dream could be, but once at the brushwood pile he moved within known limits and could see where he was going. (*DW*, p. 270)

Although exhibiting the kind of surrealist quality often found in dreams – like ships opening up into cardboard boxes and people eating at breakfast tables covered with roses – there is nothing at all vague or insubstantial about this particular dreamworld. In fact the very title of the story identifies Georgie as he is in the dream, and not as he is in waking reality. Taken all round, although this particular realm which begins at the point of the brushwood is accessible only through the medium of dreaming, it is not easy to dismiss it just as a ‘dreamworld’. George is mystified by its ‘permanence’, this continual undercurrent to his life.

The dreamworld of ‘The Brushwood Boy,’ then, baffles in its continuing solidity, giving rise to the feeling that it is an actual other world, running parallel to the daylight realm. For all this though, it seems, overall, as if Kipling does not intend to make too much of a mystery of it. For one thing, it seems in some measure to have evolved in fairly straightforward fashion from the fancies that Georgie wove to himself as a child before going off to sleep; for example his girl-companion in the dream, ‘Annieanlouise’, was originally created in the image of a princess in an old fairy-tale book. And when he finally meets her in real life, as the widowed Miriam Lacy, they recognize each other through the experiences they have already shared in that strange realm beyond the brushwood pile. It might be that, after all, this is the sum of its

significance, and that Kipling's ultimate intention is simply to write a kind of circuitous love-story (this particular kind of psychical connection – dream-sharing between lovers – is also the theme of George du Maurier's 1896 novel, *Peter Ibbetson*.) Such a reading of the story may appear rather slight, but it is not indefensible.

Altogether, a more intriguing subworld than that of 'The Brushwood Boy' can be found in 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes'. This story bears the palpable influence of Poe, with its 'buried alive' motif, and the images of death and, even more, of decay. It appears derivative to an extent; in particular it resembles 'The Pit and the Pendulum' in view of the protagonist's repeated futile attempts to escape from his prison and his unexpected swift rescue at the end. But a case can be made for regarding it as one of Kipling's most powerful stories.

One might choose to highlight the socio-political implications of the tale: the complete reversal of Jukes's hitherto lordly position as a Sahib, and his condemnation to a subhuman existence scavenging amongst the lowest of the low. This is the approach taken by, for example, Louis Cornell: 'Jukes finds [...] that he is a Sahib for whom a hundred years of British rule in India have suddenly become undone' (*KI*, pp. 104-105). Other critics ²⁷ like John A. McClure closely follow Cornell's lead. But, as discussed earlier, Kipling often shows that the position of a 'Sahib' is, if anything, far worse than that of the native in many instances. Before he falls into the pit, Jukes is already feverish, irked beyond endurance by the howling of dogs and not least by the loneliness of his station out in the Great Indian Desert. And it is precisely because he has been pushed to the limit that he embarks upon his wild flight in the first place – the ride that ends in such calamity.

²⁷ John A. McClure, *Kipling and Conrad: The Colonial Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 33. There have also been more elaborate interpretations – for instance Nora Crook makes explicit the Dantean connections and also argues, ingeniously, that the story is all about the fear of 'sexual degradation', in her book *Kipling's Myths of Love and Death* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) pp. 96-107 (p. 101).

However, although he is faced with an extreme situation which throws up all kinds of gruesome horrors, Jukes does not, overall, appear too badly affected. Despite his spasms of terror he does usually manage to keep his head during his ordeal; and in fact he generally retains his sense of superiority. He does not hesitate to knock the others about; and there is no question of his entering into any kind of companionship with them; the only one he empathizes with is his fellow-Englishman whose mummified corpse he uncovers. And in the aftermath there is no real suggestion that he has been unsettled by his experiences in any fundamental sense. His chief grievance seems to be the lack of veneration shown to him during his stay in the pit: 'He [...] grows very hot and indignant when he thinks of the disrespectful treatment he received', the framing narrator tells us (*MWK*, p. 3), and this, considering all that he has actually been through, sounds oddly superficial. If he has acquired any lasting psychological scars, it does not seem to be the purpose of the story to call attention to them.

Of course, in another way, the discrepancy between the macabre horror of Jukes's experience and his plain rendering of it, only serves to increase the impact of the tale. And not only is Jukes very ordinary – his experience is also seen to result from an accident of circumstance rather than from any transgression on his part, as is so often the case in gothic, or ghost, stories where infringement of boundaries, moral or spiritual, brings retribution. This is the case in other Kipling stories like 'The Mark of the Beast'; but the arbitrary nature of Jukes's experience makes it altogether more chilling.

Most intriguingly of all, the Village of the Dead, which Jukes so unexpectedly stumbles across, is a place which defies easy categorization. Sandra Kemp has noted that 'much of the power of the narrative derives from the equivocal placing of the experience' and queries whether 'the events of the story take place in "reality" or in "imagination"'.²⁸ The more one seeks to pinpoint the exact location of the Village of the

²⁸ Sandra Kemp, *Kipling's Hidden Narratives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 16.

Dead the more problematic the matter seems to become. This is due partly to the introductory paragraph (which, incidentally, does not feature in the story's original publication in 1885). Zohreh T. Sullivan, commenting on its 'unsettling play with invention and reality, truth and imagination' notes that

The story is embedded in a frame narrated by a teller who subverts its reality from the start. As the voice of society and administrative authority, the narrator vouches for the sanity and reliability of the narratee Morrowbie Jukes, yet sabotages the veracity of his tale. He opens with the line 'There is no invention about this tale', but continues: 'And, since it is perfectly true that in the same Desert (as the Village of the Dead) is a wonderful city where all the rich money-lenders retreat after they have made their fortunes [...] and decorate their palaces with gold and ivory and Minton tile and mother o' pearl, I do not see why Jukes's tale should not be true.'²⁹

So the narrator, at this point, appears to dismiss the whole thing as an 'invention' after all – on a par with other traveller's tales, the stuff of rumour and conjecture. But there are other factors to consider too; and it is hard to decide which is the most relevant. Jukes's own testimony is that he was suffering from fever at the time, which, of course, might lead to delirium. Or maybe it is all a remarkably vivid nightmare, which begins abruptly with a sudden descent into the hellish village, and then just as abruptly ends with Jukes pulled up out of it again.

But despite the very strong elements of fantasy, Jukes's story is at the same time quite factually rendered. However he might have ended up in the Village of the Dead – whether it is, in the conventional sense, 'real' – and no matter how ghastly it all appears, once there he realizes that he still has to get on with the elementary business of living (or existing), as do all the other inhabitants. There is no time for 'preamble' (*MWK*, p. 8) of any kind. In fact the whole set-up can even be regarded as another version of

²⁹ Zohreh T. Sullivan, *Narratives of Empire: The Fictions of Rudyard Kipling* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 72-73.

‘things as they are’ for those unfortunate Indians who are rated so low that they are left to rot in the foulest conditions. The horror and putrescence may be reminiscent of Poe and gothic excess, but, in another way, it is all part and parcel of ‘reality’ for these people. And, somehow, they adapt; and Jukes, once he is precipitated into this world, has to do the same.

Therefore, there is a quite matter-of-fact approach all round in this story – reinforced by Jukes’s plain style. There are some fanciful references to ‘the Damned’ (*MWK*, p. 13), and ‘the Fates’ (*MWK*, p. 15), but these are kept to a minimum. In this respect the story marks a departure from the generally heightened mode employed by Poe in his tales of ‘premature burial’, and in fact is closer to the likes of Dostoevsky’s ‘Bobok’ which also relates the animation of the dead in a matter-of-fact way (although, as sometimes in Poe, or Maupassant, one might view the narrator as being deranged). The dead in ‘Bobok’ are only heard, not seen, but, as in ‘The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes’, which refers to vile-tasting roast crow and rank well-water and most of all the continual ‘sickening stench’ (*MWK*, p. 6), there is a nauseous flavour throughout. This is set off by the description of the narrator looking into opened graves full of sickening green water;³⁰ the ‘stench’ of the corpses is also repeatedly mentioned.

‘Bobok’, however, whether related by a madman or otherwise, is a less complex tale than ‘Morrowbie Jukes’. The dead in ‘Bobok’ have been straightforwardly classified as such, and are buried and well out of sight (if not out of hearing). Also of course there is a satirical purpose attached to this tale: Dostoevsky uses the dead to comment on the ways of the living. But, in Kipling’s story, more troubling questions remain: who, or what, are these people who inhabit the so-called ‘Village of the Dead’, and what is the essential nature of their abode? Gunga Dass, when Jukes first arrives, proceeds to

³⁰ *The Novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky*, transl. by Constance Garnett, 12 vols (London: Heinemann, 1912-1920), xi: *An Honest Thief and Other Stories* (1919), 293.

explain the ‘meaning’ of things in what at first sight appears to be a concise and straightforward manner.

There are only two kinds of men [.].. the alive and the dead. When you are dead you are dead, but when you are alive you live [.].. If you die at home and do not die when you come to the ghat to be burnt you come here [...]

In epidemics of the cholera you are carried to be burnt almost before you are dead. When you come to the riverside the cold air, perhaps, makes you alive, and then, if you are only a little alive, mud is put on your nose and mouth and you die conclusively. If you are rather more alive, more mud is put; but if you are too lively, they [...] take you away. (*MWK*, pp. 8-9)

Gunga Dass uses the simplest of terms: ‘live’ (enhanced by the adjective ‘lively’), ‘dead’ and ‘die’ – but actually he only succeeds in complicating matters; he does not, or cannot, clarify the exact status of this hideous little community in which Jukes has so unexpectedly found himself. In fact the story ultimately serves as a vivid illustration of Poe’s comments in ‘The Premature Burial’: ‘The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague – who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?’³¹ We, as readers, begin to wonder just what constitutes living, and what dying; and the notion that there might be a place for those who have been found to conform neither to one state nor the other, is disturbing.

In the end, for all its loathsome physicality, the Village of the Dead can be viewed in a metaphysical context. It may be that Jukes has unwittingly discovered a genuinely new realm, however hateful it might be. It is an intriguing concept; there might be much to ponder for someone more intellectually and imaginatively stirred than Morrowbie Jukes.

³¹ *Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe*, iii: *Tales and Sketches 1843-1849*, p. 955.

v):A world of doubts: Buchan's 'The Green Wildebeest'

In 'The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes', then, the exact placing of the central experience remains an issue of supreme uncertainty, engendering confusion for the reader if not so much for the protagonist. Buchan's 'The Green Wildebeest' is even more problematic in this respect, and leads to bewilderment as much for the narrator as for the reader.

'The Green Wildebeest' is the opening story of the 1928 collection, *The Runagates Club*. *The Runagates Club* is probably the most fully representative collection of Buchan stories, as it takes in everything from his South African interests (in 'The Green Wildebeest') to the depiction of bleak northern landscape (in 'Skule Skerry'), and exhibits his most characteristic themes, from wartime stories ('The Loathly Opposite') to urban adventure ('Sing a Song of Sixpence'); from the gentle mockery of upper-class life (in 'The Frying Pan and the Fire') to the arduous testing of the individual who must prove his mettle ('Ship to Tarshish') – as well as stories dealing with more apparently supernatural events.

'The Green Wildebeest', however, unlike most of the stories in this collection, was not originally written in the twenties but much earlier, in 1912 – which places it in the same period as 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' and *Prester John*, other South African tales. Furthermore, it marks the first appearance of Hannay, before he became established as the hero of thriller novels. It is also interesting however to consider it alongside other 'supernatural' stories in *The Runagates Club*: 'The Wind in the Portico', or 'Fullcircle'. Of course these stories, as discussed earlier, are set in England, demonstrating how, for a writer like Buchan, the supernatural was to be found as much at home as abroad (perhaps even more so). But 'The Green Wildebeest' differs from these stories in more than just the setting. 'The Wind in the Portico' appeals to a more overt gothic

sensibility, with its invocation of an ancient deity apparently capable of blasting people to death, leaving only charred corpses. The central force in 'Fullcircle', as already seen, is more insidious in its workings; but its effects, too, are generally straightforward. By contrast, although it might appear at first glance to be a typical adventure-story of the period, with an exotic colonial setting which can take in strange native ideas and superstitions, there is little that is straightforward or plain in 'The Green Wildebeest'.

The story opens with Hannay on a prospecting expedition, noting the 'varieties of game' all around which make him wish he were 'on a hunting trip instead of on a business job' (RC, p. 18); little does he think, at this stage, that any other-worldly creature may also be lurking around. The first inklings of the supernatural only come when he arrives at a village and learns that its water supply apparently issues from a 'sacred place' (RC, p. 22). Naturally Hannay's first reaction is to scoff, as befits his superior status as a white man, and moreover as a resourceful man of action. He does add, though, that 'I make a point of respecting the gods of the heathen' (RC, p. 23) – again one is reminded of Buchan's caution that 'the gods are kittle cattle' and that 'a wise man honours them all'. However it is not until Hannay actually goes to visit the sacred grove itself – having been informed of his companion Andrew's altercation with the old priest – that he fully realizes that something strange is going on. Even so, initially he does sound slightly patronizing: 'That that young fool Andrew should have lifted his hand upon an old man and a blind man and outraged some harmless *tabu* seemed to me an abominable thing' (RC, p. 27).

But the point is, of course, that the *tabu* is anything but harmless; and we gain a sense of some inscrutable, and even more, *inexorable* force at work.

The words [of the priest] were wholly without menace; rather he spoke as if he were an unwilling prophet of evil. He was there to declare the law which he could not alter if he wanted [...] his slow sentences

came out without a trace of bitterness. It was this that impressed me so horribly – he was like an old oracle repeating the commands of the God he served. (*RC*, pp. 28-29).

The measured syntax of this is effective, and Hannay appears mesmerized to some degree by the priest's manner and mode of speech; at any rate he cannot even begin to inquire into the hows and whys of it all, far less make any 'practical' inquiry (*RC*, p. 29).

Hannay's visit to the grove, however, is not more baffling than the amazing change which befalls his young companion, Andrew du Preez, who appears to revert to the condition of a 'primitive lout', a veritable 'caveman' (*RC*, p. 33). In the first instance, an explanation of a sort is offered, relating to his heredity, his mixed ancestral influences. (Buchan was certainly interested in the whole heredity issue; for instance in *The Path of the King*, a series of linked narratives, he explores at length the idea of distantly inherited kingship, over a matter of centuries – culminating in the figure of Abraham Lincoln.) Hannay remarks, judiciously: 'I remembered how the glade and the well had solemnized even me, and I considered that Andrew, with a kaffir strain somewhere in his ancestry, was probably susceptible to something which left me cold' (*RC*, p. 34). This appears to parallel the case of Lawson in 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' who also undergoes a complete physical and mental collapse in the presence (it is suggested) of the goddess worshipped by his forefathers. The fever to which Andrew succumbs, subsequent to his unseemly behaviour in the grove, seems to support this kind of explanation of events, yet Hannay is not completely satisfied: 'All the same, I didn't quite convince myself' (*RC*, p. 24).

A little later, though, when Hannay reads the letter from Andrew in prison, the psychological – indeed pathological – theory appears to be reinforced. 'Gone was the enlightened commercially-minded young man [...] It was a crude boy who had written those pages, a boy in whose soul old Calvinistic terrors had awakened, and terrors older

still out of primordial African shadows' (*RC*, p. 40). Buchan adds yet another ingredient to the mix here, that of Calvinism. And although Andrew himself is Dutch, rather than Scottish, this establishes a route back to Scottish tradition and the dark strain of supernaturalism seen in Scottish writers engaging with Calvinist notions of sin and evil, like Stevenson and Hogg. Of course, this strain also surfaces elsewhere in Buchan, for instance in *Witch Wood* (although in that novel a more modern anthropological approach is evident than in the likes of 'Thrawn Janet'). But the main thing to note in 'The Green Wildebeest' is that the invocation of Calvinist terrors of the soul (harnessed to still older fears 'out of the African shadows') lends considerable weight to the notion that the whole extraordinary chain of events *is* due to Andrew himself, that all these 'terrors' are contained within his mind, or in his blood; and that therefore any external agency cannot be held responsible. And indeed the epigraph to the story, the quotation from Sir Thomas Browne, fits in with this particular view: 'We carry with us the wonders we seek without us; there is all Africa and her prodigies in us'.³²

But the awed and admiring tone of the *Religio Medici* is very different from that of 'The Green Wildebeest'. Of course one should bear in mind that as Browne had received medical training in the first half of the sixteenth century he had been well primed, as Robin Robbins notes, to witness the continuing shift from the old medievalist conception that 'physical man is little more than food for the worms' to a new sense of excitement concerning the marvels of the human body, which were being revealed in the work of Renaissance anatomists.³³ In 'The Green Wildebeest', by contrast, the whole notion of the wonders which lie within is tempered with disquiet. The marvels

³² Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici and Other Works*, ed. by L. C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 15.

³³ Robin Robbins, 'Browne's Cosmos Imagined: Nature, Man and God in Pseudodoxia Epidemica', in *Approaches to Sir Thomas Browne: The Ann Arbour Tercentenary Lectures and Essays*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1982) pp. 155-165 (p. 156).

which inhere in Andrew are seen to lead to nothing but madness, murder and general mayhem.

However, the story does not – cannot – rest comfortably on ‘internal’ explanations, after all. Consider the passage where Hannay attempts mentally to reconstruct the fateful moment when Andrew shot and killed a man, in the belief that he was aiming for the green wildebeest. ‘Somewhere, somehow, down in the Selati bushveld his incubus took bodily form, and he met – or thought he met – the thing which his impiety had released. I suppose we must call it madness’ (*RC*, p. 42). Once more, the tone of uncertainty creeps in: ‘he met – or thought he met’; and as to what Andrew actually met, Hannay merely calls it a ‘thing’ – he is unable to define it any further than this. ‘I suppose we must call it madness’, he says finally (note the odd conjunction of ‘I suppose’ and ‘we must’) but one feels that words are left unspoken. The whole affair is labelled as ‘madness’ only because no other explanation (at least from a common-sensical point of view) appears to fit.

Hannay thus emerges from the whole business without having any clear-cut notion as to what it was about. We should particularly note Buchan’s stratagem in never once actually showing the green wildebeest. He could conceivably have presented Hannay as being *with* Andrew during the crucial encounter, for instance – or at least in the vicinity. But Buchan avoids this totally, and the central event is much obscured.

Hannay heads back to the grove at a later date, in the hope of one final talk with the priest which may shed some light on things – to find the place wiped out by a rockfall with only the moonflowers left ‘looking in the dusk like ghosts of a vanished race’ (*RC*, p. 44). The eerie emptiness of which he was so aware on his first visit now has given way to a final, dead emptiness (although Buchan does not labour the point of the ancient grove being wiped out, as he does in ‘The Grove of Ashtaroth’). And Hannay (uncharacteristically, in view of his better-known exploits in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and

other novels) is left quite impotent by the end of it all – his signal failure being that he did not manage to save Andrew from the gallows – and also extremely puzzled. He cannot say whether or not the grove was indeed part of another world; but in any case, it seems now to have vanished for good.

As an illumination of the essentially problematic nature of 'The Green Wildebeest,' it might be considered alongside the Kipling tale 'The Mark of the Beast' (from *Life's Handicap*). This story deals with the same theme of the violation of a sacred power – a power which again, has a strong animal connection; and again the act is seen to have appalling results for the perpetrator. But it is largely a straightforward gothic exercise. Unlike Buchan's approach in 'The Green Wildebeest', the main events are clearly presented; Fleete directly defiles the image of Hanuman with his cigar-butt, and Kipling leaves the reader in no doubt that recompense for this outrage is demanded, with the incident of the little leper man literally leaving his mark on Fleete who then begins a descent into bestiality (Martin Seymour-Smith remarks that from this point on the story becomes 'an ordinary werewolf tale').³⁴ There are also scenes of torture as the leper man is coerced into retracting the evil spell which has been laid upon Fleete, some of which, apparently, are too horrible for the printed page. The main aim of the story is, plainly, to shock (although at least Fleete is restored to his senses by the end); it does not, like 'The Green Wildebeest', make the reader think.

One might further consider another story involving an animal which may or may not be a denizen of a truly other world, and which also happens to bear the word 'green' in its title: Sheridan le Fanu's 'Green Tea' (from his short-story collection of 1872, *In A Glass Darkly*). As noted by Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert, le Fanu was almost exclusively a ghost-story writer, 'a supreme specialist' in his chosen field,³⁵ and

³⁴ Martin Seymour-Smith, *Rudyard Kipling* (London: Queen Anne Press, 1989), p. 210.

³⁵ Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert, eds, *Victorian Ghost Stories: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. xviii.

therefore 'Green Tea' readily fits into a recognized genre (while 'The Green Wildebeest' can be thought of as anecdotal). There is in 'Green Tea', as in most other stories considered in this chapter, a conflict between the theory of mental delusion and the suspicion that the supernatural is truly involved: the clergyman might just be imagining the diabolical little monkey as the result of drinking copious amounts of 'green tea'. But le Fanu provides a strong overarching framework to the story by drawing upon the philosophy of the eighteenth-century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg, in which he was fairly well-versed. And so a Swedenborgian explanation is considered, along with Dr. Hesselius's theories concerning 'hereditary suicidal mania'³⁶ and other such factors, that somehow an inner eye has opened within the clergyman which has not only gained him vision of one unearthly being but has also, in effect, given him an outlook (however undesired) onto a whole new world, the mystical world of a Swedenborg.

'Green Tea', then, is ambivalent – but, crucially, it is not *ambiguous*; it is either *all* in the clergyman's mind, or it is *all* out there; le Fanu can draw upon an established tradition of mysticism to help produce this effect. Also, the figure of Dr. Hesselius – who like Algernon Blackwood's John Silence is a 'psychic doctor' – is important; the whole story is presented as one of his cases, and so the context is well-defined. Hesselius is, clearly, an authority figure; but 'The Green Wildebeest' lacks authoritative assertion of any kind – unless one is of the opinion that the priest's statements qualify as

³⁶ Sheridan le Fanu, *In A Glass Darkly*, ed. by Robert Tracy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 40.

such. The green wildebeest is never satisfactorily contextualized; it remains only a perplexing image.

Moreover, 'The Green Wildebeest' lacks even the kind of narrator that is found in 'The Door in the Wall', who, if he is unable to volunteer answers confidently after the manner of a Dr. Hesselius, at least summarizes the evidence and puts it into neat form, giving the feel of a proper shape to the tale at its close. But in the Buchan story there is rather less of this. This is not to say that the story altogether *lacks* closure: Andrew's story is done, the grove is finally obliterated. But overall it can be said that Hannay simply narrates his experience and when he does try to 'sum up', as already seen, he makes rather a hash of it. There is, all round, far more uncertainty in 'The Green Wildebeest' than in 'Green Tea'.

vi) Conclusion: wandering between worlds

The uncertainty which surrounds events in 'The Green Wildebeest' is a factor common to most of the stories discussed in this chapter. It is something of a distinctive pattern in much imaginative fiction of the period; there is a reluctance to admit the supernatural but also the inability (and in some cases at least, the unwillingness) to explain it away. Perhaps it is most accurate to say, as Claire Hanson does of Kipling, that in these stories there is not so much the supernatural *per se* as that which 'exceed[s] the ordinary'.³⁷ One might say that this kind of writing occupies a kind of halfway house between two vastly popular genres of the day. On the one hand there is the ghost (or perhaps more accurately, the horror) story, like those of M. R. James which generally feature beings unmistakably from other dimensions (James's stress upon their sheer physicality detracts from the notion that they are merely figments of the beholder's imagination).

³⁷ Claire Hanson, *Short Stories and Short Fictions 1880-1980* (London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 39.

On the other hand, there is the (Holmesian) detective story, which, of course, tends towards the resolution of all mysteries.

To briefly examine the wider cultural context of this kind of writing at the turn of the twentieth century, it is helpful in the first instance to return to Sir Thomas Browne, to consider the nature of the age in which he lived. Browne's age, the Renaissance, was to a degree characterized by what is broadly termed scepticism,³⁸ which arose out of the intellectual turmoil precipitated by the Lutheran Reformation – and coincided with the re-discovery of scepticism as a philosophical system from the Ancient World. Except in its most destructive forms, scepticism accommodated continuing Christian belief; but it did question the *grounds* for belief, and displayed a marked loss of confidence in the human ability to apprehend ultimate truths (while not necessarily denying the existence of these ultimate truths). As C. S. Lewis and A. D. Nuttall have argued, this loss of certainty is much in evidence in one of the most famous Renaissance texts, *Hamlet*. For Lewis, *Hamlet* is primarily a tentative questing 'beyond all Christian and Pagan maps of the hereafter [...] a curious groping and tapping of thoughts, about 'what dreams may come';³⁹ Nuttall takes up this point, in the process refuting William Empson's 'atheist' view that *Hamlet* is a deliberately teasing and 'puzzling' play. While agreeing that 'no ultimate answers' are provided in this work, Nuttall remarks that the playwright also 'refuses to make it clear that no answer should be sought': that it is, in fact, an agnostic play.⁴⁰

And the uncertain 'groping' of *Hamlet* is the quality which is also manifested in the work of many writers in English literature three centuries later, as the note of doubt sounded by sceptics in the sixteenth century continued to reverberate in succeeding

³⁸ On the development of sceptical thought, see, for example, Richard H. Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

³⁹ C. S. Lewis, 'Hamlet: The Prince or the Poem?' in *Selected Literary Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), pp. 88-105 (p. 99).

⁴⁰ A. D. Nuttall, 'Hamlet: Conversations With the Dead,' in *The Stoic in Love: Selected Essays on Literature and Ideas* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), pp. 27-40 (p. 30).

ages, and in many other areas beyond that of theological dispute. But agnosticism, the awareness of something beyond, coupled with an inability to make coherent sense of it, seemed to be especially marked towards the close of the nineteenth century. Although it has become rather a cliché to say so, this was due in no small part to the decline of traditional Christian supernaturalism, which had taken something of a battering from scientific theories and discoveries in the course of the nineteenth century. There is a parallel here with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – not so much in the sense of concrete achievement as in the promotion of the modern scientific method. But in the Renaissance this new scientific outlook was only beginning to take shape; by the turn of the twentieth century it had been long established. And the nineteenth century had seen significant advances in many and varied scientific fields – from the measurement of the earth to the monitoring of the interior world of the mind.

This awareness of the inner world also existed in the Renaissance, of course, as witness the likes of Sir Thomas Browne. Again, this is something that might be seen to derive from the theological controversies of the period, from which the revolutionary Calvinist injunction arose that one should look inside oneself for answers, rather than to the traditional external authorities of Church or priesthood. The process of interiorization seen earlier in Browne also appears in *Hamlet*, although in bleaker form; Hamlet is troubled not only by what dreams may come in the undiscovered country beyond death, but also by the ‘bad dreams’ that may arise from the ‘infinite space’ within himself.⁴¹ And this shift inward continued in following centuries. It is evident in the Romantics, in particular Wordsworth who in the Proem to *The Excursion* deliberately shunned all manner of external marvels to concentrate on the ‘fear and awe/ As fall upon us often when we look /Into our minds, into the Mind of Man – /My haunt,

⁴¹ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare: The Alexander Text* (Glasgow: HarperCollins, 1994), pp. 1079-1125; ii. 2. 253-255 (p. 1095).

and the main region of my song'.⁴² Compare also the internalizing drive of Gothic in the course of the nineteenth century which as Fred Botting notes was the darker counterpart of 'Romantic ideals of individuality, imaginative consciousness and creation'. 'Gothic', he continues, 'became part of an internalized world of guilt, anxiety, despair [...] External forms were signs of psychological disturbance, of increasingly uncertain subjective states dominated by fantasy, hallucination and madness'.⁴³ But even the more frightening impulses of the mind, the terrors of the soul, were in the nineteenth century being meticulously charted – a process which reached new heights with the breakthrough of Freudian psycho-analysis early in the twentieth.

At the dawn of the twentieth century, then, it seemed that both the world without and the world within were being rigorously mapped; and humanity was still in the midst of an ongoing technological revolution which had seen, among many other things, the birth of the telephone, the cinematograph and the automobile – all of which had transformed, or were soon to transform, everyday life. And as many more things seemed to be coming under the jurisdiction of man than ever before, it may well have seemed that the supernatural had become largely redundant in the modern world – at least, the super-natural in the truest sense of the word, as denoting a superior, transcendent realm. We find this usage of the word in Glenn Cavaliero's book, *The Supernatural and English Fiction*, for example. Compare, too, what Colin Manlove has to say: 'that the 'difficulty' for 'the modern 'imaginative' fantasist' is that 'the gap between the worlds has grown too wide for more than an occasional vision [...] of its

⁴² William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, in *Poems*, ed. by John O. Hayden, 2 vols (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), ii, 35-289

⁴³ Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996) pp. 10-11.

⁴⁴ Colin Manlove, *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 259.

⁴⁵ For an different view of fantasy as being essentially a disrupting and disturbing force, see, for example, Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981; repr. Routledge, 1998).

healing'.⁴⁴ The word 'healing' indicates Manlove's bias towards a sense of the transcendental, when talking about 'fantasy'.⁴⁵

Certainly, as Manlove suggests, the gap between the traditional transcendental realm in Western culture – that of Christianity – and the everyday world, may have widened considerably in modern times. But the turn of the twentieth century was a time when the 'groping' about for other worlds is particularly evident. Even when many older notions concerning the supernatural appeared to have been discarded, there remained a strong suspicion that there were yet realms beyond the visible and verifiable world, as is reflected in the lives and works of many writers of the period. At one end of the scale there is the likes of Kipling, whose conceptualization of the other world amounts to little more than the image of a nebulous darkness; at the other end we find a writer like Doyle who finally came to embrace the world beyond, confident that it had a definite plan and a name, and attempted to enlighten his fellow-human beings about it. (This, of course, led to a shift in Doyle's fiction from the 'rationalist' concerns of the Holmes stories to spiritualist propaganda in the 1926 novel *The Land of Mist* which sees Malone, Roxton and finally even Challenger converted to the cause.) Between these two extremes there was Haggard, who while adhering to traditional Christian observances flirted openly with other kinds of belief, drawing on Egyptology and also on the influx of eastern religions which, in part at least, complemented the decline of orthodox Christianity. A similar attitude is found in Buchan (although in more elegant form), who always showed himself responsive to the ideas and beliefs of other places, other times, other cultures.

All this was very much characteristic of the period; although man had achieved much in the last century, he had not arrived at any new knowledge of the larger truths of life and death. Indeed, in this respect, he was rather less certain of himself than in many

previous ages. But there still remained the drive to explore areas as yet unmapped, a desire to seek the unknown. Indeed, George Wyndham, friend and associate of W. P. Ker among others, who in an address given in 1910 defined romance as being not merely a matter of 'the strange' but of '*welcoming the strange*',⁴⁶ went on to declare that this attitude was particularly evident in his own day – as at only certain other periods in history. His tone may have been over-enthusiastic, but this was sound recognition of the fact that romance, in the sense of passing beyond the limits of the ordinary, visible world, of adventuring into new realms or at least having awareness of them – and thereby adding an extra flavour and mystery to life – was still a vital presence on the threshold of the modernist age.

⁴⁶ George Wyndham, 'The Springs of Romance in the Literature of Europe', in *Essays In Romantic Literature*, ed. by Charles Whibley (London: MacMillan, 1919), pp. 1-41 (p. 36, emphasis added).

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