


LITERARY TEXTS AND THE POPULAR MARKETPLACE

# John Buchan and the Idea of Modernity

*Edited by Kate Macdonald  
and Nathan Waddell*

Number 4



JOHN BUCHAN AND THE IDEA OF  
MODERNITY

# LITERARY TEXTS AND THE POPULAR MARKETPLACE

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# JOHN BUCHAN AND THE IDEA OF MODERNITY

EDITED BY

Kate Macdonald and Nathan Waddell

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## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**Patrick Scott Belk** is a visiting lecturer in the English department at the University of West Florida (USA). He is director and project manager of the Pulp Magazines Project, website manager for the Joseph Conrad Society UK, and has published on pulp magazines and American serializations.

**Rebecca Borden** recently received her doctorate from the University of Maryland, College Park. She is currently the executive editor of Modern British Literature at the Foreign Literatures in America Project and is co-editing the scholarly edition of Joseph Conrad's *Tales of Hearsay* for Cambridge University Press.

**Stephen Donovan** is a senior lecturer at the Department of English, Uppsala University, Sweden. His publications include *Joseph Conrad and Popular Culture* (2005, awarded the Conrad Society of America's Adam Gillon Prize), co-editor of *Authority Matters: Rethinking the Theory and Practice of Authorship* (2008), co-editor of *Secret Commissions: An Anthology of Victorian Investigative Journalism* (2012), and essays on Conrad, modernist writing and imperial fiction, particularly Rhodesia.

**Christoph Ehland** is Professor of English Literature and Culture at the University of Paderborn in Germany. He has published on Scottish writing of the inter-war period with a particular interest in the literary work of Lewis Grassie Gibbon and John Buchan. Currently his research focuses on cultural conceptions of space and mobility from the early modern period to the present. He is author of *Picaresque Perspectives – Exiled Identities* (2003) and edits the book series *Spatial Practices*.

**J. William Galbraith** is an independent scholar who has written over two dozen articles about John Buchan in publications such as the *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, the *Literary Review of Canada*, the *John Buchan Journal* and the *Ottawa*



*Citizen*. He is the author of *John Buchan: Model Governor-General* (forthcoming, Dundurn Press). He is a senior civil servant and has worked in a number of Canadian government agencies and departments.

**Douglas Gifford** is Emeritus Professor of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow, and Honorary Librarian of Walter Scott's Library at Abbotsford, where he is director of the Abbotsford Library Research Project. His books include *James Hogg* (1976) and *Neil Gunn and Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (1983). He edited *The History of Scottish Literature: Nineteenth Century* (1988), and co-edited *A History of Scottish Women's Writing* (1997) with Dorothy Macmillan. He is general editor of the three-volume series on *Scottish Language and Literature* from Edinburgh University Press (1997–2002), and main editor of the third volume, *Scottish Literature in English and Scots* (2002), which has particular emphasis on modern Scottish writers. He has published extensively on Scottish fiction from Scott to the present, and on modern Scottish writers from William Soutar to Alasdair Gray, and is presently working on the movement from Irish Revival and Celtic Twilight to the Scottish 'Renaissance' of Hugh MacDiarmid and others, and on a study of the neglected Scottish novelist Robin Jenkins.

**Simon Glasscock** worked first in psychology and then computing before reading for a second BA in History at Balliol College, Oxford. He has written about *Greenmantle* for *The John Buchan Journal*, and contributed a chapter on the role played by sport and public school athleticism in Buchan's popular novels to K. Macdonald (ed.), *Reassessing John Buchan: Beyond 'The Thirty-Nine Steps'* (2009).

**Douglas Kerr** is Professor in the School of English at the University of Hong Kong. His publications include *Wilfred Owen's Voices* (1993) *George Orwell* (Writers and their Work series, 2003), *A Century of Travels in China: Critical Essays on Travel Writing from the 1840s to the 1940s* co-edited with Julia Kuehn (2007), *Eastern Figures: Orient and Empire in British Writing* (2008), and *Arthur Conan Doyle: Writing, Profession and Practice* (2013). He has written on the relationship between John Buchan, Joseph Conrad and literary theft in K. Macdonald (ed.), *Reassessing John Buchan: Beyond 'The Thirty-Nine Steps'* (2009).

**Joseph A. Kestner** is McFarlin Professor of English and a professor of film studies at the University of Tulsa in Tulsa, Oklahoma, USA. His research interests include nineteenth-century British literature; film history, theory and genres; art, music and classical mythology; masculinity theory; gender studies; adventure and detective fiction; Jane Austen; and Joseph Conrad. He has won numerous national and international awards, and has authored eight monographs and over 100 scholarly journal articles.

**Kate Macdonald** is a lecturer in English at Ghent University, Belgium, where she teaches British literary culture and history. She has published many articles and book chapters on the publishing culture and literary history of the Edwardian and inter-war periods. She is the author of *John Buchan. A Companion to the Mystery Fiction* (2009) and the editor of *Reassessing John Buchan* (2009), *The Masculine Middlebrow* (2011) and *Political Future Fiction* (2013), and is writing her next book on politically conservative popular novelists.

**Simon Machin** is writing a PhD at Roehampton University about 'Ripping Yarns' and masculine codes of behaviour in British 'boys' own' adventure fiction from 1850 to 1925. His research interests include codes and memes in adventure fiction; the representation of British national identity; cultural memory in texts of childhood, particularly boys' story papers; the intersection of children's literature and adventure stories; middlebrow fiction; British publishing practice in the late nineteenth century; the examination in literature; and the writings of Rudyard Kipling and T. E. Lawrence.

**John Miller** is a lecturer in nineteenth-century literature at the University of Sheffield, having previously worked at the Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, East Anglia and Northern British Columbia. His first monograph, *Empire and the Animal Body* (2012), explores the representation of exotic animals in Victorian and Edwardian adventure fiction. He is currently working on the co-authored volume *Walrus* for the Reaktion Animal series and on his second monograph, *Fur: A Literary History*.

**Pilvi Rajamäe** is a lecturer at the Department of English at the University of Tartu, Estonia and executive director of the Estonian Centre for British Studies. She teaches British history and the core course of English literature from Beowulf to modernism. Her special interest is the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century fiction and also the English country house. She wrote her MA thesis on the country house in Evelyn Waugh's novels (1998) and her PhD on John Buchan (2007). She has published many articles and chapters on Buchan's work.

**Ryan D. Shirey** is a lecturer in the Writing Program and director of the Writing Center at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC, USA. He completed his PhD at Washington University in St Louis, where he wrote a dissertation exploring the Romantic influences deployed in the works of Neil M. Gunn, Edwin Muir and Lewis Grassie Gibbon. He is currently interested in examining the relationships between genre fiction and literary fiction in twentieth-century Scottish literature.

**Nathan Waddell** is a lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Literature in the School of English at the University of Nottingham, UK. He is the author of *Modernist Nowheres: Politics and Utopia in Early Modernist Writing, 1900–1920* (2012) and *Modern John Buchan: A Critical Introduction* (2009), and is a co-editor of *Wyndham Lewis and the Cultures of Modernity* (2011). At present he is working on a project exploring political tensions in literary modernism's musical contexts between the two World Wars. He is the secretary and treasurer of the Wyndham Lewis Society.

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## INTRODUCTION

Kate Macdonald and Nathan Waddell

Early on in the process of developing this essay collection, an alternate title of *John Buchan and the Modern World* was mooted. This title remained in place for some months. However, as the essays neared completion, we felt that they and thus the book were about far more than John Buchan's writing and work passively reflecting his place in a modernizing world. On the contrary, the focus of the book had taken an ideological turn. It had become about Buchan and the *idea* of modernity. The volume now registered Buchan's complex understanding not only of the/his modern world (that of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), but of certain key concepts of modernity, and processes of modernization, by which that world was underpinned. Moreover, the essays charted how these concepts determined Buchan's novels and essays; showed how his writing steered a course through middlebrow cultures linked to, but not coincident with, that of his modernist peers; and engaged with Buchan's self-questioning accounts of various epistemological and ontological modernities, and of the discursive structures they informed. The Buchan that had emerged, in other words, was no simple adventure novelist or naïve imperialist, but one fundamentally attuned to the moral, political, religious, socio-cultural, philosophical, and racial ambiguities of his time.

The 'idea' of modernity has meant (and still means) different things to different people. A range of sociological commentaries have made this overdetermined concept a marker not simply of a distended time period (covering, in some accounts, the growth and consolidation of the whole of modern global capitalism in the Western world), but of the conceptual and existential trajectories through which that epoch has taken shape and is still understood. Globalization has been a key discourse in these debates, but the importance of revolutionary ideology, scientism, social rationalization and materialism, population growth and philosophical scepticism should also be emphasized. Critics have viewed such phenomena with enthusiasm as often as they have with distrust, however, and the idea (or ideas) of modernity they underpin have produced optimism as well as concern. Hence Andrzej Gąsiorek's claims that the dawn of moder-

nity was predicated on an essential ambivalence; that '[t]he transition from a form of life rooted in a long established habitus to one that projected itself towards an as yet unrealized but radically different future' led to a widespread 'recognition of the world's radical contingency'; and that throughout this process '[t]he possibility of re-imagining and re-making life [vies] with existential dread'.<sup>1</sup> 'Modernity', in other words, implies different kinds of socio-political and philosophical phenomena, and signals divergent forms of affect within a broad ideological continuum.

Given that artistic modernism is often taken as *the* formal and thematic expression of modernity, it has enjoyed a privileged, though contested, position in cultural history. In the main, modernism has been viewed as the index of a certain kind of disenchanted experience that appeared with intensity during, but not limitable to, early twentieth-century western Europe. This relationship has been outlined by the editors of *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms* (2010):

If modernism expresses modernity in some sense, then this notion is to be conceived not on a base-superstructure model but on the principle of multiple interactions across social and geographical locations and of a non-linear, non-progressivist view of temporality. Modernism is not determined by a modernity that precedes it but is imbricated in it, is inseparable from the self-reflexive nature of the modern life-forms into which it is bound. Modernism is then to be seen in terms of overlapping, criss-crossing, and labile networks. This model complicates our understandings of causality and diachrony because it insists that the history of modernity (and thus of modernism) should be seen as geographically and temporally 'uneven': modernity is not 'singular' but 'multiple', its development is intermittent, not smoothly progressive, and it takes diverse forms depending on time and place, and on different agents' specific interventions, in particular sociocultural circumstances. Thinking about modernity and modernism along these lines gives rise to what Ian Hacking has described as 'a local historicism, attending to particular and disparate fields of reflection and action' that 'discourages grand unified accounts' (totalizing theories), replacing them with scrupulous attention to specific sociocultural contexts.<sup>2</sup>

Within the capacious terms of this definition, modernism should be seen not as an unbiased 'mirror' of modernity, but instead as a component of modernity, as part of its dislocations, ruptures and gaps. Modernism's inseparability from the self-reflexive attitudes it embodies is reflected in its formal experimentalism and auto-critical emphases, which articulate Henri Lefebvre's sense of modernity as 'a reflective process, a more-or-less advanced attempt at critique and auto-critique, a bid for knowledge'.<sup>3</sup> But if modernism offers commentaries upon these processes, dissecting modernity through self-aware and complex artistic modes, it is also the case that modernism is itself part of the very thing it seeks to criticize. Modernism's attempts to represent and understand modernity are therefore further iterations *of* modernity, which in the early twentieth century 'turned its gaze upon itself and attempted to attain the clear-sightedness and self-awareness

which would eventually disclose its impossibility', to quote Zygmunt Bauman, 'thus paving the way to the postmodern reassessment' of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century timeframes.<sup>4</sup>

How to account for these complications in cultural-historical terms has been a key preoccupation of the New Modernist Studies.<sup>5</sup> The last two decades have witnessed a surge of scholarly publications seeking to explain artistic modernism not only in terms of its inseparability from modernity, but also in terms of its interior complexity, multi-modal growth and manifold linkages with contemporaneous and alternative artistic forms. The early twentieth century is the key historical focal point for these efforts. Though modernism as it developed between 1890 and 1945 was once viewed in generally formalistic terms, with only passing gestures to modernism's historical placement, the 'local historicism' invoked by Hacking has now transformed scholarly understandings of modernism's cultural origins, uneven progressions, sacred texts and major triumphs, along with its entanglements in other kinds of artistic groupings and activities. In the literary sphere, for instance, modernism now tends to be conceived not as a succession of exceptional masterpieces written by individuals hermetically distanced from their contemporaries, but in terms of multifaceted negotiations between writers involved in overlapping communities and contexts. One major result of such revisionism is that oppositions between an allegedly elitist, high-brow modernism, on the one hand, and a supposedly democratic, popular mass market, on the other, have been problematized. Scholars working on the literary histories of the early twentieth century are now far more inclined to view the field as a palimpsest of overlapping discourses that makes it hard to sustain uncomplicated divisions between 'modernist' and 'non-modernist' productions, particularly in the light of continuing debates over the exact meaning of such terms as 'modernism', 'non-modernism', 'lowbrow', 'middlebrow' and 'high-brow'.<sup>6</sup> Nicola Humble has wisely observed that 'there is something wrong with the way in which we have mapped the literary field of the first half of the twentieth century', and notes that the act of cultural validation is as culpable as the act of cultural categorization.<sup>7</sup>

We begin with these thoughts to give a conceptual context to the notion that the writer John Buchan (1875–1940) – who is usually known, and sometimes dismissed, as 'only' the author of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) – might be profitably connected with an idea as complex as 'modernity'. More and more is being written on Buchan's life and work, but this century-long 'tethering' to a single work of fiction has meant that the true character and extent of his *oeuvre* has remained hidden within the sweep of canonical literary histories.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the cultural-historical cliché that positions Buchan as the originator of the twentieth-century spy thriller has obscured his many other successes, which include roles as Lord Milner's private secretary during the reconstruction of



South Africa after the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902); leader-writer for the *Spectator*, head of Britain's Department of Information in the First World War; a director of the international news agency Reuters in the 1920s; Member of Parliament for the Scottish Universities from 1927 to 1934; Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1933 and 1934; and, finally, Governor-General of Canada from 1935 until his death. Subjective scholarly accounts of Buchan's activities as a novelist have also obfuscated his achievements as poet, short-story writer, editor, historian, philosopher and socio-political commentator, parts he played with gusto (and to no small acclaim) throughout his life.<sup>9</sup>

Within these wide-ranging endeavours, Buchan responded to the idea of modernity in various ways. His answers to the 'radical contingency' implied by modernity might be said, broadly put, to have been united by a search for wholeness and continuities in the face of an underlying chaos. For Buchan, imperial civilization provided one such form of wholeness, even as he recognized that 'civilization' itself is an abstraction, an imposed construct in need of persistent justification and renewal. Hence his declaration in *The African Colony: Studies in the Reconstruction* (1903) that '[i]deals are all very well in their way, but they are apt to become very dim lamps unless often replenished from the world of facts and trimmed and adjusted by wholesome criticism'.<sup>10</sup> Buchan similarly trimmed and adjusted his support for the British Empire in such works as the symposium novel *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906); the biographies *Julius Caesar* (1932), *Gordon at Khartoum* (1934) and *Augustus* (1937); and his memoir *Memory Hold-the-Door* (1940), among other texts. His faith in imperialism was inseparable from his oft-repeated sense that civilization is divided from barbarism by a thin and fragile dividing line, an image first expressed at the turn of the twentieth century in his short story 'Fountainblue' (1901) and then recapitulated in, among many other texts, *The Power-House* (1913). Unlike Walter Benjamin, who later claimed that '[t]here is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of barbarism', Buchan felt that imperial civilization could, if wholesomely and perpetually criticized, make possible a kind of sacred unity.<sup>11</sup> Whereas Benjamin equated civilization with savagery, Buchan viewed imperial culture as a means of keeping barbarism at bay. Twentieth- and twenty-first-century history makes it hard to accept uncritically views of this sort, but, from the time of his involvement in South African reconstruction to his final years as Governor-General of Canada, Buchan believed, to differing degrees, that imperialism could be 'a potent and beneficent force in the world' and that it might bring about 'a world-wide brotherhood with the background of a common race and creed, consecrated to the service of peace'.<sup>12</sup>

Alan Sandison has argued that Buchan invested empire with an 'ecclesiastical significance' and 'looked on it as a God-given means whereby man in his secu-

lar condition could be integrated with his spiritual ideal'.<sup>13</sup> This is broadly right, but Buchan's commitment to imperialism was more complicated than Sandison's view permits. Much has been made, and rightly so, of the deleterious effects of imperialism throughout its long history. However, for Buchan the British Empire represented a way of establishing a necessary and desirable order within a chaotic modern world. Buchan was not blind to the wrongs imperial practices could and did produce, and such fictions as *A Lodge in the Wilderness* and *Prester John* (1910) tell us that he thought carefully about the pitfalls of colonial rule and political expansionism. However, he argued in *The African Colony* that sound imperial government was not an 'outcome of the grace of God and a flawless code of abstractions', but the result of 'perpetual effort, a keen sense of reality, a constant facing and adjusting of problems'.<sup>14</sup> This key contention – advanced in the specific historical and political context of South African reconstruction – underpinned Buchan's lifelong and self-questioning commitment to imperialism as, in his view, a 'beneficial' politics, one which might eventually lead to universal spiritual truth. In contrast to Sandison's emphasis on the 'God-given' nature of imperialism, Buchan argued that imperialism was a means of overcoming a disenchanted, fragmented modernity in favour of an elusive transcendental significance.

All of which is to say that if Buchan supported discourses and politics which in many ways ignored, rather than faced head-on, modernity's aporias and estrangements, he lived in full awareness of a reality shaped, to quote Bauman once more, 'by the suspicion of the brittleness and fragility of the artificial man-designed and man-built islands of order among the sea of chaos'.<sup>15</sup> In all aspects of his life and writing Buchan was alert to 'degrees of truth and differing levels of reality', a relativism taken in the first instance from youthful reading of Arthur Balfour's *Defence of Philosophic Doubt* (1879) and *The Foundations of Belief* (1895).<sup>16</sup> But Buchan was at the same time convinced that a contingent reality needed to be held in check by self-reflexive attachments to history, tradition, faith and ritual. These pieties underpinned an outlook flexible enough to welcome modernization when Buchan recognized the benefits of the new over the old, yet sufficiently tenacious to conserve that which had been tried and tested through experience. This attitude was particularly true of his account of statecraft, which he felt always had to be tempered by the recognitions that 'the State is an organism'; that for changes to it 'to be organic [they] must be gradual and well considered'; and 'that, in short, it is not good to change boats till you have the new one quite ready'.<sup>17</sup> Gradualism of this kind determined Buchan's politics as a whole. In contrast to those revolutionaries, such as the Bolsheviks, who were inspired by 'the brittleness and fragility' of 'man-designed' political orders to smash the state and build society *de novo*, Buchan put faith in measured, sceptical responses to social problems.<sup>18</sup>

These responses run throughout Buchan's historical, philosophical and political texts – books like *Some Eighteenth-Century Byways* (1908), *Homilies and Recreations* (1926), *The King's Grace* (1935), *Men and Deeds* (1935), *Canadian Occasions* (1940) and *Memory Hold-the-Door* (1940) – and his political opinions are investigated in his novels, poems and short stories. In fact, the formal strategies adopted in these literary works mean that two challenging claims need to be made here about the deeper implications of Buchan's writing. First, it has become a commonplace in specialist Buchan scholarship that he engaged with late-Victorian and twentieth-century modernity in ways comparable in scope to more canonical modernist literatures. A claim of this sort emerges in part from the broader labours of modernist and middlebrow studies, whose goals include dismantling what Robert Scholes calls the 'paradoxes of modernism' – the assumptions of a certain kind of literary scholarship whose roots lie in the criticism advanced by the modernists themselves, and whose investments in a discourse of 'high' and 'low' art forms causes 'confusion generated by a terminology that seems to make clear distinctions where clear distinctions cannot – and should not – be made'.<sup>19</sup> One consequence of such efforts is that histories of twentieth-century literary cultures in which modernism plays a more appropriately-weighted – that is, non-dominant – role are now being written. Another consequence of the combined work of modernist and middlebrow studies is that scholars have become freshly sensitive to the vocabularies in which their arguments are made. So, when we observe that a figure like Buchan writes, as he sometimes does, in self-reflexive and experimental modes as good as, or identical to, those used in different contexts by his modernist peers, we need to reflect not just on how and why we discriminate between 'modernist' and 'non-modernist' literatures, but also on the more problematic question of how those descriptors are themselves freighted with familiar, but historically contingent, value judgements.<sup>20</sup>

Second, if we accept that a writer like Buchan can write – in both fictional and non-fictional contexts – in ways reminiscent of, or equivalent to modernist styles, then this raises the question of why his work has not generally been viewed as 'imbricated' in modernity in the manner claimed for modernism by the New Modernist Studies. It would be wrong to describe Buchan as a modernist plain and simple, just as it would be wrong simply to call him a 'popular', 'non-modernist' or even 'minor' writer. Exactly where to locate Buchan between these extremities is not obvious, however, as in different parts of his output he discloses different kinds of sympathies to various modernist projects.<sup>21</sup> One reason for such ambiguity is because the term now typically used to 'place' Buchan's *oeuvre* – 'middlebrow' – is conceptually indeterminate.<sup>22</sup> Another reason is that the personal and cultural networks Buchan belonged to make it hard to pigeonhole his creative and critical efforts in relation to the boundaries of a twentieth-century modernism whose limits continue to be queried. And yet,

posing the question in this way is itself part of the problem, since to say that the value of Buchan's work needs establishing *vis-à-vis* modernism merely re-instantiates the latter term in the dominant side of a binary whose discrepancies modernist and middlebrow scholars have tried so hard to erase. If Buchan wrote fictions marked by formal ambivalence, ethical complexity and self-reflexivity – all of which are terms applicable, in Susan Jones's view, to the Richard Hannay stories, for example – but does not 'qualify' as a modernist, then that mismatch ought to make us ask why these textual qualities have been favoured as *modernist* qualities first and foremost.<sup>23</sup>

A key problem in defining what does or does not count as 'modernist' writing – and therefore as writing which in some sense amounts to an expression, or complex articulation, of modernity – is the issue of textual 'pleasure'. Modernism was for many years assumed to have been written in a 'difficult' way to satisfy an anti-democratic impulse. This viewpoint reached its zenith in John Carey's polemic *The Intellectuals and the Masses* (1992), but has since been rejected by scholars who have paid scrupulous attention to the specific socio-cultural contexts of modernist authorial intentions, and to the variegated audiences to which particular textual undertakings were addressed. Indeed, it is now accepted that certain modernist writers (Ford Madox Ford, for instance) hoped to use experimental literary forms for inclusionary, egalitarian objectives. Likewise, literatures now classified as 'middlebrow' were for many years disparaged for offering 'easy' (and thus 'non-literary') soporifics by way of such generic modes as crime fiction, the adventure story or imperial romance. However, critics are now more willing to concede that such apparently predictable texts not only contain purposefully incorporated profundities and ambivalences, but that they too express something about modernity by capturing (at both formal and thematic levels) the mind-sets of individuals negotiating a transitional, post-industrial and post-Darwinian world. Deciding where to locate Buchan in this field of increasingly more nuanced concepts is difficult. And yet, the fact that his work frustrates diverse literary-historical classifications can be taken as evidence of that work's importance and of the challenges it poses to modern-day literary scholars.

In assembling the contributions to this volume, then, we have refrained from trying to identify Buchan as belonging to any single or reductive literary-historical category, even if terms like 'modernism' and 'middlebrow' do help us get our bearings in accounting for his achievements. For some of our contributors (Rebecca Borden, Simon Glasscock and Pilvi Rajamae) Buchan's work belongs perhaps most clearly to the middlebrow or even to 'inter-modernism', a classification evolved in response to the fact that the paradoxes of modernism have 'created a real problem in how to categorize any figure from the first four decades of the [twentieth] century not central to the canonical formulation of [high modernism]'.<sup>24</sup> If the middlebrow refers, broadly speaking, to 'an aesthetic mode

that uses experimental and engaging tactics to integrate a variety of genres and styles available in literature, the arts, design, music, theatre and film; dissemination and transmission practices that aim for success with a large cross-section of the public; and consumption practices that negotiate among both intellectual and whimsical tastes and attitudes; then 'inter-modernism' articulates a comparable desire to find some *via media* between modernism and its various institutionally-sanctioned 'others'.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, in his chapter on 'John Buchan, Myth and Modernism', Douglas Kerr sees Buchan as a novelist who in his adventure fiction of the 1920s appropriated mythological narratives in response to the destructive effects of the First World War, thus aligning him, in certain respects, with post-war modernism's comparable uses of myth to come to terms with the trauma of global industrialized conflict.

We begin this collection with an important contextualizing essay by Douglas Gifford on 'The Roots that Clutch: John Buchan, Scottish Fiction and Scotland'. Gifford's analysis of the sources, influences and cultural roots from which Buchan's work is inseparable addresses this writer's complex relationship with the Scottish fiction tradition. In doing so, Gifford invites us to reflect not just on how Buchan saw the literary past as 'recoverable', but, more importantly, on how he saw a specific Scottish attitude towards such recovery as relevant to twentieth-century literary demands. Gifford's essay also reflects on the significant question of Buchan's dual 'belonging' to Scottish and English backgrounds, a duality also highlighted by David Goldie when he argues that 'Buchan's Scottish birth and upbringing would always remain central to his concerns, but his involvement with wider British and imperial issues meant that his attention was often focused elsewhere'.<sup>26</sup> Gifford's chapter concludes with reflections on this characteristically Buchanesque tension, a pressure which resulted in a constant oscillation between Scottish and English identities made yet more problematic by the difficulties of Buchan's Scottish and Free Church background, as well as his commitment to Unionist Nationalism.

Gifford's attention to Buchan's dualities is echoed in Simon Glasscock's chapter, 'A Civilising Empire: T. H. Green, Lord Milner and John Buchan', in which Buchan's faith in the 'illuminative' powers of empire is explored in relation to the Hegelian philosophy of Green and the social reformism of Milner, among other influences. Buchan's complex understanding of the imperial project distinguishes him in certain respects from the modernist writers of his time, for example, whose exploits and literatures have become enshrined in our collective cultural consciousness at the expense of writers like Buchan and middlebrow figures comparable to him. Buchan and Joseph Conrad, for example, saw the relationship between empire and modernity as significant, but construed that relationship in starkly opposed ways. That said, the relatively recent tendency to dismiss late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century defenders of empire as

somehow unthinking or barbaric tends to ignore the fact that most of them defended the imperial project in extremely careful and precise ways (however much we might now want to question the ideological assumptions upon which those defences, and the claims of imperialism more broadly, were based). This is not to 'defend' empire, but simply to note that imperialism was a complex phenomenon that needs to be carefully historicized if it is to be understood fully. Glasscock's chapter reveals just how careful and precise Buchan's defence of empire really was, and traces his promotion of the imperial project through journalism, history writing, autobiography and popular fiction. Glasscock also considers such historical contexts as Buchan's friendship with Leo Amery and other members of the Co-Efficient and Compatriot dining clubs and the Round Table, and his work for Lord Milner in South Africa in the early 1900s.

Buchan's involvement in Milner's 'Kindergarten' – the name for that group of individuals who held the key positions in Milner's administration of the Cape Colony – took him to a variety of locations. One of the most critical of these locations, Rhodesia, was for Buchan a place of mysterious antiquity as well as a site of 'modern barbarism' – a space of contradictions.<sup>27</sup> The next chapter in this collection, Stephen Donovan's 'A Very Modern Experiment: John Buchan and Rhodesia', attends to these contradictions by way of Rhodesia's 'virtual' existence in early twentieth-century culture. When Richard Hannay in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* points out that he hails not simply from South Africa but more specifically from Rhodesia, he is, Donovan argues, foregrounding his membership of a quite particular imperialist enclave: a colony administered by a chartered company, rather than the British Crown, which heavily featured not only in Buchan's writing but also in the discursive and literary trajectories of imperial modernity. Such writers as H. Rider Haggard, Bertram Mitford, Frederick Whishaw and James Chalmers made Rhodesia a noticeable and necessary part of their creative enterprises. Donovan compares those enterprises with a range of less-studied Buchan texts – among them *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906), 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' (1910), *Prester John* (1910), *The Moon Endureth* (1912), *The Runagates Club* (1928), *The Courts of the Morning* (1929), *The Gap in the Curtain* (1932), *A Prince of the Captivity* (1933) and *The Island of Sheep* (1936) – in order to explain, first of all, Rhodesia's 'virtual' presence in Buchan's *oeuvre*, and, second, to show how Buchan used that presence as a way of disentangling the steadily intensifying ideological and economic predicaments of imperialism in the early twentieth century.

Throughout this period imperialism often acquired the status of myth. But, as we have seen, Buchan was not an uncomplicated 'upholder' of myths, even if many of his novels can make it seem like he was. On the contrary, Buchan as often *investigated* mythic frameworks as he upheld them, a point particularly relevant to his views of T. E. Lawrence, his friend and a national hero. Lawrence's

exploits as 'Lawrence of Arabia' were to some extent legitimized in the public consciousness through the character of Sandy Arbuthnot, who first appears in Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916) before emerging in time as a hero of Lawrentian stature in *The Courts of the Morning*. Buchan's relationship with Lawrence was complicated, however, and the relationship in its entirety emerges over several decades in surprising ways – a relationship charted here by Simon Machin in his chapter "The Ministry of Information": Buchan's Friendship with T. E. Lawrence. For Machin, the interest of the Buchan–Lawrence connection lies in the emerging qualifications made by Buchan as their friendship developed. In *Memory Hold-the-Door* Buchan wrote that he did not 'profess to have understood T. E. Lawrence fully, still less to be able to portray him; there is no brush fine enough to catch the subtleties of his mind, no aerial viewpoint high enough to bring into one picture the manifold of his character'.<sup>28</sup> And yet Buchan also made it known that Lawrence had 'a fissure in his nature' – 'on the one side art and books and friends and leisure and a modest cosiness; on the other action, leadership, [and] the austerity of space'.<sup>29</sup> Buchan's concern with the dualities of Lawrence's character informed what Machin understands as the writer's ambivalent perception not only of the Lawrence 'myth' but also of the man himself, a man increasingly drawn to different kinds of public persona and self-promotions, from whom Buchan gradually distanced himself in the inter-war period. Part of the problem here was Lawrence's contentment in cultural contexts with which Buchan only ever had an ambiguous relation. Chief among these was the context of artistic modernism, which comes in for some dedicated, albeit good-humoured, criticism throughout Buchan's output.

Both Buchan and T. E. Lawrence knew several modernist writers, for instance, but whereas Lawrence's creative energies actively drew on modernist techniques and forms – *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922) being 'one of the greatest of modernist autobiographies' – Buchan's momentum went in the opposite direction, oscillating *against* the modernists who for him were, by and large, part of a more general 'revolt against humanism, a return to the sourness of puritanism without its discipline and majesty'.<sup>30</sup> For Buchan, a particularly 'sour' aspect of modernist culture was its interest in psychoanalytical theories, a point explored in greater detail by John Miller (of which more in a moment). Joseph Kestner is comparably concerned with the connections between Buchan's work and the insights provided by twentieth-century psychoanalytical theories. But whereas Miller explores such theories as appropriated and comprehended by Buchan, Kestner uses psychoanalysis as a point of departure for investigating how in Buchan's wartime Hannay novels – *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, *Greenmantle* and *Mr Standfast* (1919) – masculinity is presented as a 'psychic structure' dependent on socio-cultural conventions as much as on unconscious psychological moods. Kestner's chapter, 'Masculinities in the Richard Hannay "War Trilogy" of John Buchan,'

offers a psychoanalytical reading of Buchan's wartime fiction that draws on the Lacanian principles of phallic symbolism and the 'Law of the Father'. Kestner thus read Buchan's work through psychoanalytical concepts, and invites us to reassess the complexity of such seemingly 'clear-cut' texts as Buchan's thrillers by proving their responsiveness to psychoanalytical modes of inquiry.

The richness of the first three Hannay novels is proved again in Rebecca Borden's chapter, 'John Buchan and the Emerging "Post-modern" Fact: Information Culture and the First World War'. Here Borden focuses on the conditions under which information circulates in the early twentieth century. Examining Buchan's extensive use of rumours and rumour-mongering in these novels in relation to inter-war information theories, Borden explores how the information environment of modernity is one in which individuals are overwhelmed by the volume of information reaching each person from distant and copious sources. This situation diminishes an individual's ability to accurately understand his or her place in the world. Borden argues that these post-war ideas discount the flexible and collective conduits of rumour that allow an individual to make *meaningful* sense of the world without reference to the accuracy of such a worldview. By analysing Buchan's little-studied short story 'The King of Ypres', Borden demonstrates that a paradigm of effectiveness rather than truthfulness should be perceived in Buchan's wartime narratives, and that this paradigm reflects a similar change going on in the contemporary information culture at large. In exploring Buchan's depiction of wartime looting, anarchy and violence by and against civilians, Borden shows how this Buchan story may mark a late moment of independence before Buchan's critical identity as a war commentator and historian was 'quenched by khaki'.<sup>31</sup>

Throughout the 1910s and 1920s Buchan reflected on those communities which had taken part in the First World War and which were, in its aftermath, trying to come to terms with its material and psychological fallout. In 'The Great Captains', an address originally delivered in 1920, Buchan wrote that in the immediately post-war period men and women had grown 'very weary of war', before adding that 'there is no one of us but hopes that in the future, by some happy conversion of heart and an adjustment of the mechanism of Government, the danger of it may be lessened and may ultimately disappear from the world'.<sup>32</sup> From the vantage-point of the twenty-first century such a statement appears distinctly utopian, but Buchan's claim that the inter-war period was populated by war-weary men and women finds an interesting outlet in his fiction of this timeframe, in which his protagonists attempt to adapt to a fundamentally changed psycho-social and material landscape. Buchan's novels of this 'moment', as Christoph Ehland argues in his chapter in this volume, 'display the struggle to moderate and channel the radical forces of change and the conservative urge to persist' in a time of unprecedented social and cultural upheaval.



Ehland, in 'The Spy-scattered Landscapes of Modernity in John Buchan's *Mr Standfast*', attends to Buchan's 1919 novel in particular to show that this thriller is somewhat more than a mere novel of action or escape, reading it instead as an expression of Buchan's search for some stable 'ground' in a modern moment of mind-boggling upheaval.

Buchan's concern with material disturbances matched his interest in psychological complexity. Many of his novels, especially those written in the 1920s, investigate psychology and psychosis in ways relevant to his understanding of the imperial project as a means of coming to a greater knowledge of the self and its limitations. When Francis Carey in *A Lodge in the Wilderness* defines imperialism as offering a way of examining 'ourselves and find[ing] the reason of that faith' which belongs to him and his imperial associates, he is among other things presenting imperialism as a mechanism with which the mind's operations at a crucial moment in Western modernity might be subjected to critique.<sup>33</sup> Buchan saw imperialism in similar terms, but his fascination with psychology was not restricted to imperialism alone. His short story 'Space' (1911), and such novels as *Mr Standfast*, *Huntingtower* (1922) and *The Three Hostages* (1924), indicate that Buchan could draw psychologically complex characters, whereas such orations as 'The Integrity of Thought' (1937) show that he was able to discuss the relationships between literature and psychology in thought-provoking ways. Other details sprinkled throughout his fiction reveal that Buchan was well acquainted with Freudian psychoanalysis, even if in places in his novels and short stories he tended to satirize Freud's theories as a subject matter discussed by decadent intellectuals in equally profligate 'hideaways'. John Miller in his chapter, 'The Soul's "Queer Corners": John Buchan and Psychoanalysis', shows how Buchan's engagement with psychoanalysis went beyond simple satire, however, to include an impressive level of familiarity with Freud and Jung, as well as an on-going effort to understand how interpreting the mind's operations from a psychoanalytical perspective might be as much part of modernity's various crises as part of the cure by which those crises might be overcome. Put another way, Miller shows us how Buchan's grasp of psychoanalytical principles allowed him not just believably to depict in his fictions complex psychological states, on the one hand, and psychoanalytic debate, on the other, but more importantly to explore the limitations of psychoanalysis itself at a moment when a good many of Buchan's contemporaries were venerating Freud's ideas as a uniquely powerful way of understanding the self.

Another way of comprehending the self, as Buchan recognized, was through the historical sway of myth. Central to Ehland's analysis of *Mr Standfast*, for instance, is the tension Buchan builds into the novel between ideas of an idyllic English rurality and the various forms of urban modernity, the garden city among them, encroaching upon it. The 'myth' of Englishness that Hannay articulates in *Mr Standfast* when he puts 'peace, deep and holy and ancient' in the

same basket as a typically green and verdant English landscape of 'little fields enclosed with walls of grey stone and full of dim sheep', rolling hills and streams slipping among 'water-meadows' stands as a local sign of Buchan's more general concern with different mythic forms at this moment in history.<sup>34</sup> Douglas Kerr develops this point in his essay 'John Buchan, Myth, and Modernism' through an analysis of the links between Buchan's novel *The Dancing Floor* (1926) and the understandings of mythological history advanced in Sir James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890). This text, fundamental to any comprehensive grasp of modernist literature's stylistic and thematic innovations, helps us see how Buchan used myth to underpin his investigations of irrationalism and of the thin line between civilization and barbarism. Frazer's influence upon such writers as Gilbert Murray and Jessie L. Weston is also relevant here, as Kerr demonstrates in his study of how Buchan and his modernist contemporaries were products of a shared mythological inheritance communicated through anthropological discourse. Such shared inheritance forces us as critics to ask questions about the institutional separation of popular early twentieth-century writers and the modernists to whom they have traditionally been opposed, for, as Kerr rightly understands, texts like *The Dancing Floor* can in a more productive spirit be seen as in dialogue with the very modernisms from which academic criticism has often tried to separate them.

Buchan's responses to artistic modernism might more profitably be understood as a series of ambivalences rather than a simple 'rejection' of an approach to art with which he had little in common. Likewise, the renewed attention to the periodical cultures through which modernism came into being needs to be matched by an increased focus on the parallel periodical networks from which middlebrow literature is inextricable. On that note, a promising new stream of research from periodical studies has revealed Buchan's presence within the American 'pulp' magazines in the 1910s and 1920s, magazines which serialized *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Mr Standfast* as well as numerous other texts to Buchan's material and cultural profit. Patrick Belk in his chapter, 'Buchan and the American Pulp Magazines', addresses this unfamiliar context in several fascinating ways: he demonstrates how, unlike such authors as H. Rider Haggard and H. G. Wells, for instance, Buchan himself promoted his fiction in the American pulp market without using third-party representation; he shows how Buchan's exploitation of that market was a direct result of his experience of working for the publishing house Thomas Nelson & Sons; and he argues that Richard Hannay's emergence as a distinctive character in Buchan's *oeuvre* is inseparable from Buchan's negotiation of transatlantic publishing, new media and textual and cultural 'codes'. More than this, though, Belk suggests that Buchan's handling of his pulp serializations can be thought of as in some ways analogous to Hannay's management of the growing number of texts – newspapers, notebooks, novels and more – that he encoun-

ters as he moves through the wartime landscapes of modernity. Hannay emerges in Belk's account of Buchan's work as rather more than the adventure hero he is often (albeit rightly) taken to be, inasmuch as he comes into view as an expert traveller through the modern mediascape in ways directly correlative to Buchan's own experiences in the American pulp magazine market. This parallel shows that Buchan's sensitivity to the textual cultures of his time offered not only food for imaginative thought, but also a way of marketing his work in an over-determined 'print space' in which one had to be Hannay-like to survive.

Buchan's management of his placement within early twentieth-century print culture can and should be seen as an attempt at situating himself more effectively within a changed media zone, a new landscape altered by the rise of different kinds of consumers and by the transformation of accepted habits of reading, publishing and writing. However, the contrast between Buchan's London life as a publisher, in the thick of modernity and all its technological accoutrements, and the traditional rhythms of country life that he would celebrate in much of his interwar fiction, would have encouraged reflections on how the two modes of existence would ever be reconciled. By 1921 he had emerged from the War and had recovered from the worst of his post-war grief and exhaustion. He turned to the countryside, where he bought a house, and commuted to London during the week for many years. Throughout this period he was also aware of increasing political fermentation, outside and within British politics, as the popularity of the Communist Party, in Britain and more widely in Europe, rose to a peak in the immediate post-war years. Pilvi Rajamäe shows in her chapter, 'What Kind of Heritage? Modernity versus Heritage in *Huntingtower*', how, in writing *Huntingtower* (1922), Buchan combined these concerns about conflict and discords, wrapping the tensions in an old-fashioned narrative of romance and chivalry. There is a conscious symbiosis in this novel that Rajamäe locates in many of its elements. Romanticism heals confusion about how to live a modern life with an old-fashioned set of attitudes, and tension is resolved by the old-fashioned remedy of physical action. Rajamäe extends the trope of the old versus the new onto the locus of the conflict, the ugly modern country house built in a composite old-fashioned style. Her reading of Edwardian architectural history, and the critiques of it advanced in *Country Life* magazine, reveal a hitherto-unexamined aspect of Buchan's grasp of 'living' modernity.

New critical contexts for Buchan's novels of the 1910s and 1920s can be hard to locate, as it is precisely these texts which have received the most scholarly attention during the past fifty or so years. His poetry has been far less studied. It was the natural occupation of a classicist and a scholar to write poetry, as a matter of course, and the sheer volume of the poetry reviews that Buchan contributed to the *Spectator* in the immediate pre-war years shows how popular a form it was. Yet Buchan was not willingly drawn towards the poetry of modernism: he

reviewed it, but did not follow it in his own work. His own poetry drew from the traditional Scottish forms and the work of the conventional Georgians. Buchan was also an anthologist of Scots verse, and this led him towards the burgeoning Scottish Renaissance. Ryan Shirey's chapter, 'Living Speech, Dying Tongues and Reborn Language: John Buchan and Scots Vernacular Poetry', shows how Buchan's early association with Hugh MacDiarmid originated in Buchan's view that Scots was both a spoken and a literary language. In this important contribution to the study of Buchan as a poet, Shirey shows how the literary context to MacDiarmid's project complicates Buchan's concerns about the vitality of Scots as part of twentieth-century modernity. For Buchan, Scots enabled the creative expression of his feelings about, among other things, home and loss, expressed in the rich vocabulary and speech patterns that evoke both familiarity and strangeness. Yet his own Scots poetry was often produced at a physical distance from the wellspring of the language itself, Scotland. He noted, in a preface to Violet Jacob's *Songs of Angus* (1915), that '[i]t is the rarest thing, this use of Scots as a living tongue, and perhaps only the exile can achieve it ... [T]he exile uses the Doric because it is the means by which he can best express his importunate longing'.<sup>35</sup> But although Buchan was prominent in initial attempts to revivify twentieth-century Scots poetry, he was later exiled from the ranks of the important figures of (and to) the Scottish Renaissance by MacDiarmid, and his own work as a Scots poet who struggled to reconcile a seemingly moribund tongue with the demands of both living traditions and modern innovations is often ignored or unacknowledged.

Shirey's chapter explores Buchan's Scots poetry in the context of his evolving views on the Scots vernacular, the relationship of literature to modernity and the role played by writers such as Jacob and MacDiarmid in giving birth to a sustainable and modern Scots literary culture. By contrast, the final chapter in the book brings Buchan's engagement with modernity to its final, and most globally visible phase, as Governor-General of Canada from 1935 to 1940. J. William Galbraith's analysis of Buchan's political role in modernizing the function of this delicate pseudo-diplomatic, quasi-plenipotential role shows in hitherto unpublished detail how Buchan, or Lord Tweedsmuir, as he was by this time, carried out his role as Governor-General and how this performance established the model for the Canadian Governor-General that remains relevant today. Galbraith uses a framework for examining Tweedsmuir's time in Canada that is constructed around the various roles that a Governor-General plays. The Governor-General's performance in the Canadian parliament is excluded, as this is a more formal, set role and involves the Crown's reserve powers. Rather, this chapter examines those roles that Tweedsmuir played and could influence by virtue of his character, experience, varied careers and outlook: described here as his 'superbly cumulative' life, all within the then-new context for a Gover-

nor-General which had been created by the 1931 Statute of Westminster. The chapter is formed of two parts: the first involves what can be described as the more traditional, softer or more subjective and more visible activities of a Governor-General: first, reaching out to Canadians through travel and speeches; and second, the encouragement of excellence and recognizing individual achievement. Both these dimensions contribute to creating a sense of community, of belonging, which is a key role for the sovereign or his or her representative. The second part involves the often less publicly visible, or harder, issues that involve governance, that is of a Governor-General as statesman, at both the national and international levels. Galbraith recalls Walter Bagehot's 'trinity of rights' due to the sovereign or his or her representative – to be consulted, to encourage and to warn. The focus of the chapter is largely on the relationship between Lord Tweedsmuir and his first minister, Mackenzie King, and pays close attention to Tweedsmuir as an active modernizing force in modern politics, particularly during that most modern of high political acts, the negotiations before and after, and the media coverage of, the abdication of a king.

Taken as a whole, these chapters indicate the breadth and scope of Buchan's achievements in literary, political, popular and philosophical terms. Buchan was a thriller-writer, but he was also a novelist, a statesman, a publisher and an engaged critic of the modern forms of life he, as well as many others, experienced. *John Buchan and the Idea of Modernity*, then, is intended as a clarion call to those familiar with only a small sampling of Buchan's work to keep on reading his texts in all their different forms and styles, and a friendly reminder to those already *au fait* with Buchan's *oeuvre* to stay alert to his complexities, difficulties and nuances. Buchan in 'Return to Masterpieces' (1937) wrote that '[i]t is enormous fun to browse at large over the wide domain of literature, and one may pick up some surprising treasures in unlikely places.'<sup>36</sup> It is also enlightening to browse at large over the wide domain of Buchan's own literatures, within which one is almost certain pick up some surprising riches in likely, as well as unlikely, locations. This quality in his writing has made him beloved as an author for generations. It remains to be seen whether Buchan's work will acquire the title of a collection of 'masterpieces', but among that work no shortage of thought-provoking, modern and thoroughly complicated textualities is to be found.