

# “And melodrama has become the prosiest realism”

Representations of wartime masculine heroism and romanticism in  
John Buchan’s Great War Spy Novels

Word count: 21,029

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A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Vergelijkende Moderne Letterkunde

Academic year: 2017 – 2018

De auteur en de promotor(en) geven de toelating deze studie als geheel voor consultatie beschikbaar te stellen voor persoonlijk gebruik. Elk ander gebruik valt onder de beperkingen van het auteursrecht, in het bijzonder met betrekking tot de verplichting de bron uitdrukkelijk te vermelden bij het aanhalen van gegevens uit deze studie.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank Prof. dr. Guido Latré for taking me under his wings under unusual circumstances in the middle of the year, even though he already had so many students to guide. Changing my tack, abandoning my previous topic and choosing to continue my bachelor paper's research has been one of my best choices of 2018 so far. Prof. Latré has always given me the freedom to steer my topic in my own direction and his speedy feedback has been greatly appreciated. I have enjoyed absorbing myself in the Great War and its particular zeitgeist.

Furthermore, I would like to thank my boyfriend who encouraged me to take my time and patiently helped me back on track when I could not see the woods for trees anymore. Lastly, I thank my parents for their continuous support and their fruit salads and my friends for the countless pleasant breaks from writing my dissertation.

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## 1. Introduction

There is not anything more wonderful  
Than a great people moving towards the deep  
Of an unguessed and unfeared future; nor  
Is aught so dear of all held dear before  
As the new passion stirring in their veins  
When the destroying Dragon wakes from sleep<sup>1</sup>.

It is 1914 when John Freeman writes down these bold words. The British people firmly stand tall before an unknown challenge. Over one million Britons have not yet met their maker, Ypres' city hall still looks over the Flanders Fields, and 1.5 billion shells were still to be fired<sup>2</sup>. 710,000 British men had enlisted and were ready to slay the Dragon: the evil Boche and his allies. The text quoted above was only one of the many poems of 1914 which expressed an adventurous spirit in the context of the war. Indeed, the British expected to win the war with their eyes closed in a quick, but effective battle. By Christmas they would be back in their snug homes, eating turkey and staying warm by the homefires. The reality proved otherwise: four years later, they would still be in the mud, in the trenches, with little food and tons of rats, waiting for a war that seemed to be endless. The disillusionment of the First World War became a topic that literary critics explored time and again, becoming more and more convinced that the depths of disenchantment were unfathomable. The words of Philip Larkin's poem *MCMXIV* (1914) prophetically encapsulated what was to come: "never such innocence again". This paper will walk the road towards disillusionment in the opposite direction: it will deal with the persistent romanticism of the war, and in particular with those writers who without any irony kept addressing the war in terms of adventure, unconditional patriotism and bellicosity. It investigates how they armed themselves against disenchantment.

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<sup>1</sup> Poem cited from <https://allpoetry.com/Happy-is-England-Now#sthash.2DFuPFcl.dpuf>. Date of Access: 2/07/2018.

<sup>2</sup> 1,5 billion shells were fired in WWI. Source: Beardsley, Eleanor. "WWI Munitions Still Live Beneath Western Front." *NPR*, 11 november 2007, <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=16131857>. Date of Access: 2/07/2018.

This paper springs from a bachelor paper I wrote in 2017<sup>3</sup>. It explored Achiel van Walleghem's *Oorlogsdagboeken 1914-1918* and Ralph Hamilton's *The War Diary of the Master of Belhaven 1914-1918*, the former a diary of a priest in Dikkebusch, the latter an interpreter and colonel of the British army in Ypres and France. It allowed me to examine British attitudes in the Great War by means of a Belgian representation of the British as well as a British representation of the Belgians in a context of romantic chivalry and spy mania. Achiel van Walleghem observed countless accusations of Belgian espionage against the British, while Ralph Hamilton often sensed that the Germans must have been aided by (Belgian) spies, otherwise they would not have suffered that many losses. Even though the British in fact were fighting for Belgium's liberation, they simultaneously distrusted the damsel in distress they were trying to save. Great Britain was struck by spy mania, a deep-rooted conviction that spies were lurking in the distance, or even in their midst. Paranoia about spies was an issue in all countries involved in the war, but Thomas Boghardt argues that it was the British public which developed a "fever" (Verhey). Naturally, as civilians like Van Walleghem were often suspected by the British, who were being billeted in their houses and overran their lands, they created their own view on the British. It appeared that the British were commonly represented as pretentious and relentlessly patriotic, and that they indulged in an unyielding sense of superiority. Moreover, whereas wartime propagandist publications often alluded to chivalry, both diaries also indicated that the British still cling to chivalric tactics as well: sacrifice, raids and open warfare were still deemed beneficial. Furthermore, both Van Walleghem and Hamilton – to a lesser degree – noticed that the British had their flaws: the destructiveness of the British, their lack of concern when they occupied the farmers' fields, as well as their plain reckless behaviour damaged their image as brave knights. However, I argued that romantic notions of chivalry persisted until the end of the war, as Van Walleghem's account demonstrates. When all goes down, the British still have their chivalry to cling to. Whether chivalry still works is not the question for them. Rather the symbolic value of the chivalric notions and the sense of greatness it cultivates, gives way to a more hopeful and inviolable position during the Great War. This could be connected to their spy mania as well: should Great Britain fail, the fault would not entirely be their own. Devious spies, whether German, Belgian or French, would be the actual culprits of their defeat. Van Walleghem noticed that as naïve as such convictions may be, this inviolable sense of superiority has always contributed to the

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<sup>3</sup> Paper: *The Great War and Suspect Belgian Civilians in Achiel van Walleghem's Oorlogsdagboeken 1914-1918 and Ralph Hamilton's The War Diary of the Master of Belhaven 1914-1918* (2017). Supervisor: Prof. dr. Guido Latré

endurance of the British. The best medicine for war-weariness, it seems, is chivalry, romanticism and patriotism.

In this paper then, we will have a look at a British author who actively disseminated these romantic ideals to the British people. Again, the starting point is spy mania. In the Edwardian age the upcoming obsession with spies had its roots. One of the clearest symptoms of this is the development of the spy novel in the same period. In the case of Great Britain, it is a subgenre of the novel which would foreground a secret agent who uncovers foreign spies, often dressed up as civilians such as barbers, waiters or bakers. It is a genre which is naturally endowed with a certain amount of romanticism due to its adventurous undertone, its battle of good (British) vs. evil (foreigners) and a vision of the empire. Put in the context of the Great War, which also puts an emphasis on adventure, good vs. evil and empire, the genre of the spy novel is especially fascinating to look at. Since adventure is unmistakably interwoven with heroism, I will examine representations of (romantic) heroism in the Great War in the spy novel. John Buchan's war fiction seemed to be best cut out for this endeavour. In the course of the war, John Buchan wrote three novels which focused on Richard Hannay, a colonial from South Africa who ends up being a self-made secret agent, protecting the empire against evil spies through cunning and courage. His first novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) is one of the most widely read spy novels. In 1916, *Greenmantle* followed as a sequel. *Mr Standfast* was written in July 1917 and July 1918, but was published in 1919. Two other Hannay novels appeared after the war, but as I am exploring the relation between heroism, romanticism and espionage during the Great War, I will not touch upon those.

Before the war the Scotsman John Buchan (1875-1940) was active as a journalist, novelist, lawyer and civil servant during the reconstruction of South Africa after the Boer War. Once the Great War broke out, he was already too old and medically unfit to enlist as a soldier, which frustrated him deeply. Nevertheless, he was able to occupy various positions which enabled him to fulfil his patriotic duty anyway. He wrote for the British War Propaganda Bureau, was a correspondent in France for *The Times*, and worked as a second lieutenant in the Intelligence Corps. By 1917 Buchan worked as the Director of Information for the Ministry of Information, the British organ responsible for propaganda. In the meantime, he wrote *Nelson's History of the War*, a historical account of the Great War written in 24 volumes, which is now deemed a romantic, patriotic treatment of the war ingrained with propagandistic sentiments, rather than a realistic account. It might be clear by now, that this small wartime biography of Buchan serves a twofold purpose. On the one hand, his wartime occupations

affirm that Buchan was a supporter of the war. None of his speeches, letters or articles indicate anything else than pure patriotism (Macdonald, 8). On the other hand, it raises the question how Buchan as a historian, propagandist, lieutenant and novelist relate to each other. To what degree did his knowledge of facts affect his fiction? Hew Strachan stressed that although both *Greenmantle* and *Mr Standfast* appear to be fantasy, both “pivoted on threats that were with good reason regarded as potentially subversive of both Britain and its empire” (304). Novels are never written from a neutral position, but Buchan’s case is definitely a particular one which needs to be at least touched upon before approaching his fiction. On top of the fact that Buchan gained a lot of useful inspiration and knowledge through his wartime endeavours, many critics like to highlight that Buchan’s novels were “vehicles for his ideas and beliefs, a way of propagating values that he thought important through heroes who were often based on real people and – in some cases – autobiographical” (Strachan, 324). Furthermore, Strachan argues that Buchan saw propaganda as a form of truth-telling, a means to impart information (324). Before one dismisses Buchan’s fiction as cheap conventional propaganda, one has to keep in mind that his intention never was to consciously mislead his readers in order to appease them. In the end, Buchan would choose to propagate those things he considered valuable for the British people, rather than what is beneficial for the authorities. Admittedly, Buchan did propagate his “ideas and beliefs” throughout his war trilogy, but upon further reading it is clear that his opinions sometimes did divert from more conventional ideas of heroism, masculinity and the cause of the war – a subject I will focus on more sharply in this dissertation, often in the light of romanticism.

Buchan’s novels were widely read. By 1960, Hannay novels had sold several hundred thousand copies. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* alone sold over a million and a half (Stafford, “John Buchan’s Tales” 2). His influence on the public morale is not to be underestimated. Buchan had many serving soldiers expressing their enthusiasm in their letters to him (Stafford, “John Buchan’s Tales” 7). Furthermore, Stafford argues that given models of the clubland hero of the spy novel were “a touchstone by which men in the real world of action sometimes measured their own behaviour” (“John Buchan’s Tales” 2). It is not too surprising then, that Samuel Hynes claimed in his influential work *A War Imagined* that Buchan’s greatest influence on the way Englishmen thought and felt about the war not through his propaganda work, but through the Hannay novels, “which made the war both a moral melodrama and a history lesson for Englishmen” (45).

Buchan called his novels “shockers”, which he described as “the romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible” (“foreword to *The Thirty-Nine Steps*” 1). The story itself generally involves swift action, dramatic situations, physical activity, and tension. Later it became an umbrella term to depict detective fiction, the thriller, the spy story and the wartime adventure (Macdonald, 158). In the light of this dissertation, it will be fruitful to place Buchan’s war trilogy first within the frameworks of espionage fiction and the adventure story. Both genres bear their own implications, associations and historical relevance. For the adventure story, for instance, Martin Green’s influential work *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (1978) serves as a central focal point in this dissertation. His theory about the adventure story and its intertwinement with empire will give us a deeper insight into Buchan’s motivations to work within the genre. Furthermore, the next chapters will establish how the historical context of the Great War had a far-reaching influence on the development of the espionage genre as well as the adventure story and vice versa. All this will be placed in the particular literary context of the Great War by the means of both Samuel Hynes’ *A War Imagined* (1990) and the well-known work by Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975). With the help of these valuable works, I will be able to show how Buchan’s choice to borrow from both genres enhanced his tendency to spread his ideas and beliefs as the war progressed. Equally important is that these genres contain some pre-existing heroic models Buchan could borrow from: the gentleman hero of the spy novel, the adventure hero, and the soldier hero.

Finally, a certain amount of attention will be paid to gender theory. Especially in the war when men were supposed to be fighting the battles and women were expected to be keeping the homefires burning, it is nearly impossible to write about heroism without addressing the issue of masculinity. As the eyes of the whole world were on the masculine soldiers, it is plausible that masculinity was being revalued at the same time. In the preceding decades psychologists and sexologists like Krafft-Ebing and Freud had already been searching for the essence of masculinity. As the women movement and prominent homosexuals like Oscar Wilde disrupted the conventional order, the gender debate arose. Ultimately, when a battle of unprecedented proportions broke out the time was right to measure these new findings against the reality of the war.

In this dissertation I will combine genre theory of the adventure story and the spy novel while taking into consideration some gender theory. However, the main question that I will be occupied with is the one concerning John Buchan’s representations of heroism. To what degree

does John Buchan's ideal hero fluctuate in accordance with the developments of the war? If John Buchan did propagate his own ideas on the war through his novel, how does his portrayal of the hero interrelate with this? As both the genre of the adventure tale and the spy novel will prove to be genres that are intrinsically rooted in a specific historical context, each of the novels, which were all written during different stages of the war, will provide its own conceptualisation of the war, its heroes, and the strategy to triumph. Finally, as Buchan reached a wide and – as shown above – enthusiastic audience, his novels are an interesting case to look at in the light of romanticism since it could debunk the image of an entirely disillusioned nation. Therefore, while it is already established that John Buchan had a romantic soul, I will examine whether (and/or how) his romanticism outlasted the increasingly ironic, disillusioned visions of the war as its tragedy became apparent.

## 2. The Noble Adventure of the Secret Agent

### 2.1. The Spy Novel and its Mania

Firstly, it might be adequate to have a look at the conventions of the spy novel – the main genre that Buchan borrowed from. David Stafford provides a satisfactory summary:

First, they [spy novels] were conservative in ethos. Second they were patriotic and often imperialist, accepting and exploiting racist and xenophobic stereotypes. Secret agent heroes were presented as English gentlemen acting out of disinterested patriotic motives, while their opponents were always foreigners, invariably mercenary, and very often (especially in the case of Le Queux), Jewish. Third, women and the feminine world were portrayed as dangerous either because of the fascinating attraction they held for men who were too ready to impart vital secrets to them, or because their feminine weakness hampered the exercise of masculine action. Successful secret agents were therefore generally bachelors with no tiresome obligations to women. (“John Buchan’s Tales” 12)

As Stafford maintains as well, in most respects Buchan conforms to these conventions, apart from some superficial differences (12). Touching upon the ways in which he conforms and diverts in detail would lead us too far and would only be a repetition of Stafford’s arguments. It suffices to say at this stage that it is definitely feasible to treat the Hannay books as spy novels in the conventional sense. In the context of this dissertation, it is more important to lay bare the consequences and connotations of the genre.

In critical works, the spy novel has generally been treated as a moral literary genre. The stereotyped figure of the British gentleman as a secret agent in adversity to a foreign spy, served as a “symbol of stability in response to fundamental changes in the nature of Britain’s place within the international system and to processes within British society which were perceived as threatening important elements of the social status quo” (Stafford, “Spies and Gentlemen” 491). The genre developed in the late Victorian age, but more especially during the Edwardian age. The focus in these novels was often the Edwardian unease about national security, as complex alliance systems and armament races emanated (Hepburn, 10). Xenophobic paranoia arose as the Empire seemed more and more threatened by foreign players (Hepburn, 11). It was not immediately Germany that was portrayed as the biggest threat. For a long time France and Russia used to play the villain role alongside Germany in these novels. These novels did not only address international political fears, but also the internal disorder, social decline and

decadence. Thus, the leitmotif in spy fiction almost always had something to do with the national strength of Britain, or the lack of it (Stafford, “Spies and Gentlemen” 500). In order to save the Empire, British espionage emerged as a necessary action. The Empire was no longer governed by divine intervention, but needed human intervention to take matters into own hands (Stafford, “Spies and Gentlemen” 491). The heroism of the character in the spy novel thus derived from their role as the saviour of the nation.

The most common hero of the genre is the “clubland hero”, the British gentleman with a particular liking for whisky and soda, armchairs and pipe smoking. The ideal gentleman was “scrupulous, dutiful, fair, and loyal to country, family, and God” and he was prepared to do whatever is asked out of a sense of duty to his country (Stafford, “Spies and Gentlemen” 503). Certainly Hannay fits adequately into this description. Already on the third page of *The Thirty Nine Steps* Hannay and his visitor treat themselves with whisky-and-soda while Hannay “sat down in an armchair and lit [his] pipe” (Buchan, 7). The institution of Clubland, of which Hannay was a part, was a network of men’s clubs as an alternative for domestic life. It was a place meant for bachelors, often recruited from public schools, Oxford and Cambridge or professional institutions (Showalter, 11). Many of these clubs were dedicated to a special interest like politics, sports or art. The one thing they had in common was the fact that they wished to exclude women, and not seldom this was accompanied by misogynist thought. One could ask oneself how the figure of the sly spy who more than once gets involved in criminal activities – Hannay steals several cars in the course of his war trilogy and lies incessantly – could be compatible with that of the gentleman. If decline and decadence were a major worry of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, how could one defend the immoral actions of the gentleman spy? His motives might be noble, but endeavours like blackmail, threats, lying and stealing are unquestionably dubious. Even worse at the time was that the spy concealed its identity, which was the ultimate sign of cowardice (Ambler, 12). The fact that the French infantrymen still wore blue coats and scarlet trousers in 1914 instead of khaki, proves the tenacity of this conviction that to camouflage one’s identity was a disgrace (Ambler, 13). Ultimately the task of the spy novelist was to convince the reader of the necessity of espionage as a means of self-defence. Secondly, the novel should stress that his activities did not affect his position as a gentleman. A simple word-play often did the trick equally well: only by changing the word “spy” into “secret agent” a different light was shed on the actions of the gentleman (Stafford, “Spies and Gentlemen” 507).

The genre developed even more elaborately as the espionage system in Britain increased simultaneously. Before 1907 espionage involved some payments to amateur agents in return for information, but no comprehensive system existed yet (Hiley, 868). In 1873, however, the Intelligence Department came into existence and quickly became the most important branch of War Office. In 1889 the first Official Secrets Act was passed, which was replaced in 1911 by the more stringent second Official Secrets Act. In 1887 the Naval Intelligence Board was established. As a war with Germany seemed more and more inevitable, intelligence became more organised. By 1909 the counter-intelligence service, known as the MI5, and the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) followed as a part of the British secret service. All this indicated an increased sense of vulnerability and fear of invasion, which in their turn made their mark on the popular literature (Stafford, "Spies and Gentlemen" 496). Novels like Le Queux' *Spies of the Kaiser* (1909) incorporated these fears seamlessly: German spies hid in London and the east coast, dressed up as waiters, barbers, and tourists (French, 357). From 1901 until the war started "there was not a year which did not see a novel by Le Queux, Oppenheim, or some other popular writer dealing with the successful British defeat of an enemy espionage conspiracy" (Stafford, "Spies and Gentlemen" 497). These stories in combination with the popular press which published similar stories regularly, contributed to spy mania (Stafford, "Spies and Gentlemen" 498). Furthermore, as Hiley argued, the Intelligence Department failed, being an impressive organisation, but never very successful : "the service intelligence departments laid down so precisely the type of information they needed and the areas from which it was wanted that the answers from espionage were determined solely by the questions it was asked" (Hiley, 888). Just like Oppenheim's and Le Queux's novels, the rumour of the 'swarm of spies' which supposedly invaded the Empire, mainly increased the ill-feeling between England and Germany rather than increasing the safety of the nation. (Hiley, 888).

It is no coincidence that in Fussell's significant work *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1977), espionage is dealt with in the chapter "Myth, Ritual and Romance". According to Fussell, the Great War seemed "especially fertile in rumor and legend" (115). As it roots, Fussell points to the immensity and grotesqueness of the Great War, as was never seen before in any other war. It was as if anything was possible. Spy mania in most cases can be equalled to rumour, as the actual proportions of the ubiquitous spies was never proven. David French likewise calls the story of the evil spy a "myth" (355). Nevertheless, it was a widely believed myth. As I showed in my earlier paper on Achiel Van Wallegem, it was not uncommon for soldiers to believe that local civilians sent signals to the Germans by ploughing their fields in a

specific manner, for instance. Moreover, until the last years of the war, the British had the tendency to blame malicious spies for their own failures. This is something I claimed in my paper as well, but also Fussell (121) and David French (367) touch upon this tendency. David French lays bare the far-reaching consequences of spy mania in his article “Spy Fever in Britain 1900-1915”. For instance, in 1910 a new Official Secrets Bill was passed by Haldane and Sir Charles Ottley, which made it possible to prosecute someone as a spy if there was a ‘moral certainty’, without any prove needed (French, 361). Interferences of the government, stories like Le Queux’s in which anyone could be a spy and consistent germanophobia kept the spy fever alive, even if it was mainly bred in rumour. Indeed, much like the adventure tale, espionage and consequently the spy novel were endowed with a good deal of mythical and romantic thinking.

## 2.2. The War: A Call to Adventure

### 2.2.1. The Great War Adventure Tale

In their introduction of *Heroes and Heroism in British Fiction. Concepts and Conjunctures* (2017) Barbara Korte and Stefanie Lethbridge clearly make a connection between espionage fiction and “traditional male heroism” (22). As mentioned earlier, the secret agent naturally embodies the hero-figure, as he reconstructs the unity in the Empire. Spy novels, especially Buchan’s, and adventure fiction are tied together on several levels. For instance, Martin Green devoted an entire book to the interconnectedness of the modern empire and adventure: *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire*. He calls adventures tales “the energizing myth of English imperialism”, moreover, “they were, collectively, the story England told itself as it went to sleep at night; and in the form of its dreams, they charged England’s will with the energy to go out into the world and explore, conquer, and rule” (Green, 3). Empire, he argues, is where adventure takes place and men become heroes (37). Empire is thus an important common factor of both adventure fiction and the spy novel. Additionally, Martin Green’s definition of the adventure story will clarify their relation even further:

In general, adventure seems to mean a series of events, partly but not wholly accidental, in settings remote from the domestic and probably from the civilized (at least in the psychological sense of remote), which constitute a challenge to the central character. In meeting this challenge, he/she performs a series of exploits which make him/her a hero, eminent in virtues such as courage, fortitude, cunning, strength, leadership, and persistence. (Green, 23)

Indeed, Hannay’s adventures are mostly accidental – for instance, a dead body appears in his apartment during *The Thirty-Nine Steps* – and are often in remote settings. His intelligence work takes him to Scotland, Austria and Germany among other places. His challenge is often to uncover the anonymous spy which, if he succeeds, ultimately changes the course of the war. For this he needs the virtues mentioned above, which, by attaining them, paves the way towards heroism. However, to be even more precise, Hannay embarks upon a “modernist” adventure. Green identifies the modernist adventure mainly by the tools and techniques the hero uses during progress of his adventure. The tools are modern inventions like guns and general scientific knowledge. Techniques are more abstract notions such as “the conviction of righteousness” or “any rationalized and systematized and demystified habits of thought”, so in short, modern thinking (Green, 23). There are no elves or magic to guide Richard Hannay on

his quest, and as a modernist secret agent he is bound to fall back on his own cunning to solve the riddles, with guns to face his adversary if needed.

In his dedication to *Greenmantle* it becomes evident that Buchan did not see heroism in fiction and in reality necessarily as two different things:

Let no man or woman call its events improbable. The war has driven that word from our vocabulary, and melodrama has become the prosiest realism.

Samuel Hynes invokes this citation to point out the endurance of romance in literature during the Great War. The dedication was written in August 1916, the second month of the Somme offensive, which turned out to be one of the Great War's most brutal slaughters. Even though the Somme proved to be a model for the war of attrition, with systematic violence and few results, heroism and romance were not absent from popular vocabulary yet. Both H.G. Wells and the scholar Gilbert Murray described the Great War as a "heroic age", which leads Hynes to the conclusion that romance and melodrama were being restored as versions of the truth (111).

One could wonder how romance could still prevail in the common language of the Great War in an age where rationality seems to govern everyday life. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Max Weber proposed the phrase "entzauberung" (disenchantment) to characterise modernity: rationality ultimately triumphed over belief and mysticism. Ever since the Victorian age, society has been rationalised, democratised, routinized, bureaucratised and increasingly consumerist (Korte et al, 16). Korte and Lethbridge argue that entzauberung did not lead to the collapse of the heroic, but rather an extension of the social scope in which heroes could act, that is to say, in terms of gender and class (16-17). Be that as it may, once the war broke out and its inherent horrors became manifest, heroism had to face a much larger challenge than just entzauberung. Consequently, many critics, among which Bernard Bergonzi in *Heroes Twilight*, equates the Great War with the end of the myth of military heroism. How could writers like Buchan, Brereton and Lynn keep selling their adventure tales to a large public until the end of the war? Even with popular critical war poets like Sassoon and Owen, it is an oversimplification to state that the Great War debunked all romantic stances towards heroism.

Graham Dawson demonstrates the co-existence of both dystopian and utopian narratives during the Great War by invoking Northrop Frye's structuralist analysis of the adventure. Whereas the adventure imagines, according to Frye, "a utopian world more exciting, benevolent and fulfilling than our own", narrative modes of irony and tragedy construct a dystopian

nightmare of human suffering (55). Romance and fantasy thus co-existed with horror and irony during the Great War. Moreover, one could claim that romance was perhaps the most common manner in which to speak about the war. Rupert Brooke remained the most popular war poet during the Great War, expressing themes of glory, honour, sacrifice, heroism and England (Hynes, 109). Though the anti-heroic fiction of Sassoon, Blunden and Owen reached a large public as well, popular novels kept producing stories around soldier heroes during and after the war (Hynes, 356). Again, it is productive to call upon Fussell in order to further explain this persistence of romance. A returning motif among soldiers who tried to turn their experiences into an adequate language, was the incommunicability of the events of the Great War. By using “precedent motifs and images”, like popular romance, “unprecedented meaning” could be transferred (Fussell, 139). To conclude, since the language of the adventure tale was an easy language to rely on, it did not entirely succumb to the pressures which the atrocities of the Great War put on it, especially in popular fiction like Buchan’s. As a conventional genre which is intertwined with essential concerns of war, such as empire and heroism, it serves as an adequate framework to work with. In the next paragraphs, I will touch upon the social and cultural function which the hero itself fulfilled within the conventions of the genre. Gradually, it will become more evident why Buchan chose the adventure story to spread his ideals of social behaviour and thought during the war.

### 2.2.2. The Great War Adventure Hero

In an adventure tale, the hero is the central figure. Geoffrey Cubitt offers a useful definition of the hero. A hero, according to Cubitt, is

Any man or woman whose existence [...] is endowed by others, not just with a high degree of fame and honour, but with a special allocation of imputed meaning and symbolic significance – that not only raises them above others in public esteem but makes them the object of some kind of collective emotional investment. (3)

The importance of this definition for this dissertation is the emphasis on a “collective emotional investment”. This definition explicitly places the hero in a social environment, in which the hero embodies cultural values and “symbolic significance”. The hero’s heroism is not an inherent quality, but only endowed upon him by others. Indeed, the hero serves an important societal function: they “crystallise the ideals and norms of a society, or groups within a society (who may be conformist or oppositional) and they can contribute to the building, maintenance or destruction of communities” (Korte et al, 4). Additionally, Korte and Lethbridge refer to Robert Folkenflik, who claims that heroes not only serve a societal function, they are a plain

necessity: “we can hardly do without heroes of some sort, for the idea of heroism is a mirror of an age’s very conception of itself at its best” (4). For ages, the model behaviour of the hero has been a figure to measure oneself to and can at the same time “create social cohesion, an imaginative community that supports certain values and rejects others” (Korte et al, 5). Naturally, social cohesion is vital for a realm involved in an international conflict, as Buchan would undoubtedly be conscious of as a minister of propaganda. Thus, what better way to achieve this goal than through the creation of a fearless hero like Hannay?

It is uncertain to what extent these adventure tales could fulfil their societal role in the creation of a cohesive nation. Nevertheless, Fussell revealed how Victorian romances of Tennyson and Mallory did leave their marks on young soldiers entering into war. Famous is his example of *The Well at the World’s End* (1896) by William Morris, a moral adventure tale of which Fussell claims that “there was hardly a literate man who fought between 1914 and 1918 who hadn’t read it and been powerfully excited by it in his youth” (135). In combination with other patriotic writings in the press and poetry, there was an expectation that the war indeed would be an exciting adventure. Furthermore, with democratic decorations like the V.C., which was the “premier award for gallantry” and simultaneously a decoration which could be awarded to “all ranks of the services”, anyone could become a hero during the First World War (Einhaus, 89). In addition to the professionalisation of the army (initially) based on volunteers, millions aspired to become a hero (Einhaus, 86). But who is this hero, then? What qualities, skills and characteristics are required to be considered heroic? Indeed, as Korte and Lethbridge point out as well, conceptualisations of ‘the hero’ are not fixed, but dynamic and fluid (2). Moreover, “the scale and nature of what was considered heroic expanded drastically in the course of the First World War,” Einhaus maintains (88). Early on, it became evident that precedent aspects of heroism would not necessarily be workable any longer. Modern warfare and heroism, it seemed, were not effortlessly compatible due to the difficulties that came along with trench warfare. However, fairly quickly new alternatives for traditional individual heroics emerged: “the rescue of dead or wounded comrades from No Man’s Land, the trench raid, the single-handed taking out of a machine gun” (Einhaus, 85). To guide the British people in this transition of heroism writers like John Buchan could offer a steady guide towards heroism, offering inspiration and encouragement for the incipient hero. Likewise, it will be evident in the analysis of the Hannay novels that as the war progressed, conceptualisation of the hero fluctuated with it.

### 2.3. Heroism and Masculinity: the Masculine War Hero

It is unquestionable that the war challenged, threatened and enlarged the notion of heroism. Moreover, the redefinition of heroism coincided with the questioning of masculinity. One cannot talk about war heroism without touching upon the ubiquity of the question of masculinity. Einhaus refers to Meyer's assertion that war during the Great War and even still today is perceived as "a sphere of masculine attainment and suffering" (86). Basic truths like the fact that the martial context of the army was entirely a masculine one contributed to this assumption. However, this is not to say that femininity did not undergo drastic transformations and explorations during the Great War. This topic, however, deserves its own dissertation which is why I will mainly focus on this "masculine sphere".

Already in the years preceding the war, the British nation was profoundly concerned with gender. The passage of one century into the other almost always coincides with an intensification of our imagination, as Frank Kermode argues in his influential book *The Sense of an Ending*. "The crises of the *fin de siècle*, then, are more intensely experienced, more emotionally fraught, more weighted with symbolic and historical meaning, because we invest them with the metaphors of death and rebirth that we project onto the final decades and years of a century" (Showalter, 2). It is no coincidence then that towards the end of the nineteenth century cultural anxieties reached their peaks as a sense of degeneration prevailed due to the organization of trade unions, the founding of the British Labour Party, anarchism, Irish nationalism, homosexuality and decadence. In periods of cultural insecurity, Elaine Showalter argues, "the longing for strict border controls around the definition of gender, as well as race, class, and nationality, becomes especially intense" (4). That is why the *fin de siècle* was characterised by the burning issue of gender. The novelist George Gissing poignantly described the 1880s and 1890s as decades of "sexual anarchy", when all clear-cut definitions of sexual identity and behaviour seemed to be disintegrating (Showalter, 3). The rise of feminism and the "New Woman" who strived for her rights of property, divorce, labour and education among many other things, led to a national debate concerning both masculinity and femininity. Elaine Showalter summarises the situation at the *fin de siècle* as follows: in England, there was "a crisis in the 1890s of the male on all levels – economic, political, social, psychological, as producer, as power, as role, as lover. [...] The crisis of masculinity marked an awakening of what it meant to be a man" (9). Although during the war the national debate on gender partially lost its urgency, the Great War was right on time to re-establish masculinity to its former glory. Moreover, imperialism and masculinity had been interconnected for a while then. Politicians

like Teddy Roosevelt did not eschew to call on gender to invoke images of the strength of a nation, or the weakness of feminized nations: “There is no place in the world for nations who have become enervated by the soft and easy life, or who have lost their fibre of vigorous hardness and masculinity” (Showalter, 10). Thus, a strong nation was masculinized and consequently inhabited by masculine, powerful men.

This gender debate left its mark on the literature that was being created during the *fin de siècle* and particularly on the genre of the adventure tale. Female writers, among whom the key figure George Eliot, began to be prominent rivals in the literary marketplace. By the 1870s and 1880s, more than forty percent of the authors at substantial publishing houses were women. This led to the reactionary response of a group of male writers who revived “romance” in order to reclaim “the kingdom of the English novel for male writers, male readers, and men’s stories” (Showalter, 79). It was a men’s literary revolution, taking up literary arms against the psychological, feminized novel that appeared to dominate contemporary literature. One of these authors was Robert Louis Stevenson, who is famous for his timeless novel *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). He was considered the “father of the modern masculine novel” of whom Buchan – a great admirer of Stevenson – said that “in a querulous age he left us as an example of a manly and chivalrous life” (Stafford, “John Buchan’s Tales” 5). Thus the adventure tale not only serves as an expression for imperialism and heroism, it is above all a masculine genre. In the *fin de siècle* adventure fiction was considered good for you, and especially for boys for whom “adventure fiction is important training” which offers them “mental food for the future chiefs of a great race” (Showalter, 80). Moreover, Martin Green just as much asserts throughout *Dream of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* that adventure was capable of establishing multiple forms of English national identity and masculinity. In another one of his works, dedicated to arguably the first adventure novel ever written in the English language, *Robinson Crusoe*, he plainly states: “the adventure tale [is] historically speaking the most important of all our literary forms [...] Adventure has been the liturgy – the series of cultic texts – of masculinism” (Green, 1-2). Especially the male adventure tale that was emerging exponentially ever since 1880 became a “collaborative and mutually reinforcing network” which expressed masculine values and male bonds, resisting “both feminine values and the sexual and political power of women” (Pykett, 67).

So far I have been setting up the solid link between adventure fiction and masculinity, adventure fiction and empire, adventure fiction and war and adventure fiction and the spy novel. As I established earlier, one of the intrinsic characteristics of the spy novel is the all-male

environment in which the secret servant operates. Thus, by establishing the final link more meticulously, namely the one between warfare and masculinity, it will become apparent as to why also in Buchan's war trilogy masculinity will be one of the major topics. Graham Dawson's daring work *Soldier Hero* in which he invokes psycho-analysis and gender theory to sustain his research is an essential source when reading adventure tales of the First World War. According to Dawson, "the soldier hero has proved to be one of the most durable and powerful forms of idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions since the time of the Ancient Greeks" (1). The soldier hero has been associated with aggression, strength, courage and endurance for ages. Since this figure serves a military function, their stories "became myths of nationhood itself", providing a framework for the national community (1). These forms of masculinity were called upon as a means to counter anxieties in "a social world that is deeply divided along the fracture-lines of ethnicity and nation, gender and class" (282). As a result, stable figures like Dawson's soldier hero are more than welcome in an empire threatened by an international war.

To explain the far-reaching consequences of cultural compositions of masculinity, Graham Dawson raises the notion of "narrative imagining of masculinities" :

As *imagined* forms, masculinities are at once 'made up' by creative cultural activity and yet materialize in the social world as structured forms with real effects upon both women and men. As *narrative* forms of imagining, they exist in a temporal dimension of flux and dynamic contradictions, within which men make efforts towards a degree of continuity and composure in psychic life. (24)

In this citation the fundamental component that one needs to keep in mind, is the idea that cultural forms have "real effects" upon both women and men. That is to say, one should not tread lightly over Stafford's assertion that men of action could measure their own behaviour to that of the clubland hero of the spy novel ("John Buchan's Tales" 2). However, as Dawson explains, narrative imaginings of masculinities come in all forms and shapes, so the clubland hero is only one of the many narrative forms of masculinity one can take on for oneself. Therefore, men will most likely go grocery shopping within these imaginings, picking up elements as one goes along in order to attain this "degree of continuity and composure in psychic life". Moreover, the composition of such masculinities in narratives is a complex endeavour which ultimately depends upon social recognition and the audience to which it is offered. If a storyteller composes a version of masculinity which does not correspond with the experience someone in the audience had, it will elicit an entirely different reaction with this person in comparison to someone who can relate to the experience. Thus, the recognition of

such narrative imagining of masculinities will be associated with the cultural values one holds. These values will be related to the narrative resource of a culture, namely its repertoire of shared forms. These forms organize “the available possibilities for a masculine self in terms of the physical appearance and conduct, the values and aspirations and the tastes and desires that will be recognized as ‘masculine’ in contemporary social life” (23). Dawson argues that since the imagining and recognition of identities is closely related with “wish-fulfilling fantasies”, these forms tend to become idealized masculinities, which a man may strive to. At the same time, he stresses the fact that because “the demands and recognitions of social life are not uniform but many-faceted and contradictory, the achievement of an absolutely unified and coherent gendered social identity, for masculinity as for femininity, is an impossibility” (23). However, Gramsci raised the term “hegemony” in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, to refer to the political culture of a society which decides what ideas of society can exist within it. As for masculinity, this means that there are some forms of masculinity which are more desirable, recognizable or appropriate than others. Therefore, in contrast to the homosexual form of masculinity for instance, “the soldier hero can be understood as a hegemonic form of masculinity” (24).

Hannay will at times embody an amalgam of the clubland hero of the spy novel, the adventure hero of the adventure tale and the soldier hero of the Great War. All of these three types of heroes are ingrained with notions of masculinity and try to offer stability in precarious times. In the next chapter, I will explore how Buchan evokes these kinds of heroes and what kind of ideals it encompasses. Furthermore, by now it should be clear why the espionage tale, which is – as elaborately argued – strongly associated with the adventure tale, was chosen as the pivot of my research. Both (romantic) genres in symbiosis are quintessential in order to lay bare social anxieties and to put forward alternate, stable cultural forms of masculinity and heroism as alternatives. The next pages will explore which alternatives are offered by Buchan and how these changed over the course of the war.

### 3. Buchan's War Trilogy

#### 3.1. The Thirty-Nine Steps (1915)

As the story goes, John Buchan wrote his quick read *The Thirty-Nine Steps* – arguably his most famous work – out of sheer boredom. Convalescing from duodenal ulcer in a sea-side house as war had just been declared, Buchan put his creation of Richard Hannay onto paper, presumably not realising yet that he was writing his first best-seller. Its legacy remained for over the next decades. Apart from never having been out of print since 1915, it has been adapted into a feature film four times, among which one adaptation of one of the most famous directors of all time, Sir Alfred Hitchcock. The tale revolves around Richard Hannay, a colonial mining-engineer from Rhodesia who has just returned to London only to find himself utterly “disgusted with life” (5). However, his days are about to become a lot less dull when an American stranger called Scudder approaches him in the hallway of his apartment. In a desperate attempt to throw off a bunch of spies, Scudder had to fake his own death. What follows is a rambling story about a Greek premier Constantine Karolides who will be killed in order to destabilize Europe and a German gang of spies who will try to steal important information from Great Britain. After hiding out for a few days at Hannay's apartment, Scudder is found with a knife through his heart. Fearing to be suspected of murder, Hannay flees to Scotland in order to get away from both Scotland Yard and a bunch of German spies, a journey which leads him from inn to inn, over the Scottish glens and taking up various identities just to stay underground. In the meantime, he decodes Scudder's notes, which inform him of the impending danger of a German invasion as well as the mysterious phrase “thirty-nine steps”. Ultimately Hannay gets in touch with a secretary from the Foreign Office, Sir Walter Bullivant, with whom Hannay unravels the mystery of the thirty-nine steps. It appears the phrase refers to a landing point at the English coast from where a boat will sail to Germany, packed with newly found crucial information about international affairs in Great Britain. Thanks to some ingenious detective work, Hannay is able to stop the Black Stone and save the Empire from sharing military secrets with the enemy. A few weeks later, the war is inevitably declared all the same and Hannay takes on the task of being a captain immediately, but, he claims “[he] had done [his] best service [...] before [he] put on khaki” (103).

##### 3.1.1. A Decadent Nation in Distress

Being written in 1915, one year into the war, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is first and foremost a retrospective novel. Unlike the two subsequent Hannay novels, its events take place a few months before the war, which makes it principally an adventure and spy novel rather than a war

novel. Nevertheless, according to Hynes its subject is one that is intrinsically associated with the Great War, namely “How England Got There” (45). Indeed, as I will indicate throughout this chapter, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is both a justification of the war as well as an appeal to take part in the war cause. It portrays a picture of the Empire which sheds light on both its weaknesses as its strengths, maintaining that although England might no longer be untouchable, they still stand a chance against its enemies as long as it preserves its virtues – courage, cunning, heroism and duty. After all, one of the longest-standing, most widespread beliefs about the war was that it could purge the Empire from its complacency, ignorance, unquenchable thirst for luxury and generally its tendencies towards immorality. Samuel Hynes refers to several authors who propagated their concerns in lectures, essays and articles. In October 1914 English author Edmund Gosse published a provocative essay on “War and Literature”, in which he eagerly spoke of England’s decadence and its coming purgation:

We have awakened from an opium-dream of comfort, of ease, of that miserable poltroonery of ‘the sheltered life’. Our wish for indulgence of every sort, our laxity of manners, our wretched sensitiveness to personal inconvenience, these are suddenly lifted before us in their true guise as the spectres of national decay; and we have risen from the lethargy of our dilettantism to lay them, before it is too late, by the flashing of the unsheathed sword. (Cited by Hynes, 12)

These kinds of arguments, in a surprising manner, are quite obviously not mild for the rulers and authorities of Great Britain. In a way, these critics are blaming Great Britain for the war, reproaching the British for their softness and blindness towards their own flaws. It seems that if Great Britain had taken a firm line in order to draw the Empire’s excess to a halt, the Great War – although still popular at the time – would not have been necessary in the first place (Hynes, 19). Nevertheless, it was where they were at that moment in history, and the time had come to cleanse and purify the nation from its dirty decadence.

As a South-African colonial who had lived the majority of his life outside of Great Britain, Richard Hannay was in an exceptional position to take a stance on the way in which the average British civilian went about his or her day. His outsider view was quite a harsh one and after three months in Great Britain he came to the conclusion that he was “pretty well disgusted with life” (5). London is “the wrong ditch” for Hannay: besides the “liverish” weather, he “couldn’t get enough exercise” (5). In Simon Glasscock’s essay “Buchan, Sport and Masculinity” he sheds light on the ubiquity of athleticism in the British society of the Victorian and Edwardian era. It was widely believed that in playing team games and sport, children could

internalise universal virtues like honesty, fairness, loyalty, cooperation and physical and moral courage. In learning how to deal with the disappointment of loss and in learning to accept victory with grace children were taught essential qualities of manliness (41). Equally so, many were convinced that sport and masculinity were essential for the building of an empire. However, the physical condition of the soldiers of the Boer War gave way to the belief that society was feminizing and gave evidence of a declining national character (42). By admitting he was not getting enough exercise due to living in the city, Hannay implied on the one hand that inhabitants of the city could not get access to sports easily, and on the other hand that he felt like he was becoming feminized himself, most likely like everyone else in the city. However, this is more than the talk of a man who misses the adventure of being in the “veld”, and more than just physical boredom; it is utter intellectual boredom due to a people that does not seem to be concerned with anything substantial. “The talk of the ordinary Englishman made me sick” and “the amusements of London seemed as flat as soda-water that has been standing in the sun” (5). Moreover, Hannay refers to a music-hall he went to which was nothing more than “a silly show, all capturing women and monkey-faced men” (6). The popular music-halls were never the place for critical thought or provocation. All-in-all music-halls focused on the domestic and mainly documented the “common way of life” (Bailey, 139). The England Hannay renders is precisely the shallow, ignorant nation which authors like Gosse maintains it to be. In the same fashion, it is even more telling that a few hours later a man stumbles into Hannay’s apartment to hide out from a mob of spies who seek to destabilise the European continent. The contrast between the urgency of international political tensions and the flatness of the English common entertainment, highlights the complacency of the nation’s people: England is ready to burn, but its people do not see the incipient fire yet, let alone the need to extinguish it.

Buchan’s concerns extended the scope of merely the issue of decadence. He attributed the instability of the Empire not only to the social behaviours of its people, but to economic considerations and social reform as well. Taking flight in Scotland away from the spies of the Black Stone and the police, Hannay crashes his car in his attempt to avoid an oncoming car. A young man called Sir Harry takes care of him and asks him about Free Trade when he discovers Hannay is a colonial. Although Hannay does not have “the foggiest notion of what he meant” (37) he agrees to give a speech on it at a Liberal election meeting, where he is supposed to express his disdain for protectionism in the Colonies. Moreover, at the meeting itself Sir Harry gives a stuttering speech about the “German menace”, claiming that “it was all a Tory invention

to cheat the poor of their rights and keep back the great flood of social reform” (39). Both free trade and social reform were hot topics that had determined the national debate ever since the middle of the nineteenth century. Britain was one of the only nations that still fully applied itself almost entirely to free trade, while the rest of Europe took protectionist measures ever since the Great Depression of 1873 until 1896. In the same vein, socialism was seen as a major threat to the stability of the British society. It is therefore telling that Hannay described the words of Sir Harry as “appalling rot”. This stance is reinforced again when Hannay meets with Sir Harry’s godfather, Sir Walter Bullivant, who claims that Harry generally “talked dashed nonsense” (73). Buchan has always been every inch a Tory with an abhorrence of disorder and chaos in case of revolution (Stafford, “John Buchan’s Tales”, 5), so it is not surprising for the narrator to depict Harry’s words as nonsense. If anything, Hannay’s encounter with Sir Harry conveys another argument for the justification of the Great War. With such problematical information being spread to the British people, the unity of Great Britain is under pressure and the nation weaker than ever. Social unrest is equally the most fruitful breeding-ground for (inter)national conflict.

The most obvious threat, however, is the one that Germany poses to the Empire. The first version Scudder told of the conspiracy of the Black Stone was the one in which events in the Balkan War, Jew-Anarchists, and newly made alliances all clenched into one were creating a plot which would “get Russia and Germany at loggerheads” (8). A few days later, after the death of Scudder, Hannay, whilst going through Scudder’s notes, discovers that he “had told [him] a pack of lies”. Indeed, Karolides is going to be a target, but that is not the biggest thing that will be happening soon. War is coming “as sure as Christmas” and “Karolides was going to be the occasion” (34). Moreover, the most crucial piece of information Hannay extracts from the notes, is that Germany is not pointing its guns at Russia, but at England: “our coast would be silently ringed with mines, and submarines would be waiting for every battleship” (34). An attack on the British navy would be almost symbolic: the naval arms race between Germany and Great Britain was a major trigger for invasion scares for the population. The fact that Germany is now planning an attack on Great Britain behind its back is the final proof of Great Britain’s increasing vulnerability. For too long, Great Britain had complacently believed itself to be invincible. If it was not for the interventions of Hannay, Germany would have succeeded as the Black Stone stole its naval plans. Sir Walter Bullivant, a secretary of Foreign Office, seems to be a symptom of Great Britain’s complacency. He describes Scudder’s and Hannay’s findings as “some wild melodrama”, claiming that “Scudder was too romantic” (75). The events following this assertion prove Sir Bullivant terribly wrong, which seems to be anticipating

Buchan's statement in 1916 that melodrama has become the "prosiest realism". In times of the war, nothing seemed too romantic or impossible.

In conclusion, Buchan portrays Great Britain as a nation that had been awfully naïve and ignorant in the years preceding the war. Its people were smug and had succumbed to decadence, its ideas were becoming rotten and a complacent belief of invulnerability had driven Great Britain to the weak position it was in in 1914. Indeed, Buchan seems to build on the idea that the war would purify and cleanse the nation with the re-establishment of a stronger nation than ever as the outcome. In other words, in order for the renaissance to happen, Great Britain needed a confidence-boost, one that would simultaneously boost the morale of the British public. Against the backdrop of invasion scares, social unrest and decadence, Buchan felt the need to invoke a stable hero who could convince its reader of the necessity of war as well as the need for them to support it. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is thus a typical spy novel in the sense that it elicits an endangered nation in need of a stable hero who is permitted to do whatever it takes – that is, even espionage work without an official assignment – to restore the nation to its former glory. Buchan, however, never loses sight of the underlying patriotic goals in this novel written during a perilous time. Rather than creating a perfect hero that no mortal man could live up to, Hannay is endowed with slight, surmountable flaws in order to proclaim that anyone could be a hero.

### 3.1.2. The Flawed, but Adventurous Clubland Hero

Indeed, the figure of the hero is swiftly conjured up by the way the story progresses. By pretty much accidentally getting involved in Scudder's hazardous business, the adventure trope of the unforeseen journey underlies the rest of the following events. Whether Hannay wants to or not, he has to take on what is his duty and finish what Scudder started, so that disaster can be averted. The extent of the urgency of his actions as well as the exploits he performs in order to achieve his goal, undoubtedly makes Hannay a hero. It requires the due diligence and cunning to swiftly switch from one identity to the other, to roam the glens of Scotland, to unravel the mystery and to ultimately confront the enemy. Take for instance the moment when Hannay runs into the Black Stone. As the German spies are ready to execute Hannay, the only solution for him is to blow up the room in which he is locked up. It was not unreasonable to see death as a possible consequence of this undertaking, "the prospect was pretty dark[...], but anyhow there was a chance, both for myself and for my country" (61). As it befits the hero, he is courageous and even when the outcome of his actions is unclear, he will put his duty above his own well-being.

Moreover, as Green asserts in *Dreams of Adventure*, walking and climbing bear a strong allusion to imperialism and “every mountain and river evokes the excitement of conquest and possession” (270). So even though Hannay worries about not being familiar with “the lie of the land” (53), he still manages to conquer it as he “got off [his] ridge”, “crossed a burn”, walking through “a pass between two glens” overlooking “a big field of heather sloping up to a crest which was crowned with an odd feather of trees” (54). The unknown vistas of Scotland never really present a challenge to Hannay, who never gets lost or in trouble. Additionally, he does not only manage to get through the wilderness, he “was beginning to enjoy [himself] amazingly” (53). The kind of adventure one undertakes in favour of the nation, is not necessarily one of unrelenting squalor. In fact, it is not that much different from “taking part in a schoolboy game of hare and hounds”, Hannay claims (54). Hannay writing down that his endeavours are quite pleasant is almost redolent of Rupert Brooke writing home during his service claiming “It’s all great fun”. For men to speak of war in terms of games and pleasure was a common practice during the first month of the war (Fussell, 25). A classic poem that certainly had a hand in the persistence of the notion was Sir Henry Newbolt’s “*Vitai Lampada*”:

There's a breathless hush in the Close to-night—  
Ten to make and the match to win—  
A bumping pitch and a blinding light,  
An hour to play and the last man in.  
And it's not for the sake of a ribboned coat,  
Or the selfish hope of a season's fame,  
But his captain's hand on his shoulder smote  
“Play up! play up! and play the game!”

Exercise and sport were not only seen as an essential learning school for men, poems like this insist that the Great War was an adventure, a game, and in the main quite a bit of fun. All in all, at first sight Buchan created the prototype of the adventure hero, conquering lands and facing challenges without muttering. Hannay is the undaunted chosen one to face the Black Stone: “I felt the sense of danger and impending calamity, and I had the curious feeling, too, that I alone could avert it, alone could grapple with it” (78).

In a way, Hannay claiming to be the chosen one almost undermines my previous claim that Buchan created the Hannay-hero in order to demonstrate that anyone could be a hero. That would indeed have been the case, if it were not for Hannay himself, who persists in emphasizing that he is but a simple man: “Here was I, a very ordinary fellow, with no particular brains, and yet I was convinced that somehow I was needed to help this business through” (79). Throughout the novel, Hannay does not eschew to characterise himself in terms of what he is not: “I wasn’t any kind of Sherlock Holmes” (88), “I was not bred a mountaineer”, he is no exceptional human being, he is “an ordinary sort of fellow” (17). Above all, Hannay claims himself to be lucky half of the time: “So far I had been miraculously lucky. The milkman, the literary inn-keeper, Sir Harry, the roadman, and the idiotic Marie, were all pieces of undeserved good fortune” (52). In the Middle English language the word “adventure” was closely linked to the word “fortune”. Graham Dawson brings out the contrast between “fortune” and “enterprise”, where in the world of fortune “human beings are determined by circumstances felt to be arbitrary and substantially beyond their own capacity to influence” and enterprise marks the human being who wants to “shape the world according to human desire and design” (53). Naturally, Hannay was underestimating himself at this point, since he needed a certain amount of pluck and wit to get to this point without being caught. There is no denying that the plot of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is driven forward far more by enterprise than by fortune. The simple example of the event in which Hannay uses his knowledge of mining engineering to blow up the house in which he is being held hostage by accomplices of the Black Stone supports this claim. In fact, it is actually beside the point whether Hannay accomplished his challenges by fortune or by enterprise. Even if this may be false modesty on Hannay’s side, by claiming he has been lucky he downplays the exceptionality of the hero, which is the point that he has been trying to make all along.

It takes no extraordinary powers of perception to conclude that the world of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is an utterly masculine one: there are no significant female characters in this novel. Although masculinity plays a crucial role in the world of the hero as well as the world of war, Hannay admits that his masculinity is not unassailable. In his essay “Masculinities in the Richard Hannay ‘War Trilogy’ of John Buchan”, Joseph A. Kestner claims that in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* Hannay’s masculinity is incessantly being surveyed. He refers to Laura Mulvey’s influential theory of the male gaze, a term arisen from a feminist perspective which is usually employed in film theory to address how in Classical Hollywood film the spectator is forced to take on the masculine subject position (with the protagonist generally being a male) which inevitably puts the female on screen in the object position. Kestner transferred this film theory

to literature and called attention to how in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* – as well as in later Hannay novels – Hannay is subjected to male-on-male surveillance. Therefore, the male subjectivity of Hannay is put in jeopardy by other males, in this case, the Black Stone (86). Especially being hunted by the Black Stone makes him feel “the terror of the hunted on [him]” (27). In such a way, instead of being in the inviolable position of male subjectivity, Hannay is suddenly in the object position which makes him feel terrified. On top of that, Hannay’s vulnerability is highlighted even more as he is laid low by “a bout of malaria” (68) and has to be nourished for ten days by Mr Turnbull, a local road-mender (Kestner, 86). It is clear that even though on the surface Hannay seems to be a flawless hero, Buchan does not avoid portraying his hero in vulnerable positions of imperilled masculinity as well as ordinariness.

The fact that Buchan allows for Hannay to be represented in ordinary and vulnerable terms, first and foremost plays into the quite modern notion of the flawed, human hero. In addition to that, it not only makes Hannay human, it stresses that heroic deeds are to befall anyone. Hannay feels that he alone can avert the looming danger of German conspiracies not because he is a superior creature, but because the duty of heroism in a way besieged him. Almost in a passive way Hannay moulds into the figure of the hero, which only afterwards drives him towards heroic deeds. In this manner, heroism is a duty in times when it is required and one has to heed the call. Indeed, the Great War is a time in which heroism is an urgent necessity and the masculine reader of the adventure story should sense that he as well should put on khaki and join the cause of the war. After all, anyone who is fit to fight, no matter how ordinary a man he is, can be a hero. Altogether *The Thirty-Nine Steps* should be seen as a recruitment novel that desires to include as many men as possible. Einhaus referred to a citation of Michael Paris, who claims that it was not uncommon for an adventure novel to act as a recruiting agent at the time (88). The shortness of the novel as well as its contents that lay out a nation in distress and a universal hero to save it were ideal to convince a non-conscripted soldier to take up the arms. By the time *The Thirty-Nine Steps* was published, the Military Service Act of 1916 was not in force yet, so Great Britain still had to count on volunteers. The novel tells the story of an empire with weaknesses, as well as a hero with weaknesses. Nevertheless, the weak hero succeeds in his endeavours, just like the Empire will. The first of the Hannay war trilogy thus served as a conveyer of a hopeful, propagandist message that should encourage its readers to find its inner hero and to call it in for the next years of the Great War.

### 3.2. Greenmantle (1916)

By 1916 John Buchan had found his purpose as a British civilian in the Great War that had lasted for two years already. He was now a second lieutenant in the Intelligence Corps, preparing speeches and communiqués for field marshal sir Douglas Haig. In the meantime he was active as a journalist and historian for *Nelson's History of War*. *Greenmantle* then, was mainly an escape from his propagandistic work for the government and a means to “entertain the troops” (Storer, 41). The plot is far more ambitious than *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) as Hannay now undertakes his government assignments no longer on his own, but joined by several fellow spies. There are more characters, more undercover identities and more far-off journeys through Portugal, Germany, Austria and Turkey. All in all, as the war has now officially begun, the stakes are even higher. Consequently, the task Sir Walter Bullivant, who is still working at the Foreign Office, assigns to Hannay is a matter of “life and death. [...] The stakes are no less than victory and defeat” (115). Germany was prepared to exert all its force to win the war and its Turkish allies were the means to do just that. Together they are organizing a Jihad, a Muslim uprising to “knit up [...] a shattered Empire” (113) by means of “Some star – man, prophecy, or trinket – [...] coming out of the West” (114). Hannay’s task is to prevent a pandemonium in the Middle East, India and North Africa using three clues: Kasredin, cancer and v.I. Together with his life-long friend and Boer scout Peter Pienaar, the idiosyncratic American John Blenkiron and his fellow soldier Sandy Arbuthnot, he faces the ferocious German Colonel Ulric von Stumm, the hot-headed Turk Rasta Bey and the imposing Hilda von Einem, the mastermind behind the Jihad led by the Mohammedan prophet Greenmantle. When the prophet suddenly dies – hence, the clue ‘cancer’ – von Einem tries to replace him by Sandy Arbuthnot, her love-interest. All this culminates during the Battle of Erzurum into a dramatic climax in which von Einem is shelled, Stumm is killed and the Allies triumph.

#### 3.2.1. The ‘Losers’ of Loos

Buchan’s second World War I novel begins at a big country house in Hampshire where Hannay and Sandy are convalescing after the infamous Battle of Loos, which took place in the north of France from 28 September until the 8 October in 1915. The objective of the offensive was a large scale breakthrough in the German defences, which was never achieved (Warner, 2). It could have meant the turning point of the Great War which could have led to an early victory, but it turned out to be a symbol of “bad planning and inadequate staff work” (Warner, 2). It was a vicious battle in which poison gas was used for the very first time and almost 60,000 soldiers gave their lives – many of whom during the first day – for an offensive which ultimately ended

up being stigmatized as a “useless slaughter of infantry” (Fussell, 11). The fact that Germany had only lost half the amount of British casualties made it clear that the enemy they were up against was not to be underestimated. Nevertheless, Phillip Warner claims it was nearly a success thanks to the “unbelievable courage of those who fought and died there” (1).

The battle of Loos was another one of the many slaughters during the second year of the war and another bitter pill to swallow. Therefore, Buchan’s portrayal of the battle is surprising, to say the least. At the beginning of *Greenmantle* Hannay is a full-blown war hero as a battalion officer:

[T]here was no prouder man on earth than Richard Hannay when he took his Lennox Highlanders over the parapets on that glorious and bloody 25<sup>th</sup> of September. Loos was no picnic, and we had had some ugly bits of scrapping before that, but the worst bit of the campaign I had seen was a tea-party to the show I had been in with Bullivant before the war started. (109)

It is an ambivalent tone to start out a war novel with. On the one hand, Hannay calls the battle of Loos “glorious and bloody” but on the other hand it is “a tea-party” compared to his endeavours in the *Thirty-Nine Steps*, an adventure in which Hannay’s courage did get tried but which never asked excessive heroism of him. As argued in the previous chapter, Hannay was depicted as but a simple man, who accidentally ended up in a perilous plot with German spies. Anyone could have achieved the hero status, no superhuman efforts were needed. Obviously, Hannay claiming that his adventures were nothing compared to the fighting the soldiers did under dreadful conditions is not the same as claiming those soldiers were not heroic. However, it does indicate a hierarchy of heroism on which Hannay is on a higher level than combatant soldiers. “Soldiering”, as Bullivant likewise claims, “today asks for the average rather than the exception in human nature. It is like a big machine where the parts are standardized” (111). It is as if soldiers were nothing more than cannon fodder, average humans to be sacrificed for the greater cause of war. More than once, Hannay highlights how strenuous it is to be a spy in comparison to the efforts of an average soldier. When he is mobbed by Rasta Bey and his accomplices, Hannay asserts that he is in a more gripping danger than the soldiers at Loos: “When I had been up against a real, urgent, physical risk, like Loos, the danger at any rate had been clear. One knew what one was in for. But here was a threat I couldn’t put a name to, and it wasn’t in the future, but pressing hard at our throats” (219). It is the fear of not knowing what you are up against that truly challenges an individual, while when you know the danger it can be overcome. Furthermore, being a secret agent and taking on several identities is wearisome for Hannay, as “[he’s] been playing a part for the past month, and it wears [his] nerves to tatters”

(241). All in all, the lives of secret agents are more risky, dangerous and strenuous than the lives of combatant soldiers. They are lucky as Hannay “watched the figures in khaki passing on the pavement, and thought what a nice prospect they had compared to [his]” (119).

If *Greenmantle*'s objective was to entertain the troops, Buchan's means are quite peculiar. Why would Hannay resort to depreciating the army's efforts and highlighting his own enterprises as superior in the same breath? Is it out of sheer romanticism, as a way to make the yarn seem more thrilling, challenging and perilous? Undoubtedly, Buchan could have borrowed countless literary tropes from the adventure story to exalt Hannay's heroism without having to underplay soldiering, so there has to be an underlying intention or else Buchan would not risk breeding bad blood among his combatant readers. On the one hand, Buchan seems to glorify the war as fun and adventurous, an exciting period in which boredom, bloodshed, muddiness and destruction does not seem to exist. Hannay "was happy in [his] soldiering; above all, happy in the company of [his] brother officers" (115). Hannay seems to truly believe that soldiering is more agreeable than spying, almost implicitly stating that he is making the bigger sacrifice for his country: “[he] was asked to go off into the enemy's lands on a quest for which [he] believed [he] was manifestly unfitted – a business of lonely days and nights, of nerve racking strain, of deadly peril shrouding [him] like a garment” (115). Moreover, Bullivant admits he might be sending Hannay to his death: “Good God, what a damned task-mistress duty is!” (116). Considering that 60,000 soldiers met their makers at Loos and that Hannay was there with his battalion, it seems almost inappropriate to be mourning about his impending doom. When Hannay accepts Bullivant's proposal he was “most desperately depressed” as he feels he is courageous enough to “stand being shot” (119) but not to face the East. The task Hannay is given is so overwhelming he allows cowardice to grab a hold of him, “wishing that [he] had lost a leg at Loos and been comfortably tucked away for the rest of the war” (119).

This passage allows us to approach a possible hypothesis as to why Buchan would prioritize espionage efforts over soldiering. That is, the only reason Hannay does not give in to his cowardice, is because he is “shamed out” (123) of it by his ally Blenkiron, since Blenkiron is prepared to fearlessly join Hannay on this quest, without worrying about the risks, even though he suffers from duodenal ulcer. “If a sedentary dyspeptic could show that kind of nerve, I wasn't going to be behind him”, Hannay asserts (123). Maybe the kind of reaction Blenkiron arouses in Hannay through his insistence on fearlessness, is exactly the kind of reaction Buchan wants his readers to have when reading about Hannay's endeavours. Supposing that *Greenmantle* indeed was written for soldiers, any doubts or fears should be evaporated once the soldiers read about Hannay's “crazy and impossible mission” (114). If Loos is a tea-party where

danger is known and therefore surmountable, a soldier can also be “shamed out” of his possible fears as Hannay risks his life as a secret agent in Germany and Turkey. Moreover, Hannay ensures his readers that fear is in itself not something to be shamed about, namely, “every man who isn’t a maniac knows fear” (127). It is just the power to face those fears and not let them get hold of you which makes a man truly courageous. In other words, stoicism and endurance are what characterizes a hero in war, which were not coincidentally crucial features of the hero in British writing about the First World War in general (Einhaus, 90). It is acknowledging that fear exists within every man, but that it does not need to affect you. At the very end of *Greenmantle*, when three of our heroes – Sandy Arbuthnot, Hannay and Blenkiron – are waiting for certain death on a hill during the battle of Erzurum, they seem to have interiorized this line of thinking. Rather than being afraid of death, they feel grateful for the life they have had:

I thought of my battalion, and the good fellows there, many of whom had fallen on the Loos parapets. I had never looked to come out of that myself. But I had been spared, and given the chance of a *greater* business, and I had succeeded. That was the tremendous fact, and my mood was humble gratitude to God and exultant pride. Death was a small price to pay for it. (341, emphasis mine)

Whereas at the beginning of *Greenmantle* Hannay shivered at the idea of dying during his task “shot as a spy – a rotten sort of ending!” (119) and wished he had lost a leg at Loos, by the end he has completely come to terms with his espionage business and the fears that come along with it. In the same breath, he again calls his espionage work “a greater business” than Loos, still underplaying soldiering. Altogether, *Greenmantle* is the novel in which Hannay learns to cope with fear and doubt, lesser traits he trades for stoicism and endurance. It is an ability which he likes to transfer to his combatant readers, who should not be put off by a tea-party like Loos.

### 3.2.2. The Soldier Hero and the Evil Heroine

In a way, Hannay thus slightly diverges from the adventure hero of Northrop Frye:

The adventure hero himself is an idealized figure whose actions render him superior to other characters and to the environment in which he moves. ‘Prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him’, and he is hindered neither by fears, scruples and doubts, nor by ambivalent needs and loyalties. (Cited by Dawson, 55)

Whether Hannay is really hindered by his fears is of course debatable as he has never entirely failed one of his assignments. Nevertheless, the citations above demonstrate that Blenkiron’s task does not come natural to Hannay at all. In short, one could argue that Hannay’s fears and doubts only affect his thoughts, but never his actions. All in all, this does make him a more ‘human’ hero with flaws, rather than the unassailable, fearless, mythological hero. While

Hannay embodied the Clubland gentleman hero in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, he fits far better into the mould of Dawson's soldier hero in *Greenmantle*. Hannay's strength, war endeavours, aggression – towards Colonel Stumm for instance – and his endurance offer him the necessary traits to be qualified as a soldier hero. Hannay has internalized the soldier hero construction entirely as the sound of rifles feels like coming home (288). To Hannay, military action was “the only task for a man” (288). Moreover, Simon Glassock depicts attitudes like cooperation and the ability to give and take orders – qualities which Hannay displayed in his achievements as an officer – as “the essence of ‘manliness’” (41). Now that the Great War has established its poignancy, it is feasible to invoke the stable figure of the soldier hero, which often was called upon “to counter anxieties” (Dawson, 282). However, Buchan depicts his own version of the soldier hero, whose masculinity is never invulnerable and whose courage is sometimes fragile. I will argue that these vulnerabilities do not necessarily make Hannay weaker as strength can also be gained in one's power to overcome weaknesses. In the previous paragraph we discussed Hannay's fears and doubts as a hero. In the next paragraph, we will look further into Hannay's staggering masculinity, chiefly in relation to *Greenmantle*'s magnificent antagonist Hilda von Einem.

One of the most striking differences between *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and *Greenmantle* when it comes to representations of heroism is the ubiquity of comradeship during Hannay's travels to Erzurum. Whereas Hannay worked on his own to unravel the mystery of the Black Stone, he can now count on Sandy Arbuthnot, Peter Pienaar and John S. Blenkiron to prevent *Greenmantle* from uniting the Middle East and destabilizing the war. Male comradeship in war was a crucial motivating factor in combat according to Tony Ashworth (Frantzen, 146). This notion is affirmed by Hannay as he had felt “a weight on his heart” during the mission to Erzurum due to “the loneliness of it. I was fighting far away from my friends” (338). Once reunited with all of them, he feels “the warm joy of comradeship” (346). The male bonding between Sandy, Peter and Blenkiron serves as a protective shield against external threats to their masculinity. The homosocial sphere reinforces Hannay's motivation, endurance and courage. Especially in the face of the intimidating female antagonist von Einem, male comradeship will enhance his abilities as a soldier hero. Essentially, it shapes his experience of his mission: “First and foremost it was a contest between the four of us and a crazy woman, and this personal antagonism made the strife of armies only a dimly-felt background” (275).

When Hannay first heard of von Einem, he did not think much of her: “She was probably some minister's or ambassador's wife who had a finger in high politics” (161). It did not occur

to him yet that the clue “v.I.” was a reference to von Einem – “ein” being German for one – the evil brain behind the Jihad in the Middle East. In fact, von Einem turns out to be nothing alike anything he expected her to be: she was the “devil incarnate” (266). Rather than having a finger in high politics, she has “immense power” (268) and is “a mighty clever woman” (237). She “play[s] with souls for pawns”, fundamentally she is “evil – evil – evil ...” (304). Given that the realm of politics in 1916 was still a masculine sphere, the prowess von Einem displays is threatening. During the war, women were mostly expected to “keep the homefires burning”, continuing domestic work while waiting patiently for their husbands to return (Grayzel and Proctor, 7). There was certainly some anxiety about the reversal of gender roles in wartime, as women took on diverse jobs that generally were being practiced by men before 1914 (Carden-Coyne and Doan, 91). Already before the war there were feminist movements demanding entry into professional fields from which they were excluded by law or custom (Thom, 47). However, the effects on women’s position in society has too often been exaggerated, as it was mostly the women’s view on themselves that had changed, rather than men’s perspective on women (Thom, 64). The full employment of women was seen by many as temporary (Thom, 63) and after the war demobilisation for women happened quickly (Thom, 64). Therefore, if one tries to extrapolate the fiction towards the historical reality, one should be careful about reading Hannay’s attitude towards von Einem entirely in the light of a general anxiety about women gaining power. Nevertheless, as von Einem’s power extends to the degree that the outcome of war seemingly lays in her hands as she organises the Jihad, Hannay is undoubtedly intimidated by her influence.

Furthermore, whenever von Einem is confronted with a masculine other, she takes full control of the situation. Again, it is relevant to refer to Mulvey’s theory on the male gaze, as this proves to be von Einem’s most powerful strategy to undermine Hannay. He feels she impairs his functioning “under that compelling gaze [...] she could strip me of my fancy dress and set me naked in the masquerade” (263). The sense of nakedness he experiences in her presence is ultimately a sense of vulnerability, as his metaphorical armour is removed. There was “no sex” in her gaze, “she was sizing me up as a man. [...] This woman was weighing me, not for any special duty, but for my essential qualities. I felt that I was under the scrutiny of one who was a connoisseur in human nature” (257). As the ‘gaze’ is far more present in *Greenmantle* than in *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, it is adequate to dig a little deeper into the theoretical concept. In his *Three Essays on Sexuality* Freud raised the term scopophilia to describe a pleasurable activity in which one takes “other people as objects, subjecting them to

a controlling and curious gaze” (Mulvey, 853). Freud associates scopophilia as both central to the constitution of the ego and as the “erotic basis for pleasure in looking at another person as object” (Mulvey, 835). This pleasure in looking is split between active/male and passive/female (Mulvey, 837). In psychoanalytic terms, the man is mystified by the woman due to her lack of a penis, which arouses castration fear in the man. In order to counter this danger and turn it into something reassuring, the man either resorts to voyeurism or to fetishism to control his object (Mulvey, 840). Thus, when von Einem subverts the traditional male-female roles by subjecting Hannay to her female gaze, he feels afraid rather than reassured as “the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification” (838). Even if one may have some doubts as to the validity of this theory, especially as regards Freud’s concept of female penis envy and male castration fear, the objectification aspect of it proves relevant for Buchan’s novel. Being put in the object position rather than the subject position, Hannay feels that “to be valued coldly by those eyes was an offence to my manhood, and I felt antagonism rising within me” (257). von Einem’s transgression of the gender roles – by having male power in both the political and the sexual sphere – arouses hatred in Hannay as he feels his masculinity being stripped away by her gaze.

Accordingly, von Einem poses a threat to the homosocial sphere of Blenkiron, Peter Pienaar, Sandy and Hannay. Many critics have called von Einem the ultimate femme fatale of the espionage story. Especially in relation to Sandy Arbuthnot she encompasses this figure as she uses her sexuality to enthrall him in order to turn him into the new Greenmantle after the older one deceased. Sandy shamefully admits he sometimes has “been fired [himself] by her madness...” (305). However, equal attention should be paid to the almost mythological qualities that are ascribed to her through Hannay and his friends. Hannay qualifies von Einem as someone who did not belong “to the narrow world of our common experience”, she might be “mad and bad” – as Blenkiron had called her – “but she was also great” (258). Hannay compares her to “one of the old gods” (263) and a “fury of a Norse Legend” (264). At one point, Sandy Arbuthnot even raises Nietzsche’s notion of the Superman to describe her: according to Sandy “there never has been, and there never could be a real Superman... but there might be a Superwoman” (268). In short, von Einem is a superior kind of human being, she is a Goddess elevated above the common man. Therefore, although her intimidating presence mainly arouses Hannay’s hatred, he also “longed to arouse her interest” (257). Von Einem threatens Hannay not only as a female, but also as a Superwoman with superhuman intrinsic qualities. If Hannay is a hero because he suffers through his actions for the greater good, von Einem could uphold the position as a hero for the Germans who outstrips Hannay on his intrinsic qualities on every

level. As argued before, Hannay is but a simple man, whereas von Einem is a Superwoman with God-like qualities. So more than just harming his masculinity, von Einem affects Hannay's own perception of himself as a hero, which is why he reacts so strongly to her. So when she "single[s] him out above the other as the object of her wrath" when Hannay and his friends are exposed as British secret servants, he "almost loved her for it" (333). Essentially, he feels flattered as her picking out Hannay to "hang before dusk" (333) coincides with Hannay realizing she sees him as a threat and therefore practically as her equal. Her downfall, however, is a personal tragedy to her: Sandy Arbuthnot broke her heart as he "can have neither part nor lot with [her]" (334), and bewildered by this rejection she becomes incautious and gets shelled by a Russian bomb. The fact that the comrades have outwitted an evil genius Superwoman washes away all vulnerabilities and restores them to their formal masculine stable soldiery heroism.

### 3.2.3. The Enemy we were up Against

As the hostile antagonist plays an equally important role in the portrayal of the hero as the hero himself, it might be fruitful to take a further look at how the Germans are portrayed in *Greenmantle*. Especially in adventure novels evil and opposing values are usually externalized in the villains of the tale, while shared values are embodied by the hero (Stafford, 503). Therefore, the hero derives its qualities partly in opposition to his enemy. *Mr. Standfast* pays a fair amount of attention to the enemy, but never to the same extent as *Greenmantle* does. The contrast is especially conspicuous if one is to compare the number of pages spent on the enemy in *Greenmantle* to *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. In Buchan's first part of the war trilogy, hardly any energy is spent on the German enemy spy. Before Hannay's fateful encounter with the Black Stone at the villa, we have only met the enemy once in Scotland, where his value judgement confines itself to an eerie description of the villain's eyes: "There was something weird and devilish in those eyes, cold, malignant, unearthly, and most hellishly clever" (58). Generally, the enemy in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is mostly an invisible, faceless presence in the story, who hunts for Hannay but never explicitly embodies opposing values. The malice of the Black Stone is derived from their plans to pass on confidential information to the enemy, rather than intrinsic qualities of the members of the Black Stone themselves. Even when Hannay exposes them in the climax of the novel, we only learn that the spy "in his foul way [...] had been a patriot" (103). Conversely, *Greenmantle* is the novel that will explicitly lay bare what "we" – the British – are up against.

During the better part of the Victorian era, the public opinion on the Germans was fairly amicable, mostly referring to the Teutons in cultural terms, rather than political or national ones. They were regarded as intellectual souls, as a beacon of revolutionary classical music, progressive philosophical thought and romantic literature (Storer, 38). However, when Germany transformed into a German Empire in 1871, the British perspective on the intellectual Germans shifted with it (Storer, 39). In combination with the spy novels that were springing up like mushrooms by the end of the nineteenth century, the soulful German of the Victorian area quickly remodelled into a “savage, barbarous enemy of civilization” (Storer, 41). Rather than romantics and philosophers, they were now considered “dangerous warmongers, savage and aggressive, arrogant and selfish with no sense of the value of human life” (Storer, 40).

Buchan’s portrayal of the Germans in *Greenmantle* is a striking case to explore as it both defies and affirms the stereotypes of the German enemy. First of all, Buchan does not eschew highlighting the positive traits of the antagonists. They are “cunning as cats” (128), disciplined (143) and “pretty efficient” (181). Nevertheless, these features help build the image of the intimidating danger they posit towards the Britons, as an organized, disciplined enemy could more effectively outwit its adversaries. However, the most explicit example of the externalization of evil in a character is the brutal Colonel von Stumm: “an incarnation of all that makes Germany detested” (160). He is “the German of caricature, the real German, the fellow we were up against” (146). In other words, the detested Stumm encompasses Germany as a character. His name already indicates that the “real German” will no longer be the cultured German. In fact, Stumm is German for mute, silent or speechless. A man who is unable to acquire speech can never be a man of culture. Therefore, this German of caricature is primitive and a savage which is all the more enhanced by his physical description:

He was a perfect mountain of a fellow, six and half feet if he was an inch with shoulders on him like a shorthorn bull. [...] His tunic was all wrinkled and strained as if it could scarcely contain his huge chest, and mighty hands were clasped over his stomach. That man must have had the length of reach of a gorilla. He had a great, lazy, smiling face, with a square cleft chin which stuck out beyond the rest. His brow retreated and the stubby back of his head ran forward to meet it, while his neck below bulged out over his collar. His head was exactly the shape of a pear with the sharp end topmost. [...] He was as hideous as a hippopotamus, but effective. Every bristle on his old head was effective. (146)

To ascribe gigantism and beastliness to the enemy was not an uncommon thing to do during the First World War (Fussell, 77-78), but Buchan adds a little extra by making Stumm a hybrid between a hippopotamus, gorilla and a bull with a pear-shaped face. He is more than unattractive, he is grotesque. So far, countless scholars have tried to pin down the exact nature of “the grotesque”, often shifting between Kaysar’s notion of the ‘demonic’ grotesque and Bachtin’s notion of the ‘carnavalesque’ grotesque. Phillip Thompson, a modern critic, reconciled both stances, claiming the grotesque is essentially a mixture between ‘the comic and the terrifying’ (Thomson, 21). This unresolved nature of the grotesque is what marks it off from other literary categories, like for instance ‘the bizarre’ (Thomson, 21). The reaction of both amusement and disgust is in fact a reaction to the highly abnormal, which can both be funny and “fearsome or disgusting” (Thomson, 24). The grotesque is generally distinguished by its “exaggeration” and “extremeness” (Thomson, 22) which disturbs common perception through the excess of the represented forms. The rupture of the boundaries of what is accepted as the normal ultimately results in estrangement (Harpham, 462). For instance, a common way to achieve alienation is through “physical deformity” (Harpham, 465), something which is definitely applicable to Stumm’s description as a pear-shaped-headed gorilla. Hannay admits Stumm’s grotesqueness alienates and disturbs him as “he [Stumm] was a new thing in my experience and [Hannay] didn’t like it” (172). Whereas von Einem was something new, but awe-inspiring in his experience, Stumm is something distasteful. Furthermore, Harpham contends, “the grotesque is always a civil war of attraction/repulsion” (9). It is therefore not surprising that Hannay in a way “couldn’t help admiring him [Stumm]” (160). Stumm’s grotesqueness is for Hannay both an object of fascination and repulsion: “Cruelty, from all I had heard of him in German South West, was his hobby; but there were other things in him” (160-1).

As for the reader, Stumm’s grotesqueness arouses the three necessary responses: laughter, astonishment and disgust/horror (Harpham, 463). The reactions result in a twofold effect. On the one hand, if Stumm represents the “real German” (146), then the Germans as a people are an uncanny species, who inspire fear in the Britons. The grandness of the Germans is highlighted by the alienation we experience when we encounter Stumm’s deformity. Stumm materializes the unworldliness of the German evil externalized in his character. On the other hand, it is very hard to simulate a visualisation of Stumm that is not at least a bit comical: as terrifying as the gigantism of Stumm may be, his animal-like traits, his disproportionate body and the comparison to a hippopotamus is undeniably amusing and seemingly debunks all fear

that one could experience when facing Stumm. However, this is exactly what the grotesque is about according to Philip Thomson: a combination of both fear and laughter. A possible effect of this combination of laughter and fear is that the horrifying is “rendered less harmful by the introduction of a comic perspective” (59), which is the case in *Greenmantle* as well. Hannay will prove that laughter is the only relevant reaction to the grotesque: Stumm may seem eerie, but he is ultimately outwittable as Hannay escapes his prison, steals his plans and finally escapes Stumm’s wrath, thus ridiculing him completely.

Moreover, Stumm does not only challenge normality with his appearance, he also challenges with his actions. When Hannay visits Stumm’s mansion, they visit his room, which surprisingly is filled with “chairs [...] low and soft and upholstered like a lady’s boudoir”, “knick-knacks” and “beautiful embroidery” (172). Hannay swiftly comes to the conclusion that:

It was a room of a man who had a passion for frippery, who had a perverted taste for soft delicate things. It was the complement to his bluff brutality. I began to see the queer other side to my host, that evil side which gossip had spoken of as not unknown in the German army. The room seemed a horribly unwholesome place, and I was more than ever afraid of Stumm. (172)

During the First World War homosexuality was still punishable and definitely “unsoldierly” (Hynes, 224). Whether today we would still associate a man’s well-decorated room with homosexuality is besides the question. At the time it would have been obvious what Hannay would have meant with “that evil side which gossip had spoken of as not unknown in the German army”. Homosexuality at the time was seen as “a German disease” (Hynes, 229) often to explicate why also Britons “suffered” from it. However, as Hepburn indicates, Hannay seems to imply that homosexuality solely exists in the German army as opposed to the British military ranks (199). This makes Stumm – the real German – more than grotesque, he is morally despicable.

By stressing that Stumm is the real German, the brutal warmonger with indecent longings and a grotesque appearance, Hannay seems to imply that the whole German nation is in fact evil. Apart from sporadic claims of Hannay about the “fanatic” (163) Germans who have “the poorest notion of psychology” (167), German cities likewise are evaluated negatively. They give “one an impression of ugly cleanness and a sort of dreary effectiveness” (145) and “seemed to have no soul in it, [...] like a big factory instead of a city” (146). Germany is depicted as an industrial machine looking for efficiency, ready to “destroy and simplify” in

order to “rule the inanimate corpse of the world” (267-8). However, a few unique encounters with Germans seem to destabilize the whole image of Germany as an evil nation. The first one is the much-discussed encounter with a poor German family that looks after Hannay when he suffers from malaria. Although they do not have much to offer, they feed and lay him to bed for a couple of days in their humble cottage in the woods. The mother of three “knew nothing of its [the Great War] causes and purposes” (190) but her husband might have met his maker on the battlefield anyhow. It caused a genuine revelation for Hannay:

That night I realized the crazy folly of war. When I saw the splintered shell of Ypres and heard hideous tales of German doings, I used to want to see the whole land of the Boche given up to fire and sword. I thought we could never end the war properly without giving the Huns some of their own medicine. But that woodcutter’s cottage cured me of such nightmares. I was for punishing the guilty but letting the innocent go free. It was our business to thank God and keep our hands clean from the ugly blunders to which Germany’s madness had driven her. (191)

At this point, Hannay sympathizes with the ordinary German civilian that ultimately happened to be born in a “mad” country, but did not cause the war at all. Storer interprets the woman in the cottage deep in the forest as a character from the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, thus recalling early depictions of the Germans as a people with a long history of storytelling (45). In this case, the woodcutter’s wife could be seen as the German of past times, unspoiled by the ideas of the German industrial nation with its metropolises and tendency to “simplify”. Above all, it seems as if Buchan wants to portray his own views on the war through Hannay’s character, views which he could not have expressed in his propagandist writing (Storer, 45). All in all, the entire nation should not be blamed for the actions of those in charge.

Who is to blame then? In wartime fiction it was not uncommon for the Kaiser to appear either as the “evil genius behind Germany’s plans for world domination” or as a childish figure of ridicule, incompetent and jealous of the powerful British Empire (Storer, 51). When Hannay – disguised as a Boer on the German side – is introduced to the German emperor, conversely, the latter is depicted as an aggrieved man who unwontedly carries the burden of the atrocities of the war: “I did not seek the war...It was forced on me... I laboured for peace...” (169). Altogether, it is not entirely an historically inaccurate depiction of the Kaiser. When Franz Ferdinand was shot in 1914, Germany hoped that the conflict could be restricted to Austria and Serbia (Lesage, 122). The mobilization on 1 August 1914 was a result of the enormous pressure of the army, rather than a craving for war of the Kaiser and German politicians (Lesage, 123).

In fact, Germany never intended a two-front war to happen (Lesage, 124). With this in mind, when the Kaiser admits he “did not seek the war”, Buchan seems to resort to a more realistic depiction of the Kaiser, as opposed to representations of the evil emperor or childish leader. Moreover, by 1916 the German Empire had transformed into a military dictatorship under the control of Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff, in which Wilhelm’s role became mostly ceremonial. Nevertheless, Buchan’s idiosyncratic representation is all the more meaningful in an environment in which it is uncommon to sympathize with the German Kaiser. Hannay’s reflections about the Kaiser underlies the more humane representation of Germany as a nation of diverse individuals:

I felt that I was looking on a far greater tragedy than any I had seen in action. [...] But here was a human being who, unlike Stumm and his kind, had the power of laying himself alongside other men. That was the irony of it. Stumm would not have cared a tinker’s cuss for all the massacres in history. But this man, the chief of a nation of Stumms, paid the price in war for the gifts that had made him successful in peace. He had imagination and nerves, and the one was white hot and the others were quivering. I would not have been in his shoes for the throne of the universe...(170)

This brings us back to the beginning of this paragraph: Stumm is “the real German, the fellow we are up against” (146). Romantic germanophobic attitudes are only fitting in the face of the actual perpetrators of the Great War, like Colonel von Stumm. Buchan makes a distinction between the victims and the culprits in a manner which he never could have expressed in his historical and journalistic writings: even within the German Empire there are victims and an entire nation cannot be held accountable for the actions of its leaders. Even though it seems as if the Kaiser is a self-evident perpetrator, Buchan decides to stress that the war was beyond his control. The German officers, colonels and field marshals are the real grotesque enemy we have to face. This again justifies Hannay’s actions as a secret servant, but more importantly, the contrast between the noble Hannay and the grotesque Stumm who serves as a symbol for the perpetrators of war is a crucial source from which Hannay derives his heroism. Having an explicit, threatening enemy is essentially what makes the soldier hero’s fight worth having.

### 3.3. Mr Standfast (1919)

Over time, Buchan admits he “acquired a bitter detestation of war, less for its horrors than for its boredom and futility, and a contempt for its panache” (Stafford, 8-9). By 1917 it was not uncommon anymore to express fatigue towards the war. The war kept dragging on and perspectives did not become any brighter as every ‘final’ battle that would supposedly decide the outcome of war only turned into another one and the Russian Revolution resulted in the elimination of Russia from the Allies. The failed battles, great losses and a lack of better prospects bore a significant impact on the home-front morale (Fussell, 17). It was July 1917 when Buchan started writing the final part of his war trilogy – without knowing that a year later the war would in fact come to an end. It is the year in which most of the anti-war satires were written, often by men who had fought and returned to fight again (Hynes, 243). 1917 is also the year in which Owen wrote his famous lines:

My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
To children ardent for some desperate glory,  
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est  
Pro patria mori.

The optimistic sense of adventure of the early years of war took a serious hit. One could wonder whether romantic wartime stories like Buchan’s were not exceedingly out of touch with the zeitgeist. Perhaps, Buchan saw *Mr Standfast* as the antidote against war-weariness since heroes – as mentioned in the first chapter – have societal functions and “can contribute to the building, maintenance or destruction of communities” (Korte et al, 4). Therefore, I suggest that *Mr Standfast* stubbornly clings onto romanticism, more specifically to the pinnacle of romanticism, chivalry, to unify a fractured, war-weary society.

The plot of *Mr Standfast* can be summarized rapidly. After a year on the battlefield as a Brigadier-General with numerous honorifics, Hannay is called to the War Office in order to receive instructions from Sir Walter Bullivant for his new mission as a secret servant. This time he has to roam the English countryside, Cotswolds and Biggleswick, disguised as Cornelius Brand, a South-African pacifist, which to Hannay is “a black disgrace” (356). However, the underlying task is once more awfully urgent: amongst the pacifists there is a traitor, a German spy named Moxon Ivery, who is “the most dangerous man in all the world” (367) and accountable for countless leaks to the Germans. He leads an enormous network of spies, that is supposedly even responsible for the Russian Revolution (545). Moreover: “every finished subtle devilry that the Boche has wrought among the Allies since August 1914 has been the

work of the Wild Birds and more or less organized by Ivery” (545). Great Britain, it is claimed, was only half to blame for the disastrous attacks with great losses (Loos, the Somme, Ypres), and devious espionage of the Boche is the true culprit<sup>4</sup>. Finally, Hannay realizes Ivery is actually the evil Graf Otto von Schwabing, a previous member of the gang of the Black Stone. After thrilling excursions through the Isle of Skye and Switzerland, Hannay and his friends are able to catch Ivery and give him a taste of his own medicine by sending him to the British front, where he cowardly dies as he tries to flee to the Germans. *Mr Standfast* ends with a great battle in open warfare (628) – symbolically a war tactic that was terribly outdated by then, but derived from chivalric traditions (Frantzen, 156) – in which Peter Pienaar sacrifices himself and the Allies are saved. Now that the German spies cannot leak pivotal information to the Germans anymore, the road to Armistice seems paved.

Buchan does not eschew making his intentions unequivocal by alluding to perhaps the most famous chivalric romance ever written: John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678). The choice for Bunyan’s classic makes sense as it was a text that everybody had been raised on (Fussell, 317). It is a religious allegory about Christian’s journey into the Celestial City which carefully lays out central chivalric values and Christian ideals. It bore a significant influence on the soldier of the Great War as it was not difficult to see the similarity between a fully loaded soldier and the burdensome Christian packed for his adventure (Fussell, 137). It is a book Peter Pienaar symbolically reads incessantly over the course of the novel. Moreover, by openly comparing his characters to Bunyan’s, Buchan readily makes his readers aware of the persistent value of chivalry in the Great War. Allen J. Frantzen dedicated an entire work, *Bloody Good* (2004), to establish the continuing influence of chivalry in the Great War. The soldiers of the Great War, much like the knights of the Crusades, saw “themselves as executioners avenging insults to sacred beliefs and institutions” (2-3). Chivalry, he argues, works against demoralization as it emphasizes love – camaraderie, concern, and self-sacrifice – over hatred (265). It can work as an easy language (15) for a world in crisis (85). Hannay’s world indeed is a world in crisis as made explicit by Blenkiron: “the whole earth’s war-weary, and we’ve about reached the danger-point” (393). This war-weariness is mostly characterized by the attention

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<sup>4</sup> It is a romantic notion I also paid attention to in my bachelor paper: romance and chivalry, I argued, were forms of self-deception. Blaming spies, rather than themselves, the British used espionage to cover up their own failures with. (Paper: The Great War and Suspect Belgian Civilians in Achiel van Walleghem’s *Oorlogsdagboeken 1914-1918* and Ralph Hamilton’s *The War Diary of the Master of Belhaven 1914-1918* (2017). Supervisor: Prof. dr. Guido Latré. )

paid to the pacifists in Biggleswick and Cotswold. Pacifists are generally represented as fairly odd people, with a peculiar – often modernist – literary taste (363) and they live in “oddly built houses” (369). By making them outsiders, their anti-war opinions likewise are rendered abnormal. Hannay’s opinions on them are unrelenting: they are the anti-heroes of war who have nothing in common with the characters of *Pilgrim’s Progress* (375). Moreover, the pacifists are not the only ones with an aversion for war. During his mission Hannay spends quite some time with the Scottish working class, where socialist thought is slowly but surely taking the upper hand: “This war was made by the cawpitalists, and it has been fought by the workers, and it’s the workers that maun have the ending of it” (401). More than with war, the socialists are concerned with the capitalists and the Irish who fled their country to take their jobs (398). If that was not enough, criticism is directed at officers as well: “will any soldier deny that the men are the barrage to keep the officers’ skins whole?” (406). The thought that the inept officers sent out orders from comfortable chairs while the men of the line suffered through their battles was persistent (Fussell, 83) and particularly damaging. All things considered, the first pages of *Mr Standfast* focus on a divided Great Britain, with a bitter population upset with either the war, capitalism, the Irish or the officers. Unification was an urgent necessity and Great Britain had to restore its pride to former glory.

Once again, Buchan made sure this message could not be missed by his readers. Upon his arrival at Cotswold, Hannay roamed through the hills and valleys, past streams and through great beechwoods. He “could see the stream slipping among its water-meadows and could hear the splash of the weir” (360). It is in this moment, Hannay has a revelation:

I had a vision of what I had been fighting for, what we all were fighting for. It was peace, deep and holy and ancient, peace older than the oldest wars, peace which would endure when all our swords were hammered into ploughshares. It was more; for in that hour England first took hold of me. [...] I understood what a precious thing this little England was, how old and kindly and comforting, how wholly worth striving for. [...] For in that hour I had a prospect from a hilltop which made all the present troubles of the road seem of no account. I saw not only victory after war, but a new and happier world after victory, when I should inherit something of this English peace and wrap myself in it till the end of my days. (360)

By seeing the glens, hills and valleys Hannay realizes he is ready to swap his South-African identity for his new English one for good. This is telling. However, it is perhaps even more significant how this passage explicitly harks back to British countryside romanticism, a literary

tradition which marks off England from other European nations. Hannay's sense of peace aroused by the landscape is redolent of Wordsworth's awe at seeing a "rainbow in the sky" or Keats' empathy with a nightingale. The romantic tradition of the early nineteenth century lived on in The Great War, for instance in poems like Edward Thomas's *Adlestrop* (1914) – incidentally also based on an experience in Cotswold – written on a train journey towards the front. It expresses a sense of home by seeing "willows, willow-herb, and grass,/ And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry"<sup>5</sup>. For many serving soldiers this romantic landscape hit close to home and it became one of the most popular poems written during the early stages of the war. Hannay's affinity with the countryside thus arouses a deeply-felt patriotism in him, enhanced by associations with England's literary heritage. England is worth fighting for and this passage echoes the popular idea that the war was a purge which will render a nation more thriving than ever before.

### 3.3.1. Peter Pienaar, Self-sacrifice and Fortitude

In the final episode of Buchan's war trilogy, it is not Hannay's heroism that is at the centre of the story. This time, Hannay is faced with two emasculated knight-like figures whom he could compare himself with as his guides. The first one is Launcelot Wake, the conscientious objector with an unmistakably chivalric name alluding to King Arthur's right hand. To this ambiguous knight I will return in the next paragraph. First I will take a look at Peter Pienaar, a well-known character who has played a central role in the two preceding novels. It is from him Hannay learned the key lesson of disguise: "If you are playing a part, you will never keep it up unless you convince yourself that you are *it*" (96), a maxim he remembered actively during *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. Peter Pienaar was also Hannay's partner-in-crime for the better part of his travels to Turkey in *Greenmantle*. In *Mr Standfast*, on the other hand, there is not much left at first from the good-humoured Boer scout from earlier narratives. After his mission to Turkey, Pienaar had applied to the Royal Flying Corps and quickly became a successful air-fighter. His triumphant journey did not last forever when his plane was downed by his German rival Lensch. Pienaar was made prisoner and he could never use his left leg again. Crippled, mutilated men often fell victim to emasculation (Carden-Coyne and Doan, 100). In convalesce wounded men needed to transform back into their masculine, fit form (Carden-Coyne and Doan, 100), but when Pienaar's leg could never be put to use again, he lost a substantial part of his masculinity.

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<sup>5</sup> Found in: Thomas, Edward. *Selected Poems of Edward Thomas*. Edited by Matthew Hollis, London: Faber & Faber, 2011.

How, then, could Buchan transform him into arguably the most masculine figure Britain had known so far: the chivalric knight?

First of all, Buchan attributed chivalric qualities to Pienaar by making him a pilot, a military role that was admired by combatants and noncombatants alike (Frantzen, 157). The origin of the chivalric associations with airpower is explained by Stephen O'Shea : "The glamour of war, destroyed when the horseman left the field to be replaced by the troglodyte in the trench, was a mystique badly in need of novelty" (Frantzen, 157). This novelty was the pilot's weapon and one-on-one battles like the ones between Lensch and Pienaar were redolent of the individual combats of knights (Frantzen, 157). However, once Pienaar could no longer fulfil his knight's role as a pilot, he needed to achieve his chivalric attributions through different means. The stress on Pienaar's "fortitude" – the exponent of courage and strength – is how he could retain his noble status. Often, Hannay is impressed with Pienaar, who "was behaving like an early Christian martyr – never a word of complaint" (359). It is from Pienaar's letter Hannay learns the value of "fortitude" :

*It is easy enough to be brave if you're feeling well and have food inside you. [...] You see, Dick, in all that game there's a lot of fun. [...] But the big courage is the cold-blooded kind, the kind that never lets go even when you're feeling empty inside, and your blood's thin, and there's no kind of fun or profit to be had. [...] One of the men here was speaking about that kind, and he called it 'Fortitude'. I reckon fortitude's the biggest thing a man can have – just to go on enduring when there's no guts or heart left in you. (492-3)*

In a time of division, social unrest and war-weariness, when millions have left their lives on the battlefield and the outcome might look grim, fortitude is exactly the kind of quality you need. It takes a certain stoicism and perhaps even patriotism to suffer enduring hardship with your head held high. It is the wake-up call Hannay needed as there he was "losing heart just because he had failed in the first round and my pride had taken a knock" (493). When Ivery seems to win, when his loved ones are in danger, when in battle they are "not hanging on by [their] eyelids" but by their "eyelashes" (625) Hannay remembers the importance of fortitude.

The relationship between Hannay and Pienaar has sometimes been described as one underpinned by homosexual longing. For instance, Glasscock claims their friendship is on the verge of the physically homoerotic (44). Reasons for this probably were Pienaar's effeminate "face as gentle as a girl's" (135), but mostly Hannay's continuous longing for him: "I longed

to have old Peter with me” (520), “I wished to Heaven I had old Peter with me” (440) and “[a]gain I longed for Peter” (442). Pienaar was Hannay’s life-long friend in South-Africa and during battles or risks, they worry about each other (636). Indeed, to modern readers, some passages may be highly ambiguous. They may see homoerotic tendencies in statements like “I only wished Peter could have been with me. And so my thoughts fled to Peter in his prison camp, and I longed for another sight of my old friend as a girl longs for her lover” (449). However, to read this passage as homoerotic is highly anachronistic since it would not have made sense for Buchan to make Pienaar and Hannay essentially criminals – since homosexuality in 1917 was still a legal offence. Therefore, it is far more interesting to look at their relationship in the light of chivalry. Frantzen rightly alludes to C.S. Lewis, who indicated that in chivalric literature “the deepest of worldly emotions” was not romantic love but rather “the love of man for man, the mutual love of warriors who die together fighting against the odds, and the affection between vassal and lord” (79). Male comradeship is the cornerstone of chivalry (Frantzen, 146) and the love between two comrades is purely platonic rather than erotic. It is also, according to Hannay, something purely masculine: “Women, bless their hearts! Can never know what long comradeship means to men” (555).

The comradeship drastically came to an end during the final battle in *Mr Standfast*, when Pienaar faces, despite his malfunctioning leg, Lensch for one last time as a pilot and finishes him in a chivalric act of self-sacrifice. Frantzen distinguishes two ways to respond to violence, based on the two responses of medieval chivalry to Christ’s death. The first one was a sacrificial response: “it calls for the taking of one life to avenge the loss of another and thus for perpetuating cyclical violence” (3). Choosing not to take another one’s life in order to achieve peace, is the second, anti-sacrificial response. The third response finds itself between sacrifice and anti-sacrifice, namely self-sacrifice which “conflated prowess and piety” (3). It is taking one’s own life instead of another’s, which is sacrificial, but with the underlying goal of ending the violence, which in its turn is anti-sacrificial. Pienaar’s attack on Lensch was exactly this: “he was there to make certain of victory and he took the only way...” (654). In order to bring to a halt the slaughtering of the countless soldiers, Pienaar sacrificed his life in a violent manner but with an appeasing objective, the end of the battle. It gave him the status of Mr Valiant-for-Truth, a courageous Pilgrim from Bunyan’s story, although Pienaar saw himself modestly as

Mr Standfast, the character after whom the novel was named<sup>6</sup>. Peter Pienaar thus transforms from an emasculated cripple into a courageous knight who ultimately decided the outcome of the final battle which Great Britain was bound to lose if it were not for him. It proves that masculinity and chivalry do not reside in one's physical capabilities, but in endurance, stoicism and giving what it takes inside the borders of one's abilities. Ultimately, fortitude – enduring when there are no guts or heart left in you – is what will unify Great Britain once more. In a way, all soldiers, officers, marshals, nurses, ... are self-sacrificial: they give their lives in order to attain this long longed for peace, even if the odds might not be in their favour.

### 3.3.2. Launcelot's Chivalric Awakening

The second knight in *Mr Standfast* is both unexpected as well as problematic. Launcelot Wake is a pacifist, a non-combatant and a conscientious objector, although he is an athletic, young man who would be eminently suited for service. The Military Service Act of 1916 exempted some men, such as ministers of religion, men who are medically unfit and finally men with a “genuine conscientious objection to combatant service” (Bibbings, 340). Those who had not enlisted before and were not planning to do so, could thus still choose to avoid combat. However, a CO could not avoid the pillory since a persevering public opinion insisted that the only way to be truly male was through soldiering (Bibbings, 338). Consequently, in many ways Wake makes an unfitting knight particularly because conscientious objectors in the First World War were generally not seen as real men, or even worse, as an “unman”, “lacking basic characteristic common to both genders” (Bibbings, 343). Nevertheless, during Hannay's mission Wake turns out to be an indispensable asset: he guides Hannay over the mountains during a blizzard in order to save Mary<sup>7</sup>, and during the battle in France he stoically endures being bombed while delivering messages for Hannay. Much like Pienaar, Wake dies in a self-sacrificial act transferring a crucial message to General Mitchinson, even though he knows he is facing “certain death” (639). Humbled by Wake's gallantry, Hannay maintains that Wake “was the Faithful among us pilgrims, who had finished his journey before the rest. Mary had

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<sup>6</sup> For an elaborate reading in the light of the *Pilgrim's Progress*, see: Idle, Jeremy. “The Pilgrim's Plane-crash: Buchan, Bunyan and Canonicity” *Literature and Theology*, vol. 13, no.3, 1 September 1999, p249-258, <https://doi.org/10.1093/litthe/13.3.249>

<sup>7</sup> At this point Mary Lamington is already Hannay's fiancée. Since this dissertation focuses on masculinity in the Great War rather than femininity, I will not dig deeper into her representation as a female for this deserves its own dissertation. Glossock argued that “women are welcomed [into Hannay's adventures] on the basis of their physical and emotional resemblance to school boys” (44). This is the case for Mary who is a courageous, intelligent woman who is allowed into Hannay's life because she resembles his male comrades (specifically Pienaar, see p.555). Her masculine traits pose no threat to Hannay's masculinity, so Mary will not be discussed any further.

foreseen it. ‘There is a price to be paid,’ she had said – ‘the best of us’” (649). Wake’s transformation from an emasculated CO, proclaiming “nauseous folly” (367), into a self-sacrificial knight has often been read in the light of Buchan’s own stance towards pacifism. In the early twentieth century Buchan had expressed his dissatisfaction with anti-war sentiment, seeing it as “a threat to social pluralism and as fundamentally unrealistic as politics” (Waddell, 91). By 1919, on the other hand, Buchan rendered a more qualified position towards pacifism, distinguishing between the many different kinds of pacifism and expressing sympathy towards some victimized groups (Waddell, 91). Indeed, *Mr Standfast* makes sure to lay bare the disparate individual stances within pacifist thought and accepts that most objectors were sincere protestors (Waddell, 95). Offering a balanced view on COs is one thing, but it takes a lot more to rightfully brand Buchan as partially sympathizing with pacifists. Wake’s complex characterization may actually indicate a far more condemnatory attitude towards pacifism.

Wake is described as quite intelligent (365), but his opinions on the war are altogether challenging since trying to argue that Germany had not been responsible for the war (378) might have stirred up some ill-feeling with contemporary readers. Professing views which in 1917 were most likely perceived as quite backward, should indicate a red flag concerning Wake’s character. Consequently, his heroic deeds are never fully unproblematic. Firstly, against all expectations, his detrimental attitude does not prevent him from actually contributing to the allied cause. By the end of 1917 Wake was working as a support labourer at Zonnebeke, near the Ypres Salient. Yet, the reader should be chary of his praise for Wake. He has not become a convert, “[he] think[s] as [he] always thought” and his motivation for leaving his comfortable chair in the Home Office is simply “self-indulgence: [he] wanted fresh air and exercise” (506). He is not in it for the honour, rather it eases his conscience – “it cheats me into thinking I am doing my duty” – and he enjoys himself doing it (506). Instead of a courageous man who selflessly puts aside his ideals for the greater good, he is a self-abnegating narcissist.

Secondly, his motivations for guiding Hannay across the passage in the Swiss Alps are not fully straightforward either. While saving Mary is definitely a noble cause, it is conceivable that he acts out of love for Mary, his friend Hannay’s fiancée. He has made it clear to Hannay that he is the better match for Mary: “You’ll murder her soul. You an ordinary, stupid, successful fellow and she – she’s the most precious thing God ever made” (532). While he apologized and seemed to have accepted that Mary is engaged to Hannay, there is no reason to assume he did no longer love her. Given that he courageously crossed the mountain and put his physical limits to the test, he still acted out of not entirely selfless reasons. Finally, seeing his

compatriots and French allies fighting like Trojans (631), does not change his perspective on war. Yet, he seemed “singularly happy” when he was to deliver his final message on the battlefield. Nevertheless, he ensures that Hannay is not mistaken. On his deathbed he says to him: “A year ago I was preaching peace... I am still preaching it...I’m not sorry” (642). Ultimately, it is doubtful whether there in fact was a transformation of Wake’s character. He still died as a conscientious objector.

Wake’s cause of death was “shrapnel in the groin” (641). Indeed, already being emasculated by being a CO, Wake loses the fundamental symbol of masculinity: the phallus. It is telling that even after his chivalric self-sacrifice, Wake is not redeemed from his effeminate stigma. The reader is reminded that Wake is still a flawed, emasculated hero. In the passages before his death, Wake’s masculinity was raised as an issue even beside his identity as a CO. As mentioned before, in the years leading up to the war Victorian and Edwardian public schools stressed the importance of athleticism for its intertwinement with masculinity and empire (Glasscock, 41). Fears of degeneration due to the disappointing fitness of the soldiers of the Boer War (Glasscock, 41) resulted into the prioritizing of healthy activity over the unhealthy potential of introspection and self-absorption (Bibbings, 346). Here again, Wake falls short:

I see more than other people see [...] and I feel more. [...] How would you like it if a thousand strings were always tugging at you, if you saw that every course meant the sacrifice of lovely and desirable things, or even the shattering of what you know to be unreplaceable? I’m the kind of stuff poets are made of. [...]From the bottom of my heart I believe that it needn’t have happened, and that all war is a blistering iniquity. (552)

Given that a man enhances his athleticism by being a soldier, Wake puts his masculinity at risk twice by caving in to his emotions. Not only do his feelings lead him to pacifism, he consequently prioritizes them over his physical health by choosing not to be a combatant. Wake’s physical deprivation is evident in the Swiss Alps: he is a technically skilled mountaineer, but he is clearly outstripped by Hannay when it comes to fitness. While Wake is “on the edge of fainting”(588), Hannay’s strength “felt inexhaustible” (589) as he ultimately carried Wake on his back for the final miles. In the end, when Wake does embark on the battlefield as a messenger for Hannay he surprisingly proves himself to be a bit of a maniac. Officers on the field are “perturbed” by Wake’s “gallantry”, yet they describe his courage likewise as “eerie” (663). Hannay claims Wake is “the opposite of shell-shocked, if you understand me. He had never been properly under fire before, but he didn’t give a straw for it

[...] He used to go about with a smile on his face, a smile of contentment. Even the horrors – and we had plenty of them – didn't affect him” (632). Wake's indifference to fear, danger and shells is arguably far more disturbing than it is admirable. Earlier Hannay had already asserted that “the man who says he doesn't mind being bombed or shelled is either a liar or a maniac” (483). Wake's cold behaviour in the battlefield reflects the sincerity of his nonchalance towards bombs, so naturally he seems to be a maniac. All in all, one could wonder whether his behaviour derived from courage or from mania?

What function does this false knight serve then? Unlike Pienaar, the reader should not mirror oneself too much to Wake. Yet despite his self-centred motivations and his unstable character, Wake's patriotism is to be held in great respect. He “love[s] the old place [England]”, perhaps “more [...] than [he] love[s] [himself], and that's saying a devilish lot” (553). Given Wake's narcissistic tendencies, his love for England seems entirely selfless especially when he was ready to knock out Hannay when he took him for a German spy (446). Wake's patriotism deviates from usual depictions of COs in the Great War: usually they were seen as unpatriotic (Bibbings, 343). Moreover, whatever Wake's intentions might have been, he was of utmost importance in Hannay's mission: without Wake, Hannay would not have made it through the Alps. Likewise in battle Wake's communication was indispensable and his self-sacrifice was nonetheless heroic. There are two possible explanations for Wake's ambiguous characterisation. In pro-pacifist readings, Wake's emasculated mania could be perceived as a precaution taken by Buchan. Supposing Buchan did sympathize with some individual groupings among pacifists, he never could have carelessly implemented his ideas in *Mr Standfast* without running the risk of being prosecuted like Rose Allatini's pro-pacifist novel *Despised and Rejected* (1918) (Bibbings, 352). By subtly implying Wake's mania, he could simultaneously express his pacifist sentiments and safeguard himself against prosecution. The other, perhaps more likely, explanation is that Buchan still disagreed with anti-war sentiments, but believed that those who nurtured such convictions could fulfil their patriotic duty in multiple ways. Wake never had to be a combatant, but nevertheless could live up to the chivalric ideal. *A Suit of Armour for Youth* (1824) laid bare the chivalric virtues for young men: “loyalty, wisdom, virtue, prudence, valor, mercy, gallantry, modesty, friendship, diligence, honor” (Frantzen, 123). Wake embodies almost all of these virtues, perhaps except for honour since he did not fight. He does get punished heavily for the lack of this virtue as he is stripped of his masculinity. Yet, he is courageous in his own “perverted way” (376) according to Hannay. It was not uncommon to portray the CO as “journeying courageously into his own no-man's land”

(Bibbings, 354) as it took guts to go against the belligerent tide. Moreover, this interpretation seems to fit in Buchan's unification plan: pacifists may be deviants reinforcing the social unrest, but by proclaiming that they, too, can be chivalric like Wake if they contribute in non-combatant ways they can be included into society once more. Wake's ambiguous characterisation then works as the instalment of a chivalric hierarchy. Combatant knights like Pienaar are to be admired to a greater degree than non-combatants who fulfilled their duty in diverse ways. In the light of this, it is again useful to have a look at Launcelot's symbolic name. The mythological Lancelot was one of Arthur's greatest knights of the Round Table, but he turned out to be the most flawed one. He betrayed his King by having an affair with his wife Guinevere, which resulted in the downfall of the kingdom. In an allegorical reading, Wake can thus be seen as a great knight who, led by his emotions, chooses the wrong path and as a CO betrays his country. Wake's character serves as an inclusive knight-figure, the knight who is accessible to the outsiders of society who, despite their flaws, deserve a seat at the Round Table of Great Britain.

## 4. Conclusion

In this dissertation I have explored the various representations of heroism throughout the spy novels and adventure tales of John Buchan during the Great War in order to comprehend his persistent romantic attitude. As heroes reflect the “ideals and norms of a society” and “can contribute to the building, maintenance or destruction of communities” (Korte et al, 4), it is fruitful to have a look at their construction in the context of the Great War: what ideals are represented in the romantic and heroic war novels of that period? In Buchan’s case, Richard Hannay and its allies fulfil this societal function: their portrayal should be the standard to which a civilian, combatant or non-combatant, measures oneself to. Moreover, all the kinds of heroes I have mentioned in this dissertation – the clubland hero, the adventure hero, the soldier hero and the chivalric hero – offer a stable cultural form in response to unstable times characterised by all kinds of (social) anxieties. This stable form often goes hand in hand with a stable masculinity. The revival of “romance” at the end of the nineteenth century was first and foremost a consequence of the increase of female writers. The male adventure story was thus a means to take up literary arms against the psychological, feminized novel. This literary trend coincided with the emergence of the spy novel in the Victorian and Edwardian age, which also foregrounded the masculine social sphere. As a result, Buchan’s fiction examined not only heroism, but more precisely male heroism which proved itself to be convenient during the Great War when male soldiers were at the centre of events. The romantic genre of the spy novel and the adventure novel are an ideal starting point to explore these masculine heroes of the Great War.

Furthermore, it should be clear by now that romance and espionage are likewise strongly connected. While spy mania definitely had its mythological connotations, espionage and romance are intertwined in even more diverse ways. In Achiel van Wallegghem’s diary romance and espionage concurred in a context of self-deception: chivalric stances of the British had a symbolic function which cultivated a superior and seemingly inviolable position. The diary Van Wallegghem implicated that the British explained failures by means of pointing accusations at supposed dishonest spies in order to keep their superior reputation intact. Critical self-evaluation did not seem to have a place in conversations of the British. Conversely, in Buchan’s work espionage and romance are interconnected in a divergent way. Admittedly, the claim that Moxon Ivery and his network were responsible for almost all of the Allies’ failures, does sound redolent of Van Wallegghem’s observations about the British’s belief in their superiority. Nevertheless, in Buchan’s war trilogy the intertwining of romance and espionage have a lot

more to do with adventure and empire, rather than with self-deception. The presence of spies shows the deviousness of the enemy and their exposure gives a sense of a healed empire. It is the adventure and urgency of Hannay's endeavours which is stressed and it is undeniable that spies are indeed around.

Furthermore, the spy novel is naturally connected to conceptions of the empire. Not only is the British Empire constantly threatened by spying enemies, Buchan also pays considerable attention to decay in terms of socialism and discussion about free trade. Ultimately, the period between 1914 and 1918 is not only marked by the horror of war, it was also an unstable time due to general social unrest. Rather than self-deception, romance for Buchan is an appeal to restore the Empire. Self-deception implies a denial of flaws. Instead, Buchan recognises the Empire's shortcomings. For him, persisting in romantic attitudes is a cure for a diseased empire.

By creating romantic visions of England (like Hannay's revelation in *Mr Standfast*) romantic representations of the war as an adventure (which concern all three novels), and heroic characters with noble ideals, Buchan composes a romantic view of the Empire as being capable of surmounting all possible perils. The Black Stone, Hilda von Einem and Moxon Ivery are each time described as awe-inspiring villains, but the War Office never fails to overthrow any of them. Even though crushing impossible enemies against all odds is a common trope in adventure fiction, it is still interesting to explore this in the light of Buchan's war trilogy because of the context it was written in. The Great War with its unforeseen atrocities must have been experienced as an impregnable danger at times. Naïve but hopeful fictions like those of Buchan could have born a certain significance in the period of the war, especially since he capitalized so often on current events for his fiction. *Greenmantle* refers to the Battle of Loos, an event which had a lot of symbolic meaning for the British, whereas *Mr Standfast* on the other hand responds to war-weariness. Exploring the evolution of Buchan's characters, and more specifically their representations as heroes, in a constantly modified context, makes it clear why critics like Samuel Hynes would declare that the Hannay novels influenced English thoughts and feelings about the war far more than his propaganda work (45). The historical allusions, Buchan's tendency to formulate aberrant ideas about the enemy, COs and heroes, as well as his persistent examinations of masculinity must have made his trilogy an interesting and anomalous read during the war.

As shown above, there was a clear evolution in Buchan representations of the hero. In all three novels, Richard Hannay indisputably represents the adventure hero, entirely in keeping with the genre he is working in. More interestingly, in each novel he portrays a subcategory of

the adventure hero which reflects the progress of the war quite precisely. The first part of the trilogy, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) was a retrospective novel about the events leading up to the war. Richard Hannay embodies the typical Clubland Hero of the spy novel, a masculine gentleman accompanied by whisky and sodas and pipes. His patriotic sense of duty sets him out on the adventure of the Black Stone and this ultimately allows him to acquire a heroic identity. The allusions to luck, adventure and fun in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* resonate with the popular view of war as an adventure. As argued, while Hannay does have many heroic traits, he is meant to be portrayed as the accessible hero: no matter how ordinary a man you are, no matter your flaws, heroism can be achieved if one follows the path of duty. *The Thirty-Nine Steps* both depicts a flawed decadent Empire and a flawed hero with a sometimes-imperilled masculinity and no extraordinary qualities. Both the Empire and the hero, however, are far from lost causes: if ordinary men like Hannay can change the course of the war, the Empire can be saved if attention is paid to its shortcomings. In the early context of the war with armies in need of new recruits, the dutiful clubland hero is suited as a stable figure in an unstable context. In order to address as many men as possible, Buchan does not rely on the vigorous, stout soldier hero. A conscientious man without any exceptional skills or bravery would do in 1914-1915, when a quick destruction of the enemy was not inconceivable yet. It was believed that the war would quickly purge the Empire and its civilians of its flaws, and Buchan's first adventurous Hannay novel was inconspicuous between other romantic publications of 1915, such as Rupert Brooke's poetry.

A year later, in 1916, *Greenmantle* was published. Whereas *The Thirty-Nine Steps* was the prototype of the quick read, *Greenmantle* was a far more complex novel with various plot lines and multiple central characters, and contained international conspiracies that stretched to Turkey. Obviously, the novel reflects the increasing complexity of the conflict that had now introduced mass-destructive weapons like poison gas. The war had outlasted two Christmases already and neither of the adversaries was close to surrender, as the Battle of Loos had established. However, Buchan starts his novel with claiming that it was only a tea party in comparison to his espionage endeavours. The accessible, ordinary hero will no longer be sufficient: soldiers need to be shamed out of their fears caused by events which they perceived as strenuous when Hannay indicates that, clearly, things can get worse. Feelings of fear need to make room for stoicism and endurance, the clubland hero needs to be exchanged for the more stable masculine soldier hero. *Greenmantle* is Hannay's transformation into this in three ways. Firstly, learning to be shamed out of cowardice and embracing possible death, teaches him the

virtue of stoicism. Secondly, facing the grotesque Stumm, teaches him who his real adversaries are and which virtues the (soldier) hero does not embody. Lastly, the evil, imposing Hilda von Einem gives him an armour against future threats against his masculinity. Hannay's transformation into the masculine soldier hero would not have been possible without his comrades, who make him resilient in perilous times, even when all hope seems lost. Comradeship, it seems, keeps the heroism of Hannay and his friends intact. The final, elaborately described battle of Erzurum reveals this transformation in the biggest war novel of the trilogy, where impending doom seems to lurk behind every corner.

Finally, the third part of Buchan's war trilogy, *Mr Standfast* (1919), focuses on the pinnacle of heroism: the chivalric hero. Also in this final part Buchan adapts his representation of heroism to the context of the Great War. War-weariness surfaced, as apart from disappointing, unending battles, the British civilians were burdened down with worries about pacifism, socialism, labour unrest, the Irish and incompetent officers. Buchan had to strengthen all resources for the reunification of the British Empire. Therefore, *Mr Standfast* turned out to be the most romantic part of the trilogy, while romanticism in Great Britain generally was dwindling. The novel is set in a context of open warfare – a chivalric tradition – nationalism, countryside romanticism, characters with medieval names and perpetual references to *Pilgrim's Progress*. This makes the appearance of two brave knights to be expected. The first one, Peter Pienaar, is Hannay's lifelong South African friend with whom he always had strong ties. In the final days of his life, Pienaar taught Hannay about fortitude and true chivalric heroism, as he decided the outcome of a losing battle in a self-sacrificial act as a pilot for the British army. Even though he was emasculated by being crippled, he became the epitome of masculinity: a knight. Conversely, Launcelot Wake, the other main knight of the novel, is a more complicated case. His heroic deeds are overshadowed by egoistic motives, mania and pacifist tendencies. The conscientious objector dies by having shrapnel in the groin as a messenger for Hannay in battle. Thus, even when you are a CO a chivalric status can be achieved, yet on a lower scale in the chivalric hierarchy. COs can be seen as Lancelots: heroic, yet ultimately dangerous and flawed. However, in the light of a unifying project, COs deserve a spot at the Round Table as long as they, like Wake, contribute in diverse ways to the war effort.

While Buchan certainly is a romantic wartime author, his heroes always remain in the realm of the humanly possible. That is to say, they are allowed fears, flawed masculinity and both physical and mental weaknesses. In every novel, Richard Hannay suffers from malaria and

his successful enterprises always go hand in hand with a certain amount of luck. Nevertheless, Hannay's flaws – for instance his fear or imperilled masculinity – never affect his actions.

In conclusion, while some aspects make Hannay a more complex hero, all-in-all he remains quite conventionally romantic. As the war progresses, the sense of war as an adventure remains. The road gets tough, but never to a degree that the war's burdens become unbearable. The appalling circumstances in the trenches, the dreadful gas-attacks and the wasted lives because of avoidable losses do not seem to exist in Buchan's universe. Perhaps, Buchan's romanticism would have perished if he had ever fought in the trenches and had sensed the horrors of the shells and bombs at close quarters. Perhaps not. Whatever the case may be, his romantic attitude certainly did not suffer any blows because of strenuous circumstances in the battlefield or the cities. The later in the war and the trilogy, the more Buchan's romanticism increases. While the clubland hero of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* is still quite easy to appropriate as a reader, the stoic soldier hero of *Greenmantle* demands a lot more from a person. To acquire knighthood status, no matter how inclusive Buchan wants to portray it, is even less self-evident. The same goes for masculinity: while the first part hardly addresses masculinity, the second part focuses on the masculine soldier hero and the last one on the pinnacle of masculinity: chivalry. In this sense, Buchan makes an inversed movement in comparison to contemporary literature. As Bernard Bergonzi argued, romantic heroism had been attacked severely during the Great War and it has never really recovered since. It seems as if Buchan mainly holds an aberrant attitude towards the unforeseen enormity of the war. Whereas poets like Owen, Blunden and Sassoon became disillusioned on the battlefield, Buchan responded towards the events in an almost fascinated way: romanticism seemed an appropriate and familiar language to address the unknown, yet awe-inspiring experiences. The world had changed into a place of adventurous quests. Buchan's increasing romantic language ultimately leads us back to *Greenmantle's* foreword:

Let no man or woman call its events improbable. The war has driven that word from our vocabulary, and melodrama has become the prosiest realism.

The Great War, Buchan seems to imply, needed heroes because the context indeed was melodramatic, adventurous and romantic. If the empire was diseased, romance was the cure.

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