

INTRODUCTION

John Buchan was born in Scotland in 1875 to a Presbyterian family with strong farming connections, and left Glasgow University for Oxford in 1895. He took a First in Greats (classical studies) in 1899, while supporting himself throughout his studies as a writer and a publisher's reader. He tried the Imperial Civil Service, the Bar and journalism, but settled in 1907 into publishing and his lifelong happy marriage, and continued to publish his own fiction, though without wild success. His interest in actively engaging himself in politics was tested in 1911 when he failed to gain a seat in the House of Commons, but by 1914 he was in the thick of wartime publishing, and was developing his skills as a historian, a novelist and as a government propagandist. Buchan emerged from the war famous, with a growing family (his fourth child was born in 1918), and a house in Oxfordshire, but also a sick man and much bereaved. The 1920s were spent in constant writing and publishing, and he won the coveted seat in Parliament. Honours and formal appointments followed, and in 1935 he was ennobled as Baron Tweedsmuir to become Governor-General of Canada. His flow of writing began to slow, and in 1940 he died after suffering a brain haemorrhage. His most well-known novel, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) has never been out of print, and he published over 100 books in his lifetime, a substantial proportion of them non-fiction.

There have been three biographies of Buchan,¹ three bibliographies² and much critical writing. Only two full-length books on Buchan's writing have been published, but a substantial amount of critical research has been done, scattered as book chapters, academic articles, op eds in the public press and book reviews.³ Only very recently was a comprehensive survey of his fiction published and, shortly after the date of this volume, he will come out of copyright in Britain to an expected surge of new editions of his works.

The impetus for this volume on John Buchan came from the realization that a great many individuals were working on Buchan simultaneously, but that no collection of essays representative of this sustained effort existed. Collections of essays on a single author by a range of authorities examine the subject thoroughly, and have the extra value of tackling the same subjects from different

angles. A collection such as this also ensures that the author under discussion is approached from outside a single discipline. In collating this book it became obvious how impossible it is to separate out aspects of the life and work of John Buchan solely in terms of his historical writing or his literary work. Both are inextricably intertwined, and dominate the other genres in which he published (for example, poetry and the law). Interestingly, the contributors to this volume are also divided, roughly equally, between historians and literary scholars: the work of the classicist and theological contributors can also be read predominantly through the lens of history and literary style. It seems clear that to understand Buchan's fiction we must understand his history and his place in history. To understand how he felt about his own times and the events in which he participated we need to look at how he wrote his fiction, and what he chose to put into it.

It will also be apparent that none of the essays presented here are solely historical or solely literary-critical. History washes around the discussions of form and language, and examples from Buchan's fiction inform the historical points being made. With such crossings-over and mutual influencing, organizing the essays seemed to need a different set of criteria, not derived just by historical period or literary concern, but by looking deeper into the essay subjects to determine their underlying links. We have also striven for a certain amount of chronological progression, but this was not always possible, because the thematic approaches taken have ranged over Buchan's entire life and work.

Alan Riach notes in his essay in this volume that 'a comprehensive reassessment of Buchan's achievement must read his work in three ways: intensely and closely as literary art ... in terms of his biography, the divided loyalties he experienced himself very early on ...; and thirdly in the entire political and cultural moment of his era'. I have taken this useful tripartite division as a guide for ordering the essays, because Riach seems to me to have got straight to the heart of the matter. Buchan's cultural roots powered all his writing, and demand reconsideration for the simple fact of their all-pervasiveness in Buchan's work and life. The divisions and loyalties that he developed and experienced are also crucial for an understanding of what he wrote and why he wrote it. Finally, reassessing Buchan as a literary artist has been too long overdue, particularly from such a broad range of specialisms as those represented here.

Opening the section on Buchan's cultural roots, then, the value of J. C. G. Greig's discussion of Buchan's Calvinism lies in the author's long professional engagement with Presbyterian and Calvinist theology. The present generation, and several generations preceding them, simply do not have the intellectual and cultural training to read the religious aspects of Buchan's writing in the way that Buchan intended, or would have expected from his own generation. Greig's exegesis of the Calvinism in Buchan's writing fills an important gap in the literature,

and advances our understanding of how Buchan's religious philosophy informed his creative imagination. A similarly important lacuna in modern education, quite different to that expected by Buchan of his readers, is supplied in the essay on Buchan's use of the classics by Michael Haslett and the late Isobel Haslett. Their survey of Buchan's fictional oeuvre unpicks the patterns of his reading and citations, explains his motivations, and shows how his reliance on Jane Harrison and his Oxford tutors influenced his plots and writing style.

Buchan probably started to acquire a notion of his own cultural identity at around the same time that he began untangling Latin conjugations. David Goldie's essay on the Scots and English in Buchan discerns a more subtle relationship than mere opposition. Buchan was not a convert to Englishness, and neither was he a Scots nationalist: somehow he made these two opposites produce a force of twin, parallel loyalties that have rarely been articulated so lucidly in fiction. Simon Glassock also deals with a fundamental force in the life of a male Scot: the passion for sport. He shows how Buchan reflected and shaped ideas of late Victorian and Edwardian masculinity into a philosophy of life and behaviour addressed to his middlebrow male readers. This philosophy informed his response to changing ideas about male culture and literary art, and developed into the Buchan hero, a character who maintained links with masculine ideals of the past and who could be relied upon to re-present these ideals to a post-war readership in the throes of a modernist agenda. Combining these two ideas, of physicality and national identity, Bill Nasson's essay on Buchan's depiction of the South African soldier in the First World War shows how Buchan drew on an idealization of the colonial soldier fighting for the Home Country in his *History of the South African Forces in France* (1920). Buchan's values for the colonial warrior rested on the physical requirements of a successful Imperial settler, but Nasson decodes the rhetoric to show how these contrasted with the values exhibited in the soldiers at the time.

This sense of doublethink, of what Buchan presented as his own view and how this differed from other perspectives, takes us to the second section of the book, on divided loyalties. Staying in South Africa, but going back twenty years to the turn of the twentieth century, Michael Redley examines Buchan's work for Lord Milner in South African land settlement immediately after the Boer War, using hitherto unpublished archive material. He shows how Buchan deployed a ruthless pragmatism that took advantage of the Boers, and drove his political master's policies forward at the expense of the established protocols. Redley shows how, even this early in his career, Buchan used his journalistic connections to advance political propaganda. Revealingly, this pragmatism also convinced Buchan to struggle against the racist prejudices of the Boer farmers, so that Redley presents us with a complex picture of the young Buchan as an early resistor

of Apartheid, as well as a man who took advantage of the confusion of post-war conditions to further British government aims.

Moving on to the First World War, historian Hew Strachan explores how Buchan wrote his own war histories, and how he responded to war in his portraits of soldiers and the wounded. Buchan's administrative and political pragmatism, now rather more tempered by time and experience, was matched to the upholding of civilized values, where the truths that Buchan chose to tell, in his fiction and in his official historical accounts, were for the benefit of the British people, not necessarily for the British authorities. Nathan Waddell also addresses Buchan's reportage of the cultural experience of the First World War, by examining his depiction of pacifists and conscientious objectors. Buchan can be seen to have moderated his views on pacifism, and Waddell shows how he divided his loyalties by his principles in acknowledging a personal sympathy for the individual conscientious objector, while disagreeing with pacifist philosophy.

Continuing the investigation of dual perspectives, Peter Henshaw examines Buchan's American-aimed propaganda to find a consistent pattern in Buchan's long-held beliefs about the British Empire and in how Britain and America should continue to do business together. Buchan's depiction of Americans, his use of America as a fictional setting and as a market, and his attachment to Anglo-American relationships are shown to have been a directed insistence from Buchan that Anglo-American understanding was fundamental to how he saw the future of the civilized Western world.

The Iraqi scholar Ahmed al-Rawi also offers a new close reading of Buchan by examining Buchan's use of Islam in his fiction and essays, in terms of how Buchan's Empire writing can be seen to be predicated upon an assumption of Christian authority as well as Western white rule. Using *Greenmantle* (1916) as a starting point, al-Rawi examines the small, fleeting glances in idiom and phrase in Buchan's dialogue and settings, and makes a highly persuasive case for a postcolonial reassessment of Buchan's works that opens up spiritual and cultural rather than racial territory. H. E. Taylor also uses a new lens, that of the world of work, to examine how Buchan dealt with businessmen, showing how the evolution of business methods was reinterpreted in Buchan's fiction by rooting the terrifying Conquistadors of *The Courts of the Morning* and the pawkiness of Mr Craw in *Castle Gay* in a sound appreciation of the role of the entrepreneur in society. The divided loyalties of conscience and money, God and Mammon, are reconciled through an acknowledgment of moral consequences.

Opening the third section to examine Buchan as a literary artist, Douglas Kerr goes to Buchan's earliest publications, and to the heart of creative endeavour, by unearthing an old literary libel. Did Buchan plagiarise Joseph Conrad? Kerr explores the nature of literary borrowing and hypertextuality, and gives Conrad

and Buchan a close reading to establish that there are unsettling but perhaps not unbenign coincidences at both ends of Buchan's career. Kate Macdonald gives similarly close attention to Buchan's depiction of women in his fiction, using narrative theory and feminist readings to categorize his female characters in terms of their function in the story, and their relationship to the protagonists. The use of archetypes, of the older, the sexualized and the challenging women, who might also be class infiltrators, is shown to be Buchan's way of expressing disapproval of changing social behaviour.

Alan Riach looks at Buchan's art in terms of a framework from which Buchan engaged with the world through his language and stories. The tension that Buchan employed in his fiction to produce suspense can be read as a motivating force, in the narrative, in Buchan's own life and in the journey that must end. Linguistic choice makes clearer 'the pathos of epic effort', and shows how Buchan reconciled his narratives with form. Paul Grant also explores Buchan's fiction as a mode for reconciliation, in presenting Nature as both benign and malign in his supernatural fiction. Buchan's use of landscape in addressing the nature and origins of fear, and his literary skill in producing an uncanny atmosphere, by the powerful impetus of suggestion, make him a classic writer of horror and the unknown. Contrariwise, John Miller shows how Buchan's depiction of ecology allows him to bypass the horrific in his fiction, by advocating a harmonious integration with nature, rather than a resistant alienation. Using *The Waste Land* and anarchism as exemplars of the negativity that Buchan was striving to overcome, or at least avoid, Miller shows how Buchan's metaphors and metonymy also resist modernist tendencies. Hygiene is correlated with resistance to extremism, in all its forms.

No work on Buchan can avoid *The Thirty-Nine Steps*. As we see below, this single work is dealt with thoroughly in many of the chapters published here, but Tony Williams takes *Thirty-Nine Steps* studies to a new level with a discussion of the first three films of the novel, and reallocates Buchan's original literary tropes across forty years of film history. Intertextuality, hybridization and the demands of a screen audience rather than a readership disembodied the original novel and made it a flickering screen creation in 1935 (Hitchcock), 1954 (Thomas) and 1978 (Sharp). Williams reinterprets the films to show how Buchan cast shadows on them, rather than seeing the films as pale imitations of his book.

Over forty fictional works by Buchan are discussed in this volume, many of them by more than one contributor. The Buchan work cited by the most contributors is, however, Buchan's autobiography, *Memory Hold-the-Door* (1940), showing how it is still considered a valuable key to Buchan's own thought, and as evidence of his interpretation of his life. That which he did not recall in print in this work is also notable: he says little about his relationship with his mother, his early years working with John Lane in the context of decadent aesthetic *Yellow*

Book London, or about exactly how his early First World War journalism turned into official war reportage. Negative data are also indicative in considering how his works of fiction have been discussed. *Mr Standfast* (1919) and *The Three Hostages* (1924) are the novels most often examined by the contributors to this volume, followed by *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915) and *The Dancing Floor* (1926). 'The Grove of Ashtaroth' (1910) is the most fruitful short story, discussed in as many essays here as *A Lodge in the Wilderness* (1906), *Greenmantle* (1916), *The Courts of the Morning* (1929), *The Island of Sheep* (1936) and *Sick Heart River* (1940). 'The Moor-Song' (1897), *Prester John* (1910) and *A Prince of the Captivity* (1933) are ahead not only of *Sir Quixote of the Moors* (1895), *Huntingtower* (1922), *John Macnab* (1925), *Witch Wood* (1927), and *The Blanket of the Dark* (1931), but also *Nelson's History of the War* (1915–19). By looking at the works that have not been covered by more than one author we can see how trends of interest are apparent. All the supernatural stories have been looked at, by Grant and the Hasletts, as well as by others, but less obvious works, such as *Salute to Adventurers* (1915) and *The Gap in the Curtain* (1932) have not been covered widely, yet contain much material of importance to, say, the study of the historical novel and the perception of America as a frontier, and the social history of the 1930s. Clearly more work is waiting to be done.

Also used intensively in this volume is Buchan's journalism. His collected editorials and leaders for *The Scottish Review* (1907–9) are usefully available in one volume (ed Gray, 1939), but Buchan's *Spectator* journalism, which lasted for a great deal longer and had the advantage of being anonymous, is a fascinating but underused resource to supplement Buchan's fiction writing and his burgeoning historical and biographical work from the turn of the twentieth century.

It is hoped that the seventeen essays in this volume will advance Buchan studies to a level where the foundations will be seen to have been solidly laid down from 1949 to 1995, and work on Buchan began its second phase in 2009. Buchan is taught now more than ever, either for his place as a great Scottish writer (his works have been on Scottish school and university curricula for decades), or for *The Thirty-Nine Steps* in the context of film history or the genesis of the thriller genre. More recent critical approaches have included his war novels as expressions of reading history, his place in the middlebrow continuum and as an aspect of pre-modernist *fin de siècle* writing. The scope is broad: these essays demonstrate that, with the right viewfinder, Buchan and his writing can be used as a valuable and productive lens for new cultural, historical and literary exploration.

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