

HEROISM IN THE FICTION OF LESLIE CHARTERIS

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ABSTRACT

The heroism of Leslie Charteris' gentleman vigilante, Simon Templar, known as "the Saint", is determined by a range of ideological, historical and social influences. The nature, origins and power of this heroism are addressed through an interdisciplinary analysis of his characterization and development over thirty-five years. Three fundamental elements – Charteris' personal identification with his creation, Templar's inclusion in the tradition of the Western warrior hero, and his reflection of the heroic quest figure – influence Charteris' representation of the Saint. Further, the character's varied literary origins, and contemporaneous ideologies in the prewar, wartime and postwar periods, generate five primary layers in Templar's heroic persona. Chapter I provides an overview of Charteris' Saint narratives, his readership, his other fiction and his distinctive writing style. Chapter II examines Charteris' personal identification with the Saint, and argues that the character is part of the wider Western warrior hero and heroic quest narratives. Chapters III and IV identify the origin of the Saint in the literary representations of the empire hero, an English gentleman with special skills who resembles the American frontier hero, as well as in those of non-official detectives, romantic and charismatic criminals, vigilantes, pirates and highwaymen. In Chapter V, it is argued that important changes in the Saint, that reveal further complexities in his heroism, were generated by major political and social ideologies in the different periods and countries in which Charteris wrote his narratives. The final chapter analyses two specific aspects of the Saint's heroism arising from his anti-war sentiment and his hostility to non-Western "others" in the 1930s and 1940s.

CERTIFICATION

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.



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INTRODUCTION

Charteris and His Work

Every year the UK Crime Writers' Association holds its prestigious “Diamond Dagger” ceremony. The Diamond Dagger is awarded annually to crime writers whose careers have been marked by sustained excellence, and who have made a significant contribution to crime fiction published in the English language. Winners have included Ian Rankin, Eric Ambler, John le Carré and Ruth Rendell.

On 7 May 1992 the Chairman of the Association presented the Diamond Dagger to the 84-year old Leslie Charteris, whose fiction featuring the gentleman warrior, vigilante adventurer and modern knight-errant Simon Templar, known as the Saint, first appeared in 1928 and is still being published today. Outperforming both heroes and villains and a destroyer of society's enemies for decades, the central protagonist of Charteris’ twelve novels, thirty-four novellas and twelve volumes of short stories excelled in popularity. As Clive Bloom has warned, figures relating to book sales, at least in Britain, “must always be approached with considerable caution,”¹ but based on known editions and reprints, publishers’ remarks and information from Charteris’ letters, it has been estimated that Charteris’ sales have topped forty million.² While small in relation to the huge output and marketing of authors like the early twentieth-century thriller writer Edgar Wallace, or the famous Agatha Christie whose sales run into billions, Charteris’ sales record for his more modest output remains very substantial. Publication of his fiction tailed off in the 1980s, but from December 2012 Mulholland Books at Hodder and Stoughton commenced republication of thirty-five Saint titles.

The Saint began as an early 1930s wealthy, upper class English gentleman exhibiting some dandy traits and enjoying a liberated, exciting lifestyle; an idealistic, modern buccaneer seeking excitement and spoils who obtains both by merrily and mockingly ridding society of evildoers. He subtly matures, showing more restraint by the end of the decade, later becoming an Americanised, worldly

¹ Clive Bloom, *Bestsellers: Popular Fiction Since 1900* (Houndmills, Basingtoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 107-8.

² Ian Dickerson, *A Saint I Ain't* (unpublished draft biography of Charteris), 2. Dickerson is the Secretary of the UK Saint Club and was personally acquainted with Charteris.

and urbane counter-espionage agent for the US Government during and after the Second World War. In the 1950s he turns into a wealthy international celebrity traveller and playboy – older and less driven, though still adventuring and righting wrongs. In 1990, in a short article about Charteris and the Saint, Helena Blakemore suggested that it is worth examining “how one particular character can survive and maintain popularity for over half a century...retaining reader loyalty through succeeding generations and various media”.³ Blakemore’s suggestion is a good one. By 1963, when he ceased sole authorship of fiction featuring Simon Templar, Charteris had published 140 Saint narratives.⁴ Yet despite the volume and popularity of his work and its long period of publication, almost nothing of an academic nature has been written about his fiction. Why is this so?

Firstly, as argued later in this Introduction, while Charteris drew on different forms of crime fiction in constructing his narratives, they are generally best described as thrillers. One reason for a lack of academic interest in his work is the relative dearth of academic focus, within the genre of crime fiction, on the thriller – compared with, in particular, detective fiction. While there have been some major studies and articles about thrillers, detective fiction in all its forms is much better served, both in broad historical consideration and in more specialized critical analysis. For the period from the 1920s to the early postwar years, when Charteris produced much of his Saint fiction, there is particular academic emphasis on the clue-puzzle novel of ratiocination – best represented by the work of Agatha Christie – and on American “hard-boiled” private eye fiction such as the novels of Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett. Hammett’s famous 1930 private eye novel *The Maltese Falcon* is often viewed as an early example of crime fiction as serious literature. Today much detective fiction, unlike most thriller fiction, tends to be seen as serious and often complex literature, and studies of it form a specific area of literary criticism. The academic journal *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, published biannually by McFarland & Co of Jefferson, North Carolina, focuses on the analysis of detective fiction, and a number of scholars have noted the place of this literature in academic scholarship.⁵

³ Helena Blakemore, “The Novels of Leslie Charteris”, in *Twentieth Century Suspense: the Thriller Comes of Age*, ed. Clive Bloom (London: Macmillan, 1990), 70. The “various media” are radio, film, comic strips and television.

⁴ In a BBC interview with broadcaster Nan Winton on 5th June 1965, Charteris claimed that he had written 143 Saint stories. It is unclear how he reached this figure, though he probably included *Vendetta for the Saint*, written collaboratively with Harry Harrison and first published in book form in 1964.

⁵ For example Heta Pyrhonen, “Criticism and Theory”, in *A Companion to Crime Fiction*, ed. Charles J. Rzepka and Lee Horsley (Chichester, West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 43; 45; Carl D. Malmgren, *Anatomy of Murder*

The major reason Charteris' work has not been seen as worthy of serious study is that it has often been included among those crime fiction narratives perceived as mass-produced, consumer literature of little or no value. Such literature has traditionally been seen as "pulp fiction", read for escapist diversion and then discarded. Julian Symons, one of the most respected of the twentieth century historians and analysts of crime fiction, describes Charteris as one of the "big producer and big seller" crime and thriller writers, "few of [whose] books are of individual interest", whose "work has a machine-like nature", and is "a ready-made product like cornflakes or puffed wheat". Others allocated to this category by Symons are early prolific writers such as John Creasey, Edgar Wallace, the mid-century Mickey Spillane, and more recently Fredrick Forsyth and Robert Ludlum.⁶

Symons is probably referring to what he sees as excessive similarity of theme and plot in such fiction. Dismissal of Charteris' work, however, is unjustified. Certainly, like most thrillers of the period his fiction is not complicated, following a narrative pattern and concentrating its action through the Saint hero whose characterization is wedded to the action. The Saint's world is sharp and clear-cut, like its dashing main character, with little ambiguity and few dilemmas of motivation, psychological tension or personal morality. While he is no cardboard stereotype like the protagonists of many early thrillers, Templar can sometimes, especially in the very early years, be too close to perfection and his opponents too monstrous. But he is a hero; all societies in all ages have had heroes, and needed heroes. Such figures, whether fictional or real, are meaningful in many ways, not least because they fulfil a vital role in demonstrating to ordinary people how qualities such as bravery, goodness and fairness are worthwhile virtues that help navigate problems in an uncertain world full of villains. This alone suggests Charteris' hero and his narratives have relevance not only for his time but for all time, and are thus worthy of study.

Beyond this, however, the very fact of the Saint's prominence in twentieth century crime fiction and Charteris' success in creating such a popular hero suggests Simon Templar should not be ignored. While the Saint shares important origins with many other heroes in the Western canon of literature, he has a distinctive appeal; there are no other crime fiction heroes in the period under discussion that

(Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2001), 3; or Joel Black, "Crime Fiction and the Literary Canon", in Rzepka and Horsley, *Companion*, 76-89.

⁶ Julian Symons, *Bloody Murder: From the Detective Story to the Crime Novel* (London and Basingstoke: Pan Books Ltd, 4th ed., 1994), 247; 248-252.

come anywhere near his combination of prodigious power, protective benevolence, physical attractiveness and devil-may-care merriment. He is probably the best known and most celebrated of the gentleman crime fiction heroes who, as discussed primarily in Chapter III, evolved in the early decades of the twentieth century. The character's portrayal is a major contribution to this concept of heroism and was a crucial factor in extending its life beyond the immediate post-Great War years.

A further reason for study of the Saint is the unusual circumstance whereby, as noted above and discussed in depth in Chapter IV, major changes in the presentation of the character occur over the various periods of Charteris' writing. While some other crime fiction characters roughly contemporaneous with the Saint evolve and change in consecutive novels, no figure undergoes the metamorphoses seen in Simon Templar. While the basic attributes of the character endure, his outward nature and manner are substantially altered in his different manifestations. Analysis of this phenomenon provides insights into the range of factors that shaped the Saint as a very special type of crime fiction hero not found elsewhere.

And finally, it should not be forgotten that Charteris' work is memorable and emotionally persuasive. His narratives weave major, sophisticated variations within the pattern; the exciting, glamorous Saint, imaginative, colourful description, varied and interesting detail and, in particular, clever and comical language entrance the reader. His prewar writing has a sparkle, liveliness and intensity of emotion rarely found in crime fiction, and his later novels and novellas are mature and refined, with plausible villains, believable threats and realistic excitement. His short stories are skilfully constructed and entertaining. These factors, along with all of the above, suggest his fiction should not be ignored.

Yet Charteris remains virgin territory. Apart from one or two brief articles like that of Blakemore, there are no academic studies analysing the meaning and themes of his narratives, the ideas and ideologies that permeate what he wrote, his writing style or any other aspects of his oeuvre. This absence of considered analysis, given the great popularity of his fiction, his evident creative ability, his descriptive power and his skilful use of language indicates that the time is long overdue for a study of his work.

Aim, Scope and Methodology

The lack of any significant previous studies of Charteris' fiction provides a unique opportunity to examine in detail the work of a popular author for the first time, and from a position uninfluenced by prior analyses of the subject. The potential scope for analysis is very broad, but the power of Charteris' narratives is bound up with the central feature of his fiction: his hero, Simon Templar, and a study of that figure is an appropriate focus for an initial examination of his work. Blakemore asserts that "western culture has had a voracious appetite for heroes".⁷ If so, what might this mean for Charteris' hero? This thesis is concerned with determining the nature, origins and enduring qualities of the Saint character's heroism, by examining the influences that shaped that heroism. It seeks to answer the three interrelated questions "what sort of a hero is the Saint?", "where does his heroism come from?" and "why was he such an enduring and popular hero?"

It should again be noted that the study is an initial examination of Charteris' fiction. This is because the large size of his oeuvre, and, as discussed later in this Introduction and in Chapter I, the varied nature of the Saint narratives he produced, mean that it is not practical for a single study to comprehensively examine all dimensions of his work. There remains scope for later studies to consider, far more than is done here, the extent to which, for example, his writing reflects contemporaneous attitudes, perceptions and cultural change in societies as different as 1930s Britain, wartime America and the world of the 1950s. His distinctive style and use of language, its variations in different historical periods and readers' responses to and interpretations of this, is worthy of a study in itself. This analysis, in seeking to answer the three questions about Charteris' hero, also focuses on a specific historical period: from 1927, when Charteris' first (non-Saint) novel was published, to 1963. This is for two reasons. First, because *The Saint in the Sun*, a collection of short stories published in 1963, is the last book containing Saint narratives written solely by Charteris. After that date, he collaborated with a range of other authors who drafted new Saint narratives that were usually published under his name. This collaborative or hybrid authorship process produced six novels and nine novella collections, and there are also the two novels *Capture the Saint* and *The Saint*, both by Burl Barer and published in 1997. Second, at approximately the time this process began, the British ITV television program "The Saint" debuted. Running from 1962 to 1969 and

⁷ Blakemore, "Novels", 70.

starring Sir Roger Moore, the series was stunningly successful. Charteris alone did not determine the character's nature and activities in these new important presentations of the Saint, and the television series, in particular, was a major influence on perceptions of Simon Templar from that time.

Based on the celebrity playboy Saint of the 1950s rather than the earlier, more outlaw vigilante hero and, notwithstanding the Americanization of the character in the stories of the 1950s, presenting Templar as a droll, sophisticated Englishman, it was enormously popular all over the world. Many of the plots loosely reflect Charteris' published narratives. The Saint had already featured in films, radio programs, a syndicated comic strip and comics in different periods from the late 1930s through the 1940s and 1950s. Nine, mainly B-grade, films of varying quality and success were produced from 1938 to 1953, eight by RKO Hollywood, with Templar portrayed by various actors as a witty and debonair Englishman. Charteris' published fiction remained far and away the primary medium for the Saint, though the other media undoubtedly added to the character's popularity. The impact of the Moore series, however, was far greater than that of the early movies and radio programs. Sales of Charteris' books, which had begun to taper off, were revitalized, with many more millions being sold; it is undeniable that the overall popularity of the Saint and Charteris' work, and a substantial portion of his overall sales, owe a great deal to the television series. But unlike the earlier media presentations of the Saint, which are unlikely to have significantly influenced literature-derived perceptions of the character, the program's enormous popularity in its own right was such that the Saint was now largely defined as a hero in his Moore television persona, as the hybrid Saint novels began to appear and also at a time when the profile of James Bond, a hero in some ways similar to the Saint, was exploding in film from 1962. Moore, the former Saint, played the role of the incredibly popular Bond from 1973.

New questions arise from this metamorphosis: the way television viewers comprehended the Saint of the television series and of the hybrid novels, how Bond impacted on perceptions of Templar, and how this mix of influences affected readers' perceptions of the Saint's heroism in all of Charteris' fiction. Given the complex nature of these issues, it is appropriate that they be addressed in later studies. In the 1970s and 1980s Charteris' books continued to attract readers, but the character's popularity declined again, despite the production of two much shorter, and far less successful, television series. It is likely this decline resulted from the absence of an award-winning television

program, the prominence in new thrillers of flawed, complex heroes unlike Simon Templar and an increasing focus on Cold War espionage, as well as the by then dated settings and ideologies in Charteris' work.⁸

It should be acknowledged that the Saint's status as a hero in Charteris' fiction is, in one sense, inherent in the narrative pattern. As with most thrillers, the Saint narratives depend not only on the inevitable survival of the character but on a satisfying and reassuring closure, with readers confident that the tension or fear aroused by the events of the plot will be definitively erased by the protagonist. Dennis Porter, in his early but penetrating analysis of ideology in detective fiction, has suggested that for detective stories "a sense of mechanistic inevitability is communicated that has the reassuring force of a law";⁹ similarly, in all of Charteris' narratives, the inevitability of the outcome means that the Saint, as the primary mechanism bringing about the satisfying closure and exorcism of evil, becomes a hero in the process of doing so. In defining the Saint's heroism, this study does not identify him as a particular type of hero, such as the romantic hero, although Templar does in some ways display the characteristics of this figure. He is not emotional, introspective, brooding or self-destructive through arrogance or overconfidence, yet, like the romantic hero, he is isolated, has special qualities and abilities, is attractive to women and admired by men, challenges orthodoxy and rejects conventional behaviour. He is a law unto himself, and there can be an aura of dark, cryptic power about him. Categorizing the Saint, however, would detract from the importance of the many other, separate qualities that make up his heroism, and would be insufficient to answer the three posed questions.

In seeking to provide answers, the study argues initially in Chapter II that there are three fundamental influences that provide an ultimate basis for the Saint's heroism. The first of these is Charteris' close personal identification with his protagonist, which impacted in various ways on the type of hero the Saint became. The second is Templar's inclusion in the tradition of the warrior hero of Western imagination, which has been consolidated in many forms through the ages from its origins in the classical Homeric/Virgilian hero, and includes a form with whom the Saint is specifically identified –

⁸ The protagonist of the 1997 film *The Saint*, directed by Phillip Noyce and starring Val Kilmer, bears little resemblance to the Simon Templar of Charteris' fiction. Burl Barer's fictional work *The Saint* is a novelization of the film.

⁹ Dennis Porter, *The Pursuit of Crime* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 219.

the medieval knight. The third is Templar's reflection of the universal quest figure of myth and folklore, the restorer of well-being to society.

Beyond these influences, the primary dimensions of the character's heroism lend themselves to categorization by layers – five layers of heroism that explain the nature, origins and popular impact of the Saint as a hero, both across his whole career and specifically in different periods. These primary layers can be seen in the evolution of the character from the protagonists of nineteenth and early twentieth century adventure and thriller literature, whose attributes were innovatively adapted by Charteris to create his unique Simon Templar, and in the way the Saint was further shaped by the particular social, historical and ideological contexts of 1930s, 1940s and 1950s Britain and America.

The first layer is founded in Templar's evolution from the well-established fictional English gentleman hero of the outer reaches of the British Empire in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the "empire hero". Much of this figure, whose heroism is revalidated and reaffirmed through its similarity to that of the popular frontier hero of the American West, is central to Simon Templar. The second layer is represented by a range of other established and popular fictional heroes in thrillers and adventure stories of the same period, heroes who played a major part in shaping the Saint. This second layer includes, in particular, benevolent vigilantism and romantic, piratical outlawry, often associated with adventurer and trickster qualities. Romantic criminals, vigilantes, pirates, highwaymen and cavaliers created by well-known writers such as Alexandre Dumas, Rafael Sabatini, Edgar Wallace, Maurice Leblanc or "Sapper" (H. C. McNeile), as well as the many portrayals of the merry outlaw Robin Hood, all exhibit second layer features that can be found in Simon Templar.

After the initial 1930s period, the character was reconstructed in two later historical periods: during and immediately after the Second World War, and in the 1950s. This means that there are three different forms of the character from his inception to the last narrative written solely by Charteris in 1963. These three different forms of the Saint add three further layers to the character's heroism. In each period the attributes associated with the first two layers described above remain with him, and he continues as a warrior, unique and special within society, his actions righting wrongs and protecting the community. But these attributes are adapted, modified or strengthened in each period

for reasons relating to period context. In the 1930s, English political and economic influences, ideologies and values helped shape the Simon Templar of that decade, just as a variety of trans-Atlantic factors remodelled him as the Americanised Saint after 1940. The self-reliant, self-made and savvy Templar of this period, for example, appealed to American audiences by reaffirming American beliefs in the supremacy of the free and successful individual. In the 1950s, the heroism of the older, playboy celebrity Saint, while less intense, is predicated on various contemporaneous American and Western ideologies.

Overall, then, the five layers of the Saint's heroism include two layers generated by the character's origins in prior heroes – on the one hand, the empire hero, and on the other, romantic criminals, vigilantes, pirates and highwaymen – and three layers arising from political, ideological and historical influences in reasonably distinct chronological periods. In addition to these five layers, there are supplementary dimensions of the Saint's heroism in the 1930s and 1940s. These can be seen in the character's changing attitudes to war and conflict, and in his heroic representation of Western civilization against alien "others".

The changes in Templar reinvigorated and refreshed his heroism for successive generations, while maintaining essential features of the character that were attractive to readers from earlier periods. Each reconstructed Saint also reflects Charteris' personal identification with the character. The greater maturity, seriousness, reflectivity and cynicism depicted in the character as his career progresses results largely from Charteris' own maturing, ageing and changing outlook. Similarity between author and protagonist is particularly notable in the 1950s, when the lifestyle and outlook of the wealthy playboy Saint, less driven and more reflective about his missions, embody those of Charteris at that time.

The Saint restores well-being to society, but he is no revolutionary. Always part of the upper echelon of society, ultimately he is a hero of the establishment, one whose nature and actions support and reaffirm the existing political and social system and concomitant ideologies in the places and periods in which he operates. This can be seen in both the English and American Saint. It is important, because outwardly he is a renegade, an outlaw whose actions are illegal and who has rejected the prevailing system. In the prewar narratives, in particular, there are many strong and overt criticisms

of English conservative values and institutions such as the English public school, and in both England and America the villains in the narratives are frequently outwardly respectable, upper class figures.

All of the above factors define and validate the Saint's heroism, and in any one period he manifests attributes from its various dimensions. The inherent popularity generated by his known and understood heroic features is enhanced by his distinctiveness, his exciting and thrilling exploits, his wealthy and luxurious life-style, and the satisfaction resulting from his vanquishing of evildoers, all of which offer vicarious pleasure to the reader. Charteris' impudent, amusing and skilful writing style enhanced the attractiveness of his hero. And while secondary to the book form, the early film, radio and comic strip presentations of the character undoubtedly boosted his popularity, as did Charteris' careful, clever and very extensive commercial exploitation of his work.

The Saint appears in narratives that vary enormously in size, plot, location and focus, even within the distinct prewar, wartime/postwar and 1950s periods. His activities and the settings in which they occur constantly differ. This makes it impossible to select one particular cluster of Charteris narratives for analysis that are sufficiently representative of the character's nature, qualities and activities to explain the full scope of his heroism and answer the three questions. Within individual novels of the 1930s period, in particular, in a series of thrilling adventures Charteris explored different aspects of his hero. In the novel *Getaway* (1932), the concept of personal liberation is enunciated through the Saint. In *Saint Overboard* (1936), under very different circumstances, the character's relationship with a woman with whom he suddenly falls in love is depicted in an intensely emotional, ultimately sacrificial way. This is in absolute contrast to Templar's merry outlaw relationship with his partner Patricia Holm in many other Saint narratives. Similarly, the Saint of these situations bears scant resemblance to the character of murderous redemption and tragedy in *The Saint in New York* (1935), the dedicated, streetwise anti-Nazi agent who rejects a voluptuously available woman in order to bring her fascist father to justice in *The Saint Steps In* (1943), or the outwardly reluctant, even tired protagonist of "Vancouver: The Sporting Chance", a short story in *The Saint Around the World* (1956).

A clearly more fruitful approach is to consider the Saint narratives in toto, analysing Templar across Charteris' entire oeuvre. Accordingly, detail of the Saint's nature, activities and circumstances from

individual novels, novellas and short stories across the whole corpus of material is examined from a range of perspectives – historical, social, ideological, literary and cultural – in order to interpret the character's heroism. Such consideration and analysis shows that, above a consistent basis of nature and behaviour, this heroism manifests itself in a variety of modalities, with varying degrees of intensity.

The publication history of Charteris' fiction is complex. Most of his narratives appeared in magazines prior to, and a handful after, their publication in book form; in the prewar period, for example, when Charteris lived mainly in England, much of his fiction was published first in the long defunct Amalgamated Press magazine *The Thriller*, with some short stories appearing in *Empire News* magazine. A few items were also published in American magazines. The narratives often bore different titles from those used when they were later published in book form. Further complicating the picture, many of the prewar books themselves, after initial publication, were republished with different titles for commercial reasons. Charteris moved permanently to the United States in 1939, and much of his 1940s work, both during and after the Second World War, was first published in American magazines. From 1948 he wrote only short stories, which after 1953 generally first appeared in the various iterations of *The Saint Mystery Magazine*, a weekly launched by Charteris in that year that ran under various names until 1967 in both Britain and America and was also available in foreign language editions.

The whole series to 1963 comprises thirty-six books, including novels, compilations of two or three novellas and collections of short stories. Most were first published almost simultaneously in Britain and the United States, some also in Canada and elsewhere. There were many reprints, new editions, new compilations of existing narratives and a large number of foreign language editions. Two omnibuses of Saint fiction appeared, in 1939 and 1952. There is also an extensive bibliography of Saint stories in French – including, apart from translations of Charteris' works, stories by others based on the Saint radio programs and comic strips, produced with varying degrees of collaboration by Charteris. The publication history of all Charteris' Saint fiction, including his later collaborative authorship, is comprehensively addressed in a number of publications.¹⁰

¹⁰ See Burl Barer, *The Saint: A Complete History in Print, Radio, Film and Television 1928-1992* (Jefferson, North Carolina & London: McFarland, 2003); W.O.G. Lofts and Derek Adley, *The Saint and Leslie Charteris* (Bowling Green,

The difficulty in the 21st century in obtaining a uniform series of Saint publications has meant that a variety of editions have been used for this study.¹¹ Where mentioned, novella and short story titles are in quotation marks, and book titles, both of novels and of collections of novellas or short stories, in italics. Quotations from the narratives will include, in the initial reference, the details of the edition actually used, the original title (where it differs) and the first year of publication. Non-quotational references will include only the original title of the earliest publication as a book or part of a book, and the first year of publication. Where books were first published in Britain and America simultaneously but with different titles, the original title will be that in the country where Charteris primarily resided at the time. A full list of editions used with their original titles and dates of publication is included in the thesis bibliography.

Thrillers and Crime Fiction

It was noted above that the general designation for Charteris' work in this study is "thriller". It is appropriate here to explore why this is the case, and to consider the idea of the thriller in the period when Charteris produced his major work. Although spy thrillers can sometimes be seen as a separate category, most other thrillers, like detective stories, are usually considered to be a sub-genre of crime fiction. Crime fiction is itself a vague term, employed, as one observer has noted, to "classify an otherwise unclassifiable genre".¹² This difficulty of classification has led Stephen Knight to use "crime fiction" as a general generic descriptor for texts in whose varying forms "there is...always a crime (or very occasionally just the appearance of one)"¹³ – a designation adopted in this study. Crime fiction includes many sub-genres or sub-classifications, often overlapping each other, and there is little consistency in the use by critics of terms like "mystery fiction", "detective fiction" or "crime novel".

Ohio: Bowling green University Press, 1972); "The official website of author Leslie Charteris", the Saint Club, accessed 13 August 2014, www.lesliecharteris.com; "A History of the Saint Books of Leslie Charteris", Peter Dunn, accessed August 11, 2012, www.simontemplar.info; and "The Saint Works of Leslie Charteris and the Adventures of Simon Templar", Dan Bodenheimer, accessed August 11, 2014, www.saint.org.

¹¹ The new Mulholland series noted above became available too late to be of practical use.

¹² John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 1. Rzepka also wrestles with the term, musing whether "crime writings" might be more appropriate. Charles J. Rzepka, "Introduction", in Rzepka and Horsley, *Companion*, 2.

¹³ Stephen Knight, *Crime Fiction Since 1800: Detection, Death, Diversity* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), xiii.

As scholars have not shown great interest in the thriller, its parameters are not easy to define. Certainly, there are some general studies – early ones such as Ralph Harper’s 1969 examination of existentialist themes in the thriller and reader psychology, or Jerry Palmer’s analysis of genesis and structure in the sub-genre; and later approaches like Michael Denning’s investigation of narrative and ideology in the British spy thriller, Bloom’s compendium of analyses of twentieth century thrillers or Lee Horsley’s study of the noir thriller.¹⁴ Some overviews of crime fiction make reference to novels that have thriller elements, and a few include discrete chapters or sections on the thriller.¹⁵ There are, of course, specific definitions of the thriller based, in particular, on structure and plot. In his often quoted study Palmer argues that there are only two “absolutely indispensable” elements: a competitive hero and a conspiracy.¹⁶ The famous structuralist Tzvetan Todorov categorized the thriller by suggesting that while the murder mystery can be understood as two “stories” – the first story, that of a prior murder, being reconstructed by the second, which is the narrative of the investigation/solution of the crime – the thriller, in contrast, energises the second story over the first, so that the crime is not prior but merely a part of the action of the narrative, and is less important than the mission (of the hero). The mystery is predicated on curiosity, the thriller on suspense.¹⁷ Martin Priestman suggests most thrillers can be divided into two groupings: the noir thriller, characterized by an alienated, sometimes doomed protagonist in a dark and pessimistic environment, and the anti-conspiracy thriller, where the hero, with little or no help from the authorities, challenges a powerful conspiracy.¹⁸ The extensive range of thriller types and the amorphous nature of many thriller narratives mean that most attempts at definition fall short of a comprehensive categorization. In these circumstances it may be more satisfactory to define the thriller from an affective perspective – as a narrative that relies, in particular, on action and excitement to satisfy, one which heightens the reader's awareness of events through the experience of shock, excitement and suspense. While

¹⁴ Ralph Harper, *The World of the Thriller* (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969); Jerry Palmer, *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre* (London: Edward Arnold :1978); Bloom, *Twentieth Century Suspense*; Lee Horsley, *The Noir Thriller* (Houndmills, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave, 2001); and Michael Denning, *Cover Stories* (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987).

¹⁵ For example Symons, *Bloody Murder*; Martin Priestman, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); or Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*.

¹⁶ Palmer, *Thrillers*, 82.

¹⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, “The Typology of Detective Fiction”, in Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 46.

¹⁸ Martin Priestman, *Crime Fiction: From Poe to the Present* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), 34.

thrillers can and often do include elements of mystery or detection, the intensity of the thrill is what stands out, including a feeling of vulnerability and loss of control.¹⁹

Thriller plots usually follow a pattern evolved from that of the adventure story. Traditionally they have included little of the varied characterization and moral, motivational or general life issues typically found in serious literature. They tend to be centred on major crises or threats, with a reckless and risk-taking hero who is always in danger and often a fugitive. Early twentieth century British thrillers, important in the evolution of Charteris' narratives and his hero, grew out of nineteenth century "sensation" and adventure fiction, and were largely generated by perceived threats to the empire from rival powers threatening invasion. Typical thrillers of the day, often poorly written, include unrealistically malevolent villains and potentially world-shattering threats. The enduring and very popular character Sexton Blake, for example, outwardly a detective similar to Sherlock Holmes but really an action thriller hero, vanquished terrible enemies and countered colossal threats for decades in the fiction of multiple authors from 1893. While modern thrillers, of course, can be sophisticated and complex, such as the work of John le Carré, much of this early form has endured; the James Bond novels, arguably the best-known thrillers of the latter part of the twentieth century, are similar to early "shockers", as these were often called in Britain, in terms of the patriotic and action-oriented hero, the grotesque villains and the national or even global nature of the threat. In the new social environment after the Great War, however, the horrors of the trenches brought into question reader interest in such excitement, and in traditional values associated with honourable behaviour, the class system, the sporting field and mindless patriotism attested by many thriller heroes of the day. A new generation of influential writers of detective fiction denigrated the thriller as lacking in literary merit, appealing mainly to less educated readers and only suitable for pulp magazines.

Thus the early twentieth century thriller came to be regarded by many as inferior to more cerebral detective mysteries of what was later called the interwar "Golden Age"²⁰ of detective fiction – especially the predominant "clue puzzle" mysteries of ratiocination in which not only the detective but also the reader is expected to solve the mystery. Agatha Christie's narratives of this type were

¹⁹ This process is described well in Martin Rubin, *Thrillers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 4-6.

²⁰ The chronological parameters of the "Golden Age" are discussed in Knight, *Crime Fiction*, 84-85.

especially innovative. Such texts include plots that were widely seen as stimulating reasoning ability in the reader, a phenomenon considered to be a civilizing process: “calming the feverish excesses produced by the modern world and endemic to the thriller”.²¹ An interesting variation is the work of R. Austin Freeman (from 1907), where the perpetrator is revealed to the reader at the beginning of the story, which then aims to provide intellectual satisfaction derived from a forensic approach by the protagonist, Dr. Thorndyke, in solving the mystery. Prominent among the early writers were female authors; some of the best-known of their detectives, such as Christie’s Hercule Poirot or Dorothy Sayer’s Lord Peter Wimsey, were outwardly “feminized” – manifesting attributes widely seen at the time as feminine in nature, such as intuition, a fastidious attitude to dress, and a non-aggressive, intellectual manner. These attracted a high female readership.

The famous “rules” for the construction of detective stories were contrived by prominent clue-puzzle writers like Christie, Sayers, Freeman, Ronald Knox, Anthony Berkeley Cox and the anglophile American S. S. van Dine (Willard Huntingdon Wright). These were intended to maximize the puzzle-solving dimension and the reader’s emulation of the observation and logical thinking employed by the detective. The essentially English clue-puzzle can be seen as a game, in a period in Britain when word puzzles and similar entertainments were popular, with slight variations in the pattern helping to maintain interest in the form. But despite these developments, thrillers and their heroes continued to be overwhelmingly popular. The novels of the enormously prolific Edgar Wallace, for example, were eagerly devoured. Stephen Knight has noted that “for every one person who read a Christie, let alone a Sayers, there were ten who read Wallace or Sexton Blake”.²² Even a few of Christie’s novels, such as her “Beresford” series, differ from the clue-puzzle form and are sometimes considered to be thrillers.

The police “procedural”, so common today, did not really develop until after World War II, but two other types of crime fiction became popular in the interwar period. One is the well-known “hard-boiled” American private eye novel, prominent in the 1930s and 1940s, where a street-wise, battle-worn, flawed but inherently noble protagonist battles evildoers in a dark and corrupt society, tracking and pursuing rather than detecting. Murder and violent action occur randomly, often lacking a

²¹ David Glover, “The thriller”, in Priestman, *Cambridge Companion*, 136.

²² Knight, *Crime Fiction*, 105.

rational cause and effect structure, and there is rarely a closure involving restoration of a comfortable social order, as is frequently, though erroneously, thought to be the case with the refined clue-puzzle.²³ Private eye stories of this time are usually classed as detective novels but can be seen as thrillers in the dark, pessimistic noir tradition. Their development was originally a reaction against the clue-puzzle; their heroes are well typified by Raymond Chandler's world-weary knight Philip Marlowe, Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade and Hammett's earlier nameless, short, fat "Continental Op". The most popular private eye hero of the post-Second World War era was Mike Hammer, a largely two-dimensional character who features in the novels of Mickey Spillane. Essentially a violent street thug and fanatical anti-communist, his intensity and simplicity recall H. C. McNeile's English interwar vigilante "Bulldog" Drummond. Another development was the "crime novel", a form that can resemble the thriller, but which focuses on the contextual psychology of the criminal – exemplified in the modern era by the Tom Ripley novels of Patricia Highsmith. Julian Symons has usefully categorized the differences between the detective story and the crime novel.²⁴ The difficulties of classification in crime fiction mentioned earlier can be seen in the way different critics have approached its various forms. Malmgren, for example, classifies what he calls "murder fiction" as "mystery fiction" (clue-puzzle novels like those of Christie), "detective fiction" (hard-boiled American private eye novels), and "crime fiction" (essentially what Symons calls "crime novels").²⁵ Similarly, Pyrhonen distinguishes "crime fiction" from "detective fiction", the former being not an all-encompassing descriptor but again referring to what Symons calls "crime novels".²⁶

Leslie Charteris, at the beginning of his career in England, seems to have been aware of, and rejected, condescending attitudes towards the thrillers of the day. In the 1930 novel *Knight Templar*, the Saint vehemently praises "the low-down shocker" as a "decent and clean and Honest-to-God form of literature".²⁷ While *Templar* does not exhibit the right-wing and sporting field values common in the early English thriller hero, at that stage Charteris clearly considered himself a writer of "shockers".

²³ The prevailing social order in, for example, Christie's novels, while outwardly serene and cozy, is a facade concealing danger, betrayal and incoherence. See Knight, *Crime Fiction*, 90-91; Merja Makinen, "Agatha Christie (1890-1976)" in Rzepka and Horsley, *Companion*, 417; and Susan Rowland, *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 42. Nor is Christie nostalgic; Rowland (*From Agatha Christie*, 41) notes that in her 1946 novel *The Hollow*, Christie "condemns a whole generation of vapid gentry and colonial survivors".

²⁴ Symons, *Bloody Murder*, 201-203.

²⁵ Malmgren, *Anatomy*, 8.

²⁶ Pyrhonen, "Criticism and Theory", 44-45.

²⁷ *Knight Templar* (London: Hodder and Stoughton: n.d.), 177. [1930].

During the 1930s, some thrillers evolved away from this form. The 1930s noir novels of Eric Ambler, or Graham Greene's contemporaneous "entertainments", for example, are often seen as "literary" or more "realistic" thrillers. They exhibit what Denning has called an "aesthetic [having] 'realism', moral and literary seriousness, and popular front politics",²⁸ with ordinary, often reluctant protagonists rather than larger-than-life heroes. Ambler claimed to have purposely "intellectualized" his narratives and made the heroes "left-wing" in contrast to the conservative, establishment protagonists of earlier thrillers, and Knight has noted a liberal, leftist position in the 1930s crime fiction of Nicholas Blake (Cecil Day Lewis), Montagu Slater and Maurice Richardson.²⁹ Charteris' own fiction, while not part of Denning's "aesthetic", certainly became more refined and sophisticated as he gained experience. Some of his very early narratives, including the four pre-Saint novels he wrote before settling on Simon Templar as his hero, have confused and implausible plots, barely credible villains and a doubtfully all-powerful protagonist. As his writing improved and he developed his own, distinctive style he evolved away from the early thriller tradition, with more realistic villains, more original plots, a more effective and distinctive writing style, a frequent anti-fascist orientation and above all a merry, mocking outlaw hero.

The considerable overlap between thrillers and many types of crime fiction is evident in the frequent use, without clear distinction, of terms like "adventure", "mystery" or "thriller". A degree of detective activity was often present even in pre-Great War thrillers, and Charteris' work is no exception. The Saint can sometimes behave like a detective, ferreting out guilty parties and solving mysteries alongside the exciting physical action. In the 1930s some of Charteris' work can be seen as "caper", a less prominent type of crime fiction characterised by bold cleverness, humour and enterprise with less emphasis on mystery and fewer of the extremes of the early thriller. His Second World War and immediate postwar narratives set in the United States are more serious, sophisticated thrillers, and have a contemporaneous American ambience in dialogue and narration. His 1950s short stories are considerably varied; some include thrills and action, many again are succinct mysteries or romances with little violence or excitement. Overall, the predominance of thriller elements in so much of Charteris' fiction suggests that "thriller" is the most practical designation for his work.

²⁸ Denning, *Cover Stories*, 61.

²⁹ Joel Hopkins, "An Interview with Eric Ambler", *The Journal of Popular Culture* 9 (Fall 1975): 286; Knight, *Crime Fiction*, 104.

A range of historical, literary, ideological, social and cultural influences, as well as Charteris' own personality and circumstances, generated and shaped Simon Templar, a phenomenon who evolved and appealed to generations of readers in widely differing circumstances. Focusing specifically on the hero protagonist over a qualified period, this study inevitably leaves many wider questions about Charteris' fiction and the early thriller hero unanswered. What follows, however, will hopefully add a little to the understanding of an often neglected area of crime fiction and, in particular, facilitate further consideration of the work of one of the most popular crime fiction authors of the twentieth century.

Chapter I provides an overview of the complex history and evolution of the Saint narratives. It describes the changes in the Saint character over the long period of Charteris' writing, and explains the contribution to the Saint's development of the heroes of Charteris' four early, pre-Saint novels. It also examines the way Charteris' language, especially the jocular and witty writing so characteristic of his 1930s fiction, helps make the Saint attractive to readers. Chapter II discusses the three influences at the core of the Saint's heroism: first, Charteris' personal identification with the character he created, and how this impacted on the development of the Saint and on the manner in which he is portrayed as a hero; second, the identification of key attributes of Templar with those of the Graeco-Roman and medieval warrior hero traditions; and third, the alignment of the character's nature and experiences with the well-known quest hero motif.

Chapters III and IV argue that the Saint evolved from popular protagonists of nineteenth and early twentieth century adventure and crime fiction, the types of attributes he inherited from these characters, innovatively modified by Charteris, constituting the first two of the five primary layers of his heroism. The empire hero as an important forerunner of Simon Templar and the indirect influence of the frontier hero is discussed, as are protagonists of other novels and stories who established the idea of the romantic and charismatic outlaw, the gentleman criminal hero like E. W. Hornung's character Raffles or the roguish, trickster figure like Maurice Leblanc's crime fighter Arsène Lupin, elements of all of whom can be found in the Saint. The evolution of Templar as a vigilante hero can be seen in the nineteenth century reconstruction of the Robin Hood myth and texts such as Edgar Wallace's benchmark novel *The Four Just Men* (1905), the Psmith novels of P. G. Wodehouse and McNeile's "Bulldog" Drummond thrillers. Charteris' youthful fascination with

novels and stories featuring colourful pirates, highwaymen and outlaws helps to explain important features of the Saint, including his vivid and flamboyant nature and his liberated approach to life. The portrayal of Templar as a modern-day benevolent highwayman or pirate is a prominent feature of Charteris' writing, linking the Saint to popular perceptions of chivalrous, swashbuckling heroes. The literary and social origins of the Saint's early dandy features, and their relevance to his heroism, are also discussed.

Chapter V examines how three further primary layers of the Saint's heroism were generated through his reaffirmation of major political and social ideologies in the different periods and societies in which Charteris' books were read. In the early 1930s his actions are an ideological palliative as he does what incapable authorities should have done, audaciously mocking their pompous incompetence while revalidating the integrity of a largely discredited traditional ruling class and providing reassurance against national decline. At this time he is a fictional outlaw folk hero. During and after the Second World War, reconstructed as a sophisticated yet street-wise American counter-espionage agent, in effect still a vigilante, he is an ideological vehicle whose enterprise personifies the capability of the United States to defeat the Nazis and to mould and purify itself for world leadership. In the 1950s, a less driven, celebrity Templar travels the world for pleasure, still fighting crime and righting wrongs; while not an overt Cold War combatant, in a time of challenge he affirms United States supremacy by showcasing the benefits of being American.

Chapter VI looks at two further, major dimensions of the Saint, primarily in the 1930s and 1940s. Firstly, notwithstanding his warrior nature, in the interwar period he opposes war, as well as warmongering by war profiteers and right-wing totalitarianism. At that time, such attitudes and behaviours could readily be seen by many to be heroic. After the actual outbreak of war, the Saint's preparedness to engage in conflict so that barbarism could be destroyed, and his opposition to fascist-leaning magnates, were also conducive to his standing as a hero. The chapter further argues that some enemies of the Saint recall the literally monstrous myth and folklore adversaries of earlier quest heroes, and also have the menacing, repulsive or terrifying form of alien others. The latter, when defeated by Templar, help to define him as a hero of Western civilization.

Finally, the Conclusion sums up the overall thesis, assesses the extent to which the posed questions have been answered, and discusses Charteris' crime fiction legacy.

CHAPTER I

CHARTERIS' FICTION AND THE SAINT CHARACTER

The chapter overviews Charteris' narratives, his writing and the character he created. It introduces the Saint fiction, identifies Charteris' readership and explains how the character changes, develops and matures over the differing periods and locations in which his adventures are set. It examines Charteris' "pre-Saint" novels, demonstrating how the heroes of these narratives are precursors to Simon Templar, and argues that Charteris' clever and entertaining use of language underscores the heroism of the Saint in his different forms.

The Saint Narratives

The current dearth of awareness of Charteris and the Saint requires that this study assume no substantial prior knowledge of his work or of the character he created. Charteris' fiction is no longer the mass market phenomenon it was from the 1930s to the 1970s; the Saint gradually declined in popularity in the later twentieth century. This reality, as well as the numerous and varied nature of the Saint narratives, makes it essential to briefly overview Charteris' work, his readership and the way he portrayed the Saint, in order to provide a context for the analysis of heroism in his fiction.

The mission of the Saint, a young, wealthy, English gentleman vigilante of the early 1930s, who acquired his appellation partly from "his gift of assuming a pose of fabulous and even fatuous innocence",¹ is to fight crime and defend the community according to his own code, regardless of the law, and in doing so gain the excitement and spoils he desires. Clever, handsome, immaculately dressed, advanced in combat and survival skills, he drives fast cars and flies aeroplanes. A benevolent twentieth century pirate or highwayman, he is excitingly disreputable and iconoclastic; the police see him as a criminal and constantly seek evidence to arrest him, but he is always too clever for them. Adventure finds him, most of his enterprises beginning purely by chance or coincidence. While sometimes condescending and patronizing towards those below him, he is an essentially flawless figure, in his early years almost superhuman. His targets over his long career

¹ "The Bunco Artists", in *Thanks to the Saint* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1965), 7. [1957].

include many different types of evildoer, in Britain, America and elsewhere, including corrupt aristocrats, criminal business magnates, industrialist warmongers, thugs and racketeers, confidence men and exploitative individuals, and, during the Second World War, Nazi agents and fascist-leaning American capitalists. The prewar decade is Charteris' primary literary period, when he produced much of his major work; the Saint was introduced and developed with a uniquely irreverent zest and a bright, explosive creativity that entranced readers of the day.

As noted in the Introduction, the narrative pattern of most thrillers evolved from that of the adventure story. Cawelti's well-known concise determination of the adventure story formula, which he calls the "central fantasy", has the hero "overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission".² Charteris' major thrillers generally follow a pattern whereby the Saint pursues, is pursued by, and always defeats a powerful, evil villain whose identity is often not in question but who is associated with a conspiracy and usually supported by a large organization – a pattern seen in many thrillers, including the James Bond narratives. At a time when books were a primary source of entertainment,³ Charteris was a superb story-teller, satisfyingly reaffirming, as discussed in Chapter V, prominent social and political ideologies, and combining ingenious plots with thrilling action and excitement. His narratives are enlivened by his entertaining writing style and the vicarious enjoyment readers could experience in the Saint's liberated and luxurious lifestyle of wealth, international travel, fast cars and swashbuckling adventure.

In any discussion of the impact and popularity of a fictional hero, it is of course necessary to determine as accurately as possible the nature of the readership. Over many decades, as noted earlier, publication of Charteris' fiction in popular periodicals generally preceded publication in book form. The prior appearance, in the 1930s, of most of his work in *The Thriller* allowed easier access to the Saint by, for example, the traditional readers of thriller stories – working- or lower middle-class men, who might find it difficult to regularly purchase books, especially in the pre-paperback era, but could more readily afford an inexpensive weekly magazine. In America, some of Charteris' narratives were

² John G. Cawelti, *Adventure, Mystery and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 39.

³ Colin Watson suggests "a buyer or borrower of books in the 1920s and 1930s could choose from between 180 and 210 brand new titles every week". *Snobbery With Violence* (New York, London and Tokyo: The Mysterious Press, 1988), 89. [1971].

also available in magazines, notably *The American Magazine*. As in Britain, those who read magazine thriller stories were primarily working-class males.⁴ *The American Magazine*, however, was a relatively upmarket periodical, incorporating items from established authors, implying a wider readership for Charteris' contributions.

In both Britain and the United States the large number of Saint book editions and reprints, given their greater cost and at a time of economic depression, suggests popularity in broader sections of society for Charteris' fiction than the hard-hit working class. Certainly the thrillers of Edgar Wallace and John Buchan's "shockers" had been popular across society, especially in Britain, from before the Great War. Denning argues that from the 1930s, possibly because of the thrillers of writers like Greene and Ambler, the readership of spy thrillers in Britain had shifted to a "clerical/service/professional-managerial class configuration".⁵ It is likely that, in that country at least, the readership of Charteris' Saint thrillers similarly broadened, especially as they became more sophisticated after the very early years. In the 1930s the Saint was an English hero, and the sales peak was probably in Britain. An indication that readership of Charteris' work in this period crossed class boundaries comes from Charteris himself. In 1939, while addressing the issue of the strong criticism in his Saint stories of public schools – at that time populated largely by the sons of the upper class – Charteris claimed that his "fan mail statistics" indicated that "a large percentage of my most faithful readers are either past or present members of some British Public School".⁶

Another period feature of reading that extended the circulation of Saint fiction in Britain was the lending library. Primarily used by the middle class, chain subscription circulation libraries in the prewar period such as Boots Booklovers Library, Mudie's, and libraries in the stationery and newspaper shops of W. H. Smith operated alongside public libraries. Smiths in particular stocked vast quantities of publications from Hodder & Stoughton, Charteris' publisher. Colin Watson quotes statistics from 1939 that he suggests "lend weight to contention that subscription libraries were customers for something like three-fifths of all copies of 'sensation' fiction that were being

⁴ Erin. A. Smith, *Hard-Boiled: Working-Class Readers and Pulp Magazines* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

⁵ Denning, *Cover Stories*, 64.

⁶ Introduction to "The High Fence", in *The First Saint Omnibus* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950), 693. [1939].

produced.”⁷ Adventure and thriller fiction, including Saint fiction, was popular library material; it is likely that a substantial portion of the readership was female. The Introduction noted that the English “clue-puzzle” detective story was popular with women readers, and Bloom points out that women have always been very frequent borrowers of library fiction, including “crime thrillers and detective novels”.⁸ Anecdotal evidence suggests a broad female interest in Charteris’ work.⁹

The popularity of Charteris’ fiction is also indicated by the creation of Saint-like heroes by other authors. Two thriller protagonists who resemble Templar, “the Baron”, and “the Toff”, were created by the enormously prolific John Creasey in the late 1930s. Others include the adventurer Norman Conquest, a product of Berkeley Gray (Edwy Searles Brooks) from 1938, and Ludovic Saxon, “the Picaroon”, who appears in a series of novels by John Cassells (William Murdoch Duncan) in the 1950s. “Nighthawk”, a secret avenger who features in seven novels by Sydney Horler from 1937 to 1954, also shows some resemblance to the Saint. A figure called “the Falcon”, based on Templar, appeared in a number of movies from the RKO Radio Pictures studio in the early 1940s after Charteris had sold to RKO, but then bought back, the rights to the Saint. Charteris took legal action, and in a later novel has the Saint make a sarcastic comment about the Falcon.¹⁰ None of these characters achieved the popularity of Simon Templar.

In the years following the Second World War, the book club concept and consolidation of the public library in Britain further facilitated the availability of Saint fiction, especially for the middle class. In 1952 Charteris mildly admonished his readers for using lending libraries to obtain Saint books instead of purchasing them.¹¹ The paperback revolution, of which crime fiction was a major part, meant that his books became cheaper to buy, especially in America, and in England from the early 1960s. The publication of new Charteris stories in the various forms of the postwar *Saint Mystery Magazine* prior to book publication allowed wide access to Templar’s adventures in Britain, the United States and other countries.

⁷ Watson, *Snobbery*, 31-32.

⁸ Bloom, *Bestsellers*, 51.

⁹ Ian Dickerson of the UK Saint Club advises that in a letter to him from Charteris in the late 1980s, and in subsequent conversations, Charteris claimed that his male and female readers were about equal, though “women tended to be the ones who wrote to him more”. (Personal communication, 20-21 September 2012).

¹⁰ See *The Saint Steps In* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), 123. [1943].

¹¹ Foreword to *The Second Saint Omnibus* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1952), 11.

Overall, despite the absence of definitive data it seems reasonable to infer that Charteris' work was enjoyed, from the early 1930s, across all sections of the societies in which his books were published. His hero began life in Charteris' third novel, *Meet – the Tiger!*, published in 1928. His first, second, fourth and fifth novels, discussed later in this chapter, feature other protagonists who have varying degrees of similarity with the Saint, but apart from a couple of minor instances do not appear in later books. *Meet – the Tiger!* presents what is in effect a prototype Saint, an adventurer seeking financial reward with as yet no particular ideals or mission, vigilante or otherwise. The 1930 publication *Enter the Saint*, though not chronologically the first publication in which the character is established as a benevolent vigilante, is the primary introduction of the Saint in this role – in its first novella, “The Man Who Was Clever”. One of the Saint's targets in this novella, the gang leader “Snake” Ganning, is

the first victim of the organization led by the man known as the Saint, which was destined in the course of a few months to spread terror through the underworld of London – that ruthless association of reckless young men, brilliantly led, who worked on the side of the Law and who were yet outside the Law.¹²

This passage seeks to establish the positive legitimacy of a masculine, uninhibited violence that ignores convention and legality with all the satisfying vigour of youth and with no fear of consequences. This violence is acceptable because it supports the law – a Law that, while technically contravened by the use of “outside” assistance, is ennobled by its capitalization.

The early, English Saint is the secret identity of Simon Templar. He is portrayed as an individual with a glorious past who has been chosen by Destiny. Aside from a few hints of years of previous adventuring, his past is never explained and his origins are unknown. His female partner Patricia Holm is a blonde beauty who, apart from the passive, dependent way she is depicted in one or two very early narratives, in the prewar period loves excitement, adventure and outlawry as much as the Saint does. Templar is impudent and mocking; his actions, thoughts and interests occupy almost the whole of each narrative. He has a boyish, youthful dimension, seen in the ardent nature of his ideals, his clownish friendship with his companions, his intense relationship with his partner Patricia, the flamboyant way he dresses, the occasionally silly way he speaks, and the brash and vigorous

¹² “The Man Who Was Clever”, in *Enter the Saint* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948), 9. [1930].

approach he takes to his enemies. At this stage the most notable of these enemies are warmongering arms dealers and corrupt, criminal aristocrats. In the earliest narratives the Saint leads a band of companions, but later in the decade these only appear from time to time to assist him. The youthful Templar enjoys fighting, adventure and excitement more emphatically than at any other time in his career – following a creed of “battle, murder and sudden death”.¹³

In the early 1930s Charteris was still developing his approach to writing, and borrowed ideas from other crime writers of the day. As discussed in Chapters III and IV, the younger Saint resembles in several important ways McNeile’s 1920s vigilante “Bulldog” Drummond, and some of Charteris’ early plots, including those of his pre-Saint novels, resemble those of Edgar Wallace thrillers, with their confusion of identities, fantastic threats and denouements in deep, dark places. Charteris’ 1929 pre-Saint novel *Daredevil*, for example, shows alignment of plot and structure with Wallace’s 1922 thriller *The Crimson Circle*. In 1932, the Ruritanian, Mittel-Europa setting of Charteris’ popular novel *Getaway* strongly resembles those of Dornford Yates’ contemporaneous “Richard Chandos” thrillers, set in remote areas of Austria.

Notable in the character throughout the 1930s is a concern for the welfare of society. Much of his opposition to corrupt and criminal upper class figures is linked to a concern for ordinary people who have suffered through exploitation or neglect. In this period, the Saint’s relationship is developed with the man who becomes both his police nemesis and primary foil: Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal. Occasionally in Charteris’ very early fiction there is, as is found in much of Wallace’s work, a depiction of the police as an efficient, all-knowing organization, and originally Teal is a powerful figure who seeks to capture the Saint. As the series progresses into the 1930s, however, the police are portrayed less favourably, and Teal becomes a figure of fun – constantly outwitted and taunted by Templar. Both Templar and Teal nevertheless maintain an underlying mutual respect, in some ways not unlike that between Sherlock Holmes and Inspector Lestrade, and more than once they offer mutual assistance. Later police officers fulfill a similar role, but never as emphatically or

¹³ This phrase first appears in *Meet – the Tiger!*, (1928) expressing what the Saint wants out of life, and is more fully explained in *The Last Hero* (1930). It is originally from the Church of England Great Litany, a prayer rite composed by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1544, in which supplicants pray to avoid such calamities. It is found in other thrillers of the time with which Charteris was certainly familiar, such as McNeile’s “Bulldog” Drummond thriller *The Female of the Species* (1928) and his *The Island of Terror* (1931), P. G. Wodehouse’s 1915 novel *Psmith, Journalist*, and P. C. Wren’s adventure story *The Wages of Virtue* (1916).

satisfactorily as Teal. Another regular character, the unintelligent, alcohol-sodden but good-hearted American gunman Hoppy Uniatz, totally and unconditionally loyal to the Saint, first appears in 1934.

It was flagged in the Introduction that the Saint evolves and changes as the narratives progress, both in nature and activities. He begins to change in the later 1930s, subtly maturing, and a more sophisticated figure slowly emerges. While his motives, merry persona, appearance and wit remain, he is given to a lounging sophistication and exhibits a greater cynicism. After 1934 the Saint is described by the critic William Butler as “smoother, less flamboyant and... a lot less outlandish”.¹⁴ Charteris’ hugely successful *The Saint in New York* – the only narrative set in America in this period – appeared in 1935. Somewhat of an anomaly in Charteris’ prewar fiction, it is a dark and emotional story, with very little jocularly and flamboyance, and Templar’s mission to cleanse New York of gangsters, though successful, is overshadowed by betrayal and tragedy. His merriment returns for the remaining narratives of the decade, set mainly in England. Prominent is *Prelude for War* (1938), a strongly anti-war and anti-fascist novel that resulted in Charteris’ work being banned in Nazi Germany.

The Saint surfaces as an American counter-espionage agent after 1942, and for most of the war and the immediate postwar years works for the US Government. He works alone, without partner, companions or gunman follower, having only his Washington contact, a mysterious figure called Hamilton, a sort of director with more or less unlimited resources who provides the Saint with his assignments and any support he may require.¹⁵ He remains, however, in effect an independent operator – a sort of official vigilante who accepts his assignments, demands whatever resources he needs, including release from jail on a couple of occasions, and does whatever is necessary, including killing his opponents, to complete his missions. This wartime counterspy Saint, operating alone, is a wealthy, sophisticated but streetwise American. His earlier opposition to war has evolved into acceptance of the need to defeat Nazi barbarism, and also prominent among his enemies are corrupt or criminal members of the powerful American business elite – figures in many ways similar to his English enemies of this type in the 1930s. His jocularly is still there, but the seriousness of his

¹⁴ William Butler, *The Durable Desperadoes* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973), 177-178.

¹⁵ In a postwar short story the organization the Saint worked for is identified as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the forerunner of the CIA. See “The Latin Touch”, in *The Saint in Europe* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1954), 172. [1953].

missions gives him a harder edge, and his desire for thrills and spoils is subsumed into his wartime mission.

In the nine volumes of postwar short stories the character evolves yet again. These collections, commencing with *Saint Errant* in 1948 and ending with *The Saint in the Sun* in 1963, feature an older, outwardly less adventurous, more hedonistic and more jaded Templar, who travels the world alone, primarily for enjoyment. Essentially a playboy, he enjoys the best hotels, the most beautiful women and the finest food and wine – the last usually described in epicurean detail. Many stories are set in different locations in North America; others in Latin America and the Caribbean, the remainder mostly in Europe. As the decade progresses, the Saint often states he is “retired”, or “on holiday”, not infrequently reflecting how his life is different from the past and increasingly expressing cynical views about many aspects of society. There are fewer action thrills, with the focus on the Saint cleverly outwitting adversaries and solving mysteries. He sometimes refers to his increasing age, says that he is “reformed”, and that having adventures is “reverting” to his old ways. Attracting adventure, which in his early days was integral to his persona, is now sometimes almost a nuisance; the narrator emphasizes how adventure now finds the Saint whether he wants it or not. His love of excitement and spoils regularly surfaces, however, and he remains a vigilante and modern knight-errant.

Charteris’ Pre-Saint Heroes

Before settling on the Saint, Charteris created other protagonists, whose nature throws light on the development of the Templar character. These pre-Saint heroes demonstrate in varying degrees attributes of the nineteenth and early twentieth century adventure and thriller protagonists who generated the first two layers of the Saint’s heroism discussed in Chapters III and IV. The pre-Saint heroes form a bridge between these protagonists and Templar; while the Saint is not a reproduction of any particular one, their cumulative attributes are prominent in him in subsequent narratives. Charteris’ third novel *Meet – the Tiger!* (1928) introduces the prototype Saint, but as noted earlier his two previous and two subsequent thrillers feature different characters. Some further pre-Saint heroes also appear briefly in his early stories written for *The Thriller*.

These early novels are not well written. Charteris' first book, *X Esquire*, is fancifully based on a plot to poison the English population through drugged cigarettes. It is filled with sudden, inexplicable and sensational occurrences, masked figures and childish merriment. This is perhaps understandable, as the book was published in 1927, when the author was barely twenty years old.¹⁶ The protagonist, wealthy young-man-about-town Terry Mannerling, a medical practitioner, dresses and speaks like an inane and fatuous fop. He is seen by many as "a harmless and amiable imbecile", but his "dominant mouth", "idealist's jaw" and "humorous blue eyes which could on occasion harden into the semblance of tempered steel"¹⁷ hint at his true role as the secret vigilante "X Esquire" who ruthlessly kills those who would bring England down. Despite his outward manner he is clever and skilled with weapons. The second book, published in 1928, is *The White Rider*, the protagonist being the young, well-to-do, witty and mysterious Peter Lestrangle, who turns out to be a Secret Service officer who has specialized "in bank frauds, holdups, and dope, with murder as a sideline... on the side of the Law".¹⁸ Despite his official standing, Lestrangle acts independently and is little different in his mission from the vigilante X Esquire.

Two magazines in 1928 saw a very short-lived hero, improbably known as "the Duck", emerge from Charteris' pen. The Duck is an aristocrat, merry, mad and debonair. *Meet – the Tiger!* was Charteris' next publication, but in his fourth novel, *The Bandit* (1929), he experimented with a different type of hero, a bandit from South America, urbane, lithe and romantic, dashing, daring and smart. Like the prototype Saint of *Meet – the Tiger!*, he has no vigilante mission. As a native of South America he hardly fitted the English upper class mould of Charteris' other creations, and the book was not popular. The final pre-Saint hero in book form is Captain Christopher (Kit) "Storm" Arden, who appears in *Daredevil* (1929). A "reckless, daredevil trouble-hunter",¹⁹ Arden speaks like Lestrangle, and like him, tends to act independently and sometimes dresses flamboyantly. A major difference between Arden and the gold-seeking Templar of *Meet – the Tiger!* is Arden's official position with Scotland Yard. Yet like the Saint in *Meet – the Tiger!*, Arden loves excitement and has a slightly

¹⁶ In a foreword to the 1963 Pan edition of *Enter the Saint*, Charteris notes how he considered the pros and cons of revising the material he had written so many years earlier – including "polishing the crudities of style which I am now conscious of, [and] toning down the uncouth juvenilities which now embarrass me". *Enter the Saint* (London: Pan Books, 1963), 8. [1930].

¹⁷ *X Esquire* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., n.d.), 79. [1927].

¹⁸ *The White Rider* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1930), 246. [1928].

¹⁹ *Daredevil* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., n.d.), 11. [1929].

disreputable adventuring background. The book is noteworthy for the first appearance of Chief Inspector Teal. It suffers from similar weaknesses to those of *X Esquire*: overdramatized events, masked villains, secret societies and juvenile dialogue. Arden, for example, when explaining why he was seen with a detective, bumbles “I was being arrested...The charge was barratry, champerty, and attempted gumboils, with complications. I explained that I was a Quaker and had never eaten tripe, so...they let me go.”²⁰ After *Daredevil*, Charteris published no further narratives in book form featuring protagonists other than Templar, though some of his early *Thriller* stories featured other primary characters, policemen and adventurers, whose identity was later morphed into the Saint.

The heroes of Charteris’ four pre-Saint books, published in the late 1920s, are precursors to the Simon Templar of the 1930s and beyond, both contributing to and building on the prototype Saint introduced in *Meet – the Tiger!* in 1928. Their flamboyant, audacious and adventuring nature, and their independent, often vigilante approach to evildoers are attributes that culminate in Charteris’ Saint hero. Of all the non-Saint figures, Arden of *Daredevil* is probably the closest to the 1930s Simon Templar with his assertive power, mocking confidence and combat ability. Ultimately, all Charteris’ experimentation with his early protagonists, including his South American bandit, lead in fits and starts to the benevolent vigilante Saint. The short-lived police and adventurer characters that Charteris introduced in his early *Thriller* stories, who were rewritten as the Saint, also help illustrate how Charteris’ concept of his hero evolved. One of these, Lyn Peveril, who can “take all the punishment six hoodlums can hand out to him ‘n’ come back smiling to qualify the whole half-dozen for an ambulance ride”,²¹ is without doubt an early Saint figure. The changes made in these characters when recast as Templar demonstrate the importance for Charteris of depicting superior abilities, as well as audacity and impudence, in his primary hero. Some in their original form exhibit a weak, callow love-sickness for the primary female protagonist, a trait not uncommon in English thriller literature at the time but most definitely absent from the strong, experienced Simon Templar. The Saint also has fewer general limitations; a particular foreign language, for example, is not in one

²⁰ *Daredevil*, 32.

²¹ Words spoken by a character in “Number One!”, *The Thriller*, February 1 1930, 103.

character's "limited repertoire", but in the Saint version of the story, the language is "included in the Saint's extensive repertoire".²²

The speech of these *Thriller* heroes becomes much livelier from the mouth of the Saint, with Charteris making small but telling amendments to the original wording. These usually take the form of additional or altered dialogue, with bland words replaced by comical or cheeky terms. Phrases like "Good morning, gentlemen" become a sarcastic "Good morning, my lovely ones", and an overdicate word like "horrid" becomes "revolting".²³ Additional descriptive comment by the narrator is common. In *The Thriller*, "Mr Traill was scribbling away industriously, as usual" becomes in book form, after Jimmy Traill has been turned into Simon Templar: "The Saint was drawing on his blotting-pad a portrait ... which would, if it had been published in a newspaper, have provided more than sufficient grounds for a libel action".²⁴ Such changes are strung through Charteris' very early work, and indicate the type of personality he wanted for his principal creation.

The Depiction of the Saint as a Hero

Charteris' use of language and his writing style were undoubtedly factors in attracting readers to his fiction and to the Saint. In some of the very first Saint narratives, occasional awkward or unsophisticated phraseology and juvenile effervescence like that in his pre-Saint novels is still evident. In "The Policeman with Wings", a novella in *Enter the Saint* (1930), for example, the Saint is stepping from one fast-moving car to another. "O.K., Big Boy!" says Templar to his companion Roger, the narrator later stating "on these occasions, the Saint's *sang-froid* would have made an ice-box look like an over-heated gas oven". Later in the same novella, Templar and Roger discuss a prisoner the Saint calls "Dismal Desmond": (Templar) "...when Dismal Desmond's conversation gets boring...just blip him over the head with the slop-pail and wave the flag". "Right you are, Saint". "So long, Beautiful". "So long, Ugly-Wugs".²⁵

²² Respectively in "The Secret of Beacon Inn", *The Thriller*, April 6 1929, 14, and "The National Debt", in *Alias the Saint* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949): 172. [1931].

²³ Respectively Jimmy Traill in "The Story of a Dead Man", *The Thriller*, March 2 1929, 9, and Simon Templar in "The Story of a Dead Man", in *Alias the Saint*, 157.

²⁴ Respectively in "The Story of a Dead Man", *The Thriller* 2 March 1929, 7, and "The Story of a Dead Man" in *Alias the Saint*, 22.

²⁵ "The Policeman With Wings", in *Enter the Saint*, 103; 114.

In the early 1930s Charteris' writing began to mature, becoming frequently comical and impudent, sometimes biting and sarcastic, sometimes emotional and reflective, always powerful, both in his fiction and in later forewords and introductions to new editions of his books and the Saint omnibuses. Clever and skilful in his use of syntax, he employs metaphor, alliteration and ellipsis – the latter a modification cleverly used for emotional effect and absent from the versions of his narratives published in *The Thriller*. A feature of his writing over the entire oeuvre is the use of complex mixes of words to delectate the reader – for example, after a long, muddled exposition by a verbose character the Saint thinks: “Did that turgid bouillabaisse of unsemantic verbiage have significance?”²⁶ He also uses rare and complex words, sometimes inventing new word forms, even in other languages. In one short story he uses the contrived German word *zerquetschenreiflichkeit*, meaning, roughly, “readiness for squashing”, referring to the overdue need for punishment of a particularly odious criminal.²⁷ He occasionally accentuates characters' negative traits through their names; in *Prelude for War* (1938), a war-loving general who cares nothing for casualties is named “Sangore”, a play on the French word *sang* (blood) and “gore”. His imagery and descriptive ability is highly developed; he saw precision in wording as essential, at one stage criticizing the grammar of Fleming's James Bond novels. He held these in low regard, calling Fleming a “sloppy writer” and an “ignoramus”.²⁸ He makes powerful use of sensual images – especially of the Saint himself, and of the many attractive women with whom he interacts, but also of a range of villains and subsidiary characters. Notably, the tone of his writing changes in accordance with the metamorphosis of Simon Templar; the prewar writing is cheeky and impudent, with a plethora of comical similes, becoming slicker, more knowing and cynical as the American Saint evolves. By the 1950s, a degree of world-weariness is evident.

Charteris' wit is arguably the most distinctive feature of his writing. Impertinent mockery permeates the 1930s narratives. In “The Simon Templar Foundation”, a novella in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal* (1934), the Saint confronts a corrupt police officer who has taken him to meet an equally corrupt aristocrat. The passage combines pure comedy with the Saint's typical disparagement of the English

²⁶ *The Saint Sees It Through* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950), 145. [1946].

²⁷ “The Art Photographer”, in *Boodle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), 225. [1934].

²⁸ See “The James Bond Phenomenon”, Leslie Charteris, accessed 23 August 2009, <http://debrief.commanderbond.net/topic/23153-leslie-charteris-on-the-bond-novels/>. The article first appeared in *Diplomat* magazine in December 1965.

upper class and public schools: “ ‘You ought to have told me we were going to visit a lord, Snowdrop,’ he said reproachfully. ‘I’d have put on my Old Etonian suspenders and washed my neck. I know you washed your neck to-day, because I can see the line where you left off.’ ”²⁹

The tone of the narrator’s comments and asides mirrors the Saint’s dialogue. In a 1931 novella the narrator comically reflects on the Saint’s enemies, noting that many “would have been delighted to see him meet an end so sticky that he would descend to the place where they thought he would go like a well-ballasted black-beetle sinking through a pot of hot glue.”³⁰ And when Chief Inspector Teal tries to rescue three movie stars whom he mistakenly thinks the Saint has kidnapped, rather than being welcomed as their saviour he is comically equated with an unpleasant pathological phenomenon as they “studied him with the detached curiosity of surgeons inspecting a new kind of tumour revealed by an operation”.³¹

These images of an iconoclastic, merry vigilante snubbing authority were generally absent from the 1930s Saint narratives when they were first published in *The Thriller*. This suggests, as with the amendments noted earlier, that Charteris worked at interpolating extra material or reinstating editorial deletions into the book versions to strengthen his depiction of Simon Templar. The narrator’s comical comments, especially descriptions of Templar’s dim-witted follower Hoppy and Chief Inspector Teal, generate a bright, lively atmosphere that accentuates the lampooning humour of the Saint. The image of a poor, hang-dog Teal eternally suffering under Templar’s inexorable omnipotence is seen in the following passage, where using words like a precision instrument, the narrator depicts the Saint as a metaphorical bomb, contrasting his explosive power with the amusingly pathetic picture of Teal, a senior official, being continually and violently ejected from his comfortable position:

To Mr Teal, the Saint was a perennial harbinger of woe, an everlasting time-bomb planted under his official chair – with the only difference that when ordinary bombs blew up they were over and done with, whereas the

²⁹ “The Simon Templar Foundation”, in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal*, 35.

³⁰ “The Logical Adventure”, in *Featuring the Saint* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), 81. [1931].

³¹ “The Beauty Specialist”, in *The Ace of Knives* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), 229. [1937].

Saint was a bomb with the supernatural and unfair ability to blow up whenever it wanted without in any way impairing its capacity for future explosions.³²

Similarly, the narrator's descriptions of the dense, ugly, alcoholic Hoppy use adept, comical phraseology to increase the atmosphere of fun that surrounds Templar. In the following passage, a superb example of Charteris' skill with words and humour, the comical aspects of Hoppy's limited intelligence and slow thinking are accentuated by their contrast with the sophisticated, refined, almost didactic language that describes his situation:

It was true that an all-foreseeing Providence, designing his skull principally to resist the impact of blackjacks and beer bottles, had been left with very little space for grey matter; but nevertheless some room had been found for a substance in which a planted thought could take root and grow with the ageless inevitability of a forming stalagmite. The only trouble with this adagio germination was that the planting of the seed was liable to have been forgotten by the time the resultant blossom coyly showed its head.³³

Such descriptions are not only amusing but also serve to emphasize the superiority of the Saint. His cleverness, elegance and handsome appearance, a constant feature within the narratives, is accentuated through comparison with both the bumbling Hoppy, who is depicted almost as a cartoon caricature, and the permanently flustered, frustrated Teal. This emphasis on Templar's superiority incorporates an elitist attitude towards these lower class figures, an element integral to Charteris' portrayal of the Saint that is discussed in the next chapter.

Even at moments of what would be, in most other thrillers, points of high tension, the narrator's witticisms appear. In a 1937 novella the Saint creeps into a room of a remote coastal mansion where his friends are held captive by a thug called Borieff, one of a vicious group of villains who intend to torture and murder them. The narrator demonstrates the overwhelming power of the Saint, with his almost supernatural jungle animal abilities and strength, but neatly aligns this power with his love of fun and playful qualities. The Saint moves

³² "The Affair of Hogsbotham", in *Follow the Saint* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), 173. [1938].

³³ *The Saint in Miami* (Philadelphia: Triangle Books, 1944), 179. [1940].

...like a stalking leopard until he was so close behind Boreiff that he could have bitten him in the neck. The actual state of Boreiff's neck removed the temptation to do this. Instead, his right hand whipped around Boreiff's gun wrist like a ring of steel, and he spoke into the man's ear. "Boo," he said.³⁴

One of the finest examples in all of Charteris' writing of the way the narrator's asides underscore the nature of the Saint is seen in "The Art of Alibi", another novella in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal* (1934), where Templar is having dinner with Chief Inspector Teal. The extract is long, but includes some of the best examples of Charteris' clever use of words, metaphor, alliteration and sheer comic wit:

...but at that moment a waiter came to the table. The chronicler, a conscientious and respectable citizen whose income-tax payments are never more than two years in arrears, hesitates over those last ten words. He bounces, like an inexperienced matador on the antlers of an Andalusian bull, upon the horns of a dilemma. All his artistic soul, all that luminescent literary genius which has won him the applause and reverence of the reading world, rises in shuddering protest against that scant dismissal. He feels that this waiter, who rejoiced in the name of Bassanio Quinquapotti, should have more space. He is tempted to elaborate at much greater length the origin and obscure beginnings of this harbinger of fate, this dickey-bird of destiny; to expiate in pages of elegant verbiage upon the psychological motivations which put him into permanent evening dress, upon his feverish sex life, and upon the atrophied talent which made him such a popular performer on the sackbut at informal Soho soirées... With all these things in mind, the sensitive psyche of the historian revolts from that terse unceremonious description – "a waiter came to the table".³⁵

As a purportedly profound and witty unconventional aside to a sentence so mundane that it would normally be meaningless "...a waiter came to the table", the passage bemuses and captivates the reader. It combines an impudent, faux self-mockery... "luminescent literary genius", "elegant verbiage", "sensitive psyche"... and a humorous simile with the diverting juxtaposition of the waiter's nonsensical name, amusing personal habits and quaint life-style described in such contrastingly eloquent terms. It is later revealed that the waiter comes to the table bringing a message that presages the Saint's forthcoming adventure. Hence "harbinger of fate" and "dickey-bird of destiny", phrases that incorporate both serious and comical meaning and amusingly accentuate the difference between the waiter's vital role and his silly activities. The whole passage, including the third-person

³⁴ "The Unlicensed Victuallers", in *The Ace of Knives*, 161.

³⁵ "The Art of Alibi", in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal*, 218-219.

references by the “chronicler” to himself, while highly entertaining, has a condescending, almost smug tone that places the narrator and, implicitly, the Saint, above the normal run of humanity represented by the waiter. As with the figures of Teal and Hoppy, the implicit contrast between the waiter and the Saint underscores Templar’s supremacy, and once again, in belittling an essentially ridiculous working class figure and by extension, the working class in general, the passage expresses Charteris’ elitism.

While it becomes less prominent over time, the liting mockery of the Saint and the narrator never disappears. Charteris on several occasions extends this mockery to himself, by having either the Saint or the narrator self-reflexively acknowledge to the reader that what is being read is fiction. This phenomenon appears in his work as early as early as 1931, but a definitive example can be found in *The Saint Steps In* (1943) when the narrator bemoans the Saint’s failed attempt to eavesdrop a conversation in a hotel room, complaining that [the hotel] “...had not been considerate enough to architect itself with a convenient system of balconies for listening outside windows, as any hotel which had known it was going to be used in a story of this kind would assuredly have done.”³⁶

The sardonic comments and thoughts that begin to appear in the Saint from the late 1930s are echoed by the narrator. Derisive attitudes about life, women, human nature and society are expressed. In the 1939 short story “The Benevolent Burglary”, for example, the narrator sarcastically criticizes the shallow, self-serving interests of those attending an art exhibition.³⁷ Such attitudes demonstrate Charteris’ growing cynicism towards life and society, but as discussed in Chapter II cynicism probably did echo elements in his readership, and helped to convey the impression of an omnipotent and omniscient Templar. In Charteris’ 1940s work, where the American Saint is a more serious figure countering major global and national threats, there are still some jocular comments and depictions. But the wartime novels include frequent reflection on the evils of war and Nazism, and personal emotions other than the horror of war are described in a more matter-of-fact way than previously. While Charteris maintains his clever and entertaining manipulation of words and phrases, sentiment is expressed more sharply, in a slick, confident manner not dissimilar to the smart wise-cracks of the hard-boiled fictional American private eye. This language lends authority to a hero who

³⁶ *The Saint Steps In*, 124.

³⁷ “The Benevolent Burglary”, in *The Happy Highwayman* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1969), 38. [1939].

knows his way around in a tough society, can look after himself, and is not intimidated by authority or wealth; a suitable fit for a worldly, hardened American paladin dealing with weighty matters of national security. An illustrative example is the following extract from a wartime novella, where the Saint is on important government business and the wife of millionaire Milton Ourley has invited him to her “little place” in Oyster Bay, Long Island, New York:

He reached Oyster Bay soon after six-thirty, and after the inevitable series of encounters with village idiots, characters with cleft palates, and strangers to the district, he was able to get himself directed to Mr Ourley’s little place. This little place was no larger than a fairly flourishing hotel, occupying the centre of a small park.³⁸

The derogatory descriptions of the decrepit locals whom the Saint “inevitably” encounters mark him, again with a degree of amusement, as different, superior and burdened with having to deal with lesser mortals. The description of the house sarcastically conveys in a no-nonsense and cynical way disdain for the type of person represented by Ourley, a wartime profiteer, and his gushing, high society wife.

Even in the postwar *The Saint Sees It Through* (1946) and *Call for the Saint* (1948), where the comic similes and descriptions often recall those of the 1930s, the Saint has subtly become older, harder and more serious. By the 1950s and early 1960s, the more constrained, occasionally reluctant heroism of the now celebrity and international traveller Templar is conveyed in both the tone of his thoughts and the narrator’s asides. In one late 1950s short story the Saint is asked by a Scottish policeman to assist him in investigating a death that seems to be associated with the Loch Ness monster: “The Saint sighed. In certain interludes, he thought that everything had happened to him that could befall a man...but apparently there was always some still more preposterous imbroglio waiting to entangle him. ‘Okay,’ he said resignedly.”³⁹ In the same story, the narrator despairs at the failed artistic response to the beauty of Scotland and the contrast between the natural and built environments, mirroring Templar’s mood in lamenting the ugliness of poorly designed buildings in an untamed, naturally beautiful environment. The situation is so bad that even the mighty Simon Templar, who has saved nations and brought down monstrous enemies, is unable to explain or comprehend it, and has given up. Scotland is

³⁸ “The Black Market”, in *The Saint on Guard* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1945), 20. [1944].

³⁹ “The Convenient Monster”, in *Trust the Saint* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1962), 155.

a country whose unbounded natural beauty seemed to have inspired no corresponding artistry in its architects, but rather to have goaded them into competition to offset it with the most contrasting ugliness into which bricks and stone and tile could be assembled. This was a paradox to which he [the Saint] had failed to fit a plausible theory for so long that he had finally given up trying.⁴⁰

Charteris' skilled use of language – his syntax, imagery, and comically wry tone – pinpoint his style of thriller writing. Stylistic changes consolidate the reconstructions of Simon Templar. The youthful, merry avenger; the mature, worldly operative; and the older, reflective, world-weary international traveller are graphically represented by the immersion of the character's dialogues and thoughts in a linguistic environment where the narrator's language reflects and accentuates the nature of the Saint as he changes and develops.

This opening chapter has introduced Charteris' fiction, the character he created and his writing style, providing a framework facilitating analysis of the Saint's heroism. The next chapter examines the three influences that provide a foundation for that heroism.

⁴⁰ "The Convenient Monster", in *Trust the Saint*, 157.

CHAPTER II

FUNDAMENTAL INFLUENCES ON THE SAINT'S HEROISM

Notwithstanding the range of factors and circumstances explored in this study that contribute to the heroic Saint figure, three influences consistently underpin the creative shaping of the character. They lie at the core of the Saint, fundamentally impacting on his construction by Charteris. It is consequently appropriate to examine them prior to considering the modern literary, historical, social and ideological influences discussed in subsequent chapters that define the various primary layers of Simon Templar's heroism. First, there is Charteris' personal identification with Templar and the relationship between the character and Charteris' life, outlook and personal circumstances. Charteris conceived the Saint as an imaginary form of himself, and there are a number of major parallels between author and character. Second, the Saint figure aligns with the Western warrior hero literary tradition, founded in Homer and manifested in Western heroes since that time. Lastly, there is Templar's conformity with the quest hero tradition, a motif that permeates the imagination of many societies.

Charteris' Life¹

A brief overview of Charteris' life and personal circumstances is necessary to facilitate an examination of his identification with his hero, and will also assist in understanding a range of other aspects of the Saint. A major issue for Charteris was his Anglo-Chinese ethnicity. His father was Dr Yin Suat Chuan, a prominent and wealthy Chinese surgeon in colonial Singapore who was heavily involved in local affairs and community welfare. Yin had met Charteris' mother, Lydia Bowyer, while staying at the boarding house run by her family in London. The couple married and went to

¹ There is as yet no comprehensive or critical biography of Charteris. Barer, *A Complete History* and Lofts and Adley, *The Saint*, while useful, leave many questions unanswered about the events of his life. "An Appreciation of Leslie Charteris", Ian Dickerson, accessed 2 September 2012, http://www.shotsmag.co.uk/feature_view.aspx?FEATURE_ID=22) fills some gaps, but the best source is the as yet unfinished draft of Dickerson's biography *A Saint I Ain't*, which he has kindly made available to me. The first three chapters cover Charteris' life well into the 1950s. The Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center of Boston University includes the Leslie Charteris Collection, which contains manuscripts, commercial correspondence and a range of printed material, mainly from the mid-1940s. See "Charteris, Leslie", accessed July 2013, <http://hgar-srv3.bu.edu/collections/collection?id=121761>.

live in Singapore, where Charteris (Leslie Charles Bowyer-Yin) was born on 12 May 1907; he had one brother, Roy (1910-2010), who later became an Anglican clergyman. A “mixed” marriage was socially unacceptable in the strictly segregated city that was colonial Singapore. As children, Charteris and his brother were “outsiders”, finding it difficult to make friends in either the British or Chinese communities. Charteris revelled in the vicarious excitement of books and magazines – he read *The Boy’s Own Paper*, a weekly with an undercurrent of Christian ethics that included articles on sport, hobbies, real-life and fictional adventure, and public school stories,² but preferred the annual bound volumes of *Chums*, a weekly British boys’ magazine filled with stories of pirates, highwaymen and adventurers, whose rejection of conventional life undoubtedly struck a chord with a boy uncomfortable in his community. While his father’s wealth allowed many luxuries – Charteris travelled the world more than once as a child – the ongoing strain of Singaporean life undermined the marriage, and Lydia returned to England with her two sons shortly after the Great War. Despite their separation, both she and Charteris’ father, an Anglophile, wanted him to have a sound English education, and in 1922 he was enrolled at Rossall School, a public school in Yorkshire. Here he first decided he would like to be a writer, and read voraciously – especially the thriller and adventure literature of the day, such as the works of Edgar Wallace, “Sapper” (H. C. McNeile), Dornford Yates, E. W. Hornung, H. Rider Haggard, Maurice Leblanc and many others.

Charteris did not, however, fit in. Highly intelligent, later becoming one of the earliest members of the high IQ association Mensa, well-travelled, multi-lingual – he spoke Chinese and Malay, later French and German – and above all Anglo-Chinese, he was “different” and unhappy; given the attitudes of the day, it is certain he suffered from discrimination at the hands of other pupils. He left Rossall in 1924 and, after a short period as an art student in Paris, was sent by his father to King’s College, Cambridge in 1925 to study law. Still unhappy, and bored with legal studies, he dropped out after a year, determined to seek a more exciting and unconventional life, formally changing his name to Leslie Charteris – apparently after the eighteenth century soldier and adventurer Colonel Francis Charteris, “the notorious gambler, duellist, rake and founder member of the Hellfire Club”.³ His father was outraged and cut off all financial support, so that Charteris had to work at a number of casual jobs until 1927, when his first novel, *X Esquire*, was published. His break came in 1929 when

² See Philip Warner, *The Best of British Pluck: The Boy’s Own Paper* (London: Macdonald and Jane’s, 1976).

³ Lofts and Adley, *The Saint*, 17.

he was approached by the editor of Amalgamated Press' new weekly magazine *The Thriller*. He wrote for *The Thriller*, even after international success as an author, up to its demise in May 1940. The editor, Percy Montague ("Monty") Haydon, became his mentor. A former military officer, Haydon was shrewd and capable. He liked Charteris' early work and commissioned him to produce some stories, at first featuring other heroes and then the Saint, resurrected from *Meet – the Tiger!*. Lofts and Adley note that

‘Monty’ gave him help on practically every story he wrote for the *Thriller*, and if Leslie was ever at a loss for an idea, ‘Monty’ could always toss out something stimulating...They regularly kicked ideas and plots around together over innumerable three-hour lunches...⁴

It is likely the development of the Saint was influenced by these discussions, and by the ability of the widely experienced Haydon to gauge the interest of the reading public. He helped and encouraged the young author, to the extent that they became life-long friends. In recognition of their friendship, Charteris created the character "Monty Hayward", a newspaper editor who is the Saint's companion in *Getaway* (1932), and also appears in two later short stories.⁵

Seeking further experience and greater rewards, Charteris spent the years 1932-1934 in the United States, partly in Hollywood where he worked as a film script writer. With the publication of *The Saint in New York* in 1935 his success as an author was established and, now financially secure, he travelled widely, enjoying a sophisticated international lifestyle. Idealistic and iconoclastic, he held strong anti-war and anti-fascist views and abhorred exploitative capitalism. At the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 he was in the United States, and remained there; because of the Chinese Exclusion Act of the time, as a person of fifty percent Chinese ethnicity he was unable to become a permanent resident until a specific exception was made by President Roosevelt in December 1942 for himself and his daughter, his then wife being American. He formally became an American citizen after the war. During the 1940s he produced fewer novels, but the Saint was by then in movies, on radio, in comic strips and comic books, all overseen by Charteris who also wrote non-Saint scripts for

⁴ Lofts & Adley, *The Saint*, 25. Haydon refers to a lunch with Charteris in *The Thriller*, 2 March 1929, 16.

⁵ These are "The Newdick Helicopter", in *Boodle* (1934) and almost thirty years later "The Intemperate Reformer", in *Trust the Saint* (1962).

radio and other articles. Controlling what was now a Saint business enterprise, he led a celebrity lifestyle, socializing with film stars like Errol Flynn, Marlene Dietrich and Gregory Peck.⁶

By the late 1940s he had been married and divorced three times. Wealthy but restless, he travelled constantly and in 1951 was married for the fourth time, to the actress Audrey Long, finally finding happiness in a partnership that lasted until his death. More settled, he “attacked life with a new vitality”.⁷ His output increased significantly, resulting in the nine volumes of Saint short stories reflecting Charteris’ international life-style, after 1963 beginning his collaborative authorship of further Saint novels as the ITV series “The Saint” strongly reinvigorated interest in the character. In the late 1960s he returned with his wife to England, where he led the life of a wealthy country gentleman, travelling frequently and still overseeing the Saint enterprise. He died on 15 April 1993.

Charteris’ Identification with the Saint

In 1980, fifty-two years after the Saint first appeared, Charteris wrote:

I was always sure that there was a solid place in escape literature for a rambunctious adventurer such as I dreamed up in my youth, who really believed in the old-fashioned romantic ideals and was prepared to lay everything on the line to bring them to life...there will always be a public for the old-style hero, who had a clear idea of justice, and more than a technical approach to love, and the ability to have some fun with his crusades.⁸

This passage reveals Charteris’ enormous pleasure in creating the Saint, and his enduring love of the romantic adventurers and thriller figures of his childhood and adolescent reading. Nostalgic emotion surfaces in the reference to his youth (he was 73 at the time of writing), through words like “old-fashioned” and “old-style”, and in the imbued feeling of an imagined uncomplicated, purer past. In this past, heroes were “real”, going on “crusades” and manifesting true justice, love and enjoyment of life. These emotions, along with Charteris’ youthful determination to avoid a mundane, conventional

⁶ See Dickerson, *A Saint I Ain't*, 3. Charteris’ friendship with Flynn is noted in Thomas McNulty’s *Errol Flynn: The Life and Career* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2004), 300-301, and with Peck in Gary Fishgall’s *Gregory Peck: A Biography* (New York: Scribner, 2002), 130.

⁷ Dickerson, “An Appreciation of Leslie Charteris”.

⁸ Leslie Charteris, Introduction to *The Saint Meets the Tiger* (New York: Ace Charter, 1980). [*Meet – the Tiger!*, 1928]. This is the only edition of the novel in which this Introduction appears.

life,⁹ show great vicarious satisfaction in his swashbuckling hero, and there is little doubt that he enjoyed identifying himself with Templar. This impacted on the type of hero the Saint was to become in his various manifestations.

Many aspects of the Saint's nature, experience and outlook parallel, often in an intensified way, those of his creator. Lofts and Adley suggest that Charteris had a childhood image of himself as a daring adventurer, and that "the Saint was based on his creator Leslie Charteris and was the author's mental image of what he himself would have liked to be". They note many similarities of appearance, dress and lifestyle: both are gourmets, speak several languages, are pilots and can throw knives.¹⁰ The parallelism between author and character was not lost on Charteris. In 1939, he wrote in his introduction to one of the novellas in *The First Saint Omnibus*:

I have never been able to see why a fictional character should not grow up, mature, and develop, the same as anyone else. The same, if you like, as his biographer... I must confess that a lot of my own selfish pleasure in the Saint has been in watching him grow up.¹¹

Simon Templar grew up alongside his creator. Only twenty when *Meet – the Tiger!* was first published, Charteris was twenty-two when his first stories were published in *The Thriller*, and twenty-three when the book series began with the publication of *The Last Hero* in 1930. As a young man he was brash, exuberant and boyish, just like the early Saint with his companions; for some years he wore a monocle for effect.¹² He wrote in 1939 that readers often confused him with the Saint, and that, having "grown into him...there may after all be some excuse for a confusion of our identities".¹³ In 1941, he played the part of the Saint for a photographic feature in *Life* magazine published in May of that year,¹⁴ and in the 1946 novel *The Saint Sees It Through* the character is described as having travelled on the maiden voyage of the ill-fated airship *Hindenberg* and featured

⁹ "I *had* to succeed, because before me loomed the only alternative, the dreadful penalty of failure...the routine office hours, the five-day week...the lethal assimilation into the ranks of honest, hard-working, conformist, God-fearing pillars of the community". Quoted in Barer, *A Complete History*, 17. No specific source for the quote is provided.

¹⁰ Lofts and Adley, *The Saint*, 28-29. For knife throwing see also Dickerson, *A Saint I Ain't*, 15.

¹¹ Introduction to "The Million Pound Day", in *The First Saint Omnibus*, 362.

¹² Lofts and Adley, *The Saint*, 29.

¹³ Foreword to *The First Saint Omnibus*, viii, xii.

¹⁴ Foreword to "Palm Springs", *The Second Saint Omnibus*, 117. The event is also related in Barer, *A Complete History*, 63-64.

in a newsreel shortly afterwards – experiences enjoyed by Charteris in 1936.¹⁵ Like Charteris, the Saint is jocular, convivial and enjoys fine living.

It was noted in the Introduction that the various forms of the Saint reflect the stages of Charteris' life. By the late 1930s Charteris had spent substantial periods of time in the United States, was wealthy and well-travelled, and from 1935 the Saint had become an enterprise that required sophisticated handling: the first three Saint movies were produced by RKO in 1938 and 1939. The more mature Simon Templar of the second half of the decade reflects the more experienced, more mature Charteris of that time. In prewar Britain his outlook reflected important political and social ideologies, including perceptions of ruling class incompetence and moral corruption, betrayal by government, decline in society, opposition to capitalist exploitation, anti-fascist thinking and early anti-war sentiment. All were major, powerful elements of the Saint's heroism in that period that ensured the character's popularity. After Charteris moved permanently to America in late 1939, he devoted much time to promoting and managing the Saint as a business interest. The wealthy, enterprising Americanised Charteris can be seen in the Americanised Saint from 1942. Charteris' circumstances now mirrored the American ideological goal of self-made success, and in wartime America he supported national policies such as commitment to war and the need to destroy Nazi barbarism.

Charteris' portrayal of many of the Saint's criminal enemies as rich and powerful members of the upper level of society is one of the most prominent features of the Saint narratives of the 1930s, and is also seen in his 1940s work. Chapter V argues that this is linked to the prewar ideologies mentioned above, but it was clearly given an emotional edge by the author's personal experience. It is likely that Charteris' "outsider" status was a factor in him creating a character who revels in the rejection of conventional society, who mocks upper class pomposity and whose opponents are often evil aristocratic figures. The discrimination he endured during his childhood, during his subsequent schooldays in England and later at Cambridge seems likely to have generated a resentment towards the English upper class, a personal psychological driver that shaped the opinions of Simon Templar,

¹⁵ See "Author Leslie Charteris, a passenger on zeppelin Hindenburg's maiden voyage, tells of his experience", Critical Past, accessed 18 November 2010, http://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675047075_Hindenburg-Zeppelin_arriving-passenger-tells-of-experience.

many narrator's comments in the texts and the nature of the Saint's important enemies.¹⁶ As mentioned earlier, the English public school is a *bête noire* in Saint fiction; Charteris disliked his schooldays, acknowledging a "violent prejudice" against public schools,¹⁷ and the English villains Templar vanquishes are often linked to public school attitudes and behaviours. Prominent villains in the Americanised Saint's 1940s adventures are, like their English counterparts, also powerful, ruthless figures in the top strata of society.

The periods of hardship he endured after his estrangement from his father and the loss of financial support from 1926 probably hardened his attitudes against perceived wealth and privilege in others, like those who rejected him at school and university. There was also the likely impact on him of the "Bright Young People", a social current among the wealthy younger generation that coincided with his time as a student and young man. As discussed in Chapter V, this group radically rejected convention and the social values of the traditional ruling class. But paradoxically, the 1930s Saint himself is, notwithstanding his outlawry and his iconoclastic attitudes, an upper class, English gentleman, and the 1940s American Saint is equally at home in the upper echelon of society. Despite the deprecation of the English upper class and its institutions in Charteris' fiction, the gentleman outlaw Templar, it is argued in Chapter V, reestablishes and revalidates the traditional responsibilities of the English ruling class, purifying it and reaffirming its "proper" role of benevolent society leadership by targeting and removing from it members who are corrupt and criminal.

Underlying support for the English social and political elite in Charteris' 1930s fiction has more than one origin. Chapters III and IV argue that a major factor in the evolution of the Saint character was the frequent portrayal, in the early adventure, thriller and crime-fighting literature with which Charteris was so familiar, of powerful upper class men who seek to serve or protect their society. And even with his prejudices, coming from a wealthy family and with a father who was influential and proactive in his community, Charteris was clearly aware of the impact a benevolent, wealthy elite could have on the welfare of the general population. But it is also possible to speculate that one of the factors in his creation of the upper class Simon Templar was the "reaction formation" of Freudian

¹⁶ Dickerson confirms that Charteris suffered racial discrimination at this time (personal communication 20 May 2009).

¹⁷ Introduction to "The High Fence" in *The First Saint Omnibus*, 693. [1939]. The villain in this story is a nauseatingly precious public school man.

psychoanalytical theory. This is a type of defence mechanism where the individual represses a threatening and unmanageable situation by outwardly embracing the threat. From this perspective, Charteris' rejection by the elite within his own society, and perhaps more tellingly by his father who wanted him to be successful among that elite, was a driver not only of his negative portrayals of upper class Englishmen and English public schools, but also of his personal pursuit of an upper class life-style and his creation of an upper class English hero who ultimately supports the English establishment.

Charteris' personal circumstances, and his complex relationship with the English class system, are thus likely to have been important reasons behind his portrayal of the Saint as a figure who exhibits upper class sophistication, wealth and positive, benevolent leadership. As such, Templar manifests associated traditional elitist and privileged attitudes. Clear distinctions are made in the narratives between the Saint, his male companions and his partner Patricia Holm on the one hand, and on the other figures with whom he is associated, such as his follower Hoppy or his police nemesis Teal. As we have seen, the latter are working class figures whose behaviour is often characterized by buffoonery or stupidity; despite his concern for the greater welfare of society, Templar can be amusingly condescending towards the working class persons with whom he comes into contact. Chapter V explains how this was an attitude held by some non-working class elements of contemporaneous British society, almost certainly shared by Charteris. Such elitism in the Saint can readily be perceived as detrimental or negative to the character. But Templar is always the central basis of the narrative, with all other characters playing secondary roles and being relevant only through him. Boorish, unsophisticated or comically unintelligent figures associated with the Saint magnify by contrast his standing as a hero powerful and important enough to deal with the major threats he confronts. Templar's elitism, centred in his upper class wealth and power, is acceptable, it is argued in Chapter V, because it is associated with his ability to protect society.

Charteris' manifestation of himself in his created hero is also evident in the circumscribed portrayals of women in the narratives. His fantasies of swashbuckling heroes derived from childhood reading include images of women categorized simplistically – often, as explained later in this chapter, ultimately symbolic of female figures and entities in traditional, long-standing quest narratives. He was uninterested in developing female characters, including them among secondary figures adjunct to

the Saint. In his fiction, the Saint is an ideological vehicle through which women are meaningful in only stereotyped and limited ways – in particular as helpless maidens in need of protection, manipulative and threatening *femmes fatales* or courageous, feisty companions.¹⁸ In one case, in the important 1935 novel *The Saint in New York*, a woman is presented as an all-powerful, mysterious, almost supernatural figure. In his later work, females tend to be categorized more negatively, a development possibly related to his three failed marriages; a prominent example is in *The Saint Sees It Through* (1946), where two evil, sadistic and repulsive criminals are women. The 1948 novella “The King of the Beggars”, presents a high society lady as an evil mastermind. Ruthless and criminal women also appear in the postwar short stories.

Charteris’ stereotyped or categorized female figures, like his working class characters, serve primarily to underscore Templar’s power and supremacy. Where female partners are his brave companions, they are successful because they follow his lead and try to do what he does. The *femme fatale* is exemplified by the character Olga Ivanovitch in “The Sizzling Saboteur”, a novella in *The Saint On Guard* (1944) – she is beautiful, sultry, mysterious and vaguely menacing. But by the end of the narrative she unrestrainedly surrenders herself to the Saint and his cause and travels away with him. Templar always defeats and brings to justice the evil, criminal women who cross his path, and even the all-powerful female figure of *The Saint in New York* sacrifices herself for him.

The Saint’s relationships with those female characters for whom he has enduring affection also attest strongly to his standing, in different ways. His early protective love for the vulnerable Patricia Holm in *The Last Hero* (1930) underscores his superior power as a modern knightly warrior, gallantly shielding the lady he adores. In later 1930s narratives, however, when Patricia becomes a brave, capable and excitement-loving outlaw who shares his adventures, she is no longer an easy object of overt patriarchal reverence and protection. But in surrendering his heart to her Templar does not become vulnerable, because she has now become, like him, a superior being, a fitting partner for the heroic Saint. Were Templar to express such emotion to a more conventional woman, he would in

¹⁸ One exception is arguably Lady Valerie Woodchester, a skilfully portrayed combination of high society innocent and cunning, self-serving manipulator in *Prelude for War* (1938).

effect be emasculated. In only three later instances throughout the entire series does he experience tender, emotional involvement with a woman, and in each case she resembles the outlaw Patricia.¹⁹

A further dimension of the close Charteris/Templar relationship is the later Saint's increasingly cynical outlook on many aspects of life. In particular, the less intense heroism of the Saint in the 1950s includes, as noted earlier, a noticeable degree of sarcastic, world-weary and derisive comment, reflecting Charteris' increasing cynicism at that stage of his life. In 1946-1947 he had produced a newsletter called "Letter from the Saint", in which he expressed blasé and often sardonic views on himself, the Saint and a variety of other subjects. His postwar short stories include increasingly sarcastic comment about life and society, the noticeably more negative portrayals of women in his later work being integral to this trend. Acerbic cynicism expressed by protagonist and narrator does not naturally suit a vigilante hero whose mission is to joyfully rid society of evildoers. But it does convey a satisfyingly down-to-earth, no-nonsense view of life and society, and a knowing, experienced, controlling approach to the world. As such, it once again emphasizes Templar's superior capability, and the need for a champion like him.

Charteris sought to explain one important change that, in his view, had a major impact on the Saint. In his Foreword to *The Second Saint Omnibus* in 1952, he emotively discusses the necessity of change in the Saint's missions and opponents as the character moved into the wartime era. He suggests that, no matter how powerful, evil or corrupt the Saint's 1930s enemies were, ultimately they were individuals, human and vulnerable, which the Saint could vanquish as St George vanquishes a dragon. But the wartime enemies were too large for one champion to defeat – meaning that the Saint, inevitably, was only "a cog in the machine", "a bee in the hive", able only to nibble at the new dragon rather than slay it. This meant that the Saint "had to lose some of the spurious greatness I had endowed him with when the going was easy".²⁰

It is easy to see, as humankind entered the atomic age and the Cold War was beginning, how many would believe that the era of individual champions like St George was over. Yet Charteris sells his

¹⁹ These are the female protagonists in *Saint Overboard* (1936), *The Saint in Miami* (1940), and the Saint's partner in *The Saint Sees It Through* (1946).

²⁰ Foreword to *The Second Saint Omnibus*, 14; 15.

own hero short. The Saint's "greatness" as a vigilante and knight-errant, and other important dimensions of his heroism such as his hatred of war, were not spurious; they were accepted and acknowledged by a mass readership. Tellingly, the character in practice retains much of his original role in his wartime battles, with his enemies primarily portrayed, as in the 1930s, as powerful individuals. The Saint's superior standing as an individual champion is still clearly identifiable in the character's wartime service as an enterprising American, notwithstanding his inability to achieve total closure by single-handedly bringing about the destruction of the entire enemy. A "cog in the machine" he may be, but while the horror of war is frequently described in the narratives, the wider context of the global struggle is generally relegated to the background, and the Saint's personal victories as a lone hero become an all-encompassing metonym for the war against Nazism, restoring knowable, heroic human agency to a monstrous world of unknowable forces.

By the 1950s, the Saint is traveling the world for pleasure, no longer passionately committed to removing society's evils. In 1952 Charteris wrote

The ideal [of the Saint] is less sharp to me now than when I first outlined it. I am a lot older, and my sight has mellowed. The edge between black and white is not so crisp. The issues are not so simple. The hero that I dreamed up in my twenties is less conclusive now.²¹

The doubts and uncertainties in this passage, accentuated by Charteris' awareness of his middle age, indicate that the enemies and causes so meaningful for the younger Saint and his then youthful, passionate creator have not only passed away in time, but in intensity. Charteris now acknowledges the complexities in determining wrong from right, so that his hero is no longer as ready to remove an evil or prevent a war with a single stroke. The older, mellowed Charteris can be seen in the older, less idealistic, less action-oriented, sometimes reluctant and cynical Templar of the postwar short stories. And just as Charteris gave himself more over to travel and pleasurable living, so the Saint focuses on a hedonistic life-style. Importantly, at this time, although formally resident in the United States, Charteris distanced himself from the then dominant political ideology of anti-communism. He did not, for example, imbue Templar with an intense anti-communist prejudice like that of Mickey Spillane's Mike Hammer, the tough private eye who was enormously popular in the McCarthyist

²¹ Foreword to *The Second Saint Omnibus*, 16.

environment of that era. With his background of strong anti-fascism, Charteris had no interest in making the Saint a Cold War warrior, and the Saint's activities are mostly focused elsewhere.

These 1950s changes in Templar probably weakened his standing as a hero compared with the earlier versions of the character. It is especially likely that readers who believed a character like Templar should directly combat communism as a threat to society saw him as less of a champion than previously. But despite the changes, the Saint's underlying ideals, his vigilante mission and his mocking approach to life still surface, and remain the ultimate determinants of his actions and his popularity. As argued in Chapter V, notwithstanding Charteris' position Templar does in fact indirectly participate in the Cold War, in that his wealth, life-style and experience showcase the benefits of being an American and embody American power.

Overall, it can be seen that those circumstances and features of the Saint that arise from Charteris' concept of the character as an imaginary depiction of himself impact on Templar's heroism in various ways. The Saint is a hero for many literary, historical, social and ideological reasons, but Charteris' personal, individual attitudes and psychological drivers remain fundamental components of his portrayal of Templar. While some of these phenomena arguably detract from the Saint's heroic status, others emphasize the figure's centrality and superior status, a defining element of his heroism.

The Warrior Hero and The Saint

The second fundamental influence on the Saint's heroism is the character's alignment with the warrior hero tradition of Western literature. It is widely acknowledged that classical concepts of the hero inform perceptions of heroism in the modern world. John Carroll, for example, has shown how Western heroism is founded upon the Homeric forms, with continuity extending through the Middle Ages to the modern world and seen in phenomena such as the detective novel and American Western movies:

Achilles and Odysseus became the twin figures to reverberate through the entire literature, from the Middle Ages to Joyce's Ulysses and on. From Agincourt to Armada, from Trafalgar and Waterloo to the Battle of Britain, it is the Homeric wave out of the Dreaming that picks up the particular events and immortalizes them.²²

The superior and isolated hero, who is “larger, stronger, brighter than normal humans”, has his origin in the warrior Achilles; he does not belong, and needs not to belong, in order to counter the threat to those who are ordinary, settled, and belong. A modern example is Raymond Chandler's private detective hero Philip Marlowe, “the lone, just man ... gravely flawed”.²³ In his recent overview of heroic archetypes, American historian M. Gregory Kendrick acknowledges that medieval knights were “heirs of both Greco-Roman and Germanic military traditions”, and that the “Virgilian notion of the warrior hero as a loyal and selfless servant to his people...resonate[s] through the centuries to come.”²⁴ Both Carroll and Kendrick also see the hero as athlete, linking classical heroism and modern sport as reflected in the behaviour of both players and fans in contemporary sporting contests. Historian Dean Miller, in his study of the epic hero, also acknowledges a continuity of heroic tradition from Homer.²⁵ A more specific study by Sergio Sergi traces the nature and evolution of the hero, primarily as warrior, in Western epic from antiquity through medieval chivalry to, once again, the novels of Raymond Chandler. In Sergi's model the characterization of the hero remains essentially the same over this entire period, with Achilles the prototype and subsequent heroes such as Aeneas or the medieval Arthur adding non-fundamental changes to the core concept.²⁶

Certainly, the precise nature of the classical heroes, the extent of uniformity among them and even the concept of ancient heroism itself are subject to much argument. Lydia Langerwerf, Cressida Ryan and the contributors to their recent study of the classical hero, for example, reveal “a host of assumptions and potential anachronisms and tautologies in critics' use of the term [hero]”.²⁷ But in Homeric society the highest commendation was bestowed on men who “successfully exhibit the

²² John Carroll, *The Western Dreaming* (Sydney: HarperCollins 2001), 72-73.

²³ Carroll, *Dreaming*, 76; 69-71.

²⁴ M. Gregory Kendrick, *The Heroic ideal: Western Archetypes from the Greeks to the Present* (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, 2010), Kindle edition.

²⁵ Dean Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), viii; 9-11; 392.

²⁶ Sergio Sergi, “Across Lands Forlorn: the Epic Journey of the Hero, from Homer to Chandler” (PhD diss., University of Canberra, 2006).

²⁷ Lydia Langerwerf and Cressida Ryan, “Introduction”, in *Zero to Hero, Hero to Zero: In Search of the Classical Hero*, ed. Lydia Langerwerf and Cressida Ryan (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 5-6.

qualities of a warrior”, are wealthy and of social position and valorously protect their dependents in war and peace. Valued most highly were “men who are well-armed, strong, fleet of foot and skilled in war, counsel, and strategy”.²⁸ These attributes, and others such as the importance of reputation or “name” acquired through *kleos* (the story of the deeds that win *time*, honour or prestige, reported in epic song),²⁹ the relevance of fate, a relationship between the warrior and his god(s), a code or standard of behaviour, and qualities such as the martial power, youth, beauty and wild anger (*furor*) of Achilles or the cleverness, trickster features, eloquence and wit of Odysseus are frequently found in warrior heroes through the ages. While the outward form and nature of heroes is shaped and consolidated by the conventions of the society in which they emerged, many such attributes can be found in both the Christianized Charlemagnic warrior, like Roland, and the chivalric knight-errant like those depicted in Sir Thomas Malory’s influential fifteenth century Arthurian work *Le Morte d’Arthur*.

The knight-errant is well known from, inter alia, the “Matter of Britain” (medieval texts in both French and English featuring King Arthur), the work of the twelfth century French poet Chrétien de Troyes and the texts of the French Vulgate Cycle. Central to the knight-errant and his chivalry is his high standing, martial prowess, reputation, protection of the weak, and close relationship with God or the Virgin Mary. His positive attitude towards his community resembles the compassion and social responsibility inherent in the *pietas* of the Virgilian Aeneas. He is likely also to have fine armour and equipage, and ideally manifests the refinements, including eloquence, integral to the concepts of *courtoisie* and *gentillesse*. Many of these qualities can also be found in gentleman crime fiction heroes of the early twentieth century, including the Saint. Templar is readily identifiable with key attributes within this heroic tradition, drawing on a heritage ingrained in Western cultural consciousness through centuries of intertextuality that found expression in the imagination of Leslie Charteris. Much of what the Saint is and does mirrors the warrior hero through history.

The heritage that lies behind Charteris’ creation is reflected in the admiration for classical and medieval heroes in the English society in which the Saint was conceived. While, as Christopher

²⁸ Arthur W.H. Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility: A Study in Greek Values* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 34; 36. [1960].

²⁹ These definitions are from Katherine Callen King, *Ancient Epic* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2009), 54-55.

Stray has shown, the study of classics in England was subject to pressure and change in the post-Great War period,³⁰ the field continued to be a major element in the curriculum of public schools, and the languages, culture, literature and history of the classical Western world were still considered an essential part of a sound education. Classical and medieval heroes, the latter including Lancelot, Arthur and Roland with his warrior companions, were widely extolled as exemplars of bravery, loyalty, duty and sacrifice, especially in war.³¹ Admiration for these champions was likely increased by the similarity to them of the old northern or Viking hero, who, as Andrew Wawn has demonstrated, was enormously popular in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain.³² As discussed in Chapter III, medieval chivalry as imagined in Victorian England became an enduring code of conduct for gentlemen; Charteris' wide reading and public school education would have familiarized him with such mores of behaviour.

The Saint manifests attributes well known among the pantheon of major heroes like Achilles, Odysseus, Aeneas, Arthur, Roland and many others. Early portrayals graphically and emotionally depict him as being, in effect, favoured by supernatural forces – “a man born with the sound of trumpets in his ears”³³ – and he can have a superhuman presence. He is youthful and physically attractive. Narrator's references to his destiny appear frequently throughout the narratives, and there are often references to his “guardian angel” in the narratives. In one early novella, what can best be described as a mystical revelation suggests he is guided by higher powers after he has “drunk the magic wine of the High Gods.”³⁴ He is a warrior; his martial standing is boosted by his defeat of enemies who frequently maintain large and powerful criminal organizations. He is an expert with weapons, a fencer and boxer and is highly skilled in martial-related skills like driving fast cars, piloting aircraft, and hunting, stalking and surviving in the wild outdoors. His strength, hearing, ability to move through wild or jungle terrain, especially at night, is likened to that of a panther or other great beast.

³⁰ Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England, 1830-1960* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), especially Chapter 10.

³¹ Mark Girouard, *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 281.

³² Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002).

³³ *The Last Hero* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1948), 24-25. [1930].

³⁴ “The Melancholy Journey of Mr Teal”, in *The Holy Terror* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), 267. [1932].

The traditional high social standing of the warrior hero can be seen in the Saint as a wealthy English upper class gentleman during the 1930s, and as a rich American in the highest strata of society during the 1940s and 1950s. Recalling classical eloquence or the refined conversation of medieval *courtoisie*, he can verbally engage, humiliate and infuriate enemies and the authorities alike with cutting sarcasm and masterful badinage. His anger, perhaps his one weakness or flaw, exceeds that of normal men, like the *furor* of Achilles or Lancelot. His reputation is such that he is held in awe by both good and evil elements in the community, and in early narratives there are references implying glorious deeds in former days of wandering and adventure. In the very early narratives he is a leader of warrior companions, like Roland and his paladins. He is clever like Odysseus, mirroring that hero's trickster qualities as he outwits and confuses his enemies. He shows a responsibility for the community in the tradition of Aeneas' *pietas* and the chivalric code of the medieval knight-errant.

Charteris specifically identifies the Saint with the medieval knight, characterizing Templar as a modern form of the idealized image in shining armour of popular imagination. This is established at a very early stage. Crime fiction heroes, especially the American private eye, have often been identified as knightly figures. Over forty years ago John Cawelti argued that the hard-boiled modern detective resembles "the chivalrous knights of Sir Walter Scott", and even earlier George Grella discussed the links between the hard-boiled detective story and medieval romance.³⁵ For his creator Raymond Chandler, Phillip Marlowe was a modern knight "in search of a hidden truth",³⁶ and Julian Symons asserts that "to highlight the quest structure [of his narratives], Chandler converts the detective from a worker (an 'operative') into a knight".³⁷ The American frontier hero, whose relevance to the evolution of the Saint is discussed in Chapter III, is also often seen as a knightly figure.³⁸ The importance of rediscovered medieval chivalry for the gentleman of nineteenth and early twentieth century England means that many early English gentleman crime fiction heroes are, like the Saint, knightly warriors ridding the country of crime and corruption, in doing so reaffirming the ideological relevance and importance for society of the gentleman and his activities.

³⁵ Cawelti, *Adventure*, 151; George Grella, "Murder and the Mean Streets", *Contemporaria* 1 (March, 1970): 11-12..

³⁶ "The Simple Art of Murder", Raymond Chandler 1950, accessed 13 August 2011, <http://www.en.utexas.edu/amlit/amlitprivate/scans/chandlerart.html>.

³⁷ Symons, *Bloody Murder*, 125.

³⁸ For example John Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 39-41; or Sergi, "Across Lands Forlorn", 351 pp.

The most obvious link between Simon Templar and the medieval knight is his surname, the title of the 1930 novel *Knight Templar* and Charteris' publication in 1949 of a book of short stories entitled *Saint Errant*. The Saint's surname specifically connects him with the Knights Templar (The Order of the Temple), a Christian military order that fought in the Crusades and later became the basis of the early European banking system until it was disbanded by Philip of France and Pope Clement V in the early fourteenth century.

The Templars are probably the best-known medieval order in popular culture, still featuring today in novels, films and other media. As early as 1819, in Sir Walter Scott's enduringly popular novel *Ivanhoe*, there is a reference to a Templar knight, which inspired later theatrical and even operatic performances. A number of histories of the Order were written later in the nineteenth century. Many organizations, including Freemasonry and similar associations across the Western world, have been influenced and inspired by perceptions, even if sometimes wildly inaccurate, of the Order. At the time Charteris was writing, many readers in Britain and America would have heard of the Templars and related them in general terms to popular conceptions of gallant, chivalrous medieval knights. And while the Order's skill in the acquisition of wealth was probably less well known, it should not be forgotten that the Saint's interest in acquiring spoils and wealth is as prominent as his knightliness in most of Charteris' fiction, suggesting a further identification with the Templars.

Linking the Saint to the wealthy and influential medieval Knights Templar Order increases his standing, and through many allusions in the narratives, especially in *Knight Templar*, Charteris depicts the Saint as a knight-errant. Along with his other chivalric qualities, as noted earlier he can be a protective champion to women; the most intense instance, in *The Last Hero* (1930), portrays his partner Patricia Holm as an idealized icon, dependent and in need of protection, whom the Saint reveres as in English chivalry and medieval courtly love.³⁹ In a few instances the Saint is represented as St George, the patron saint of England, for centuries portrayed as a medieval Christian knight in armour. The depiction of Templar as a swashbuckling pirate or highwayman begins to predominate

³⁹ Similar females occur in the Homeric epic. See King, *Ancient Epic*, 67-68. The qualities demanded of women in the Homeric epics are "beauty, skill in weaving and house-keeping, chastity and faithfulness". Adkins, *Merit and Responsibility*, 36.

after the first few years of Charteris' writing, but knightly gallantry is always present, and references to medieval figures and concepts can be seen throughout the whole series.

The Saint also incorporates the earlier, more militaristic conduct of heroes like Roland in *La Chanson de Roland*, probably the most famous exemplar of the early epic poetry known as *chansons de geste* and forming part of the "Matter of France", texts centred on Charlemagne. Roland and his twelve paladins, a Christianized form of the early Germanic warrior bands styled by the Romans *comitatus*, follow a code of martial prowess, honour, mutual assistance, loyalty and plunder. This emphasized warrior qualities with scant regard for the *courtoisie* of romance.⁴⁰ Roland especially exalts in attributes such as the fame of his name, the thrill of battle, the glory of fighting against impossible odds and comradeship with his companions.⁴¹ A similar focus is found in both Templar and among the fictional outlaws, highwaymen and pirates important in his evolution.

Joyful warrior companionship is a feature, in particular, of the early Saint. The younger Templar is the leader of a group of like-minded young men, completely loyal to him. They are different from Jerry Palmer's concept of the "back-up team" of the thriller hero, where friends are essentially non-heroic helpers;⁴² those the Saint gathers around himself, though of lesser power, are gentlemen warriors whom he moulds and shapes to his purposes, with qualities similar to those of their leader. In later Saint narratives, when individual companions appear they fulfil the same function as the earlier group. Through the nineteenth century chivalric "band of brothers", discussed in Chapter III, the young men who gather around the Saint in Charteris' very early work ultimately reflect the comradeship of the medieval warrior hero and his men who acknowledge him unquestioningly as leader, share his ideals, receive plunder from him and joyously accompany him into battle. In *Saint Overboard* (1936) where two early companions return to assist Templar, there is still boisterous horseplay when the three meet, and a boyish eagerness for the fray.

In his relationship with his companions the early Saint is a leader of men, and in a chivalric context a lord to whom the members of his company have sworn allegiance – like Arthur. The Arthur of

⁴⁰ See, for example, Anthony Adams, "The Chivalric Quest: Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", in *The Hero's Quest*, ed. Bernard Schweizer and Robert A. Segal (Ipswich, Massachusetts: Salem Press, 2013), 149.

⁴¹ This is summed up in Robert Harrison, trans., *The Song of Roland* (New York: New American Library, 2002), 35.

⁴² Palmer, *Thrillers*, 26-29.

Malory's important *Le Morte d'Arthur*, while less central than Lancelot, is still a paragon of power and honour, for example in his slaying of the foul giant at St Michael's Mount, and in his demand that the women of the conquered city of Urbyne be treated properly.⁴³ Templar as Arthur is especially evident in *The Last Hero* (1930), where the Saint's companion Norman Kent, hopelessly in love with the Saint's lady, sacrifices himself for them both. Kent personifies chivalric honour in his unconditional loyalty to his leader in giving up both the woman he loves and his own life. To a lesser extent a similar sentiment is seen in *Knight Templar* (1930). Here the Saint's companion Roger Conway, in love with Sonia Delmar with whom he suspects Templar has also fallen in love, nevertheless dutifully carries out the Saint's command to return to London from their mission on Britain's east coast, leaving her with him. In both cases their fealty is that of the knight sworn to his king.

Finally, a notable feature of the Saint that echoes the medieval knight is the possession of a named weapon. Usually a sword, the best known of these is probably Arthur's sword "Excalibur". Lancelot and Gawain have named weapons, and "Joyeuse" and "Durendal" are the respective swords of Charlemagne and Roland in *La Chanson de Roland*. The weapon may be personified, have a history, and be of magical or mystical significance. The Saint has a small, superbly crafted razor-sharp knife, which saves his life many times. In *The Last Hero* it is introduced and described in effect as a living entity, named "Anna"; in later novels he has a new knife, "Belle". The femininity of Templar's knives is an interesting question. It is possible that ascribing a feminine persona to deadly weapons reflects the powerful and dangerous female figures, discussed in Chapter III, sometimes seen in nineteenth century adventure novels featuring the empire hero forebears of the Saint – and beyond that, the threatening sorceresses, enchantresses and *femmes fatales* of Western imagination through the ages. The Saint dominates, controls and uses the feminine power of his weapon, directing its destructive force to the service of good.

⁴³ Sir Thomas Malory, *The Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, ed. Eugène Vinaver, rev. P. J. C. Field, third edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 203-4; 243. [*Le Morte d'Arthur*, 1485].

The Saint and the Heroic Quest

The Saint character also evinces the characteristics and experiences of the quest hero, a motif seen in the myths, folklore and legends of many societies. The quest or journey, as Robert Segal points out, may be “outward or inward” – that is, actual or metaphorical.⁴⁴ There are numerous well-known analyses of quest narratives, such as those of Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye or Vladimir Propp, with certain key elements common to most. The quest can be defined as simply as “venturing forth, transformation, and return.”⁴⁵ It usually involves the hero undertaking a mission, travelling to physical or metaphorical dangerous, remote areas such as labyrinthine or watery underworlds, suffering trials and setbacks and ultimately reappearing more powerful and triumphant against a monstrous opponent, benefiting both his society and himself. During his journey he is both assisted and opposed by others, including a woman, who may be a prize, a helper, or an enemy. The common perception of the crime fiction hero as a chivalrous knight, a figure closely associated with the quest, makes the quest well-known in that genre. Over sixty years ago W. H. Auden identified the detective story with the knightly quest for the Grail.⁴⁶ Rose May Verrico has further linked the detective story to Frye’s quest concept and the detective himself to Campbell’s concept of the hero,⁴⁷ while Susan Rowland has more recently proposed the myth-complex detective story, whereby the “Grail” is achieved by redemption of the social “wasteland” caused by the crime and the restoration of harmony between the disrupted myth-complex elements.⁴⁸

The adventures and experiences of thriller heroes, including those prominent around the time Charteris was writing, also fit heroic quest patterns. In the Saint thrillers, Templar undertakes a journey into a world of danger outside normal society, a world where he must fight and risk his life to attain his goal. His enemies are frequently powerful, outwardly respectable but malevolent figures

⁴⁴ Robert A. Segal, “Theories of Myth”, in Schweizer and Segal, *Hero’s Quest*, 15.

⁴⁵ Jeremy M. Downes, “Romancing the Quest: Quest Narratives in Changing Contexts”, in Schweizer and Segal, *Hero’s Quest*, 56.

⁴⁶ W. H. Auden, “The Guilty Vicarage: Notes on the Detective Story, By an Addict” 1948, W. H. Auden, accessed 13 August 2011, www.harpers.org/archive/1948/05/0033206. The article was originally published in *Harper’s Magazine*, May 1948.

⁴⁷ Rose May Verrico, “Detective Fiction and the Quest Hero”, *Clues: A Journal of Detection* 14, 1 (1993): 137-139; 145.

⁴⁸ Susan Rowland, “The Wasteland and the Grail Knight: Myth and Cultural Criticism in Detective Fiction”, *Clues: A Journal of Detection*. 28, 2 (Fall 2010): 44-54. Rowland sees this myth-complex as an alternative, in detective fiction, to Campbell’s monomyth.

whose actions harm the community. Many of them, like those of other quest heroes, are monstrous; Chapter VI argues that these opponents, while othered as aliens and feared in Western society at the time, also represent, even physically in some cases, the dragons, giants and ogres fought by the traditional quest hero. Northrop Frye has argued that the quest hero's enemy, as a dragon or leviathan, often a sea-monster, is a threat representing the sterility of the land or other detrimental phenomena such as social oppression.⁴⁹ The Saint's removal of criminal and other threats to society and, in the 1930s, his enforcement of social justice, can be seen as the destruction of such "monsters". Like other quest heroes the Saint usually receives a reward at the end of his adventures, usually in the form of money or spoils, but also in the form of fulfilment of his need for excitement and increased admiration by the community.

He always encounters difficulties and suffers setbacks before eventually emerging triumphant. His adventures usually take place in a perilous urban or occasionally rural environment, often in distant mansions, city hideaways or deep, dark places, sometimes on ships at sea or even underwater. In two early narratives he is almost drowned in deep underground caverns, and in another he is nearly gassed to death in a deep cellar.⁵⁰ Even in "normal" environments, his battles are fought in a metaphorical remoteness and wilderness – an environment of evil, immoral criminality, distant from the rules and values of normal society and a place where danger and death are commonplace. On many occasions he comes very close to death, but escapes, more powerful than ever.

He is assisted by both heroic helpers, such as Roger Conway, his most frequent companion in the early adventures, and by lesser figures like his devoted follower Hoppy Uniatz. Charteris' stereotyped and categorized depictions of women were discussed earlier; in the heroic quest context Templar's 1930s partner Patricia Holm and sundry other women in various Saint narratives frequently fulfil the roles of either helper or prize for the Saint. Occasionally they may be the object of the quest. Where women are dangerous or an enemy, Templar can be temporarily distracted or tempted by their physical beauty, as with the beguiling and seductive *femme fatale* in Charteris' wartime novella "The Sizzling Saboteur" mentioned earlier. The female criminal mastermind of

⁴⁹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1990, 186-192. [1957].

⁵⁰ Respectively the novels *Meet the Tiger* (1928), *She Was A Lady* (1931) and the novella "The Story of a Dead Man", in *Alias the Saint* (1931).

“The King of the Beggars” equates with what Miller calls “the evil queen”,⁵¹ and the vicious, repulsive females of *The Saint Sees It Through* (1946) are akin to a monster like the grotesque mother of Grendel in the Anglo-Saxon text *Beowulf*.

Like other heroes, the Saint has special qualities and can operate effectively in the hostile “outside”, where he seeks his goal and where his confrontations with his adversaries occur; he uses his unique abilities in this dangerous place. Faye Ringel defines this outside as an environment of danger and insecurity where the rules and values of normal society do not apply, noting that the hero “stands as an Outsider to other men even when within the civilized Center” (normal society). The hero’s outsider standing enables him to function in that perilous environment and confront the adversary, who is “always Outside” – irrevocably hostile and alien to society because of his monstrous nature.⁵² But the hero is also an “insider”, a member of the community who, unlike his adversary, acknowledges its value and defends it. This ideological tension has been identified by Jerry Palmer, who notes a not dissimilar distinction in the modern thriller hero whom he sees as alone and isolated, a “glamorous outsider” – unlike the villain, who is a “total” and “repulsive” outsider. The hero is an “insider-outsider”, in that while he operates effectively away from civilized society, he nonetheless “shares the general moral perspective of the community he serves”.⁵³ The hero *needs* to be separate from and unique among normal men – as John Carroll has noted, “only he who may never settle...will prove big enough to counter radical disorder”. If he were to merge with the inside, with normal society, and become part of Carroll’s “cosiness and confines of community”,⁵⁴ he would be unable to maintain the special qualities that enable him to fight in the outside to preserve that society, and would lose his power.

In an interesting observation about the hero’s standing, Dean Miller argues that he is “easily detached from the societal matrix...[and] is often as dangerous to the social fabric as he is useful in defending it”.⁵⁵ Such a danger highlights a paradox in the Saint: he preserves and secures his community, but

⁵¹ Miller, *Epic Hero*, 169.

⁵² Faye Joyce Ringel, “Patterns of the Hero and the Quest: Epic, Romance, Fantasy” (PhD diss., Brown University, 1979), 143.

⁵³ Palmer, *Thrillers*, 7-15, 24, 25, 29.

⁵⁴ Carroll, *Dreaming*, 69.

⁵⁵ Miller, *Epic Hero*, 162.

does so by unorthodox methods that ignore and mock the community's own laws and are usually vigorously opposed by the formal authorities. Indeed, his activities as an avenging vigilante would be dangerously destabilizing if he were a normal part of the social fabric, for example if his actions were formally condoned. But as someone who can operate outside the law, far away from the rules and procedures of the community, he can defend the inside while remaining detached from it.

A maturation process is usually associated with the quest – especially the quest of chivalric romance, whose hero incorporates both Christian spirituality and traditional martial virtues. The Saint does mature as his adventures continue – a change, as explained earlier, primarily reflecting Charteris' own maturing – but the quest hero's maturation as he proceeds on his journey is primarily spiritual, a purifying process leading to a spiritual rebirth and a spiritual goal like the Holy Grail. The Saint's close identification with the knight-errant who seeks the Grail raises the question whether the Saint's personal reward can incorporate a spiritual achievement. While Templar does not in any overt way transcend to a higher degree of self-awareness at the completion of his quests, their implicit goal is a society free of unfairness, injustice and evil. This objective is unlikely ever to be achieved, but as he progresses on his essentially endless journey the goals he achieves are part of an ongoing cleansing process, removing different types of malevolent threats to the community. As each evil is eradicated society is further redeemed, the contrast between his opponents and himself is increasingly accentuated, and his moral power as a purveyor of right and justice is intensified. The exhilaration he experiences as his need for excitement is fulfilled empowers and revitalizes him, adding to his spiritual power.

A quest narrative specifically associated with America is found in Charteris' important novel *The Saint in New York* (1935). This is the "Shane" motif, named after the 1949 novel by Jack Schaefer and the 1953 film of the same name.⁵⁶ Shane is a gunfighter who suddenly arrives in an isolated farming valley, and takes the side of the farmers against a ruthless cattle baron and his minions. He defeats them then rides away wounded, possibly to die. The motif has been concisely described as the stranger who "rides in from the outside, restores order, then rides away".⁵⁷ It is essentially the

⁵⁶ Jack Schaefer, *Shane*, ed. James C. Work (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984). [1949]. The 1953 film was directed by George Stevens and starred Alan Ladd.

⁵⁷ Carroll, *Dreaming*, 69.

same as the so-called “American monomyth”, a heroic pattern identified by Robert Jewett and John Lawrence in a number of twentieth century films and television programs which, they argue, is a variation of Campbell’s famous formulation.⁵⁸ A lone rider similar to the Shane figure, Lassiter, appears in the very popular early Zane Grey novel, *Riders of the Purple Sage* (1912), later in his *Knights of the Range* (1939), and in the Lone Ranger, a character best known from the original 1930s radio program and a later 1950s television series. There is also the gunfighter Chris Adams, played by Yul Brynner in the films *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) and *Return of the Seven* (1966). Chris, whose past is a mystery, reflects the Shane motif as an American knight-errant; he roams the West on an endless quest, righting wrongs and winning justice for the oppressed. The motif is, however, much older than the nineteenth century American West. It is found in chivalric romance,⁵⁹ and one observer identifies it in the activities of the medieval knight Owain, one of several Arthurian “riders from nowhere” who appears in many medieval texts.⁶⁰

In *The Saint in New York* Templar appears in that city, seemingly out of nowhere, as noted earlier having been employed by a wealthy patron to rid the city of gangsters. The plot focuses on the inability of the proper authorities, represented by an incorruptible police inspector hampered by a venal judiciary, to deal with the problem of ruthless mobsters terrorizing honest citizens. The Saint assassinates various crime czars, by doing so returning a New York of soaring concrete canyons that resembles the American West to peace, stability and order. A lone hero, he uses his special outsider powers to combat these monstrous enemies in a world beyond that of an intimidated, defenceless society. He is an almost supernatural figure of redemption, confusing and frustrating the gangsters with his instant action and miraculous escapes. Charteris creates knife-edge tension far more skilfully than in his earlier narratives, culminating in a climactic episode where the Saint is captured and taken to the countryside to be executed. An atmosphere of inevitable, encroaching doom ensues. He is saved by the woman known only as Faye, the woman of mystical power alluded to earlier whose name, otherworldly nature and ultimate doom suggest she is “fey”. Her protective relationship with the Saint is like that of the goddess Athena with Odysseus, and she is interpretable as

⁵⁸ Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *The American Monomyth* (New York: University Press of America, 2nd ed., 1988).

⁵⁹ Ringel notes the example of Lancelot in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Le Chevalier de la Charrete* (The Knight of the Cart), and, in a different form, in his *Yvain*. Ringel, “Patterns”, 134-135.

⁶⁰ “*Shane* Re-Envisioned”, James C. Work, accessed 13 January 2010, nieveroja.colostate.edu/issue2/shane.htm. Owain (Chrétien de Troyes’ *Yvain*, and Malory’s *Uwayne*) is also found in Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur*.

Campbell's "Queen Goddess of the World". She is held in awe by the ruthless gangsters and, notwithstanding her ultimate sacrifice for him, is even feared by the Saint himself. With her help he escapes, but, like Shane, is wounded, and after the exposure and final capture of the primary villain, again like Shane, he disappears from sight. It would be hard to find a more fitting example of the Shane motif, or of the American monomyth.

This chapter has examined three fundamental influences that underpin the concept of the Saint: Charteris' identification with the character, and Templar's links with the Western warrior and quest hero traditions. From this basis, the chapters following examine the various primary layers of the Saint's heroism: his origins in nineteenth and early twentieth century literature, and the historical, social and ideological influences that shaped him in his various forms.

CHAPTER III

EMPIRE HEROES, FRONTIER HEROES AND THE EVOLUTION OF THE SAINT

The modern Simon Templar evolved from the heroes of early thrillers and adventure fiction. Prominent in this literature is a type of protagonist which this study calls the “empire hero”, a chivalrous English gentleman with special skills, able to operate on the wild, border areas of the empire or their equivalent with an independent approach to morality and the law. The empire hero constitutes a primary step in the evolution of the Saint, with the first layer of his heroism based on this figure’s attributes. The empire hero’s attributes closely resemble those of the American frontier hero, widely popular in the Britain as well as in his homeland; this similarity revalidated and reaffirmed the heroic nature of the empire hero. The frontier hero may therefore be seen as an indirect contributor to the evolution of Charteris’ hero.

As a schoolboy and young man Charteris devoured the adventure and thriller literature of his day. He described his boyhood fascination with the empire boys’ magazine *Chums* and, to a lesser extent, the weekly *The Boy’s Own Paper* as an “introduction to the classics which we would move on to in adolescence, from Henty to Sabatini, from Haggard to Sax Rohmer”.¹ George Alfred Henty, Rafael Sabatini, H. Rider Haggard and “Sax Rohmer” (Arthur Henry Ward) are four among many famous early adventure and thriller authors with whose work Charteris was familiar. The popularity of such authors, especially in Britain but also in America, was high. The adventure story, in particular, promulgated the ideologies of nationalism, race and empire, with young Englishmen, often in exotic locations, countering threats to the home country and empire from a variety of malevolent forces. Early vigilante thrillers such as *The Four Just Men* (1905) and its sequels, by the famous Edgar Wallace, were also read widely, as were the exploits of romantic criminals like E. V. Hornung’s Raffles, and, in the field of detection, non-official crime-solvers, most notably Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s enormously popular Sherlock Holmes who first appeared in 1887. After the Great War, more vigilante thrillers such as McNeile’s “Bulldog” Drummond novels began to appear; with the weakening of traditional values and authority subsequent to the War, these offered readers the

¹ Leslie Charteris, Introduction to *The Men Behind Boys’ Fiction* (London: Howard Baker, 1970), by W.O.G. Lofts and D.J. Adley, 1.

certainty of justice and redemption in an increasingly uncertain world. Popular French texts such as Maurice Leblanc's narratives featuring the mischievous crime-fighter Arsène Lupin and the adventure stories of Alexandre Dumas were also well known in Britain.

Like the Saint, the protagonists of much of this fiction are adventurers. The adventurer transgresses the boundaries of society, takes risks, and enjoys the thrill of pitting himself against the unknown. Sometimes he can have trickster features. Again like the Saint, adventure and thriller protagonists often exhibit attributes that are part of the Western warrior and quest traditions. Many activities and sentiments of the classical aristocratic warrior or the medieval knight-errant on his quest are similar to those that can, for example, be seen in the upper class, well-to-do English gentleman who wanders to the far-flung corners of the empire or its symbolic equivalent, is familiar and skilled with weapons, has a moral code founded on the English public school, and fights monstrous enemies who threaten Britain and the empire. Similarly, the colourful gentleman vigilante, or romantic and flamboyant outlaw, skilled in combat, who ignores the law and follows his own morality to help the oppressed and right wrongs resembles the superior, larger-than-life glittering warrior or knight in shining armour who defends the weak according to his code – a figure, as we have seen, with whom the Saint is directly identified. Prominent attributes and features of Simon Templar are directly associated with the thriller and adventure protagonists of texts that were popular when Charteris commenced his thriller-writing in the late 1920s. The young writer, eager to succeed, fashioned his hero after them. Much of the Saint can be sourced to the appearance, lifestyle, attitudes and behaviour of these heroes, with whom Charteris and millions of other readers were so familiar.

The literature in which these adventure story and thriller protagonists appear can be split into two parts. The first part, addressed in this chapter, includes various manifestations of the empire hero, who originated as a gentleman operative in the outer reaches of the British Empire, and whose similarity to the frontier hero revalidated his attributes as heroic. The second part, discussed in the next chapter, incorporates the romantic and honourable criminal, the benevolent vigilante and, in early detective fiction, the idea of the non-official crime-solver who outperforms the police. The two parts are not mutually exclusive, and many protagonists combine features found in both. The vigilante, or even the romantic, charismatic criminal can often evince values and attributes typical of

the empire hero, and all may share some features with the private, non-official detective. These figures played a major part in Charteris' creation of his own hero.

The Empire Hero

Key attributes of the empire hero, manifested in the Saint, constitute the first of the primary layers of Templar's heroism. The empire hero needs to be examined in some detail, not only because of his importance for the Saint character but because there are so many different exemplars across the wide range of narratives in which he appears. The empire hero began in the early British adventure novel. He is a gentleman, usually wealthy, a natural leader, physically superior, the product of an English public school education and an adherent to its concept of chivalry, which includes a moral code that stresses peer loyalty, sportsmanship, self-reliance, independent action, decency and fair play. He is usually not intellectual but outstanding at sport, especially cricket. Sport and the unwritten rules that accompany it often determine his behaviour;² secret espionage missions by empire hero figures were sometimes referred to as "the great game", a term probably first used in Kipling's *Kim* (1901). He is experienced and well-travelled in distant and dangerous places, is no stranger to violence and usually appreciates the thrills and excitement of his lifestyle. He is unmarried, and naive with women. For him, England is naturally superior to other nations. The issue of class – being upper class, or in some cases upper middle class – is integral to the empire hero; he generally reflects an upper class perception of responsibility for English society, a degree of racism, and a patronizing superiority towards less privileged persons, especially the colonized peoples.

Unlike many conventional English upper class figures, he has well-developed survival and combat skills, and can operate in wild nature and other dangerous environments. Bypassing authorities or superiors, he is inclined to take an independent and unconventional approach to achieving his goals. The hero's tension as an outsider within his community can be discerned. He has highly developed outsider capabilities – his survival and fighting ability are outsider attributes that are essential if he is to preserve the inside, his community. His class standing is clear, and his loyalty and patriotism to nation and empire is unquestioned; but he is "different", outside the mainstream, serving a society

² "...this one little word [sport] served for a great number of people the combined purposes of civic code and religious regulator." Watson, *Snobbery*, 48.

into which he is not really integrated with skills learnt outside that society. The empire hero probably does in part reflect the real colonial environment, whose outer reaches were often served by independently-minded individuals with special skills. In fiction, however, he did not always have to defeat England's enemies in an actual colonial location; in appropriate conditions he could operate equally effectively in the home country and a variety of other places.

Simon Templar was created as an English gentleman hero. He is socially adept, wealthy, strong, handsome, witty and always superbly dressed. In the 1930s his education, speech and manner readily fit the pattern of a well-connected young-man-about-town in the high London society of the day. But he manifests heroic isolation: unlike his social peers, he is skilled with weapons, in personal combat and in survival abilities. In a situation reflecting the relationship between the empire hero and his peers, an upper class group in a prewar Charteris novel sees the Saint as an anomalous version of themselves: "...disarmed by his appearance and accent, they had taken him for granted as a slightly unusual member of a familiar species – their own species".³ Templar is a gentleman, but he is also able to stalk, track and observe his enemies on dark nights and in outdoor terrain, merging into the natural environment; he is equally at home in high society, a gentleman's club or in the wild, fighting for survival. Self-reliant, ultimately alone, he is independent of thought and action, does not acknowledge superiors, and has little time for convention or legalities. He has a natural sophistication, self-confidence and authority over others. He can be ruthlessly violent, and is often condescending towards other classes; he can be racist. These features are typical of the empire hero.

There is, of course, much of the empire hero that is not found in the Saint. Charteris innovatively reshaped the empire hero concept, casting aside features and traits that did not fit his conception of heroism and, as shall be seen, adding others. Templar's outlawry and illegal vigilantism go well beyond the independent and self-reliant thinking of the empire hero – he is *more* different. And his patriotism, while strong, bears little resemblance to that of the empire hero, focusing to a large extent on opposition to fascist and Nazi extremism. The irrelevance of and awkwardness with women, the absence of intellectuality, the frequent emphasis on cricket and sport, the public school code – none of these is found in the Saint. Templar's strong and sarcastic criticism of public school values throughout the 1930s narratives is not found in even the most independent empire hero. But the core

³ *Prelude for War*, 63.

similarities – gentlemanly standing, weapons and combat ability, survival knowledge, preparedness to deal with enemies regardless of law and convention according to a particular set of values – are pervasive. And, as noted earlier, while the Saint strongly criticizes public schools, he ultimately defends the role of the traditional ruling class associated with such institutions.

The late nineteenth century adventure tales known to have been read by Charteris, like those of Rider Haggard, Henty and Rudyard Kipling, include good examples of early empire heroes, who often operated in British colonial Africa or India. These characters bear little outward resemblance to Simon Templar, but their similarity in key attributes with the Saint strongly suggest their characterisation influenced Charteris' development of his hero. Almost forty years ago, the literary historian Jenni Calder identified the protagonists of such texts as "Imperialist Heroes",⁴ where

...the habits and standards of the English gentleman were readily adaptable to frontier conditions. His good manners and natural authority were useful in dealing with the natives. His sense of nationality was a continual encouragement. His skills in riding and shooting were essential aids to survival.⁵

Other authors such as R. M. Ballantyne, Stanley Weyman and Sherlock Holmes creator Conan Doyle published many adventure novels with similar protagonists. The heroes of Conan Doyle's historical stories *The White Company* (1891) and *Sir Nigel* (1906), Alleyne Edricson and the chivalrous Nigel Loring, may be seen as proto-empire heroes from an earlier age. Shortly before Calder developed the idea of the Imperialist hero, Patrick Howarth proposed the concept of "*homo newboltiensis*", or "Newbolt Man", derived from the writings and perceptions of the nineteenth/early twentieth century poet and author Sir Henry Newbolt. Newbolt Man represents a similar kind of protagonist to Calder's Imperialist Hero.⁶

The Imperialist/Newbolt hero is an empire hero represented in varying degrees by many well-known fictional characters, such as the well-known Allan Quatermain. Quatermain first appeared in

⁴ Jenni Calder, *Heroes: From Byron to Guevara* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1977), 66-82.

⁵ Calder, *Heroes*, 67.

⁶ Patrick Howarth, *Play Up and Play the Game* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1973). Newbolt is probably best known for his poem "Vital Lampada" (1892), which extols the value of public school sporting attitudes in life and war by exhorting the reader to "Play up! Play up! And play the game!" Sir Henry Newbolt, "Vital Lampada", accessed 5 September 2011, <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/vita-lampada/>.

Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and subsequently in eighteen other narratives up to *Allan and the Ice Gods* (1927). While thoroughly at home in the harsh African environment, he is nonetheless an English gentleman and an unconventional, independent man of power and action. He makes his own decisions, combining an ability to look after himself physically in the hard environment of Africa with the attitudes of "decency", "fair play", comradeship and initiative supposedly found in the best English schools and sporting endeavours of the day. Another exemplar is Robert Seymour, who plays a small but important part in Haggard's *Benita* (1906). Described by Howarth as "a good representative example of one who remains true to Haggard's ideals in the face of continual danger",⁷ he is a straight-shooting, courageous, broad-shouldered English gentleman.

Also found in Africa is an Edgar Wallace hero, the professional British colonial administrator Mr Commissioner Sanders. He is interesting because he has official status as a member of the colonial administration, operating partly as an executive and partly in a policeman-type capacity. Sanders appears in twelve novels up to 1928, beginning with *Sanders of the River* in 1911, in most of them as the central protagonist. Courageous and totally committed to service to the empire and the homeland, Sanders is a figure whose perceptions and judgement are predicated on the absolute power of British imperialism and on a belief in the natural superiority of Englishmen over Africans. Arrogant and condescending, in his isolated posts he makes his own, independent decisions based on what he believes to be the interests of the empire. He is prepared to deal out summary justice, including execution, regardless of law or convention. Apart from occasional vague hints in the narratives of his tender feelings for his subordinate Hamilton's sister, he has no interest in women. He is no office *wallah*, and is readily able to disguise himself as an African and disappear into the bush. Such embodiment of both identities, English gentleman and "native", is a type of symbolic further colonization, displaying the power of the empire hero in what is seen as a wild, alien environment.

The core combination of gentlemanly refinement, independent thinking and combat survival skills, so evident in the Saint, is very apparent in these early protagonists. And like Templar, the empire hero can be ruthless, enjoy danger and physical challenges. As noted earlier, he is also no stranger to violence. Blood flows often and easily in, for example, Haggard's novels; in *King Solomon's Mines* Sir Henry Curtis, whose gentlemanly standing includes a high degree in classics, slaughters right and

⁷ Howarth, *Play Up*, 112.

left, and in Doyle's *Sir Nigel*, a soldier collects the head of his former captor as the debt he is owed. In Kipling's short horror story "The Mark of the Beast" (1890), set in colonial India, has the narrator and the character Strickland brutally torture a leper with red hot gun barrels. In his first novel, *The Light That Failed* (1891), an Arab's eye is gouged out in the Sudan. As indicated later in this chapter, Templar can display a similar kind of violence, especially in his early years.

The variety of empire hero types is evidenced by characters like Kim O'Hara, the protagonist of Kipling's novel *Kim* (1901), and Baroness Orczy's Sir Percy Blakeney, the Scarlet Pimpernel. Kim, a boy of Irish origin in India, is sent after a ragamuffin youth to an English school in India and then, fit, strong and with proven survival skills, is trained as a secret agent. While he serves the empire in this role against the Russian enemy, he does so in an unconventional and unusual way because of his interest in "the great game" (spying) and his spiritual relationship and friendship with a Tibetan Lama. Skill at disguise is a feature frequently associated with the empire hero; Kim is able to disguise himself, as he physically resembles an Indian, and his English spy craft is adapted to the requirements of the sub-continent.

Sir Percy Blakeney, who first appeared in the play *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, then in the 1903 novel, offers an exemplar of the empire hero set in the time of the French revolution. He is a wealthy aristocrat who rescues French aristocrats from the revolutionaries, is strong, broad shouldered, a born leader with devoted followers, superbly skilled in combat and seamanship. Like other empire heroes, and like the Saint, he will ignore legal and other restraints in the interest of what he sees as the greater good. Blakeney is a master of disguise, especially in his feigned role as a wealthy, inane fop. He enjoys the danger and excitement of his efforts to rescue victims of the Revolution, as his wife Marguerite realizes: "She understood it all now – all for the sheer sport and devilry of course! – saving men, women and children from death, as other men destroy and kill animals for the excitement, the love of the thing."⁸ The desire for excitement or stimulation often found in empire heroes is an emotion less intense than, but not unlike, the warrior's thirst for the thrill of battle. As shown in Chapter IV, it is even more prominent in other adventure and thriller heroes. Sherlock Holmes, the epitome of the gifted non-official crime solver in detective fiction, was notorious for the dreadful depression that came upon him when the stimulation of new cases was unavailable, causing

⁸ Baroness Emmuska Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (Stilwell, Kansas: Digireads.com Publishing, 2005), 85. [1903].

him to turn to cocaine. The Saint's similar need for the excitement his adventures bring him is, as noted earlier, an integral part of his nature; it is probably even more important than the rewards he obtains through his activities.

English Chivalry

A fundamental aspect of the empire hero, whether official or not, was his status as a "chivalrous gentleman", in accordance with the nineteenth century Victorian concept of chivalric behaviour. The attributes that distinguished the chivalrous English gentleman were enthusiastically supported by empire hero creators, such as Kipling, and important dimensions of these qualities can be found in Simon Templar, merging in his identity the modern knight-errant and English gentleman hero. The reassertion in Victorian England of the knight-errant as an appropriate model for the English gentleman⁹ was influenced in particular by Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, completed in 1469-70 and rediscovered in the Victorian era by writers like Charles Kingsley, Thomas Carlyle and Edward Fitzgerald, and the pre-Raphaelite artists. *Le Morte d'Arthur* inspired other works: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, poet laureate of Britain for much of the nineteenth century and a major force in King Arthur's rediscovery, used it as the basis for his epic series of Arthurian poems *Idylls of the King*, published later in the century. The code of chivalry in Malory's book that requires knights swear not to commit murder or treason, to show mercy, to help and protect ladies, damsels and widows and to not fight for wrong causes¹⁰ contributed significantly to the ideal of honour, fair play and gentlemanly conduct of what was understood in the nineteenth century as the basis of gentlemanly chivalric behaviour. Lancelot is the highest exemplar of chivalry in *Le Morte d'Arthur* – notwithstanding having to deal with the conflict inherent in his love for Guinevere and his loyalty to Arthur his king. He displays manly courage and combat skills, and is described at the end of Book III as having the greatest name of any knight of the world; he is the pinnacle of fame, prowess, courtesy and magnanimity, after his death being described by Sir Ector as "the hede of al Crysten knyghtes".¹¹

⁹ Victorian-era chivalric behaviour is comprehensively discussed in Girouard, *Camelot*, especially Chapter 17. It was not restricted to Britain; Miller suggests the "last forlorn or pathetic gasp [of chivalry] seems to have occurred in the legendary charges of Polish lancers against German armour in 1939". Miller, *Epic Hero*, 13.

¹⁰ Malory, *Works*, 119-120.

¹¹ Malory, *Works*, 1259.

In nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain other important texts also promulgated the ideals of knightly chivalry. Arthurian “Matter of Britain” texts, and the fiction of Sir Walter Scott such as *Ivanhoe* (1819) which depicts the hero as “an amalgam of a mediaeval knight-errant and of a contemporary English gentleman”,¹² along with Tennyson’s *Idylls* and other works such as his poem “Sir Galahad” (1842), accentuated interest in Arthur and chivalry.¹³ Among chivalric heroes Lancelot and Gawain are superior warriors displaying great courage and martial skill, but Galahad, in addition to his fighting prowess, is the pure, pious knight who, when rediscovered through Tennyson’s famous poem and other texts, strengthened contemporaneous concepts of moral and ethical knightliness. Girouard notes another work of major importance, Kenelm Henry Digby’s *The Broad Stone of Honour: The True Sense and Practice of Chivalry*, a sort of guide for chivalric behaviour, first published in 1822 and reprinted and expanded a number of times during the course of the century. He argues that nineteenth century chivalry was “deliberately created” by such important enthusiasts, the aim being to “produce a new model for the ruling class, to train...an elite”.¹⁴ Its ideals were reinforced by the heroes of popular adventure novels like *Ivanhoe* or Conan Doyle’s historical romances, along with schoolboy magazines like *Chums*, as noted in Chapter II read enthusiastically by Charteris as a child. Some of the idealized attributes of the Victorian English interpretation of chivalry – that a gentleman should be a man of honour, brave in battle, independent, self-reliant, a defender of the defenceless, loyal to his monarch, caring towards dependants or inferiors – do reflect the codes and ideals of medieval chivalry. Other aspects – such as conforming in life to the values of the public school sporting code, or “playing the game” – are later additions to the concept of English gentlemanly behaviour.

An important dimension of English chivalry, shared with the warrior hero through the ages, was the perceived ennobling influence of war. Fighting and self-sacrifice were seen as the apogee of honour and manliness. This attitude was inculcated in public schools, where the exploits of medieval and earlier heroes such as “Hector and Achilles, Horatius holding the bridge, Arthur and his knights, Roland blowing his horn, Richard Coeur de Lion charging the Saracens, the Black Prince at Crecy,

¹² Sergi, “Across Lands Forlorn”, 281.

¹³ Alan Lupack, *The Oxford Guide to Arthurian Literature and Legend* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 147-148.

¹⁴ Girouard, *Camelot*, 56; 260; 261-2.

Henry V at Agincourt”¹⁵ were extolled as virtues inherent in a gentleman. Calm fortitude in the face of danger or death was also essential. It was exemplified in real life by the heroic death of Captain Lawrence Oates, a member of the ill-fated Scott expedition to the South Pole in 1912, who sacrificed himself in a vain attempt to expedite his companions’ efforts to reach their base camp. The courage of the male passengers of the Titanic, who calmly stood on the deck of the sinking vessel awaiting their fate, was seen as another example.

The medieval group of hero-champions discussed in Chapter II is reflected in nineteenth century chivalry by the “band of brothers”. One of the driving forces behind this concept, Sir Walter Scott, had written a war-song for his “band of brothers” in the Edinburgh Light Dragoons as early as 1802, but in popular fiction the phenomenon became prominent in the early twentieth century. It appears in novels like *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and the thrillers of John Buchan, especially those featuring his empire hero Richard Hannay and his companions. A band of young gentlemen also surrounds McNeile’s hero “Bulldog” Drummond, important for Charteris’ early concept of the Saint. Charteris’ favourite boyhood magazine, *Chums*, contains stories of pirate bands and other such groups. Before the Great War bands of boys were common in school stories, such as Rudyard Kipling’s *Stalky & Co.* (1899).

The support and defence of women, who were readily seen as in need of male protection or guidance, was inherent in English chivalry. While the empire hero has little interest in women, he is always patriarchal and protective. In those cases where he does feel or display emotion, he conforms to the way chivalric gentlemen were supposed to approach winning the favour of ladies – which could range from a passionately romantic infatuation, often with literary or artistic overtones, to a primarily spiritual relationship, where the object of desire is iconised as an ideal, recalling the concepts of medieval courtly love. Such elevation may have been a way of constraining a perceived potential threat to male hegemony; in some texts featuring empire heroes where a woman has more than a minor role, she is a figure of power and mystery, enthralling men with an almost hypnotic power, the ancient concept of feminine power that threatens the hero noted in Chapter II. A good example is the white queen Ayesha in Rider Haggard’s famous novel *She* (1886-87) and its sequel *Ayesha: The Return of She* (1905). Ayesha, a sorceress who has lived for two thousand years, enchants men with

¹⁵ Girouard, *Camelot*, 281.

her beauty and power. Another is Hilda von Einem, who entrances the empire heroes in John Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916). Such fantasies probably also reflect a Victorian male fear of "woman" occupying a position of power or authority not determined or controlled by men.

Consolidation of the Empire Hero

The empire hero and his chivalry continued to feature in adventure novels popular in Britain, America and beyond, well into the twentieth century. P. C. Wren incorporates Rider Haggard-type heroes in *The Wages of Virtue* (1916), with his most famous novel *Beau Geste* appearing in 1924. Wallace's Sanders novels continued to be popular for many years. In the early years of the twentieth century plots began to focus on invasion threats, terrorism, espionage and international intrigue, in narratives later considered to be early spy thrillers. Thrillers involving terrorist revolutionary plots against the nation and the empire had appeared as early as the 1890s, such as George Griffith's *Angel of the Revolution* (1893) or Robert Cromie's *The Crack of Doom* (1895), both of which may be classified as early science fiction like the novels of Jules Verne. Prominent among the new thrillers was Erskine Childer's famous and immensely popular novel, *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903). In this novel the two protagonists, one a sophisticated, patriotic gentleman and member of the Foreign Office, the other a "hands-on" sailor who combines practical life and survival skills with a well-formed, honourable and idealistic credo of life and duty, demonstrate a range of different aspects of the empire hero. They form a joint empire hero figure, with the survival and practical elements reflected strongly in Davies and the "sophisticated gentleman" side in Carruthers. As David Seed puts it, "Together they make up the two sides of a single investigating consciousness."¹⁶ The heroes of *The Riddle of the Sands* acknowledge that the spying they undertake is immoral but, defying conventional thinking, suggest it is justified for an honourable man in order to counter the machinations of those with evil intentions. This approach based on "the greater good" again reflects the empire hero's independent approach to law and convention.

The empire hero appeared frequently and regularly in the early "shocker" novels of William Le Queux, John Buchan, E. Phillips Oppenheim, and those of Sax Rohmer (Arthur Ward) and Edgar Wallace. Sydney Horler, a great admirer of Wallace, created a fine empire hero, "Bunny" Chipstead,

¹⁶ David Seed, "Spy Fiction", in Martin Priestman, *Cambridge Companion*, 118.

before turning to more vigilante protagonists in his novels. Charteris was almost certainly familiar with the work of all these very prolific authors, and important attributes of the characters they created can be discerned again and again in Simon Templar. Not all of their protagonists were empire heroes, especially in the case of Buchan and, notwithstanding Commissioner Sanders, Wallace, but their work helped establish the idea of this figure as a saviour of the nation and empire from spies, terrorists and criminals. Le Queux's novels, filled with action and excitement, were extremely popular. The enemy in his early books, up to 1905, was France, later superseded by Germany. The best-known of his more than 100 novels published between 1897 and 1931 deal with invasion or spy themes, though he also wrote some mystery and adventure stories. A typical Le Queux empire hero is Duckworth Drew of the Secret Service: a sophisticated, discreet upper class gentleman, Drew is well-known in European diplomatic and aristocratic circles. He operates independently, almost as a freelancer; he has little respect for or interest in women, is an expert in craft skills and disguise and – foreshadowing the later world of James Bond – uses gadgetry like drugged cigars.

Oppenheim, like le Queux, produced more than 100 novels, most of which could be described as thrillers. More than half were already in print by the end of World War I. Oppenheim's heroes are usually wealthy and well-connected; a good example is (Jim) Hardross Courage in the pre-Great War novel *The Great Secret* (1908). This character is “Saxon to the backbone”, doesn't “mind a row”,¹⁷ is wealthy, with a country seat called Saxby Hall, and well-connected – his grandfather was Ambassador to Paris in the time of Napoleon, and the senior politician Sir Gilbert Hardross is his cousin. Like the typical empire hero he is a sportsman: he is up in London to play for his County against the M.C.C. at Lord's cricket ground. Despite his connections and ostensible sophistication, he is awkward with women, and takes independent and unconventional action – in this case, to counter a German fifth column threat that the prime minister will not take seriously.

A typical empire hero in the novels of John Buchan is the outwardly-languid aristocrat Sandy Arbuthnot, who is in reality a brave, skilled, independent and self-reliant defender of his nation able to serve it almost anywhere on earth. Educated at Eton and Oxford, he is as comfortable in the backstreets of a Middle Eastern city as he is directing the butler in his family's English country mansion. Perhaps surprisingly, given the predominance in his novels of empire heroes, some of

¹⁷ E. Phillips Oppenheim, *The Great Secret* (Los Angeles: The Library of Alexandria, 2012), Kindle edition. [1908].

Buchan's protagonists are foreigners (non-English characters), and one is even a grocer.¹⁸ Buchan's work often includes a particular type of chapter heading format, such as "How Mr McCunn Committed an Assault Upon an Ally" (*Huntingtower*, 1922). This format also appears in earlier fiction, for example Doyle's *The White Company* (1891), and was often used by Charteris in his novels.

The most famous, and most representative of the empire hero in Buchan's work, is the protagonist of his best-known novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915): Richard Hannay. Hannay is a gentleman, a man of independent means who has "made his pile" in colonial South Africa, which features as an off-stage phenomenon that has generated his empire hero characteristics of wealth, outdoor skills and independent action. While the dogged, rather workmanlike Hannay is outwardly very different from the glittering, witty Simon Templar, the latter's need for excitement, his independent thinking and his physical skill mirrors these qualities in Buchan's best-known hero. He has a manservant to look after him in London but, like Haggard's Allan Quatermain, is strongly independent, physically capable and able to take care of himself in rough country. He is no intellectual, but is committed to patriotic service to his country. He incorporates and exemplifies a new dimension in the empire hero; he is outwardly not an especially remarkable personality, not gifted in any particular way and depicted as an "ordinary chap". But he is nonetheless part of the upper level of English society, and is special; he has an ability to think strategically, a knowledge of weapons and skill in disguise, and is readily able to handle things himself rather than relying on the authorities. His career runs through several novels, and he eventually attains the rank of General in the British Army.

Despite his commitment to his country's interests, Hannay openly expresses a sense of dissatisfaction with English society. Like other empire heroes and the Saint he has a need for excitement, and bemoans the tedium of life in London, away from the wild South African bushveld: "Here was I... yawning my head off all day. I had just about settled to clear out and get back to the veld, for I was the best bored man in the United Kingdom."¹⁹ As one commentator puts it, in Hannay "there is ... a tension between the desire for the exotic and the exciting ... and the ritual confirmation of

¹⁸ The grocer, or rather grocery entrepreneur who has sold his business, is Dickson McCunn, who appears in *Huntingtower* (1922), *Castle Gay* (1930) and *The House of the Four Winds* (1935).

¹⁹ John Buchan, *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1974), 8. [1915].

national and imperial order”.²⁰ Such “order” for Hannay is part of loyalty and patriotism, but he finds life in England boring and insipid.

Sax Rohmer’s empire hero, Sir Denis Nayland Smith, is almost overshadowed by his villain, the “yellow peril incarnate”: Dr Fu Manchu. Fu makes his first appearance in *The Mystery of Dr Fu Manchu* in 1913, and features in about a dozen subsequent novels. After Rohmer’s death Cay van Ash, Rohmer’s biographer, wrote some further Fu Manchu stories, and the character also appeared in films, comic strips, radio and television. Fu Manchu is the utterly evil, diabolically clever and almost superhuman head of a shadowy Chinese organization whose aim is to take over the world and, in doing so, enslave the “white races”. His opponent Nayland Smith is a former Commissioner in Burma, “a tall, lean man, with his square-cut, clean-shaven face sun-baked to the hue of coffee”.²¹ Smith has all the experience and skills of a man who has served on the outskirts of empire; he is “lean, agile, bronzed with the suns of Burma...symbolic of the clean British efficiency which sought to combat the insidious enemy”.²² The character juxtaposition of Smith and Fu is a fine example of the white, English hero combating the enemy “other”, demonized as alien and foreign, as seen in the Saint and some of his opponents and addressed in Chapter VI.

Smith has a mysterious but immensely broad roving remit from the British Government to deal with Fu Manchu and can commandeer virtually any resources he requires. This situation is remarkably similar to that of the Saint as a government agent in wartime America, where Templar pursues Nazi agents or sympathisers and has access to the resources of a secret government agency with almost unlimited power. Smith is a government official, but his superiors are never mentioned and he is able to do what he likes; the Saint’s wartime role as an independent operative, with a “boss” who is in effect at Templar’s beck and call, parallels these circumstances.

Smith is also clever at disguise, and as Clive Bloom has pointed out, his power has a sporting dimension: he dispatches the large, venomous red centipede sent by Fu Manchu to kill him “with one

²⁰ Seed, “Spy Fiction”, 121.

²¹ Sax Rohmer, *The Mystery of Dr. Fu-Manchu* (London: Dent & Sons, 1985), 5. [1913].

²² Rohmer, *Mystery*, 86.

straight, true blow of the golf club”.²³ Although the struggle in *The Mystery of Dr Fu Manchu* takes place in or near London, both Smith’s Burmese background and the nature of the locations where Smith encounters Fu or his minions are like unknown, dangerous border areas or wild, alien, foreign regions. In London, Smith and his companions pursue the “Chinaman” in thick fog at the Limehouse docks, surrounded by wicked characters. They clash again at Rowan House, the residence of orientalist Sir Lionel Barton. In a classic, symbolic expression of Orientalism, contrasting the alien, dangerous and decadent East with “clean British efficiency”, the façade of his house is “mantled in the strange exotic creeper which he had mentioned, and the air was pungent with an odour of decaying vegetation.” The hall is “constructed from the model of some apartment in an Assyrian temple, and the squat columns, the low seats, the hangings, all were eloquent of neglect”.²⁴ Even in England, Smith exercises his special combat and survival empire hero skills in what is in effect an exotic and remote border territory. He is impervious to the feminine charms of Kâramanèh, the female siren and slave of Fu Manchu who secretly helps him, although she captivates his assistant and narrator, Petrie, just as the sorceress Ayesha enchants Haggard’s heroes.

The Great War was to undermine some of the ideological foundations of the empire hero. The horrors of the war marked “the break-up of that powerful, interconnected configuration of cultural imaginaries... which underpinned the subsequent tradition of the national soldier hero”.²⁵ Previously unquestionable notions of nationalism, patriotism and upper class responsibility became suspect. Figures like the empire hero, whose values and circumstances were too close to what was perceived by many to be a traditional governing class responsible for the War, began to fall out of favour. Certainly, there were still substantial elements of the community, even in the social disruption of interwar Britain, who warmed to heroes like Richard Hannay or Nayland Smith. Colin Watson even suggests that “Gilt-edged Victorian and Edwardian optimism had taken far less severe a knock from the murderous futility of the 1914-18 war than one might suppose... the prospect visible was one of secure continuance of the old order”.²⁶ But the empire hero gradually faded through the popular

²³ Clive Bloom, “West is East: Nayland Smith’s Sinophobia and Sax Rohmer’s Bank Balance”, in Bloom, *Twentieth Century Suspense*, 27. The quotation is from Rohmer, *Mystery*, 25.

²⁴ Rohmer, *Mystery*, 82. The relevance of orientalism to the “othered” enemies of the Saint is discussed in Chapter V.

²⁵ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes* (London: Routledge, 1994), 153.

²⁶ Watson, *Snobbery*, 35-6.

anti-militarist and socialist activism of the 1930s, finally meeting his demise after the Second World War when the death-knell of colonialism was eventually sounded.

The Empire Hero Saint

As the early Saint matures and changes from the young idealist vigilante of the early 1930s through to the older, experienced sophisticate and government agent in America during the Second World War, some of his attributes recede and others become more prominent. When Charteris published his first novel in 1927 and began to develop his concept of the hero, fiction featuring the empire hero was, as we have seen, soundly established and extremely popular. While for his own hero the young author intensified and modified the empire hero's chivalric features and other qualities in various ways, he ensured the Saint possessed that figure's essential attributes of gentlemanly standing, special abilities, independent thinking and desire for excitement. Templar's attributes of martial prowess, the pursuit of justice, defence of the weak and elegant sophistication – whether a strong young English upper class man-about-town dealing with a ruthless criminal in 1930 London, a worldly operative putting paid to a fascist American magnate in wartime New York, or an older, playboy celebrity outwitting a ruthless and uncaring executive in late 1950s New Orleans – are ultimately those of the English knightly gentleman inherent in the empire hero. Such qualities and behaviour were regarded as heroically masculine, especially by the upper class, in the early twentieth century when Charteris was a young man. Empire hero qualities are less pronounced in Templar in later Charteris narratives. The early Saint, for example, has the empire hero's skill at physical disguise, but later tends to adopt more sophisticated ways of concealing his identity. The Americanised Saint from the 1940s is, superficially, more distant from the English original. But the empire hero tradition is embedded in Charteris' work, and broad empire hero attributes remain with the Saint throughout the entire series.

We have seen that Templar does not share all the empire hero's features. In particular, he has close relationships with and is extremely attractive to the many females who feature prominently in almost every Charteris novel, novella and short story. In his postwar and later adventures, in particular, when he is no longer linked to Patricia Holm, he has friendships and liaisons with many women. Even in the 1930s, when Patricia is his ongoing partner, as discussed earlier there are other women close to him in a number of narratives. On more than one occasion, however, Templar denies himself

the pleasure of women who offer themselves to him, where acceptance would compromise his mission. This is especially noticeable during his work as a counter-espionage agent in America in the war years, his forbearance containing a hint of Galahad-like devotion to duty and self-restraint.

The previous chapter discussed the limited ways women are portrayed in Charteris' work and how this serves to accentuate the Saint's power. Insofar as the Saint's general attitude to women can be summed up, it does include much of the patriarchal, courteous, protective and non-exploitative attitude of the chivalric empire hero. In early narratives, again like the empire hero when that figure does feel emotion, he can express love as a passionate infatuation. This is especially evident where his adored Patricia, depicted essentially as helpless, is saved and protected by him in *The Last Hero* (1930). At the beginning of the novel, presaging her later 1930s role as an active outlaw at the Saint's side, she is "a law unto herself", with the Saint "forcing himself to realize that to try and keep the girl out of trouble was a hopeless task". But later in the text, in a way that underscores Templar's strength and chivalry, she is fragile, vulnerable and almost sanctified as a paragon of purity and perfection. During the Saint's anti-war discussion with his friends, he refers to himself, his friends and Patricia as "three somewhat shop-soiled musketeers – and a blessed angel". The Saint explodes into *furor* when the monstrous Rayt Marius kidnaps her; Marius is "laying the powder-train for his foul slaughter under the shield of her blessed body". Patricia becomes an obsession when, not long afterwards, the Saint pursues the kidnappers, driving his mighty car like a maniac through the night. The car develops an almost demonic life of its own, controlled only by the Saint's supernatural strength, as, with death in his heart, he drives at incredible speeds imagining he hears her voice.²⁷

In *Knight Templar* (1930), Patricia does not even appear; she is safely sent off on an ocean cruise while the Saint deals once again with Marius. In later novels, the Saint's patriarchal chivalry is expressed towards various female protagonists. One example is in *Prelude for War* (1938), where the villains are about to torture a woman who has been captured with the Saint. As "the shrill shaky intensity of her voice stabbed through the Saint's brain", a "convulsion of superhuman power swept over his torso like the shock of an earthquake"; he tears apart the ropes binding his hands, grabs the weapon of his guard and rescues her.²⁸ As late as 1948, when Templar is an American in Chicago, a

²⁷ *The Last Hero*, 29; 45; 92; 144-146.

²⁸ *Prelude for War*, 306.

“black coldness lanced through him” at the thought of the unspoken things that could be done to his actress friend Monica, after she is captured by the criminals he is pursuing.²⁹ These emotions are an intense manifestation of the gentlemanly empire hero’s protective chivalry.

The English chivalric idea of calm acceptance of death does not sit easily with the Saint’s dare-devil and swashbuckling manner; the Saint is many times throughout his career prepared to die, but in a blaze of action and glory for a just cause. There are, however, one or two instances of a quiet preparedness to sacrifice himself. The one that stands out is in the 1936 novel *Saint Overboard*, where the Saint is forced by the ruthless criminal overlord Kurt Vogel to choose whether he will, in diving gear, open a strong room in an underwater wreck to obtain treasure, or see killed the woman Loretta Page, with whom, notwithstanding his partner Patricia, he has fallen in love. Even though he knows it will result in his own murder after he opens the strong room, he quietly agrees. He reflects on the deck of ship, before he moves “...to the twilight where he was going. Death in the afternoon. He had seen it so often, and now he had chosen it for himself. There was no fear in him.” Templar shows a similar calmness in the face of almost certain death in the 1936 novella “The Art of Alibi”.³⁰

The chivalric Saint is reprieved when Loretta promises to give herself body and soul to Vogel, whom the Saint later kills underwater before he can avail himself of her promise. *The Last Hero* (1930) provides another good example of this aspect of the empire hero’s chivalry in Charteris’ fiction, in the self-sacrifice mentioned earlier of the Saint’s companion Norman Kent. In a very emotional piece of writing, Charteris has Kent explain his actions, before he dies, with the words “nothing is won without sacrifice” – words that could have been uttered by Captain Oates.³¹

The dualism of the empire hero, the juxtaposition of civilization and wild nature where the sophisticated gentleman operates effectively in a harsh, dangerous environment, is a key parallel with the Saint. It is found throughout Charteris’ work in the elegant, urbane Saint who can readily deploy his survival skill and raw fighting ability. This is exemplified in one of Charteris’ most graphic pieces of writing, where the Saint is thrown into the Thames roped to a heavy iron weight. Because

²⁹ “The King of the Beggars”, in *Call for the Saint*, 99.

³⁰ *Saint Overboard* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950), 201. [1936]; “The Art of Alibi”, in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal*, 303.

³¹ *The Last Hero*, 287.

he is a “trained underwater swimmer”, over two or three pages of intensely described action he manages, desperately holding his breath while sinking through the black water, to slowly prise his knife from its sheath under his sleeve, cut the rope and fight his way to the surface. In another incident, he is roped to a block of stone that is pushed off the top of a high tower, but manages to hold on with one hand while securing the villain with the other.³² These events demonstrate how the upper class, gentleman Saint incorporates the dualism of his empire hero forebears: a wealthy, sophisticated man-about-town, his cultured and calm veneer conceals “wilderness” power of the highest order, including an ability and preparedness to use, if necessary, extreme violence. The urbane Templar is constantly threatened with death or injury, and in turn kills enemies mercilessly and threatens torture to extract information; in one adventure he brands a Middle Eastern white slaver on the face with a hot iron, and in another burns to death some exceptionally abhorrent villains.³³ Violence is a natural part of his persona; it underlies his status as an effective agent for good and demonstrates his power. But his violence is, like that of the empire hero, presented as a legitimate weapon in countering the evil of his opponents.

Charteris dramatically magnified the civilization/wild nature dualism of the empire hero in the Saint, linking sophisticated elegance and primitive animality. It was earlier noted that there is a frequent likening in Charteris’ narratives of the Saint’s sharp instinct and survival skill to those of dangerous jungle animals. Templar is readily able to temporarily discard the highest, most sophisticated trappings of civilization, honing and heightening his animal-like senses and instincts. Sometimes he is ascribed a “sixth sense”. It is not uncommon for thriller heroes to have extraordinary perceptions – such as the agent Quiller in the Cold War thrillers of Adam Hall, who relies on concepts such as “mission-feel” or “place-feel”. Some of the Saint’s abilities are almost supernatural:

He could leave his immaculately dressed, languidly bantering sophistication behind him in a room, and go out and become an integral part of the wild. He could go out and move through the night with the supple smoothness of a panther, without rustling a blade of grass under his feet, merging himself into minute scraps of shadow like a jungle animal, feeling his way uncannily between invisible obstructions, using strange faculties of scent and hearing with such weird certainty that those who knew him best...sometimes wondered if the roots of all his

³² For the first incident see “The High Fence”, in *The Saint Goes On* (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1965), 62-63. [1934]. The second occurs in “The Beauty Specialist”, in *The Ace of Knives*, 250-251.

³³ “The Death Penalty”, in *The Saint and Mr Teal* (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1970), 136-137; 141. [*Once More the Saint*, 1933]; “The Unlicensed Victuallers”, in *The Ace of Knives*, 165.

amazing outlawry might not be found threading down into the deeps of this queer primitive instinct. No living man could have seen or heard him as he passed on his silent tour.³⁴

This passage, where the Saint is creeping along a riverbank in rural England, depicts the dualism in Templar with all of Charteris' skilful imagery. The words of action – “go out”, “move through”, “merge himself”, “feel his way” create a perception of activity, quickness, inexorable movement towards a goal. The Saint is imaged as a supple, smooth panther – an animal known not just for its power, strength and ruthlessness, but also for its sleek, smooth elegance, the same qualities found in Templar. The elegant, gentleman Saint moves silently through his jungle, with “primitive” animal faculties of scent, hearing and movement beyond those of normal men. The possibility that his “amazing” outlawry may be rooted deep down in this instinct hints at a mighty, mysterious underlying power. These qualities in him are “strange”, “weird”, “queer”; the Saint is not just *like* a panther, he is something *more* than a panther, as he is something more than a man. The Saint's metamorphosis to a super-animal-human is an almost mystical transformation that lifts him above and beyond the realm of humanity, like a hero selected by higher powers to achieve goals and fulfil duties beyond the scope of ordinary mortals. The standing of the empire hero in his society caused by his uncommon knowledge and ability is hardly like this, but his “difference” from his peers and others is, ultimately, within the same spectrum.

The empire hero is a gentleman, wealthy, upper or upper middle class, his actions regulated by the precepts of English chivalry. He is fit and strong, skilled in combat and survival, desires excitement, is comfortable with violence where necessary, is patriotic yet prepared to operate independently, ignores legal restrictions and bypasses official authorities for the greater good. These attributes constitute a sound basis from which emerged the first primary layer of Simon Templar's heroism.

The Empire Hero and the Frontier Hero

There are important similarities between the empire hero and the nineteenth and twentieth century fictional hero of the American West, the frontier hero. These similarities contributed to the process that shaped the Saint's heroism. The New World frontier hero, who has been seen as a specifically

³⁴ “The Elusive Ellshaw”, in *The Saint Goes On*, 111-112.

American expression of the Western warrior tradition,³⁵ is known through vast numbers of narratives, usually “Westerns”, widely read in the United States, Britain, Europe and further afield. He is a complex figure, still of high ideological significance in American culture, but in the context of this study he is considered only to the extent that he is relevant to the empire hero and the Saint.

The frontier hero appears in myriad Western novels and other media from the nineteenth century through to the present day. His early popularity was increased by events such as the famous “Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show”, which featured frontier heroes and toured widely in America, Britain and Europe in the latter years of the nineteenth century. The show was performed for Queen Victoria, the Prince of Wales and most of Europe’s royalty at the queen’s Golden Jubilee in 1887. Manifesting characteristics of both the dangerous outside and the civilized inside, he deploys his outsider frontier power, like the empire hero beyond the border, to protect and defend insider, settled society. The empire hero of early twentieth century Britain was popular at a time when Westerns were widely read in Britain, as well as in their home country; Owen Wister’s famous novel *The Virginian*, with its eponymous frontier hero, was first published in Britain by Macmillan in 1902, the same year it appeared in the United States. The prolific authors Zane Grey and Max Brand (Frederick Faust) are probably the two best known of many writers whose frontier stories appeared in a myriad books and magazines in Britain in the first half of the twentieth century and later. Hodder & Stoughton, who published Charteris’ fiction, published and reprinted Grey’s novels in Britain continuously from 1908.³⁶ Conversely, novels with empire heroes were also popular in America. Many adventure and thriller heroes share key attributes, but resemblance between the empire and frontier heroes is especially strong, particularly in empire hero stories set, as many were, in wild, untamed areas such as those beyond the borders of the British Empire. Such regions were England’s “West”.

There is no direct evidence that Charteris personally read Westerns at this time, or drew on the frontier hero in his creation of the Saint. Indeed, the persona of the Saint is outwardly very different in sophistication and modern urbanity from the frontier heroes discussed below. But the frontier

³⁵ See Sergi, “Across Lands Forlorn”, Chapter VIII.

³⁶ Other publishers were Thomas Nelson and Sons, London, who published two of Grey’s best-known novels, *Riders of the Purple Sage* and *The Light of Western Stars* in 1919, and T. Werner Laurie, London. See “UK Publications” by David Leeson, Zane Grey’s West Society, accessed January 8, 2011, www.zgws.org. Leeson also advises that in Britain “from 1918 onwards, particularly in the 1920s second hand Zane Grey Books appear in larger quantities”. Email message, January 14, 2011.

hero's similarities with the empire hero, and his popularity with readers, did mean that the heroic attributes and circumstances of the frontier hero generally paralleled and revalidated for readers the heroism of the empire hero, from whom the Saint figure evolved. Allowing for obvious cultural differences, the two types display similar character and behaviour traits, thus reinforcing readers' perceptions that these qualities were appropriate for a hero. Consequently, when Charteris endowed the Saint with broad attributes of the English empire hero, in particular the civilization/wild nature dualism discussed above, these attributes were all the more effective in defining Templar as a hero because of their similarity to those of the popular frontier hero. The Americanised Saint of the 1940s can himself ultimately be seen as a sort of modern, urban frontier hero – like Chandler's Philip Marlowe. George Grella has convincingly argued that the urban, hard-boiled private detective, like Marlowe, is related to the frontier hero³⁷ and, as discussed in Chapter V, Marlowe shares some important attributes with the Saint.

One of the earliest examples of the frontier hero is the character Nathaniel Bumppo, created by James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851) in his five-novel *Leatherstocking Tales* over eighteen years from 1823. Bumppo, “the frontier prototype of the American cowboy hero”,³⁸ is a white man skilled in native American survival skills. He is self-reliant and independent. Further, he represents and embodies both “civilization” – his European heritage – and “wild nature”, through his ability to thrive in the wilderness and in the company of native Americans. As such, he stalks and tracks opponents, making his own, independent ethical decisions in the absence of a formal authority. The frontier hero of the later nineteenth century was similarly independent; like the empire hero, he operates geographically beyond the frontier, in the far West of the nation, and spans the liminal region between gentlemanly “civilization” and “savagery”. He is a “ ‘man in the middle’, possessing many qualities and skills of the savages but fundamentally committed to the townspeople”.³⁹ Although his actions can be similar to those of an official authority, he usually operates outside the law and can be ruthlessly violent, dealing out summary justice as a vigilante, based on his own interpretation of what is right and just. This dualism can be seen in the heroes of nineteenth century pulp fiction Westerns.

³⁷ Grella, “*Murder and the Mean Streets*”.

³⁸ Charles J. Rzepka, *Detective Fiction* (Cambridge, UK & Malden, MA: Polity, 2005), 58.

³⁹ John G. Cawelti, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), 29.

Characters like Deadwood Dick⁴⁰ are tough, violent outlaws, but honourable and gentlemanly; just and fair, in the West they judge and punish outwardly respectable corrupt and decadent evildoers.

The frontier hero did not have to be an outlaw. Probably the most famous and influential fictional frontier hero is Wister's *Virginian*, the unnamed cowboy who becomes a ranch foreman in the 1902 novel. The *Virginian* combines the best of the American East and West: he is manly and strong, skilled with weapons and survival knowledge in the tough world of the West, but, like the empire hero, is chivalrous, in particular towards women, and has the "graciousness, civility and reserve"⁴¹ more typical of an Eastern gentleman. While he is quite inured to violence and fully prepared to take the law into his own hands when he believes it is necessary for justice, including hanging cattle rustlers without formal trial, his chivalry ensures he is well-mannered, sensitive and thoughtful. Independent in thought and action, he refuses, in the interests of what he believes is right and thinks necessary, to acknowledge normal legalities. Similar characters can be seen in Zane Grey's Westerns, like the semi-legal Texas Ranger Vaughn Steele in Grey's *Rangers of the Lone Star* (1914), or the gunfighter Buck Duane in his *Last of the Duanes* (1913). Comparable situations are found in much of the work of Ernest Haycox (1899-1950), a less well-known contemporary of Grey whose books were published mainly in the 1930s.

The frontier hero, like the empire hero, adheres to a personal moral code, beyond and outside law and convention. His vigilantism is similar to, but often stronger and more violent than the assertive independence of the empire hero. As discussed in the next chapter, vigilantism, especially in an English context, is an important element in much of the adventure and thriller literature relevant to the evolution of the Saint. The similarity of this vigilantism to that of the frontier hero suggests that, as the heroism of the empire hero was revalidated by that of the frontier hero, so also were the actions of the early English and European vigilante heroes who were antecedents of Simon Templar, and, after Charteris' narratives began to appear, those of the Saint himself. The activities of figures like Deadwood Dick present vigilantism as heroic, and in *The Virginian*, the vigilantes represent direct action by the community, unimpeded by inefficient and frequently tainted formal processes and

⁴⁰ "Deadwood Dick", created by Edward Wheeler, appeared in American "dime novels" in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

⁴¹ Edward G. White, *The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), 142.

mechanisms. Their actions are not defiant, but an assertion of the “true” law, and of a moral code that represents the real wishes of the people. What they do is perfectly acceptable, indeed desirable, according to the code. Frontier hero violence is usually presented in a way that suggests it is legitimate, even chivalrous. Cawelti argues that the violence of the “cowboy hero”, who usually uses his six-gun only when forced to, is “disciplined and pure”, and linked to “the old ideal of knightly purity and chastity.”⁴² The chivalry of frontier heroes can especially be seen where they are modern knights-errant, questing through the West, righting wrongs and defending the weak, like the gunfighter Chris Adams mentioned in Chapter II.

In frontier hero fiction, the West can be seen as a physical expression of the wild and dangerous outside, just as settled townships and, ultimately, the “urban East” are manifestations of the civilized inside. While the urban East can include negative elements, with civilization threatened by decadent values generated in artificial, metropolitan environments, the West is conceived as regenerative, able to purge the East through its pure primal nature and virile redemptive violence. The less desirable aspects of the Eastern “metropolis”, its weakness and hypocrisy, are swept away by the unsullied West. The process is sometimes dramatized through the character of a woman or a visiting Easterner who comes to realize the true value of the West, the pure, primal wilderness of nature that is not colonized by humanity’s imprint, such as in Zane Grey’s *The Light of Western Stars* (1914). The concept appears in many other, later Western novels. This West also empowers the frontier hero: Richard Slotkin has argued that the Virginian represents an “armed and virile elite” that Wister believed needed to take control so that “civilization” is protected, and threats from “degenerate” elements in society could be contained.⁴³

A number of authors of empire hero fiction, including Erskine Childers, H. Rider Haggard, Edgar Wallace, Arthur Conan Doyle and William Le Queux were members of the Legion of Frontiersmen, an organization founded in 1904 and intended to counter the German threat through men who had the imperialist values and frontier survival skills characteristic of the empire hero. There are many, pervasive parallels between these authors’ protagonists and the frontier hero. Allan Quatermain, the

⁴² See Cawelti, *Mystique Sequel*, 35; 39-41. Such “purity” would seem to echo Victorian chivalry.

⁴³ Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth Century America* (New York; Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan, 1992), 175-183.

protagonist of Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*, has the natural, "native" survival skills and the independence of a Natty Bumppo, but is happy to return to the gentlemanly life of an English county squire. Edgar Wallace's colonial administrator Sanders, the English gentleman with upper class values has come to his "West", the untamed frontier of the Empire in Africa, and operates effectively there. Kipling's Kim has been called "a young Virginian".⁴⁴ Even the aristocratic Sir Percy Blakeney, though operating in another age, has France as a sort of "untamed wild area", or "West", where he is victorious through his physical prowess, his quick responses and his survival skills.

Many further examples underscore the parallelism between the West and the empire hero's harsh environment: one is the situation of empire hero Harry Feversham, principal protagonist of the famous 1902 A.E.W. Mason novel *The Four Feathers*. He is the son of an upper class military family, who is able to survive alone in terrible conditions in the deserts of war-torn Egypt and Sudan. Often resorting to disguise, he redeems his honour and serves the cause of Empire. Another is that of Reginald Rupert Huntingten, the young, strong, aristocratic Englishman who joins the French Foreign Legion for adventure and serves in harsh, remote African regions in P. C. Wren's *The Wages of Virtue* (1916). These heroes, like all empire heroes, can be seen as representing, like Wister's Virginian, a "virile elite" protecting society from evildoers – a concept emphatically echoed in Simon Templar.

There is also a broad parallel between empowerment by the West and the impact of the wild areas beyond the borders of the empire. The purifying danger and violence of the primal West that sweeps away weakness and corruption and empowers the hero is not dissimilar to the danger and violence the empire hero customarily endures in the border regions of the empire, or their equivalent. Liberated from ignorance and weakness in the urban or "metropolitan" centre of the colonial homeland and largely free from conventional law, the empire hero is empowered and strengthened by his struggles in his "West" and is more able to effectively achieve his goals. These concepts can ultimately be equated with the maturation or spiritual progress of the hero, including the Saint, whose own revitalization and empowerment is of particular intensity.

⁴⁴ Trotter, *English Novel*, 149.

The frontier hero of popular fiction, then, aligns with the English empire hero, reasserting and revalidating in a different genre that figure's heroic attributes drawn on by Charteris in constructing his own protagonist. The attributes of the empire hero, shared with the frontier hero, form a sound foundation for the characterization of the Saint presented to readers. The Saint's gentlemanly, sophisticated, upper class standing, his combat, survival and violence skills, his independent thinking on law and morality, his chivalry and even his spiritual empowerment, all found in the empire and frontier hero, are central to his establishment for readers as a champion who is the way a hero was supposed to be and who does the things a hero was expected to do.

The empire hero is of major importance in the evolution of the Saint. But other protagonists of adventure and crime fiction – non-official detectives, romantic and charismatic criminals, vigilantes, outlaws, pirates and dandies – also played an important part in the complex mix of influences and inspirations that fed Charteris' imagination and led to the creation of Simon Templar. The next chapter examines these protagonists, the literature in which they appear, and the way many of their attributes came to be found in the Saint, generating the second primary layer of his heroism.

CHAPTER IV

ROMANTIC CHARISMA AND HONOURABLE OUTLAWRY

Chapter III established the seminal importance of the empire hero, and indirectly the frontier hero, in the genesis of the Saint character. The current chapter argues that other types of contemporaneous fictional heroes, who exhibit different qualities, also influenced Charteris' characterization of Simon Templar, generating a further layer of the character's heroism. First, there are those, primarily from British and French crime fiction of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and sometimes sharing attributes with the empire hero, who may be gifted, non-official detectives who outperform the police; roguish, romantic and honourable criminals or tricksters; justice-seeking vigilantes; or a combination of these. Second, there are flamboyant, charismatic and adventure-loving and honourable outlaws, pirates and highwaymen, including those in Charteris' favourite boyhood magazine *Chums*.

The Saint is an urban vigilante – even, in effect, during his service as a counterspy in wartime America. He is elegant and charming, romantic and charismatic, enjoying the thrill of adventure in what he does. He outwits the police; he often helps them in their pursuit of criminals, but impudently mocks them. While he donates most of his spoils to charity, he always makes a good, illegal, profit, only ever stealing from those who deserve to lose what he takes. Such qualities may be seen in the character-types mentioned above, who feature in important texts for many years before the Saint was conceived. Once again, important qualities of the Western warrior hero can be discerned in these figures, who frequently exhibit fighting skill, gentlemanly standing, a personal ethical credo, cleverness, skill with words and a fine or distinctive appearance, and protect society by combating evildoers, both intellectually and physically. All are superior and ultimately isolated figures in their society. Sometimes actual historical influences, such as the early French detective Eugène Vidocq discussed below, helped shape them. Their attributes merge with those of the empire hero to culminate in the Simon Templar of the 1930s, arguably the ultimate exemplar of the attractive, charismatic gentleman vigilante.

As a prolific reader, Charteris was clearly aware of the types of characterization in contemporaneous thriller and adventure literature, and was personally familiar with many, if not all, of the protagonists discussed in this chapter. He endowed his creation with the attributes of these established, popular heroes that he and millions of other people liked to read about. This is not to say, however, that he simply reproduced the characters that inspired him; as with the empire hero, he innovatively deployed their features, intensifying many attributes and omitting others, mixing various qualities to create a unique character in the Saint. In particular, qualities such as glamorous charisma, fighting skill, wit, mockery and elements of dandiness are depicted in Templar much more graphically and emphatically than in the fictional detectives, vigilantes and romantic criminals whose exploits he enjoyed. This added intensity largely derives from Charteris' personal fascination with the colourful highwaymen, outlaws and pirates of his youthful reading. These figures also help to explain, along with the 1920s social movements known as the *Sonnenkinder* and the "Bright Young People" which coincided with his life in England as a young man and are discussed later in the chapter, the Saint's liberation from convention.

The Non-Official Detective and the Attractive, Charismatic Criminal

The Saint's long-standing police foil, the official police detective Chief Inspector Claud Eustace Teal, suffers throughout the 1930s narratives from the Saint's badinage and jocularly, being continually outsmarted and mocked both verbally, and physically, as the Saint mercilessly prods his rotund stomach. Equally irksome for Teal, however, is another quality of Templar – his far greater effectiveness than the official police in exposing and dealing with criminals. In "The Beauty Specialist", a novella in *The Ace of Knives* (1937), the Saint uncovers useful information about a blackmailer called the Z-Man:

(Teal): "We've been trying to get a line on the Z-Man for months –"

"And I heard of him for the first time today", murmured the Saint, with a smile. "You can call it luck if you like, but most of it's due to the fact that I'm not festooned with red tape until I look like a Bolshevik Egyptian mummy. Having a free and unfettered hand is a great help."¹

¹ "The Beauty Specialist", in *The Ace of Knives*, 231.

In this passage Templar wittily makes clear the point that as an operative free of regulation and restriction, he is much more efficient than the police. As early as 1968 A. E. Murch noted that this phenomenon – the superiority of the clever private operative who outperforms and mocks the regular police – is a feature of early crime fiction.² A major historical influence was the legacy of the early French detective Eugène Vidocq (1775-1857). Originally a criminal himself, Vidocq became a clandestine agent for the Paris police of the day, employing his own group of followers and eventually being promoted to a senior police position. Later operating as an early private detective, he was able to use his criminal background and skills to bring other criminals to justice. His flamboyant and charismatic personality, his knowledge of crime, his ability to disguise himself, his publicity skills and his social contacts ensured he was widely known in both France and Britain. His published *Mémoires* further helped to develop a public perception of resourcefulness, intelligence, special knowledge and skill on the part of those pursuing lawbreakers. Vidocq probably corruptly exploited the police system for his own benefit. But he had a unique impact on the evolution in crime fiction of the skilled private operative, the charismatic criminal and the relentless law enforcer, all key milestones on the pathway to the Saint.

France was important for the evolution of the fictional non-official crime solver. Officialdom was unpopular in that country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – “Rigorous police surveillance was...both a means of keeping a check on citizens and a powerful tool in controlling political opposition”.³ In a society that had experienced revolution, stories about clever individuals who outsmarted the authorities were popular. The non-official detective can be seen in the influential nineteenth century novels of Emile Gaboriau, which were read in Europe, America and Britain; Gaboriau’s primary hero is his official police detective (Monsieur Lecoq), but he also created the armchair private sleuth “Father” Tabaret. While Tabaret only appears in a role of any substance in the first Gaboriau novel, *L’Affaire Lerouge* (1866), he is an intriguing character, more experienced than Lecoq and known as “Tiraclair”, the one who uncovers the truth. Another early fictional detective was the aristocratic Chevalier Auguste Dupin, created in 1841 not by a French writer but by the American Edgar Allan Poe. Poe, who was probably inspired by Vidocq’s *Mémoires*, is often referred to as the father of the detective story, and his influence on the development of crime fiction

² A. E. Murch, *The Development of the Detective Novel* (London: Owen, 1968), 46.

³ Sita A. Schütt, “French Crime Fiction”, in Priestman, *Cambridge Companion*, 60.

was immense.⁴ Dupin is openly critical of the official police, whom he outshines through his brilliant abilities. He is not just gifted in crime solving, but is a suave, personable aristocrat, thus associating the non-official sleuth with an attractive persona.

A number of other nineteenth or early twentieth century crime fiction texts helped bring the non-official to the forefront over less competent official detectives. It is almost certain that Charteris, given his immersion in the crime fiction of the day, was familiar with these narratives. They broadened the fictional base from which he drew inspiration in creating his own private and non-official, heroic crime fighter. Probably foremost among them is Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes canon, but there are also, for example, the novels featuring Agatha Christie's plump Belgian detective Hercule Poirot, who first appeared in 1920, and the exploits of Austin Freeman's medical criminologist Dr John Thorndyke. Baroness Orczy's English crime analyst from 1908, "the old man in the corner", less well known than her Scarlet Pimpernel, has a distinctive charisma that overrides his disagreeable appearance and manner. A clever non-official crime solver, he has his own moral standards, and stands above others through his ingenious solutions and his ability to see what the authorities have overlooked. An especially enduring early non-official detective was Sexton Blake, the less intellectual, more action-oriented version of Sherlock Holmes flagged in the Introduction. From his debut in 1893 Blake appeared in a variety of media publications up to the late 1970s. Books, magazines, comic strips, radio serials, stage plays, films and television all offered stories of this sleuth's adventures, which were authored by almost two hundred different writers over the period. He brilliantly outperforms the police, and like Holmes, has a "Watson" – his assistant Tinker. Blake has a whole series of opponents, ranging from corrupt former policemen and criminal geniuses to barely human enemies with almost supernatural powers.

Elements of the skilled non-official operative in the field of crime detection and law enforcement can also be seen in the frontier hero, an early version of whom, as we have seen, is Cooper's Natty Bumppo. Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales*, in particular *The Last of the Mohicans*, were published and widely read around the time Eugène Vidocq's exploits were becoming known in France and

⁴ Poe may be said to have created the ratiocinative detective genre. For a useful, if concise, overview see Charles E. May, "Edgar Allan Poe", in Carl Rollyson, ed., *Critical Survey of Mystery and Detective Fiction* (Pasadena & Hackensack: Salem Press, 2008), 1437-1443.

Britain. Bumpo's ability to stalk, track and make deductions from insignificant clues are suggested by Charles Rzepka to have influenced nineteenth century French crime fiction writers such as Eugène Sue, Alexandre Dumas *père* and especially Honoré de Balzac, who were already inspired by Vidocq.⁵ Later semi-official figures in the American West, like Zane Grey's gentlemanly half-Texas Ranger/half-gunfighter Vaughn Steele discussed in the previous chapter, helped establish the notion of an independent, self-reliant operative outside or on the fringe of official authority.

Murch also refers to the development in popular fiction in the mid-nineteenth century of a sympathy for and empathy with criminals, especially in France.⁶ This development was important for the later appearance of the criminal hero as an attractive lawbreaker who often asserts a worthy personal morality – a concept established at the time Charteris began to write and drawn on by him in creating Simon Templar. The empathy-inducing criminal owes much to the French dislike of police, as well as to Vidocq's charisma and the wide and favourable publicity his career attracted. The novels of Balzac and Sue produced likeable criminals with a sense of moral honour. In *Le Père Goriot* (1835) and the later novels in which he appears, Balzac's master criminal character Vautrin, though a clever and ruthless law-breaker, is proud and strong, with a philosophy, as Julian Symons has noted, that "transcends the conventions of legality";⁷ he even, like Vidocq, becomes the Paris Chief of Police. Sue's hero in the important text *Les Mystères de Paris* (1843-45), Rodolph, the Grand Duke of Gerolstein, is an early and important vigilante figure in Paris whose activities are discussed later in this chapter. Important at this point is that one of the criminals introduced early in the novel, Le Chourineur (the "knife-man"), is seen by Rodolph as having "heart and honour" and later saves Rodolph's life.⁸ Julian Symons notes that in the "four genuine crime novels" of the nineteenth century English writer Edward Bulwer-Lytton (Lord Lytton), the protagonist is a criminal, being essentially a good man driven to illegal activities by unjust and corrupt elements in society.⁹ And the famous criminal Jean Valjean of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) evokes much sympathy and admiration for his suffering, his relentless pursuit and harassment by the ruthless, vindictive policeman Javert and the good deeds he performs in his identity as Monsieur Madeleine.

⁵ Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, 59.

⁶ Murch, *Detective Novel*, 47.

⁷ Symons, *Bloody Murder*, 37.

⁸ Eugène Sue, *The Mysteries of Paris (Vols. I, II & III)* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1845), 32.

⁹ Symons, *Bloody Murder*, 38.

An important influence on the characterization of attractive and charismatic crime fiction protagonists in early French, and later British, crime fiction and ultimately of the Saint is the character known as Rocambole, created by the French writer Pierre Ponson du Terrail. Rocambole, a very popular figure who originally appeared in novels from 1857 to 1870, evolves and matures from what might be termed a young gang leader to a more sophisticated criminal, ultimately converting to a sort of gentleman avenger and pursuer of villains. His change of heart, whereby he becomes a force for good, occurs in *La Résurrection de Rocambole* (1866). After the death of Ponson du Terrail in 1871 the Rocambole saga was continued by other authors well into the twentieth century, with new novels by Michel Honaker appearing as recently as 2005. Rocambole is hardly romantic, but he is a trickster: exuberant and boisterous, taking particular delight in outwitting or outperforming the conformist, conventional authorities.

Probably the earliest human trickster figure in the Western tradition is Homer's hero Odysseus. In comparison with other Homeric heroes, such as Achilles, his wily cleverness, playfulness, and skill in strategy, dissimulation and disguise distinguish him – in contriving, for example, the stratagem of the Trojan Horse, or taunting the Cyclops. He combines such qualities with more conventional heroic traits of the warrior hero – unlike some tricksters, he is neither small nor weak. Robin Hood, the archetypal English outlaw hero discussed later in this chapter, is similarly much renowned as a trickster. The trickster goes against convention, breaks the rules of society, and ignores norms of behaviour. Trickster elements can be discerned, in later Western literature, in the evolution of the rogue or picaroon hero, a wandering character, usually on the margins of society, who combines shamelessness or clever deceitfulness with the personality of a merry rogue.

The trickster tradition of Rocambole is seen in the appearance at the beginning of the twentieth century of the fictional gentleman burglar and sleuth, Arsène Lupin. Lupin, a jovial, witty and very likeable character created by the prolific French author Maurice Leblanc, was a major step in the evolution of the hero as both attractive criminal and clever non-official detective, and was immensely popular among French and British readers. “Much overlooked in the history of crime fiction”,¹⁰ he is an exciting and delightful figure who incorporates a number of features that appear in various early twentieth century thriller heroes, including the Saint. An expert at disguise and an accomplished

¹⁰ Knight, *Crime Fiction*, 72.

escape artist, Arsène Lupin also has a little of the vigilante about him; he robs those who he decides deserve to be robbed, and helps people who have suffered unjustly. Like the Saint, he keeps plenty of spoils for himself, occasionally assisting the police in solving mysteries – outperforming them and taunting them while doing so. Again like the Saint, he very much enjoys his liberated and exciting life-style; one observer has suggested that Lupin is avenging himself on the bourgeoisie, those whose attitude is that “material possessions and money are ... the most important thing in life”.¹¹ The best known Arsène Lupin book is probably the first, the 1907 *Arsène Lupin Gentleman-Cambrioleur*, also published in English as *The Exploits of Arsène Lupin*. Lupin’s foil, Inspector Ganimard, is constantly outwitted by his jocular adversary, who yet again like Templar, at his pleasure hands the hapless policeman information to help solve his cases.

The trickster dimension of attractive criminals is not seen in the protagonists of all, or even a majority of crime fiction of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but the trait was certainly present. Rzepka notes that Vidocq himself, in his *Mémoires*, emphasizes “the traditional virtues of the picaresque trickster-figure”, with precedence over rational inference given to “strength, agility, audacity, stubbornness, quick thinking, witty repartee and unflinching courage”.¹² This sums up Arsène Lupin’s attitude to adversaries and the official authorities. Lupin, with a twinkle in his eye, mocks Inspector Ganimard mercilessly: leading him on, playing with him, joking at his expense and making a fool of him.

Lupin and Rocambole are forerunners of the roguish mockery seen in the Saint. Charteris read Leblanc’s work, made more than one reference to Arsène Lupin,¹³ and was probably familiar with Rocambole as well. He transformed and intensified their tricksterish and mischievous qualities in his characterization of Templar, creating from these earlier templates a more modern assertiveness and rollicking roguishness in his hero that made his fiction distinctive and entertaining. Many playful elements can be seen in Simon Templar.¹⁴ As we have seen he jokes and clowns with friends, he derides and taunts his enemies, makes fools of the police, outwits criminals and hoists them with their

¹¹ Richard P. Benton, “Maurice Leblanc”, in Rollyson, *Critical Survey*, 1089.

¹² Rzepka, *Detective Fiction*, 60.

¹³ For example in his forewords to two novellas included in *The First Saint Omnibus*, 547; 899.

¹⁴ The Saint actually refers to himself as a “picaroon” in “Jeannine”, a short story in *Saint Errant* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), 73. [1948].

own petard, especially where they are confidence men or others who have targeted their victims through deceit and chicanery. His tactical moves in his many adventures and the cunning manoeuvres he employs are legion – especially in Charteris’ short stories which frequently contain a surprise or twist that makes the story more interesting and allows the Saint to demonstrate his skill.

In 1899 a seminal British book, E. W. Hornung’s *The Amateur Cracksman* (1899), introduced an important honourable and romantic criminal hero. This collection of stories, along with three subsequent publications, features the protagonist Arthur J. Raffles, who is a jewel thief. A character combining professionalism and criminality, the detective Horace Dorrington, had appeared two years earlier in Arthur Morrison’s *The Dorrington Deed-Box* (1897). Dorrington, however, is a rather unpleasant character, corrupt and ruthless.¹⁵ Raffles, on the other hand, has many attributes of an empire hero – he is a gentleman and member of high society, educated, sophisticated, wealthy, an excellent cricketer, skilled at disguise. It has been suggested that his crimes are palliated by his sporting prowess: his burglaries are sport, like cricket.¹⁶ Witty and jocular, he is physically fit, skilled in survival techniques and able to use weapons; an attractive and charismatic character, he has his own concept of fairness and justice despite his nefarious career.

Hornung was a relative of Holmes creator Conan Doyle, who warned him against creating a criminal hero, a warning he ignored. Raffles, assisted by his docile and naive friend “Bunny” Manders, steals from the wealthy essentially to maintain his luxurious lifestyle, but like Arsène Lupin he also enjoys the excitement: “Why settle down to some humdrum, uncongenial billet, when excitement, romance, danger, and a decent living were all going begging together?”¹⁷ There is a hint of moral and social reasoning in his activities, and he is also a patriot, enlisting in the army to fight in the Boer War, where he is killed by a sniper. Raffles was unique for his time; exhibiting many features of an empire hero, he is an out-and-out criminal as well. Capturing the imagination of the public, his adventures

¹⁵ Morrison’s novel is discussed in Clare Clarke, “Horace Dorrington, Criminal-Detective: Investigating the Re-Emergence of the Rogue in Arthur Morrison’s *The Dorrington Deed-Box* (1897)”, *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, 28, 2 (Fall 2010): 7-18.

¹⁶ Johanna M. Smith & Fiona Kelleghan, “E. W. Hornung”, in Rollyson, *Critical Survey*, 949.

¹⁷ E. W. Hornung, “The Ides of March”, in *The Collected Raffles* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1992), 20. [“The Ides of March”, in *The Amateur Cracksman*, 1899].

were hugely popular, and helped establish the tradition of the attractive, witty, refined and honourable criminal protagonist that Charteris drew on. Charteris was very familiar with the Raffles character.¹⁸

A Raffles-like figure who consolidated the idea of the attractive, excitement-loving gentleman criminal hero in the years when the first Saint fiction was being written is the protagonist of a long series of books that first appeared in the 1920s. This character, “Blackshirt”, was the creation of literary agent and author Graham Jeffries, who wrote under the pseudonym Bruce Graeme. He first appeared in the thriller *Blackshirt* in 1925, then in *The Return of Blackshirt* in 1927 and many subsequent novels. Blackshirt’s real identity is Richard Verrell, an engaging and wealthy society gentleman, criminologist and author. Despite his outward appearance, he is secretly a jewel thief, revelling in the excitement and stimulation this provides him. He feels the warrior hero’s “old joy of battle, the urge to fight, the lust for adventure”, for “to him it was the thrill of the danger which counted, not the amount of the haul.”¹⁹ Raised in the London slums after being kidnapped as a child, he was trained as a pickpocket but escaped his lowly station, educated himself and entered society. As suggested by his sobriquet, when on the job he wears black clothes and a black mask. The early Blackshirt is given to introspective, rather agonized Byronic reflection; also, he has no love for the poor, denigrating and vilifying slum dwellers, but he can be chivalrous. In the early novels the villainy of his targets is of less consequence than the thrills he experiences, though this changes a little in later novels when the police begin to appreciate his help in curbing criminals. Graeme, and subsequently his son, continued to publish Blackshirt thrillers up to 1969.

Finally, a British fictional character of the early twentieth century who has something about him of the clever sleuth, the attractive lawbreaker and even the vigilante, was created by an author with whose work Charteris was very familiar. This character is the witty, clever, personable and adventurous Rupert (later Ronald) Psmith (pronounced Smith), created by the well-known novelist P. G. Wodehouse. Psmith is one of Wodehouse’s most memorable creations, second only to the famous butler Jeeves. Charteris admired Wodehouse, and his 1932 novel *Getaway* is dedicated to that author,

¹⁸ Raffles is mentioned in the same Charteris forewords that refer to Arsène Lupin.

¹⁹ Bruce Graeme, *The Return of Blackshirt* (London: Harrap, 1931), 136 [1927]; *Blackshirt* (London: Fisher Unwin, 1925), 24.

“who had time to say a word for the Saint stories when he could have written them so much better himself”.²⁰

Psmith is an old Etonian, immaculately dressed, tall and thin, supercilious, overbearing, smart, witty and never at a loss for words. He has a mocking, come-what-may attitude to life, does his fair share of helping friends and acquaintances in need and delivers an appropriate comeuppance to pompous humbugs, unscrupulous businessmen and the occasional crook. He is always in control, and makes his own decisions about what action is appropriate. He first appears in the second half of *Mike* (1909) (later published as *Mike and Psmith*), but this is primarily a school story where Mike Jackson, Psmith’s friend in later novels, is the central protagonist. As an adult Psmith appears in *Psmith in the City* (1910), and in *Psmith Journalist* (1915), set in New York, where he both befriends and confronts gun-wielding gangsters and is adept at using his fists. Finally, in *Leave it to Psmith* (1923), he is back in England.

Like Arsène Lupin, Raffles, Blackshirt and the Saint, Psmith wants excitement, including that provided by criminal activity; he publicly advertises his availability to help anybody with anything, explaining “Crime Not Objected to”.²¹ His language is very similar to the smart, jocular speech found in the Saint in conversation with his close friends or in banter with enemies. Psmith uses the slang term “simoleons” for money, and usually addresses others as “comrade”; although they do not appear frequently, both of these terms are used by the Saint. It is also noteworthy that the speech of Pugsy Malone, a youth who works for the newspaper with which Psmith is associated in *Psmith Journalist*, includes turns of phrase such as “What do youse t’ink you’re doin’?”, and in denying entry to a visitor, “Nix on de goin’ in act”,²² terms very similar to the American argot of the Saint’s gunman follower Hoppy Uniatz. A milder, less active and less violent version of Simon Templar, the smooth, suave, never-at-a-loss, smart-talking Psmith forms another link in the literary chain leading to the urbane, charismatic and witty Saint.

²⁰ The dedication is in all editions of *Getaway*.

²¹ P. G. Wodehouse, *Leave it to Psmith* (1923), in *The World of Psmith Omnibus* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 424.

²² Wodehouse, *Psmith Journalist* (1915), in *World of Psmith*, 201; 228.

All of the above figures were early benchmarks for the establishment in crime fiction of the concept of a hero with certain special or superior attributes. Charteris combined and intensified these traditions, especially those of Arsène Lupin and Psmith, in the Saint. In Templar he extended the ability to fight or outsmart to the highest combat ability and cleverness; transformed moderate law-breaking into open, defiant outlawry; changed mild playfulness into consummate, roguish jocularly and cutting mockery; made suave likeableness into stylish, sophisticated charisma; and turned mild action into murderous mayhem. He juxtaposed more sharply than ever before the contrasting qualities of sophisticated gentleman, charismatic outlaw and lover of excitement, all adapted to the new social and ideological environments of the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s in Britain or America.

The Urban Gentleman Vigilante

The Saint acts independently to provide justice when the law or the authorities are inadequate or incapable. An adventurer vigilante, he takes the law into his hands according to his own perception of right and wrong. For the Saint the law is meaningless unless it can be exploited in support of this personal perception. He ruthlessly pursues criminals and villains of every conceivable kind with fierce exhilaration, seeking justice and the thrill of adventure. His vigilantism echoes the actions of the knight-errant with whom he is directly identified, the hero who wanders in dangerous regions, righting wrongs and helping others, guided by his own moral code.

Sometimes the Saint's actions are similar to those of the police, in that he punishes a villain by ensuring he goes to jail or suffers some other penalty legally appropriate to his crime. On other occasions he punishes evildoers in ways the law cannot, often far beyond what the law could inflict. In *The Last Hero* (1930), he refers to his campaign against criminals as "... beginning to justify itself in the crime statistics of London – and (which is even more important) in those subtle offences against the moral code about which there can be no statistics".²³ It will be recalled that when the Saint acquires spoils, he usually donates them to charity, minus his "collection fee". His vigilantism is most passionate in early novels, but his commitment to his own form of justice spans all his adventures, including his 1950s celebrity playboy period.

²³ *The Last Hero*, 18.

During and immediately after the Second World War, when the Saint as a government operative hunts Nazis, fascist sympathizers and criminals, his epic vigilantism fades into the background. But it never disappears, and he continues to make his own decisions about appropriate justice. In *The Saint Sees It Through* (1946) Templar kills three vicious criminals at the end of a case, set in New York, that involves international drug smuggling. Two of these are women, horrific personalities who have been brutally torturing an undercover police agent: “they were the first women that Simon Templar had ever killed, and he did it rather carefully and conscientiously, in the pellucid knowledge of what they were and what they had done, and to his own absolute judicial satisfaction”.²⁴ The Saint does appear as a cold-blooded killer in this passage, but by focusing on the rarity of women as targets of the Saint, and the “careful” and “conscientious” thought he gives to their assassination, the narrator emphasizes the seriousness and genuineness of the Saint’s ongoing credo. He is no gun-happy shooter; to carry out such an act, he must be “pellucid”, absolutely clear about their malevolence, and fully satisfied that justice requires their execution as part of the elimination of evil.

Charteris adopted or rejected the attributes of fictional vigilantes with whom he was familiar, in accordance with his vision of his own hero. Templar is far more focused, ruthless and active than most other vigilantes, his actions have a stronger element of social justice or national interest, and his mockery of many upper class prejudices and practices is not found in earlier gentleman crime fighters. A number of important texts, however, show that the attributes of fictional urban vigilantes were developed and refined over many years in the direction of those conferred by Charteris on the crime fighter Saint.

Eugène Sue’s *Les Mystères de Paris* mentioned earlier, which inspired a number of later works such as Paul Féval’s *Les Mystères de Londres* (1844) and George Reynold’s four volume novel about social misery, *The Mysteries of London* (1845-1848), stands out as an early vigilante novel. The aristocratic protagonist, Rodolph, is living secretly in Paris. He was raised by the Englishman Sir Walter Murphy to be “robust, active and daring, with a love for all that was good and right, and a hatred for whatsoever was wicked and bad”.²⁵ One observer notes that Sue “warned his readers that they would enter regions as uncivilized and barbaric as the Indian-inhabited forests of North

²⁴ *The Saint Sees It Through*, 252.

²⁵ Sue, *Mysteries*, (Vol I), 231-2.

America”, suggesting that after Sue “the city was the natural environment of criminal characters”.²⁶ Sue’s work clearly contributed to a conception of the urban criminal environment – the environment in which the Saint fights his battles – as a dangerous, wilderness area, an outside in which the hero operates. An early defining act in Sue’s novel is Rodolph’s capture and deliberate blinding of the vicious criminal known as the Schoolmaster. Rodolph acknowledges that his capture of the Schoolmaster is not legal, but he acts because the latter’s crimes place him beyond all law. He both judges guilt and awards the penalty, having his servant, David, carry out the sentence. The way he later outlines his approach to the ruthless, exploitative lawyer and criminal Jacques Ferrand, sums up his vigilante code, whereby he uses the criminal’s own qualities to bring him to justice:

If the laws are powerless to reach him, if his cunning and skill equal his misdeeds, then his cunning must be met by cunning, his skill must be counteracted by skill, his misdeeds faced by other misdeeds, but which shall be to his but a just and avenging retribution, inflicted on a guilty wretch by an inexorable hand...²⁷

Rodolph is primarily focused on alleviating social injustice, about which there is much comment in the novel. The narrator explains that in helping the poor, Rodolph experiences romance, excitement and amusement²⁸ – like the charismatic figures described earlier, and again, he is an expert at disguise. He wishes to expiate his guilt for having drawn a sword against his father, and his self-imposed task is

to reward the good, to punish the evil-doer, relieve those who suffer, penetrate into every hideous corner where vice holds her court, for the purpose of rescuing some unfortunate creatures from the destruction into which they have fallen: such is the employment I have marked out for myself.²⁹

Other vigilante heroes appear in French literature of the time. Paul Féval, apart from his *Mystères de Londres* created the avenger-type heroes Henri Lagardère, the “Hunchback”, and Jean Blanc, the gallant “White Wolf” who fights for justice. Rocambole in his later avenger role has already been mentioned. Then in 1905, much stronger vigilante heroes appeared in an English urban setting in a

²⁶ Marilyn Rye, “Eugène Sue”, in Rollyson, *Critical Survey*, 1685; 1687.

²⁷ Sue, *Mysteries (Vol. II)*, 90.

²⁸ Sue, *Mysteries (Vol. I)*, 436.

²⁹ Sue, *Mysteries (Vol. III)*, 274.

famous novel, Edgar Wallace's seminal work *The Four Just Men* (1905), a book that has been termed the "first thriller".³⁰

The protagonists of *The Four Just Men* fit what has been called the cycle of clandestinity: "an individual or group conceives of a purpose which appears to require actions beyond the bounds of law or morality accepted by other members of their society".³¹ Only one of the Just Men is actually English; two others are French and Spanish, and the fourth, who is dead and only referred to in flashback, is also French. In outward appearance, manner and bearing, however, they appear as upper class English gentlemen. They are wealthy, clever and sophisticated and assume a responsibility for the community, ruthlessly pursuing their extreme concepts of justice in early twentieth century London. For the Just Men the law is irrelevant; they deal out retribution uninhibited by official or legal constraints, and do not hesitate to murder for what they believe is the greater good. They are cleverer than the police, continually outwitting them. The book's popularity was dramatically increased by a competition arranged by Wallace prior to its publication, whereby for a large money prize the public could try to guess the method of murder used. The publicity worked, but Wallace's mishandling of the process resulted in large financial losses for him and his backers. *The Four Just Men* was followed by a series of very popular Just Men novels stretching over 25 years, including *The Council of Justice* (1908), *The Just Men of Cordova* (1917) *The Law of the Four Just Men* (1921), *The Three Just Men* (1926) and *Again the Three Just Men* (1929). In the later narratives the Just Men, who at the beginning of their career are so remorseless they can make even the Saint look merciful, are less relentless in their vigilante role and more careful about the law, though they remain committed to independent justice.

Wallace's remarkable popularity peaked in the 1920s. Many of the numerous heroes he created during his prolific career are neither noticeably upper class nor rich, and some were police officers, like the popular Mr J. G. Reeder. However, wealthy gentleman protagonists are prominent in his work, as is the vigilante theme at a time when, as argued in Chapter V, changing social and economic conditions helped popularize vigilante heroes. Several Wallace characters are good examples; one is

³⁰ David Glover, Introduction to *The Four Just Men*, by Edgar Wallace (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press [Oxford Popular Fiction], 1995), xv.

³¹ Cawelti and Rosenberg, *Spy Story*, 21.

the Ringer, who features in *The Gaunt Stranger* (1925) and in two subsequent novels; a second is the Mixer, who appears in the novel *The Mixer* in 1927. Then there is Anthony Newton, the eponymous hero of *The Brigand* (1927), and Jack Bryce of *The Iron Grip and Other Stories* (1929). The Ringer is originally a lawyer, Henry Arthur Milton, who becomes a full-time master of disguise and ruthless purveyor of murderous retribution against evildoers. In the original novel there is one primary target, but in *Again the Ringer* (1929) he disposes of a series of obnoxious blackmailers, white slavers and others responsible for various crimes and social injustices. The stories do not reveal much about him or his background, but he is clearly a gentleman, and wealthy. He continually fools Inspector (later Superintendent) Bliss, his primary antagonist, through his incredibly effective disguises and carefully constructed plans. In *The Iron Grip* Jack Bryce, an ex-soldier, pursues criminals on behalf of a firm of eminent lawyers, in cases where the police are no use. He sometimes outsmarts the perpetrators but usually defeats them by his superior physical ability.

Both the Brigand and the Mixer are softer in their vigilante activities. The Brigand, Anthony Newton, an ex-soldier of the Great War who is down on his luck, turns to a life of outlawry, focused on relieving wealthy but corrupt individuals of their ill-gotten gains. In twelve short stories he makes money for himself and punishes wrongdoers, albeit in a mild, non-violent way. Probably more influential was the Mixer, the cultivated and witty Sir Anthony Rose – aristocratic and handsome, who over twenty separate though occasionally connected short stories, leads a secret life avenging the victims of thieves and blackmailers by removing their immorally acquired loot. He pockets most of it himself, in a few cases donating something to charity. Those he and his two assistants target well deserve their losses, though relieving them of their wealth is basically all the Mixer does – no-one is killed, and some victims are even left enough to survive on. In accordance with a trend in crime fiction of the period that reflected widespread attitudes within British society, a number of the crooked or financially corrupt figures the Mixer punishes are portrayed as Jewish.³²

One critic suggests that the character appealed to a still “semi-puritanical public...*because he was as morally judicious as they were*”, and thus the acceptance by the public of (justifiable) activities by the Saint and others “owe(s) something to the mild, half-forgotten Mixer”.³³ Certainly, the Mixer only

³² The contemporaneous thriller writer Sydney Horler was notorious for his depictions of Jewish criminals and evildoers.

³³ Butler, *Desperadoes*, 94. The italics are Butler's.

appeared in one book, but it is important to note similarities between his activities (and, indeed, those of the Brigand or Jack Bryce) and the contents of three 1930s Saint publications that differ considerably from Charteris' other work of the period. The three are *The Brighter Buccaneer* (1933), *Boodle* (1934), and the last pre-Second World War book, *The Happy Highwayman* (1939). Unlike Charteris' other 1930s fiction where the Saint battles crime czars, violent lawbreakers or international villains in novels or novellas, these books all contain short stories where in most cases the Saint hoodwinks and outwits mainly swindlers or confidence men, at great profit to himself and to the benefit of those wronged. The stories also include murder mysteries, one good example of the Saint's approach to social justice,³⁴ and one of the only two occasions where Simon Templar is involved in what may be called a science fiction story.³⁵ Charteris' writing-style and the views and opinions he puts into the mouth of the Saint make the latter's exploits much more entertaining than those of the blander, matter-of-fact Mixer. But the stories in *The Mixer* and *The Brigand*, where the two Anthonys hoist conmen and tricksters by their own petard, resonate strongly with the tales of unpleasant characters who are outsmarted and sent on their way, penniless and snivelling, by the Saint. Earlier examples than Wallace's Mixer and Brigand of a thriller vigilante who outwits confidence men are not common, the nearest example probably being the pervasive Arsène Lupin.

Wallace's work, which has been judged to be "often close in feeling to Vidocq",³⁶ was to substantially contribute to and strengthen the notion of the clever, sophisticated gentleman vigilante who acts outside the law and metes out his own concept of justice – like Simon Templar. The initial publisher of much of Charteris' early fiction, Amalgamated Press' *The Thriller* magazine, on its first appearance in February 1929 raised its profile with contributions from Wallace, who continued to write for it. Charteris was a young beginner and Wallace was at the height of his fame, and while Charteris was familiar with Wallace,³⁷ it is uncertain whether the two ever met. There is a possible whimsical allusion to Charteris in one of Wallace's short stories, first published in 1929, around the time of *The Thriller*'s debut; a cameo character appears called "Leslie Carter", whose "voice said

³⁴ This is "The Sleepless Knight", in *Boodle* (1934), where a wealthy employer who mistreats his workers gets a dose of his own medicine from the Saint.

³⁵ These are "The Man Who Liked Ants", in *The Happy Highwayman* (1939), and "Dawn", in *Saint Errant* (1949).

³⁶ Knight, *Crime Fiction*, 105.

³⁷ In one of Charteris' Second World War novels, a friend of the Saint's is described as having "sparse white hair and Mephistophelian black eyebrows and an amused inquisitive nose which gave him an absurdly appropriate resemblance to the late Edgar Wallace". See *The Saint Steps In*, 93-94.

‘public school’”, whose “hands were...shapely”, and whose “movements had something of an athletic grace”.³⁸ Charteris was tall, slim and physically fit, and did have what might be called a public school accent. Be that as it may, given Wallace’s enormous standing and the similarities in plot mentioned in Chapter I between Wallace’s novels and Charteris’ very early work, it is highly likely that Charteris was inspired by Wallace’s vigilante heroes in his construction of the Saint.

Another charismatic and unusual early vigilante is the character Albert Campion, the clever crime-solving protagonist of the novels of Margery Allingham. First appearing in 1929 in *The Crime at Black Dudley*, Campion is of aristocratic origin and a member of “one of the most famous and exclusive clubs in the world”. Witty and jocular in the silliest imaginable way, he speaks with an “absurd falsetto drawl”, is “fresh-faced”, with “foolish, pale-blue eyes behind tortoiseshell-rimmed spectacles”, has a “somewhat foolish voice and fatuous expression”, and can wear a dazzlingly-coloured bathrobe.³⁹ He is nevertheless indefatigable in his ability to bring criminals to justice, has connections everywhere including criminal associates, occasionally works for the government, is known by a range of false names, and frequently sails close to the wind in his activities. He has a manservant called Magersfontein Lugg – a “large and lugubrious individual”, “a hillock of a man, with a big pallid face which reminded one irresistibly of a bull terrier”⁴⁰ – who, while very different in his relationship with his master, is otherwise not dissimilar to Templar’s follower Hoppy Uniatz.

The medical practitioner *cum* vigilante Reginald Fortune, created by H. C. Bailey in 1920 and appearing mainly in short stories until the mid-twentieth century, is more violent and ruthless, reminiscent of Wallace’s Four Just Men. The first five Fortune short story collections, from 1920 to 1929, depict him as a plump, amiable fellow with a round, comfortable face that belies his preparedness, in support of his own idea of justice, to pursue and if necessary kill those who he believes deserve such punishment. “I’m on the side of those who are wronged. I’m for the weak”, he states in one short story, and in another, when accused of taking an “awful responsibility” after

³⁸ “The Murderer of Many Names”, in *Again the Ringer* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1952), 37. [1929].

³⁹ Margery Allingham, *The Crime at Black Dudley* (Anstey, Leicestershire: F.A. Thorpe, May 1978), 312; 25; 12; 213. [1929].

⁴⁰ Margery Allingham, *Mystery Mile* (London: Vintage, 2004), 108. [1930].

facilitating the suicide of a particularly odious couple, simply answers: “Yes. I take it.”⁴¹ While he does not resemble the Saint physically, like Templar he has his own moral code, criticizes formal English justice and government officials, rises late and eats lazy breakfasts, and drives his car at high speeds.

The above protagonists and others like them contributed in important ways to the nature of the urban gentleman vigilante in British fiction before and after the Great War. A figure like Albert Campion operates almost completely legally, while others, like the Four Just Men, are fully outside the law. Characters like the Mixer are not only outside the law in the way they pursue justice, but also because they personally keep much of their illegal gains. All of them are forerunners of the Saint, and in most of them empire hero attributes are prominent; indeed their vigilantism may be seen as an extreme interpretation of the independent action inherent in the empire hero’s public school code: “the schoolboy code according to which one does not notify the authorities in charge of violations of the code but administers quick and private justice”.⁴² Their collective features represent the type of vigilante characterization that Charteris reworked to create the distinctive Simon Templar.

Unquestionably, however, the most influential and prominent gentleman vigilante fictional hero of the decade following the Great War was the hero of “Sapper” (H. C. McNeile) flagged in earlier chapters, Captain Hugh “Bulldog” Drummond. Drummond first appeared immediately after the War in the novel *Bulldog Drummond* (1920) as a bored ex-serviceman looking for adventure, and soon became the leader of a group of like-minded former soldiers who take on international villain Carl Peterson, ignoring the police and the law. Drummond and his band rely on their own resources and their own moral code based on military values and public school sport. He features in eleven further novels up to McNeile’s death in 1937, when McNeile’s friend Gerard Fairlie took over the saga, producing another seven novels up to 1954. The character appeared in about two dozen films.

Upper class Drummond is unquestioningly accepted by his men as leader. He is wealthy, not handsome but physically large and strong, a sportsman and an expert at commando-type hand-to-

⁴¹ H. C. Bailey, “The Furnished Cottage” and “The Only Son”, in *Mr Fortune’s Trials* [1925], in *Mr Fortune’s Case Book* (London: Methuen, 1936), 495; 469.

⁴² Hans Bertens, “A Society of Murderers Run on Sound Conservative Lines: The Life and Times of Sapper’s Bulldog Drummond”, in Bloom, *Twentieth Century Suspense*, 59.

hand fighting. He is ruthless and violent, his military background continually emphasized. Given to jocularly, he makes witty repartee and slangy remarks, including colourful insults directed at his enemies, much of which would now be seen as egotistical brashness.⁴³ He is a master of disguise, awkward and artless with women and a thoroughgoing racist who loathes Jews and non-Caucasians. He enjoys the excitement of pursuing criminals – in the first novel he advertises in the press, like Wodehouse’s Psmith, stipulating that excitement, legal or otherwise, is “essential”.⁴⁴ No intellectual, he claims to have shrewd common sense, and does not hesitate to kill those he believes deserve it, using brutal methods or even torture. In Drummond’s view, the nation and the empire equate with the English upper class and the capitalist system; he vigorously condemns Russian socialism, Bolsheviks, “Reds” and any member of the upper or upper middle class he considers to be a traitor to his own kind. Drummond’s extreme views and actions soften a little over time, but essentially endure through the entire series. The character is likely to have inspired Sydney Horler’s vigilante hero Tiger Standish (not to be confused with another McNeile character, Ronald Standish), who appeared in nine novels from 1932.⁴⁵

Drummond, as a wealthy, upper class gentleman with combat ability, a natural leader and sportsman, self-reliant and well-versed in survival skills, not intellectual and awkward with women, has a great deal of the empire hero about him. His vigilantism, however, is extreme, resembling that of the early Four Just Men. But a major difference from the Just Men is that the brutal Drummond does not act in the interests of justice and fairness; rather, he kills, bashes and tortures to rid England of those who he believes threaten its well-being – threaten it by, for example, fomenting a socialist revolution. The ultra-conservative McNeile believed that England’s security could only be preserved by a type of man he collectively designated “the Breed”. Members of “the Breed”, who are introduced in McNeile’s first novel, *Mufti* (1919), are exactly like Drummond. For McNeile, such men were the finest that England had to offer and ensured that their country would remain great and powerful. Drummond does tackle genuine criminals, in particular criminal mastermind Peterson, whose nationality is indeterminate, but his range of enemies also includes various Germans, Russians, Jews,

⁴³ For example, he says to his manservant: “Find me a damsel in distress; a beautiful girl, helpless in the clutches of knaves. Let me feel that I can fly to her succour, clad in my new grey suiting”. Sapper, “First Round”, in *Bulldog Drummond: His Four Rounds with Carl Peterson as Described by Sapper* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, n.d.), 21. “First Round” was first published as *Bulldog Drummond* in 1920.

⁴⁴ Sapper, “First Round”, 16.

⁴⁵ Tiger Standish “could have been Bulldog Drummond’s twin brother”. Watson, *Snobbery*, 87.

Bolsheviks, revolutionaries and others seen by him as a threat to English society. Much of him can be seen in another McNeile character, Jim Maitland, who is a combination of empire hero and adventurer. Maitland, who appears in two novels, *Jim Maitland* (1923) and *The Island of Terror* (1931), is also a member of “the Breed”, and shares Drummond’s racism.

Although Charteris never directly referred to Drummond, there is no doubt that he was familiar with McNeile’s popular thrillers.⁴⁶ It is very likely that he drew specifically on Drummond for some aspects of the early Simon Templar. In addition to similarities such as class, wealth, physical strength and witty and jocular language especially directed at enemies, both vigilante characters share an emphasis on combat and survival techniques. They are both experts at night stalking and moving silently, and have uncanny sight and hearing. They are ruthless with their enemies and (in the Saint’s case in the earliest novels) are leaders of a small group whose members obey them implicitly. Both can don rather implausible disguises: in McNeile’s *The Return of Bulldog Drummond* (1932) Drummond is disguised as a stage-hand so effectively that one of his closest friends, the impeccable gentleman Algy Longworth, does not recognize him. In Charteris’ *She Was A Lady* (1931), the Saint equally implausibly fools the aristocratic criminal Lord Essenden and his associates, who know him, by disguising himself as a lower class petty thief. Templar’s “sixth sense”, as well as his use of terms like “boodle” for money, is seen in the Drummond character, and Charteris’ first novel, the pre-Saint *X Esquire* (1927), uses identical chapter heading formats to those found in many of McNeile’s narratives.⁴⁷

Charteris, however, was again particular in his characterization of Templar, carefully avoiding a number of Drummond’s more extreme features. McNeile’s political and social views were very different from those of Charteris, who ensured that the Saint not only did not share Drummond’s militarism and public school sporting ideology, but endowed Templar with attitudes and behaviours dramatically different from those of McNeile’s hero. There are substantial differences between the

⁴⁶ Novels featuring Drummond formed part of Charteris’ personal library. (Personal communication from Ian Dickerson, 16 July 2015). In a mid-1940s novella the Saint describes himself as “Bulldog Templar” in a news article he has written. See “The Sizzling Saboteur”, in *The Saint on Guard*, 170.

⁴⁷ The chapter heading format is “In which...”, with details added, for example Chapter One of *X Esquire*, “In which a Gentleman of Blameless Reputation and Unsavoury Aspect Comes to a Sticky End”. It may not be adopted from McNeile alone; it was not uncommon in the period, being used, for example, by Sydney Horler and John Buchan, in the latter case in addition to his use of the format noted in Chapter III, which was also used by Charteris.

two characters. While occasional examples of racism surface in the Saint, the political and social beliefs he enunciates – such as the internationalist dimension of his patriotism, and his strong anti-fascist and anti-Nazi views – are at the opposite end of the spectrum from those of the semi-fascist Drummond. The strong social focus in Templar’s activities, which involves punishing those who exploit ordinary people, is also absent from the xenophobic Drummond character. The Saint’s intellectuality, his close relationships with women, the early emphasis on his destiny, his sophistication compared with the coarseness of Drummond, his interest in acquiring spoils and, in particular, his non-military status are further variations. His combat methods can be different – in a way unimaginable to Drummond, he is quite prepared to “fight foul” if necessary. In *The Last Hero* (1930), for example, he kicks a formidable opponent in the groin.⁴⁸ He also uses a knife as a weapon. For the empire hero and men of “the Breed”, the knife as a weapon was un-English, “foreign”, “not playing the game”. This attitude is nicely summed up by the narrator in the 1931 Sydney Horler novel *The Spy*, where the carrying of a knife by an Englishman is described as “beastly”.⁴⁹ The early alignment of attributes that highlights the link between the two protagonists weakened and diminished as new Saint narratives appeared through the 1930s, with Charteris’ developing authorship ensuring that Templar evolved and matured away from the rough, schoolboyish Drummond.

Outlaws, Highwaymen and Pirates

The Saint combines sophisticated, romantic and adventure-loving outlawry with a benevolent and honourable vigilante credo. This chapter and the previous one have argued that empire and frontier heroes, non-official crime solvers, attractive criminals and vigilantes – all popular heroes of adventure and crime fiction when Charteris began to write – were central to the evolution of his hero. It was also argued that in constructing the Saint Charteris re-imagined the features of prior protagonists in a far more intensive way than their original creators; none of them displays the attributes they share with the Saint in the vivid way seen in Simon Templar. In particular, their activities can seem anodyne compared with Templar’s flamboyant, roguish charisma and ruthless destruction of evildoers. The suave, urbane and romantic criminals Raffles and Blackshirt love the

⁴⁸ *The Last Hero*, 35. A similar incident occurs in “The Million Pound Day”, in *The Holy Terror*, 124.

⁴⁹ *The Spy* (1931), in *The Sydney Horler Omnibus of Excitement* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936), 201.

excitement of what they do, like the Saint does, but not as passionately or intensely, and justice and fairness is a secondary consideration. Arsène Lupin is a mischievous rogue, but is never as merry and rollicking as Templar. And vigilante figures too, like the Four Just Men, or in a different way Drummond, might display an avenging dedication like that of the Saint, but they are hardly charismatic. With the Saint, not only do all elements come together, but do so in a way that is striking and dramatic.

Features of similar intensity to those seen in the Saint can be found in certain types of popular and colourful fictional heroes of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – honourable, ethical and just outlaws, highwaymen and pirates, usually with a vigilante dimension to their activities, who serve their societies in various ways. Some have trickster qualities. Charteris as a child and young man was passionately attracted to such characters, probably in part because they rejected the conventional society into which he did not fit and which he found so oppressive. He bestowed their features, enlivened further by his own jocular personality, on the modern champion he created, skilfully transferring their contemporaneous colour, charisma and skill with swords, ships and horses to the flamboyant twentieth century Saint in his 1930s urban London world of guns and fast cars.

The Saint is readily identifiable with these figures. As discussed in Chapter V, they may often also be folk heroes who oppose corrupt or oppressive authorities. Their actions, while ethical and principled, are, like those of the Saint, usually illegal – they steal, they break the law, they kill. Central to the concept of the honourable and charismatic highwayman or outlaw is the nineteenth century recreation in Britain and America of the medieval figure Robin Hood. Everyone knows about Robin Hood – primarily in his later incarnation as the aristocratic bandit and merry outlaw who robbed from the rich to give to the poor and who, in the words of the theme song of the famous ITV British television series *The Adventures of Robin Hood* that ran from 1955 to 1960, “still found plenty of time to sing”. Robin Hood is important in the evolution of Simon Templar; the Saint has often been referred to in publishers’ blurbs as “The Robin Hood of modern crime”, and he is not infrequently identified with Robin Hood in the narratives themselves.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ For example, *The Saint and Mr Teal*, 10, and *The Saint Sees It Through*, 12.

Robin Hood has featured in literature since medieval times, but his popularity expanded enormously in the nineteenth century. The most popular nineteenth century narrative was probably Pierce Egan's *Robin Hood and Little John: Or, the Merry Men of Sherwood* (1840), but a later landmark text was Howard Pyle's 1883 book for children, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood of Great Renown, in Nottinghamshire*.⁵¹ Pyle's collection of stories helped to cement the conception of Robin Hood, who in medieval texts had been generally depicted as an ordinary outlaw, as a fun-loving benevolent vigilante, robbing the wealthy, righting injustice and helping the weak. The later Robin is a displaced lord, whose benevolent aristocratic standing resembles that of the knight-errant and facilitates the upper class, gentleman Saint's identification with the famous outlaw. From Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), Robin is an anti-Norman Saxon and becomes an English patriot as well as a defender of the common people against abuse by authority figures like the Sheriff of Nottingham. He was also well known as a merry trickster figure. The critical literature on Robin Hood is extensive.⁵²

The popularity and influence of Pyle's book, notwithstanding the many other Robin Hood stories in circulation in the later nineteenth century, was very great. Knight describes it as "still the classic anthology of Robin Hood stories for children".⁵³ It creates a rural forest idyll, where the weather is always fine and bright, Lincoln green-clad yeomen laugh, sing and feast on the greensward, and a merry, roguish Robin relieves rich and pompous clerics or noblemen of their ill-gotten wealth. Robin is attractive, charismatic, a skilled fighter and flamboyant dresser. His life is given over to adventure, laughter and the righting of injustice. A master of disguise, he takes many risks while seeking excitement and profit, for example participating in a public archery contest. His vigilante credo,

⁵¹ Howard Pyle, *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood of Great Renown, in Nottinghamshire* (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1883) (facsimile by University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, 1966). Most later editions were American, but the book was also published in London in 1883 by Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington.

⁵² Examples are Stephen Knight's comprehensive study, *Robin Hood A Complete Study of the English Outlaw* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995). Knight has also published *Robin Hood: An Anthology of Scholarship and Criticism* (Woodbridge, Suffolk and Rochester, NY : D.S. Brewer, 1999); *Robin Hood: A Mythic Biography* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003); and edited, with Thomas Ohlgren, *Robin Hood and Other Outlaw Tales* (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan Univ., 2nd ed., 2000). Other useful sources are "The Robin Hood Project", University of Rochester, <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/rh/rhhome.htm>, accessed 10 May 2010, which contains details of many studies on the subject, and Graham Seal's study, *The Outlaw Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), which lists a range of cultural, historical and social analyses relevant to Robin Hood.

⁵³ Knight, *A Complete Study*, 203. For a comprehensive overview of the many serials, books and magazines featuring Robin Hood and intended for young people in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Kevin Carpenter, "Robin Hood in Boys' Weeklies to 1914", in *Popular Children's Literature in Britain*, by Julia Briggs, Dennis Butts and M. O. Grenby (Aldershot, England; Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, 2008), 47-67.

robbing oppressive authorities of their unjustly acquired wealth and helping the poor, appears immediately, in the Prologue:

Then they vowed [ie, Robin and his band] ...whether baron, abbot, knight, or squire...from each they would take that which had been wrung from the poor by unjust taxes, or land rents, or in wrongful fines; but to the poor folk they would give a helping hand in need and trouble, and would return to them that which had been unjustly taken from them.⁵⁴

In a way that resonates with the Saint's dislike of pompous, wealthy, immoral upper class figures, Robin's wrath is especially directed at fat, wealthy, richly dressed clerics. His thoughts on one unpleasant example, the Lord Bishop of Hereford:

“Yon Bishop is overgaudy for a holy man. I do wonder whether his patron, who, methinks, was Saint Thomas, was given to wearing golden chains about his neck, silk clothing upon his body, and pointed shoes upon his feet; the money for all of which, God wot, hath been wrung from the sweat of poor tenants. Bishop, Bishop, thy pride may have a fall ere thou wottest of it.”⁵⁵

Like the Saint, Robin spends a lot of time acquiring spoils for himself – mainly by “inviting” wealthy travellers through Sherwood Forest, always self-important clerics or nobles whose wealth has been improperly acquired – to dine with him and his men, at a price.

It is not known whether Charteris read Pyle's book, or its “successor” novel, Henry Gilbert's *Robin Hood and the Men of the Greenwood* (1912). But its influence on the Robin Hood legend in the English-speaking world was strong when Charteris as a child was voraciously reading tales of adventure, and he cannot fail to have been aware of the Robin Hood mystique. Stories in the many weekly magazines and serials available from the end of the nineteenth century featuring a merry Robin and his band include deeds such as liberating kidnapped maidens, avenging the wronged or disinherited and righting injustices. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a few years prior to Charteris' birth in 1907, the Aldine Publishing Company embarked on a program of “libraries”,

⁵⁴ Pyle, *Merry Adventures*, 5.

⁵⁵ Pyle, *Merry Adventures*, 147.

focusing on British outlaws and highwaymen; the Robin Hood Library (1901-6) was the flagship.⁵⁶ Popular and successful, these magazines had bold and assertive Robin, Little John and others rescuing damsels in distress, lambasting the Normans and robbing the rich for the poor and needy. A few years later, Amalgamated Press cornered the juvenile popular market and reduced the emphasis on highwaymen and bandits as heroes. But the idea of Robin Hood as a merry, trickster benevolent outlaw was well established.

The Saint is frequently depicted as a dashing gallant from a past age. In *Knight Templar* (1930), the early novel that establishes important heroic images of the Saint, the narrator states:

He ought never to have been let loose upon this twentieth century...you looked, instinctively and exasperatedly, for a sword at his side, a feather in his hat, and spurs at his heels...there was a queer keenness in the chiseling of his tanned face...a laughing dancing devil of mischief that was never far from the very clear blue eyes...⁵⁷

In this powerful passage Charteris depicts Templar firstly as a seventeenth century cavalier or musketeer, cleverly intensifying the image by highlighting the observer's "instinctive" assumption that the Saint should be wearing a cavalier's apparel. But the "queer keenness", and "dancing devil of mischief" hint at something more: an exciting, slightly disreputable or even shady side to the character, a colourful, dashing personage at odds with normal authority – like a highwayman or pirate. Towards the end of *Knight Templar*, as Templar and his companion Roger Conway fly away on what appears to be a hopeless, suicidal mission, the Saint's thoughts turn to what his life has meant: "...I am the last lone highwayman, and I am the last adventurer."⁵⁸ The words "lone" and "last", with their implication that the Saint is the final, ultimate personification of a glorious age that is now ending, accentuate his uniqueness and place him at the pinnacle of all outlaw images.

Similar depictions of the Saint recur through the 1930s and 1940s narratives, and, to a lesser extent, the 1950s short stories. He is often described as a highwayman. This was highlighted in 1939 when Hodder and Stoughton published Charteris' collection of short stories entitled *The Happy*

⁵⁶ Carpenter, "Boys' Weeklies", 58. Other "libraries" were Dick Turpin, Claude Duval (Du Vall), Rob Roy and Jack Sheppard.

⁵⁷ *Knight Templar* (London,: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), 13-14. [1930].

⁵⁸ *Knight Templar*, 294.

Highwayman, which, as noted earlier, is the last set of adventures of the Saint in prewar England. Many aspects of Templar – brave and bold, clever, romantic, gallant and superbly dressed – readily fit early perceptions of dashing, charismatic highwaymen. Jerry Palmer argues that “in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries admiration for ingenuity and bravery focused chiefly on highwaymen”.⁵⁹ The two best known were the Frenchman Claude Du Vall and the Englishman Dick Turpin. Although the exploits of Du Vall and Turpin took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, the myth of their charisma and gentlemanly morality mainly developed in the nineteenth century. They are depicted this way in the influential and widely read early nineteenth century novel *Rookwood*, by William Harrison Ainsworth, first published in 1834.⁶⁰ Their romantic exploits were far fewer in reality than the myths that sprung up about them suggest, but their purported activities were believable, and “gentleman of the road” became the subject of fashionable admiration. In one Charteris novel, while holding up a police station, Templar bows and salutes a young woman reporter, the narrator stating “He had time to play Claude Duval with the most charming reporter he had ever met”.⁶¹

Another widely-known text that furthered this perception of highwaymen is Alfred Noyes’ stirring poem *The Highwayman* (1906).⁶² It tells of the love of an innkeeper’s daughter for a gallant highwayman, who rides through the night resplendent with his fine clothes, pistols and rapier. He is betrayed, and, knowing he is riding into a trap, the daughter sacrifices her own life to save him, but in a final, valiant charge he is shot down “like a dog in the highway” by soldiers. Popular to this day, the poem bolstered popular belief in the romance and excitement of charismatic heroes outside the law, but fair and just. A highwayman or bandit hero more recent than these, created in 1921, not English but popular in the English-speaking world right up to the present, was especially important in popularizing the swashbuckling outlaw heroes that Charteris loved so much. This is the masked avenger Zorro (“the Fox”), who first appeared in Johnston McCulley’s 1919 serialised novella *The Curse of Capistrano*, later reprinted as *The Mark of Zorro* – the mark being a “Z” slashed by Zorro’s sword as his calling card. The character became very well-known through films in the interwar period, further novels and stories, a popular 1960s TV series and modern films in the 1990s.

⁵⁹ Palmer, *Thrillers*, 130-131.

⁶⁰ William Harrison Ainsworth, *Rookwood* (London: George Routledge and Sons, n.d.).

⁶¹ *Getaway*, 294.

⁶² Alfred Noyes, *Collected Poems Volume One* (New York: Stokes, 1913), 192-196.

The original story is set in early nineteenth century Spanish California, where Zorro (referred to as “Señor” Zorro) appears out of the night as a mysterious masked bandit, clad in black, a magnificent swordsman whose mission is to avenge injustice and defend the weak against a corrupt administration and brutal soldiery. In reality Zorro is Don Diego Vega, the wealthy, outwardly indolent and foppish son of the richest and most prestigious family in the region. Vega is an aristocrat – Zorro more than once emphatically states that he himself is a *caballero* (knightly gentleman). Zorro is clever and resourceful, skilled with weapons and widely admired. Like the Saint, he is a charismatic figure – attractive to women and seen by the principal female character, the Señorita Lolita, as the epitome of manliness. Also like the Saint, Zorro taunts and makes fools of his opponents, in particular the bumbling Sergeant Gonzales and his superior the unpleasant Captain Ramon, also doing so subtly in his Don Diego Vega persona. The athletic swordsmanship, gallantry and daring flamboyance of the character, subtly stated by modern standards in the novella, were greatly intensified in the popular and successful 1920 silent movie *The Mark of Zorro*, starring and produced by Douglas Fairbanks Senior. Central to the movie is Zorro leading his opponents a merry dance through a pueblo, leaping over walls and springing over roofs like a gymnast, laughingly tricking his bumbling pursuers, overwhelming his enemies with his amazing swordplay and rescuing those falsely arrested by the corrupt authorities.

It is highly likely that Charteris was familiar with Zorro. He reportedly referred to Fairbanks as “the last guy who could fight with a laugh and a flourish and a sense of poetry thrown in”,⁶³ and he had a particular interest in things Spanish. He spoke the language fluently, travelling widely in Spanish-speaking countries. He translated Manuel Chaves Nogales’ life of the Spanish bullfighter Juan Belmonte, and in 1964 wrote a guide to learning Spanish, *Spanish for Fun*. A number of Saint narratives are set in Spanish-speaking countries – one such short story collection is entitled *Señor Saint* (1958). Important for a conceptual link between highwayman cavaliers like Zorro and the Saint is a special preface Charteris first placed in the original (1932) edition of his three-novella publication *The Holy Terror*. In an exultation of sword-wielding, swashbuckling horsemen, this preface passionately exalts youth, defiance of convention and fearless, daring action, demonstrating his passionate admiration of the type of reckless bravery that characterizes both Zorro and the Saint.

⁶³ Quoted in Barer, *A Complete History*, 243. No source is provided.

Charteris ends his paean with the stirring Spanish words *Hasta la vista, companeros valientes! Y vayan con Dios!* (Farewell, gallant comrades! And go with God!)⁶⁴

Charteris' portrayal of Templar as a highwayman is closely linked to his depiction as a twentieth century pirate. The Saint is a tanned, handsome, dashing modern-day buccaneer. In 1940 he is described as having

crisp black hair, the chiseled leanness of devil-may-care lines of cheekbone and jaw, a pair of mocking blue eyes and a reckless mouth that completed the picture of a younger and streamlined reincarnation of the privateers who once knew those coasts [the coast of the Florida region] as the Spanish Main.⁶⁵

Romantic, heroic pirates have identifiable origins in both society and literature. The widespread notoriety and romanticized exploits of historical pirates or privateers like William Kidd ("Captain Kidd") (1645-1701), Edward Teach ("Blackbeard") (1680-1718) or the Welsh privateer Henry Morgan (1635-1688) made phrases like "the Spanish Main"⁶⁶ almost household words in popular culture. While pirates were sometimes correctly seen as brutal ruffians who terrorized peaceful communities, in popular imagination there developed about them an air of larger-than-life romance and adventure, especially in the nineteenth century, long after the real pirates had faded from the scene. Perceptions of the swashbuckling pirate or cavalier hero were strengthened in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the adventure stories of popular authors such as Alexandre Dumas père, Robert Louis Stevenson, Rafael Sabatini and G. A. Henty. Dumas is universally known for his many works, including adventure stories such as his historical cycle *The Three Musketeers* (1844), *Twenty years After* (1845) and *The Vicomte of Bragelonne: Ten Years Later* (1848-1850), the latter incorporating the *The Man in the Iron Mask*. Sabatini, an English author of Italian origin, wrote many novels of adventure, among the best known of which are his two novels *Scaramouche* (1921), and *Captain Blood – His Odyssey* (1922). As noted earlier, it is very likely that Charteris was familiar with these texts and their protagonists.

⁶⁴ Leslie Charteris, "Between Ourselves", in *The Saint: Five Complete Novels* (New York: Avenel Books, 1983), 495-497.

⁶⁵ *The Saint in Miami*, 29.

⁶⁶ One of Charteris' later collections of short stories bears this term in the title – *The Saint on the Spanish Main* (1955).

Sabatini's *Scaramouche* is a tale of the French revolution where André-Louis Moreau, a lawyer who, after his friend is killed in a duel by a ruthless aristocrat, becomes a revolutionary and master swordsman. He hides from the authorities with a troupe of traveling players under the name Scaramouche, later becoming the duelling champion of the republican members of the National Assembly, after the aristocrats contrive to deplete their numbers by challenging the inexperienced republicans to duels to the death. Scaramouche, however, while a swordsman and man of action, is less swashbuckling than Dumas' D'Artagnan, the Gascon lad who comes to Paris to seek his fortune, and his friends Athos, Porthos and Aramis, the protagonists of *The Three Musketeers*. The story and its sequels are filled with daring bravery and exciting romance as the youthful D'Artagnan and his companions, who care for their fine appearance as much as their ability with the sword and musket, pit their skill against the machinations of the evil Cardinal Richelieu and the even more obnoxious Milady de Winter, while pursuing their many lady-loves. In *Knight Templar* (1930) the Saint refers to himself and his friends as "Musketeers", and the narrator refers to the Saint as "D'Artagnan born again".⁶⁷

Perhaps the most buccaneering character of all, however, is another of Sabatini's characters: the pirate and privateer Captain Peter Blood. Charteris read Sabatini's Captain Blood novels; his direct familiarity with the character is suggested in a critical comment he reportedly made about the 1960s television series "The Saint", complaining that the series "bears no more relation to the Saint that I wrote...than Winnie the Pooh bears to Captain Blood".⁶⁸ The gentleman pirate Peter Blood is an Irishman, originally a doctor – witty with words, roguish, elegant of dress – and as skilled a swordsman, leader and strategist as one could find on the Spanish Main in the seventeenth century. Unjustly sent as a prisoner to the Caribbean after the unsuccessful Monmouth rebellion in England, Blood becomes a pirate – but a pirate who, while allowing the acquisition of plunder, concentrates on combating the enemies of England in the spirit of Drake and other privateers. There are substantial similarities between the piratical Simon Templar and Captain Blood: love of fighting and adventure, appearance, witty language, fine clothes, and attitude to the law. Like the Saint, Blood is tanned, dashing and darkly handsome – half pirate and half patriot, with an attractively disreputable charisma.

⁶⁷ *Knight Templar*, 185; 176.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Barer, *A Complete History*, 131. No source is provided.

He also exudes what is best described as a lounging elegance – a good description of the mature Templar.

Finally, there was Charteris' childhood reading of *Chums* magazine. It was noted in Chapter II that, while he devoured many kinds of books, his favourite was the annual edition of *Chums*, with its tales of historical adventure, sport, war and school life. Very prominent in the magazine are stories of adventure at sea and pirates, especially those produced by the prolific writer Samuel Walkey, in which boys or young men through chance and circumstance fight battles and enjoy thrilling adventures. The protagonists of these stories are fighters who do not seek plunder irresponsibly, but like the Saint, gain their spoils from evildoers, including enemies of England, villainous sea-rovers or similar foes. Walkey's tales extol glory, virtue and excitement. Some *Chums* stories from the period when Charteris was aged 8-10 (1915-1917) provide suitable examples. One of many is "For Drake and Merrie England", in which the young orphan Hereward Champernowne is thrilled to be on the gallant ship *Seek-the-Foe* with the magnificently-named stalwarts Captain Pendragon, Jack Venture and gunner Smiteaway Strongbow:

What glorious voyages [the ship] had accomplished! What tales she could have told of fights and adventures in realms where the Spaniards had reigned until Drake and his sea-dogs challenged their supremacy and taught them to respect the flag of England. Brave, glorious old ship! How I thrilled to feel her surging onward, seeking another enemy. All that I had longed for and pined was mine at last...can you wonder if I stood there, enthralled, while the *Seek-the-Foe*...bore me onwards towards the perils and adventures that awaited me?⁶⁹

Among the stories of pluck and peril running through the 1916 *Chums* Annual is another example, the saga of the pirate-like bandit Orizava, a Mexican brigand, smuggler and patriot. This character strongly resembles the Saint, and, given the importance of Spanish culture in Charteris' life and writing, is of particular interest. Orizava is a daredevil who glories in excitement; a Robin Hood of old Mexico, he brings justice to the poor by punishing the corrupt rich, redistributing the plunder he wins and keeping a portion for himself and his men.

⁶⁹ S. Walkey, "For Drake and Merrie England", Part 2 of 13, *Chums* 1189 (26th June 1915), in *Chums Annual 1915* (Vol. XXIII) (London: Cassells & Co., 1915), 742.

There was a reckless daring in the expression of his dark, keen eyes, mingled with a careless good humour, as of one who takes life as it comes...He was wiry-framed and athletic...with a bright-coloured handkerchief folded round his head, underneath his black sombrero, a scarlet waistband in which a revolver was stuck, white shirt, and white trousers ornamented with silver braid...he had made a name for himself... as a fearless brigand...⁷⁰

The carefree, daredevil attitude, jocularity, physical fitness, colourful dress and bravery of Orizava in this passage could be a description of the Saint himself. Like Templar, he is “reckless” – a word frequently used by the narrator to describe the Saint’s approach to life – and has the hero’s “name”, known far and wide as a dashing outlaw.

Implicit in the joyful adventures of these outlaw, bandit and pirate heroes is the idea of liberation from the effete decadence of conventional living. This dimension of their characterization struck a chord with Charteris; he tried to emulate it in his own life, and endowed the Saint with all of its powerful allure. Templar worries

...that life might one day become dull, that the gods of gay and perilous adventure who had blessed him so extravagantly through all his life so far might one day desert him, leaving nothing but the humdrum uneventfulness which ordinary mortals accept as a substitute for living...⁷¹

This passage contrasts the values of the warrior hero and the ordinary person, asserting that a requirement for danger and excitement is an integral aspect of a figure like the Saint, honed to operate at a higher level of tension than normal people. As we have seen, many heroes need excitement; but the excitement inherent in Charteris’ imagined outlaws, highwaymen and pirates that found expression in Simon Templar is the warrior hero’s exhilaration in danger and the joy of combat, a process that embodies a liberating, revitalizing freedom like that of the regenerative “West” of the frontier hero: this dangerous, violent experience empowers them on their journey and helps define them as heroes. Such freedom can be seen as part of the Saint’s spiritual evolution discussed in Chapter II; it is similar to but ultimately more intense than the empowerment and regeneration of the

⁷⁰ Julian Linley, “The Exploits of Orizava: No. 1 – The Traitor”, *Chums* 1218 (15th January 1916), in *Chums Annual 1916*, (Vol. XXIV) (London: Cassells & Co., 1916), 327.

⁷¹ *The Saint in Miami*, 2. Liberation from conventional life is also a feature of the novels of W. J. Locke, especially *The Beloved Vagabond* (1906), which Charteris is known to have read.

empire and frontier heroes discussed in Chapter III. It is defined by the Saint as a primeval force free of the enervating negativities of “civilization”:

The things of value are the common, primitive things. Justice is good – when it’s done fanatically. Fighting is good – when the thing you fight for is simple and sane and you love it. And danger is good – it wakes you up, and makes you live ten times more keenly. And vulgar swashbuckling may easily be the best of all – because it stands for a magnificent belief in all those things, a superb faith in the glamour that civilization is trying to sneer at as a delusion and a snare.⁷²

Here life is reduced to common denominators, summing up Templar’s dare-devil, risk-taking enjoyment of life. The stirring appeal of the passage asserts raw, primitive values as a “natural” good, untrammelled by ambiguities. In Charteris’ narratives the Saint’s “fanaticism” manifests as a healthy firmness of purpose, and the “primitive”, “vulgar” or “simple and sane” things are a justice and fairness free of obfuscation and humbug, always directed in a positive way. A “superb faith” in the glamour of swashbuckling translates into a zest for living life to the full in a way that punishes the evildoer, protects society and succours the weak. In a later novella, Templar extols his life in words that reflect the joyous life of his outlaw and pirate forebears and his rejection of established power structures:

...doing everything that’s utterly and gloriously mad – swaggering, swashbuckling, singing – showing all these dreary old dogs what can be done with life – not giving a damn for anyone – robbing the rich, helping the poor – plaguing the pompous – killing dragons, pulling policemen’s legs –⁷³

Charteris’ skill with language underscores the intensity of the Saint’s rollicking philosophy through heightened alliterative expressions, and by strategies such as juxtaposing the heroism of St George the dragon killer with audacious tricks played on the guardians of the law. Templar’s credo of liberation is best presented in the 1932 novel *Getaway*, where he, his partner Patricia and his companion Monty are on the run in Austria and Germany. Patricia explains how until she met the Saint, she had been “half asleep all my life, like eighty percent of other people.”⁷⁴ Later, Monty

⁷² *The Last Hero*, 18.

⁷³ “The Melancholy Journey of Mr Teal”, in *The Holy Terror*, 318-319.

⁷⁴ *Getaway*, 88-89.

reflects that he would “ask for no prouder fate” than to be in the Saint’s band were they ever again to fling “their quixotic defiance in the teeth of Law and Underworld alike, when every man’s hand was against them and only the inspired devilry of their leader stood between them and the wrath of a drab civilization.”⁷⁵ Their commitment to a liberated, regenerative approach to life is total, characterized by defiance against everything both evildoers (the “Underworld”) and the forces of conventional society (the “Law”) can throw at them. The Saint’s “inspired devilry” ascribes to Templar a knowing, mischievous ingenuity, beyond law and convention, asserting his ongoing revitalization as a superior being, a hero. By the end of the 1930s the evolving Templar is less outspoken in rejecting conventional life, but his commitment to regenerative liberation is still there and remains throughout the postwar period.

Dandies and Fops

The young, early Saint has a number of dandy, foppish features. His dress is colourful and resplendent almost beyond description, the best and most expensive available. Over the years this sartorial magnificence gradually morphs into a more sophisticated elegance, but he remains almost able to transform clothing: his apparel has “all the peculiarly rakish elegance that was subtly infused into anything he put on”.⁷⁶ Even more central to his persona is his manner of speaking; his skill at witty badinage and slick, mocking impudence is seen in all his adventures. It includes smart, often amusing barbs usually directed at the many and various enemies he comes up against, his police foils, or conservative elements and institutions of English society. As the years progress his witticisms become more adult and restrained, especially in the postwar period; just as his early apparel can be flamboyant rather than elegant, his early banter can be fatuous and inane rather than clever – such as “Night-night, dear old bacterial!”, or (speaking to an enemy) “Angel Face, don’t you think this is a peach of a beard? Makes me look like Abraham in a high wind...”⁷⁷ In early narratives he occasionally composes comical limericks and poems about any and all subjects, often with a social or political message.⁷⁸ While his early appearance and manner is sometimes intended to conceal his real

⁷⁵ *Getaway*, 234.

⁷⁶ *Prelude for War*, 145.

⁷⁷ “The Man Who Was Clever”, in *Enter the Saint*, 89; *Knight Templar*, 83.

⁷⁸ This may reflect Charteris’ reading of the comical poetry of the famous satirist and writer Hilaire Belloc (1870-1953).

activities, at this stage the Saint generally gives the impression that he “ought to have been lounging his amiable easy-going way through a round of tennis and cricket and cock-tail parties”.⁷⁹

The early Templar’s appearance and speech partly reflect what Charteris referred to as his own “uncouth juvenilities” noted in Chapter I, but the Saint’s mannerisms also reflect qualities in the outlaws, highwaymen and pirates that Charteris enjoyed so much, as well as in other early heroes discussed above that form the literary pathway leading to the Saint. Two important forerunners of Templar adopt excessively dandy traits that mask their true vocation: Baroness Orczy’s Sir Percy Blakeney (the Scarlet Pimpernel), and Don Diego Vega (Zorro). Sir Percy wears “billowy frills of finest Mechlin lace: the extravagantly short-waisted satin coat, wide-lapelled waistcoat, and tight-fitting striped breeches”, while Don Diego admonishes his servants, because “his newest serape was not pressed properly, and spending a great deal of time over the polishing of his boots.”⁸⁰ As well as a penchant for fine clothing, they have a vacuous fatuity in speech and manner. In Don Diego, there is a focus on his assumed timidity and concern to avoid exertion – a bored, effete indolence – while the conversation of Sir Percy Blakeney includes an inane, vacant chatter.

Other characters are “genuine” dandies. Alfred Noyes’ *The Highwayman* extols the clothing of the eponymous protagonist, with his “coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin” that fitted “with never a wrinkle”,⁸¹ and the novels of Sabatini contain many descriptions of the fine appearance of Captain Blood, the swashbuckling gentleman pirate. Even earlier, Ainsworth’s *Rookwood* notes the apparel of the benevolent highwayman – for example, the character Jack Palmer, who is secretly the highwayman Dick Turpin, says of another highwayman, Claude du Val: “it was quite beautiful to see how smartly he was rigg’d out, all velvet and lace.”⁸² The gentleman cavalier heroes of Dumas *père* considered fine clothing to be of great importance. In *The Man in the Iron*

⁷⁹ “The Man Who Was Clever”, in *Enter the Saint*, 27.

⁸⁰ Orczy, *Pimpernel*, 27; Johnstone McCulley, *The Curse of Capistrano* (New York: Frank A. Munsey Company, 1919), Chapter Five “A Ride in the Morning”, accessed 10 May 2013, http://archive.org/stream/TheCurseOfCapistrano_538/mcculley_johnston_1883_1958_curse_of_capistrano#page/n13/mode/2up.

⁸¹ Noyes, *Collected Poems*, 192.

⁸² Ainsworth, *Rookwood*, 60.

Mask, the entire second chapter underscores the importance of the latest and most appropriate fashions for Porthos,⁸³ and Aramis is known for his fine dress and foppish manner.

A degree of foppishness is linked to the “feminization” of certain post-Great War crime fiction heroes flagged in the Introduction. Sometimes excessive foppishness or foolishness was an outward guise masking a brave, clever and resourceful man, in later narratives becoming a more fundamental part of the hero’s persona. This has been summed up by Colin Watson as the “Silly Ass convention”: an outer shell that conceals the hero beneath, the “fop with the heart of a lion”.⁸⁴ Important early crime fiction heroes who exhibit foppish qualities are Christie’s Poirot, Wodehouse’s Psmith, Allingham’s Albert Campion and Dorothy Sayer’s sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey. Even “Bulldog” Drummond, the tough soldier, has some of the dandy qualities described above, and his face has a “habitual look of vacuous good humour”.⁸⁵ Certainly, his standard of apparel rates only one mention – right at the beginning of the series when Drummond arrives at the Carlton Hotel – but it is high: “A white gardenia was in his button-hole; his grey suit looked the last word in exclusive catering.”⁸⁶ The babbling inanities he and his companions use include phrases like “old bean”, “good lad” or “my dear fellow”. Psmith dresses immaculately, wearing only the highest quality clothing, and while he can be tough and strong when necessary, he is supercilious and his jocular speech can readily become asinine – for example when speaking to Parker, a gangster who is trying to kidnap him: “Are you good at riddles, Comrade Parker? How much wood would a wood-chuck chuck, assuming for purposes of argument that it was in the power of a wood-chuck to chuck wood?”⁸⁷

Sayer’s crime-solver Wimsey was especially important in associating crime fiction with such attributes. Again, given Charteris’ wide reading, it is highly likely he was familiar with this character. Fine dress and a sense of fashion are clearly inherent in Wimsey’s life-style. His sharp analytical mind sits behind a vacuous external appearance and fatuous speech, including comic songs and the upper class inanity so amusingly depicted in Wodehouse’s silly but likeable character Bertie Wooster. Wimsey comments on his first murder: “I’m sure it [the murder] must have been uncommonly

⁸³ Alexandre Dumas, *The Man in the Iron Mask*, trans. J. Rogers, (New York: Signet, 1992), 33-41. [1848-50].

⁸⁴ Watson, *Snobbery*, 185-6.

⁸⁵ Sapper, “Second Round”, in *His Four Rounds*, 300. “Second Round” was first published as *The Black Gang* in 1922.

⁸⁶ Sapper, “First Round”, in *His Four Rounds*, 21.

⁸⁷ Wodehouse, *Psmith Journalist*, in *World of Psmith*, 364.

distressin’,” said Lord Peter, sympathetically, “especially comin’ like that before breakfast. Hate anything tiresome happenin’ before breakfast. Takes a man at such a confounded disadvantage, what?”⁸⁸ As with Drummond and the younger Simon Templar, his speech is silliest when bantering with his companions and his enemies.

An interesting variation of this type of speech can be seen in a later (from 1934) fictional police officer – the Oxford-educated Chief Inspector Roderick Alleyn, who appears in 32 novels by Ngaio Marsh. Alleyn is notable not so much for inanity but for clever, witty conversation, laced with literary and classical allusions:

[to his subordinate, Inspector Fox] “Fox, my valued old one. My little brush is not in my case. Wing your way to Miss Vaughan’s [an actress] dressing-room and get the foot of my grandmother’s hare which you will find on the dressing-table. Fetch me that foot and be thou here again ‘ere the Leviathan can swim a league.”⁸⁹

These well-known protagonists helped establish and consolidate such mannerisms as an acceptable dimension of the gentleman crime fiction hero, and most readers would not have found it unusual for the Saint to be this way. Charteris’ adoption of similar features for his characterizations can be seen early in his career, in his “pre-Saint” heroes. Terry Mannering in *X Esquire* (1927) not only dresses flamboyantly but his speech is almost identical to that of Sayer’s Wimsey and the later Albert Campion. The protagonist of Charteris’ second non-Saint novel *The White Rider* (1928), Peter Lestrangle, wears, like Mannering, a magnificent dressing-gown. He occasionally speaks in a jocular, silly way and like Wimsey, Campion and the Saint, improvises comic poems. The Zorro-like South American hero of Charteris’ *The Bandit* (1929) is quick-witted and slick with words. The most Saint-like of the pre-Saint heroes, “Storm” Arden of *Daredevil* (1929), not only can burble like Lestrangle but is at one point “arrayed in a suit of wonderfully jazzed silk pyjamas and a staggering silk dressing-gown, seated in a comfortable armchair in front of the open window, his bare feet propped up on the sill and a slim volume of Kipling on his knees.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Dorothy Sayers, *Whose Body?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), Kindle edition. [1923].

⁸⁹ Ngaio Marsh, *Enter A Murderer* (Glasgow: Collins & Sons, 1986), 63. [1935]. The Leviathan quote is from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

⁹⁰ *Daredevil*, 26.

There were influences beyond the fictional characters discussed above that were relevant to the dandy and foppish qualities of Simon Templar. Professor Martin Green in his elegant book *Children of the Sun*⁹¹ has described the birth, development and decline of a social, artistic and literary phenomenon which he calls the *Sonnenkinder* (“Sun Children”) – “dandies”, “rogues” and “naifs”. This movement came to prominence among educated youth in Britain in the early 1920s, evolving at Oxford University. The *Sonnenkinder* reacted against the values they believed resulted in the catastrophe of the Great War; they idolized youth, especially the immature, feminised young man, fostered beauty and flamboyance in clothing, speech and appearance, and cultivated aesthetic appreciation of art and beauty. They enjoyed luxury, and manifested playfulness and “decadence”. The life-style and values of prominent *Sonnenkinder* are evoked in the literary works of the novelist Evelyn Waugh – himself a *Sonnenkind* – especially in his most famous novel, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945) and the 1981 Granada Television series of this book, which express the phenomenon in their portrayal of the young men gathered around the doomed “naïf” Sebastian Flyte.

The influence of the *Sonnenkinder* was substantial. Even the career of a regular army officer (provided he went to Sandhurst and then into the Brigade of Guards) could be “dandy” in its values and life-style; the “rogue” *Sonnenkind* – less intellectual, more active and physical and more able to exist in the “normal” world – could be seen in, for example, the British fascist leader Oswald Mosley. The movement was more than just a short-lived, hedonistic, pleasure-seeking minority: intellectually, it rejected conventional society and traditional values, and through literature influenced English popular taste, especially in the area of humour. Dandy traits characteristic of *Sonnenkinder* activities and behaviour became fashionable; Green argues that “aristocratic *Sonnenkinder* and country-house eccentrics (became) the darlings of the English imagination”.⁹² Many *Sonnenkinder* attitudes and beliefs can be seen in the “Bright Young People”, later the “Bright Young Things”, terms coined in newspapers and popular magazines of the 1920s for a new social current among young people who expressed the spirit of the so-called “Roaring Twenties”. This set included a wide variety of young society figures, including public school men, society women and the bohemian fringe.⁹³ Green

⁹¹ Martin Green, *Children of the Sun: a Narrative of “Decadence” in England After 1918* (London: Constable, 1977).

⁹² Green, *Children*, 272.

⁹³ The principle work on this subject is D. J. Taylor’s *Bright Young People: The Lost Generation of London’s Jazz Age* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

relates the *Sonnenkinder* directly to the dandy elements embodied in Wodehouse's Bertie Wooster and, in a link to crime fiction, with Sayer's Peter Wimsey.⁹⁴

The early Saint, along with some other contemporaneous crime fiction heroes, probably owes something of his dress and manner to these influential youth movements. Among the educated youth culture of the time, especially in the university environment, Charteris would inevitably have come into frequent contact with young people whose life-style and values were as described above. Notwithstanding his ethnicity, he was totally anglicised and brought up to English values and attitudes. The likelihood that a young, upper class hero created by him would incorporate mannerisms, dress and speech consistent with those of the Bright Young People and the *Sonnenkinder* is high.

Dandy and foppish qualities in crime fiction heroes of the time were not universal. While many of the vigilante heroes of Edgar Wallace, for example, were wealthy or aristocratic, few share in any notable way the mannerisms found in Lord Peter Wimsey, Albert Campion, "Bulldog" Drummond and Charteris' early heroes. Wallace's Four Just Men are not foppish, nor are his Mixer, Ringer and Brigand; they speak maturely and sensibly, and are not arrayed in magnificent clothing. The dandified, foppish Saint himself was not a lasting phenomenon, nor was it extreme; the youthful Saint was never, for example, given, like Drummond, a "vacuous expression". But the popularity of the early, dandified Templar, and that of the later, more elegantly dressed, sophisticated and maturely jocular Saint suggests these features were acknowledged and accepted by readers as part of his heroic persona. Underscored by the social practices of educated youth of the time, they evolved primarily from the colourful, flamboyant apparel and witty, clever, sometimes fatuous and inane speech that was seen as natural and appropriate in many of his popular crime and adventure fiction forebears.

This chapter and the previous one have argued that fundamental aspects of the Saint's portrayal as a hero evolved through a wide range of early adventure and crime fiction protagonists. But contemporaneous political, social and ideological circumstances in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s also

⁹⁴ Green, *Children*, 258. One of Sayer's Wimsey novels, *Murder Must Advertise* (1933), involves the character with some rather unsavoury Bright Young People.

shaped Templar as a hero, resulting in the three different constructions of the character and new layers of his heroism. This is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

CLASS REFORMER, GOVERNMENT OPERATIVE AND PLAYBOY: THE THREE CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE SAINT

This chapter argues that there are three further primary layers of the Saint's heroism. Building on the character's heroic attributes discussed in previous chapters, each is generated by a different construction of the character associated with differing political, social and economic conditions in the prewar, wartime/immediate postwar periods and the 1950s. In the 1930s, the Saint's imaginary exploits in the particular circumstances of that period reaffirmed a range of contemporaneous political and social ideologies, strengthening perceptions of him as a hero who did the things a hero should do. Primarily at this time, his actions and circumstances are those of an outlaw folk hero, emulating for readers folk heroes in the real world. In the 1940s the "first" Saint of the 1930s was reconstructed, changing and evolving in a way suitable for his role as an American wartime counter-espionage agent and appropriate for readers' perceptions and assumptions about America's wartime and postwar interests. In the 1950s, an older, international celebrity Saint whose heroism is more restrained still does what a hero should do as a vigilante and knight-errant, but as an American hero he also displays and reaffirms for readers the power and pleasure of being an American, showcasing that country as the Western leader in a world threatened by the Cold War.

Although no charge against him can be sustained by the police, the Saint is acknowledged by all as an outlaw and vigilante. As late as in *The Saint Steps In* (1944), he still simply and to the point says, notwithstanding his then role as an American Government counter-spy, "I go after crooks",¹ and his activities continue during the 1950s, despite his ostensible retirement. In "The Careful Terrorist", a short story in *Thanks to the Saint* (1957), he offers his services to his old friend Inspector Fernack of New York, who first appears in *The Saint in New York* (1935), and later sums up his credo:

¹ *The Saint Steps In*, 166.

I never robbed anyone who wasn't a thief or a blackguard, although they might have been clever enough to stay within the law. I've killed people too, but never anyone the world wasn't a safer place without...my name seemed to stand for a kind of justice, and I haven't changed.²

He is always interested in accruing wealth for himself. As late as 1962 he is still combining “natural impulse and lofty objective...with sound business practice”.³ He robs only those who deserve it, and money, while important, is secondary to his vigilante and knight-errant missions. As he says in *Follow the Saint* (1939), “I like money as much as anybody else...But that's a sideline. I also deliver justice.”⁴

Charteris' primary literary period, the period of the “first” Saint in 1930s Britain, was during an era characterized by political, economic and social pressures highly conducive to the popularity of such a fictional vigilante figure. These pressures, primarily in the form of the Depression (the Slump) and its impact, created an ideological environment that made it especially likely that readers would see a figure like the Saint as a hero. In his fictional activities he vanquishes the type of persons widely seen at that time as evil and mitigates the perceived decline in society. The time was conducive to the emergence of Templar as a fictional outlaw folk hero, punishing evildoers and righting wrongs in society where the formal authorities failed to do so. Importantly, while he strongly disparages the upper or governing class, as an upper class figure himself he paradoxically reestablishes the integrity of this traditional national leadership, in doing so revalidating major social and political ideologies. All these circumstances generated for readers another layer of his heroism. Before examining the Saint in this period, it is appropriate to briefly outline societal perceptions and responses generated by the problems in Britain at the time.

Britain in the 1930s

In the early 1920s, after the short-lived post-Great War boom, reforms and improvements in society took second place to costly measures to curb inflation and service war-debts, and uncertainty through the decade culminated in the Depression (the Slump) in 1929. By late 1932 there were over three

² “The Careful Terrorist”, in *Thanks to the Saint*, 175.

³ “The Uncured Ham”, in *Trust the Saint*, 93.

⁴ *Follow the Saint*, 87.

million unemployed, many on a long-term basis, and many more under-employed. Depression-related problems became increasingly politicized, and not only among the militant unemployed. In circumstances where the gap between the still rich and the desperately poor was vast, the National Government was seen by many as uncaring about ordinary people, and as having nothing to offer but a non-existent “natural recovery”. In some quarters a perception developed that the whole of Western capitalist society was on the edge of a precipice. This was not restricted to leftist intellectuals; the 1930s Tory “radical” who ultimately became a Conservative Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, wrote:

...after 1931, many of us felt that the disease was more deep-rooted [than in the past]. It had become evident that the structure of capitalist society in its old form had broken down, not only in Britain but all over Europe and even in the United States. The whole system had to be reassessed. Perhaps it could not survive at all...⁵

Thousands of people whose lives had been ruined by unemployment believed that the crisis was one “which seemed almost beyond human control and for which no one seemed to have an obvious answer”.⁶ A spirit of helplessness in the face of what seemed an inevitable decline to catastrophe was widespread. No one seemed to be able to fix the situation; politics was increasingly characterised by confrontation, and polarized between left and right.

The social protest literature of the 1930s focused on the suffering of ordinary people. While there was a dearth of what might be termed true revolutionary novels – according to one estimate only six of 1,817 new novels published in Britain in 1937 expressed “unequivocal revolutionary sympathies”⁷ – there were many publications with themes of social concern. Four prominent examples are Lionel Britton’s *Hunger and Love* (1931), Walter Greenwood’s *Love on the Dole* (1933), George Orwell’s *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933) and his *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), the latter becoming one of the best-known books of the period. From 1936 the Left Book Club promoted discussion groups throughout the country and made available to members a wide range of books for

⁵ Quoted in Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann, *Britain in the Nineteen Thirties* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 6.

⁶ John Stevenson and Chris Cook, *Britain in the Depression: Society and Politics 1929-1939* (London and New York: Longman, 2nd ed., 1994), 296.

⁷ David Smith, *Socialist Propaganda in the Twentieth-Century British Novel* (London: Macmillan, 1978), 52.

members by authors such as Orwell, John Strachey, J.B.S. Haldane, Edgar Snow or Arthur Koestler. There was also a range of left-wing magazines, journals and newspapers, and the prominent socialist poets W. H. Auden, Stephen Spender, Cecil Day Lewis and Louis MacNeice wrote about social and political issues.

Many felt that society's problems had come about because useless elected governments had pandered to what was widely seen as incompetent old men of the upper, "natural" governing class. Antipathy towards the class system "found a ready audience...Both the disastrous casualties [in the Great War] and the post-war failures on the economic and social front were widely thought to be the fault of the traditional governing classes".⁸ Many of the educated younger generation, including the young Leslie Charteris, warmed to such views. George Orwell, in his examination of conditions in poverty-stricken areas in the north of England, notes attitudes that peaked in the early 1930s:

the mood of anti-militarism which followed naturally upon the fighting [ie, in the Great War] was extended into a general revolt against orthodoxy and authority...among the young...the dominance of "old men" was held to be responsible for every evil known to humanity... Pacifism, internationalism, humanitarianism of all kinds, feminism, free love...were getting a better hearing than they would get in normal times...it seemed natural to us to be "agin the government".⁹

A strong anti-war movement developed, with antipathy in particular towards those believed to be warmongering arms merchants and war-profiteering industrialists. A concomitant distaste developed for rich businessmen whose wealth seemed to have been acquired immorally, and for speculators or unscrupulous businessmen who sought massive profits through shady dealings. One account, first published in 1940, decries the "nouveaux riches of the 1920s, identified by vulgar display".¹⁰ These individuals were seen as part of or associated with the "traditional governing class"; they were believed to be able, because of their wealth and influence, to in effect buy their way into such circles, sometimes even acquiring titles.

⁸ Arnold Harvey, *A Muse of Fire: Literature, Art and War* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1998), 152.

⁹ George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1959), 140. [1937].

¹⁰ Robert Graves and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend* (London: Four Square Books, 1965), 54. [1940].

The concept of upper or governing class is inevitably imprecise. The *Oxford History of England* asserts that the “political governing class was largely drawn from a few hereditary families. Most of its members were educated at Eton, and some other at Harrow. Nearly all went to Oxford or Cambridge”.¹¹ The British upper class has been defined broadly by Ross McKibbin as:

the members of the extended royal family and senior functionaries of the court, the old aristocracy, the political elites attached to the peerage by birth, marriage, or social affiliation, a good part of the gentry, many of the very wealthy and a few who were none of these but who had achieved rapid social ascent.¹²

Charteris’ 1930 narratives, as shown later in the chapter, contain many direct and indirect references to the political and social circumstances of the period. There are, for example, specific examples of the exploitation of vulnerable people by unscrupulous upper class figures in some of the short stories in the two collections *The Brighter Buccaneer* (1933) and *Boodle* (1934), and in the novella “The Simon Templar Foundation” (in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal*, 1934). This criticism is also implied in the many narratives Charteris produced during the decade where wealthy, powerful upper class figures, including senior government officials and business magnates, are depicted in the plots as ruthless, criminal villains, or derided by the Saint as self-serving incompetents uncaring of social misery. Such figures are especially, though not exclusively, seen in Saint fiction during the early, harsher period of the Depression. They appear, for example, in “The Simon Templar Foundation” mentioned above, “The Higher Finance” and “The Art of Alibi” (both in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal*, 1934), “The High Fence” and “The Case of the Frightened Innkeeper” (novellas in *The Saint Goes On*, 1934), the novella “The Unlicensed Victuallers” (in *The Ace of Knives*, 1937), and in the novel *Prelude for War* (1938), as well as in a number of the 1930s short stories.

At this time the primarily English, rather than Scottish, Irish or Welsh upper class remained aloof and isolated from the remainder of British society, an isolation that began and was accentuated in the public schools so mocked and derided, as explained below, in Saint fiction. Its enormous authority was derived from the social prestige of its members, their wealth and power in finance, commerce and government bureaucracy, and their mutually reinforcing networks and connections. It was

¹¹ A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945* (*Oxford History of England* Vol. XV), (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 171.

¹² Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 2.

also, of course, prominent in elected parliamentary government, primarily in the non-Labour parties. There is little doubt that it enjoyed substantial influence within British society and that an acknowledgement of this was widespread among all sections of the population.

Templar's important and paradoxical reaffirmation of traditional leadership by the upper class, argued in the next section, is predicated on the nature of the political and social response to the Depression in Britain. The period remained characterized by major inequalities of wealth and opportunity, and saw the "creation of a new element in the Labour Party: the left-wing intellectual... The new development was basically a revolt of social conscience by intellectual members of the educated class, ashamed of 'poverty in the midst of plenty'".¹³ Yet it was always unlikely that in Britain there would be an extreme response, as in Germany. There had been no calamitous defeat to generate grievances, nor was the impact of the Depression, while terrible, as devastating as in that country. Despite the publicity they attracted, there was never any mass backing for the extremist British Union of Fascists or the British communists; the latter were, "for the vast majority, a political irrelevance", and "the same was true, broadly, of... the British Union of Fascists".¹⁴ Stevenson and Cook argue that the "fundamental stability" of British society militated against radical solutions,¹⁵ and in his analysis of the reasons why a mass Marxist, proletarian movement did not occur in Britain, McKibbin argues that both the Crown and parliament possessed an ideological hegemony. The acceptability of this to the working class, as McKibbin puts it, "underwrote the existing status-order and preserved the country's institutions and class-system more or less intact".¹⁶

Essentially, the existing political and social systems, bolstered by what McKibbin calls a "libertarian pattern of industrial relations",¹⁷ were tolerable. In his study of the English people, Stephen Haseler goes further, arguing that the role of the Crown, combined with working class deference and an established belief in inequality on the part of the rulers, has historically limited the idea of political authority resting with the people, as it does in the United States: "class hierarchies simply couldn't

¹³ Taylor, *English History*, 347.

¹⁴ Andrew Thorpe, *Britain in the 1930s* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 49-50.

¹⁵ Stevenson and Cook, *Society and Politics*, 294.

¹⁶ Ross McKibbin, *The Ideologies of Class* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 17.

¹⁷ McKibbin, *Ideologies*, 32.

allow the national culture to be anything else than an expression and celebration of the culture of its ruling classes".¹⁸ In the 1930s, despite widespread dissatisfaction with the perceived shortcomings of the authorities and of traditional leadership, it seems clear that strong feeling did not focus on revolutionary change or abolition of the traditional governing class, but rather on issues of justice, fairness and competence in government.

Despite the reality of suffering and widespread perceptions of decline, it would be incorrect to see the 1930s, especially as the decade progressed, as nothing but misery, decay and desperation. But the country was also assailed by other concerns not directly related to its many economic and social problems. The abdication of the popular Edward VIII in 1936 was a real crisis, undermining traditional support for the monarchy as the bulwark of the country and further eroding confidence in government.¹⁹ There was an awareness that the country was not the power it had been prior to the Great War; London was no longer the financial capital of the world, relations with Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union became more difficult, and many parts of the empire were subject to nationalist or even subversive movements in a world where Britain's island status no longer protected the nation from new horrors such as air bombing.

Some thought Britain should rearm, many supported the strong anti-war movement; some conservatives were equivocal about Hitler, seeing him as a bulwark against the Soviet Union and communism, and the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) presaged a new, horrific future. All these factors intensified perceptions of decline and foreboding, often reflected in Charteris' fiction of the period. Such perceptions are inherent in the Saint's many scornful comments about bumbling, incompetent, self-serving politicians and bureaucrats, and are even more directly seen, as shown later in the chapter, in Charteris' increasing cynicism about society as well as in comments, usually asides by the narrator or Templar, about the inconvenience and unfairness endured by a long-suffering population through inadequate institutions, inefficient administration or decrepit infrastructure. This is especially sharp in *Prelude for War* (1938), published late in the decade when the shadow of war and Britain's lack of preparedness were becoming increasingly evident.

¹⁸ Stephen Haseler, *The English Tribe* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 69.

¹⁹ Valerie Hope McKito, "London in the 1930s: Changing Notions of Identity" (M.A. thesis, Texas Tech University, 2002), 88-89.

The “First” Saint: Class Declaimer and Class Reformer

With governments widely seen as “uniformly dim of intellect, unsure of purpose and inept in action”,²⁰ and with the erosion of confidence in traditional upper class leadership in an increasingly threatening world, the Saint character presented as an ideological palliative for the frustration and helplessness of the ordinary person. A fictional hero like Simon Templar, a valiant warrior who fights and destroys the enemies of society, helps the poor through his donations to charity and protects ordinary people from abuse, provides a clear and comforting reaffirmation in an imaginary, simple black-and-white world of straight-forward values that transcends complexities and uncertainties. The Saint is a leader who does the right thing by the community; he is good, his enemies are bad, society is redeemed and people are helped by his actions. With his outspoken criticism of incompetent authorities, foolish and bumbling upper class figures and their frequent depiction in the novels as criminals whom he brings to justice, Templar was especially popular in 1930s Britain as a fictional hero because he both confirmed negative perceptions of the nation’s leadership and cleansed society by cutting through – irrespective of the law – what were seen as failed processes, legal bottlenecks and irrelevant conventions. He was able to do “what needed to be done”, an ability underscored by his direct action, mocking impudence and bright, clever badinage that conveys an impression of supreme control.

While he does target crime rather than, for example, the alleviation of poverty, direct action by the Saint to remove a societal problem underscores the perception that the doddering, uncaring old men have failed; a vigorous, youthful response to the nation’s problems, like that of the Saint, is effective and makes him heroic. It is notable that in three 1930s novels Templar’s vigilante activities go beyond bringing criminals to justice and actually address national issues, ultimately preserving the security of the nation and preventing an outbreak of war. Justice and positive national outcomes through such vigilante action provided a strongly satisfying contrast with the real-life incompetence of a discredited older generation and a leadership that had neither prevented war nor maintained a stable and prosperous society. Independent action also appealed to contemporaneous middle-class values of achievement and self-reliance; Templar’s not infrequent comments about police time being wasted on enforcement of petty laws undoubtedly struck a chord with readers in this environment.

²⁰ Watson, *Snobbery*, 70.

And the way the Saint's companions in the early novels accept his orders has a crisp, military tone that conveys an aura of no-nonsense efficiency to a generation all too familiar with military service.

The Saint's commitment to justice and fairness, at a time when this was perceived to be lacking, helps override any reader concerns about him using violence and breaking the law, a process strengthened by the especially abhorrent nature of some of the criminals that he pursues and the type of crimes they commit. A number of those he targets are involved in deliberate warmongering, others in illicit drug dealing and the kidnapping of English girls for prostitution in distant countries – the latter sometimes referred to as white slavery. Drugs and white slavery had a horrible fascination for the reading public at the time, being linked with ideas of monstrous, violent addiction and horrible depravity.²¹ Those behind such crimes were often thought to be of Eastern origin, imagined as alien others; examples of this type of villain in the Saint novels are discussed in the next chapter. When the Saint brings to justice those who have committed what were seen as the most odious of crimes, his illegality and violent methods are easily condoned.

The Saint and the narrator highlight stupidity and humbug in upper class figures. Ruthless mockery is probably most evident in and *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal* and *The Saint Goes On* (both 1934), but the theme permeates most of Charteris' 1930s fiction. Public school sporting values are also deprecated.²² Politicians, especially if Conservative, high government officials and senior bureaucrats, all obviously or implicitly upper class, are mercilessly derided. Below are some examples, chosen from the many that fill the narratives.

In *She Was a Lady* (1931), the Saint occupies his time by composing a song about the shortcomings of the latest Honours List, and later in the same story writes a poem satirizing the falseness of royal accolades.²³ In "The Gold Standard", a novella in *Once More the Saint* (1933), the Saint refers to the country being governed by "the largest collection of soft-bellied half-wits and doddering

²¹ Watson, *Snobbery*, 125.

²² In a 1934 Charteris short story the Saint cuttingly mocks the concept of the "sportsman". See "The Noble Sportsman", in *Boodle*, 162.

²³ *Angels of Doom* (New York, Ace Charter, 1982), 33; 116-118. [*She Was A Lady*, 1931].

grandmothers on earth”.²⁴ In *The Saint Goes On* (1934), in the novella “The High Fence”, the narrator states that:

He [the Assistant Commissioner of Police] was a man who had won his appointment largely on the qualification of a distinguished career of pig-sticking and polo-playing with the Indian Army, and he was inclined to sympathize with the officer whom he regarded as a pukka sahib, like himself.²⁵

The passage savagely and sarcastically satirizes the competence of the senior police official, appointed by virtue of his ability at shallow British India military pastimes and by his designation as a “pukka sahib”, a term borrowed from British India and used as an English upper class compliment for a gentleman whose behaviour epitomized “correct” attitudes and values – irrelevant to competence in the job. The upper class officer with whom the Assistant Commissioner sympathizes is later shown to be a totally corrupt and ruthless criminal.

In a 1933 short story, a senior government minister, a knight of the realm, is a “blathering oaf” who has sunk to “the depths of imbecility”, a “pinhead who exercised his jaw in the Houses of Parliament at the long-suffering tax-payer’s expense”.²⁶ In a novella published the next year, the Saint describes another villain, the aristocratic (and criminal) senior civil servant Sir Hugo Renway, as “an over-fed, mincing, nerve-ridden, gas-choked, splay-footed, priggish, yellow-bellied, pompous great official sausage”.²⁷

In *Prelude for War* (1938), the Saint describes to his partner Patricia a wealthy, privileged house-party group who have just escaped from a fire that destroyed the house. The tone is acrimonious, almost angry, as the Saint ruthlessly categorizes and caricatures the members of the group as useless, air-headed, pompous time-wasters typical of the conservative and military upper class:

Lady Sangore, the typical army officer’s wife, with her husband the typical army officer. Lady Valerie Woodchester, the bright young Society floozie, of the fearfully county huntin’-shootin’-an’-fishin’

²⁴ “The Gold Standard”, in *The Saint and Mr Teal*, 30.

²⁵ “The High Fence”, in *The Saint Goes On*, 22.

²⁶ “The Appalling Politician”, in *The Brighter Buccaneer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), 127; 129; 311; 268. [1933].

²⁷ “The Art of Alibi”, in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal*, 311.

Woodchesters. Captain Whoosis of the Buffoon Guards, her dashing male equivalent...Comrade Fairweather, the nebulous sort of modern country squire, probably Something in the City in his spare time, and one of the bedrocks of the Conservative Party. A perfectly representative collection of English ladies and gentlemen of what we humorously call the Upper Classes.²⁸

The cutting and often resentful way the Saint and the narrator ridicule and criticize such people was part of a wider attitude of the time. While he claims it is a sort of reverse snobbery humbug, George Orwell asks

Who is there who has not jeered at the House of Lords, the military caste, the Royal Family, the public schools, the huntin' and shootin' people, the old ladies in Cheltenham boarding-houses, the horrors of "county" society and the social hierarchy generally?...You notice this particularly in novels.²⁹

Good examples of the novels he refers to are the works of Evelyn Waugh, Aldous Huxley and P.G. Wodehouse, which in varying ways savagely satirize the shallowness and unpleasantness of the upper class. Waugh's *Vile Bodies* (1930), for example, portrays the class as ridiculous and some of its members as insane, and in Huxley's famous novel *Point Counter Point* (1928), it is in turn lampooned, made to look false and incompetent and portrayed as cruel and heartless. Even harsher depictions can be found in Huxley's earlier *Crome Yellow* (1921), with implications of paedophilia, as well as a chilling extremist philosophy expounded by the reptilian Mr Scogan.

P. G. Wodehouse, who as noted earlier was admired by Charteris, is probably the best-known and most widely read satirist of the English upper class at the time. He was very prolific and his fiction enormously popular, especially stories of the rich young Bertie Wooster who continually gets himself into scrapes from which he is rescued by the butler Jeeves. While Bertie is a likeable character, he comically epitomizes the popular idea of a not-too-intelligent, vain, irresponsible chap who lives from inherited wealth. His speech is filled with asinine expressions like "what-ho!", "right-o!", "all that rot", "pip-pip" and the like; he is weak-minded, being regularly put upon by his friends and relatives. The popularity of the Jeeves stories reflected widespread perceptions of an idle rich layer of society – fatuous, ignorant and unintelligent.

²⁸ *Prelude for War*, 37.

²⁹ Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, 158.

Silly, blustering incompetence, a wish for imagined pre-Great War truisms and unthinking right-wing patriotism were summed up very effectively by the famous fictional upper class media character Colonel Blimp. Invented by the anti-Establishment media cartoonist Sir David Low, Blimp first appeared in April 1934. He is symbolic of many of the types ridiculed in the Saint novels. “I decided to invent a ‘character’ ... typifying the current disposition to mixed-up thinking, to having it both ways, to dogmatic doubleness, to paradox and plain self-contradiction”.³⁰ For Low, Blimp represented a pompous arrogance that “could regard human beings as property and quite naturally identified the public interest with the sanctity of their purely private interests – those disagreeing being, *prima facie*, treasonable dogs”.³¹

Blimp’s pompous stupidity is very different from the amiable silliness of Wodehouse’s Bertie Wooster. And in Charteris’ fiction, negative depictions of the upper class go well beyond portrayals of irrelevance and ineptitude. The examples quoted above from his work are of corrupt and criminal figures. While he targets criminals of all types, for the Saint the whole upper level of society, including aristocrats, public school men, senior government bureaucrats and powerful and ruthless corporate businessmen, is riddled with incompetence and corruption that runs the gamut from useless ineptitude to criminality and utter evil. Many of its members, underneath their outwardly respectable veneer, are clever, malevolent and vicious criminals, sometimes with fascist leanings. Good examples are the villains in the three novellas that make up *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal* (1934): the bureaucrat Lord Iveldown, the financier Ivar Nordsten and the Treasury official Sir Hugo Renway. Others are not English, but still represent the upper level of wider European society. One is the industrialist and financier Kane Luker in *Prelude for War* (1938), a man of uncertain origin who ruthlessly dominates and despises the weak, morally corrupt and treacherous English aristocratic persons in whose circle he moves and who support him in his criminal and fascist activities. Another is Kurt Vogel, the suave, sophisticated, enormously wealthy corporate treasure hunter in *Saint Overboard* (1936). As discussed in Chapter VI, their foreignness allows figures like Luker and Vogel to be “othered” as alien threats. Such villains were a sign of the times – a number of other popular thrillers in the 1930s include similarly ruthless, manipulative international capitalists as evildoers. Sir Magnus in Graham Greene’s *A Gun For Sale* (1936) and the industrialist Krogh in his

³⁰ Quoted in Peter Mellini, “Colonel Blimp’s England”, *History Today*, 34, 10 (October 1984): 31.

³¹ Mellini, “Blimp’s England”, 35.

England Made Me (1935) are malevolent figures, and the menacing Simon Groom in Eric Ambler's *The Dark Frontier* (1936) represents an arms industry seeking profit before everything. Some novels, like *The Dark Frontier* and Ambler's *Cause for Alarm* (1938), accentuate the evil of capitalist magnates by including agreeable socialist characters. Andy Croft has usefully documented the anti-fascist element in thrillers of the 1930s.³²

There is, however, an anomaly in Charteris' deprecation of the upper class. For a range of reasons discussed earlier, the 1930s Simon Templar is undeniably – by virtue of his appearance, speech and manner, independent wealth and general circumstances – part of that class. He is unique and isolated within the class, but he is still *of* it. Indeed, it is hard to see how the background of the Saint could have been other than in the public schools he so derides. It was explained earlier that his actual contact with members of the working class includes an amusingly condescending, upper class paternalism, seen in his attitude to his follower Hoppy and Chief Inspector Teal, but also to others such as petty criminals or service providers like taxi drivers; in contrast to the clever, refined, sophisticated Saint they are portrayed as thuggish, comical, stupid or cunning. McKibbin has noted the importance of stereotyped attitudes towards the working class on the part of other sections of British society in the interwar period – in particular hostility and contempt, sometimes to the point of parody, such as the notion that the working class stored coal in their bathtubs. The working class of the slightly earlier Edwardian period were thought to be unable to remember effectively, to have a defective sense of time and to have an urge for sensation, including in physical taste.³³ The only exceptions to the Saint's condescension are Sam Outrell, the concierge at his city flat, and, for the most part, his tough, gruff, ex-marine manservant Orace. These fit the long-established ideological perception of honest, unconditionally loyal retainers.

The seeming paradox between the Saint's strongly asserted class standing and the negative way the upper class is portrayed in Charteris' fiction is resolved in that the Saint, through his beneficial actions, re-establishes for readers the traditional moral responsibility of that class at a time when, in the real world, it was perceived to have weakened in this role and to warrant mockery and depiction

³² Andy Croft, "Worlds Without End Foisted Upon the Future – Some Antecedents of Nineteen Eighty-Four", in *Inside the Myth: Orwell: Views From the Left*, ed. Christopher Norris (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1984), 200-208.

³³ McKibbin, *Ideologies*, 271; 175-177.

as corrupt or criminal. It was noted earlier that in 1930s Britain, despite widespread dissatisfaction, there remained support for the existing order and little impetus for revolution. This facilitated the key ideological message in Charteris' 1930s work, also manifested, as argued below, in his 1940s fiction – that the Saint's restoration of justice and fairness revalidates and preserves the existing system, reaffirming the traditional "proper" role of the upper class in leading the nation and defending the well-being of society. Thus Charteris' outwardly radical hero is, ultimately, not all that different from a wealthy, aristocratic sleuth like Dorothy Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey. Sayers, argues Susan Rowland, along with four other "conservative queens of crime" (Agatha Christie, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh and P.D. James), evinces "a desire to relegitimise class by prescribing a moral dimension and a duty of consideration to aspirants from below".³⁴ An unspoken acknowledgement of the established order can occasionally "leak through" in *Templar*. In one novel he is uncharacteristically hesitant in the face of an incompetent and morally corrupt court coroner, and in an earlier short story both he and Chief Inspector Teal find it hard to admit the possibility of treason by a minister of the government.³⁵

It will be recalled that the Western warrior hero is usually found among the upper echelon of society. The Saint is handsome and powerful, knowledgeable and sophisticated, wealthy and patriotic, assertive, eloquent and brave; his position in life is naturally one of wealth and power. He always has unlimited time and resources available for anything he needs to do: whether to maintain a private aeroplane and powerful, expensive car, to travel abroad, to own several houses and flats, to dine at the most exclusive restaurants, make large amounts of money on the share market and to enjoy all the other appurtenances of independent wealth. He enjoys and understands expensive contemporaneous technology, whether the latest coffee machine, electric razor or burglar alarm. His partner Patricia Holm and his companions are always available at his call regardless of time or expense. The epitome of urbanity and refinement, he can move easily in the highest social circles. These qualities, and his large, private mansion hidden away near Weybridge in one of the most exclusive parts of England, with its idyllic setting, spacious luxury, fortress-like nature and secret spaces imparts a feeling of strength, wealth and cleverness, of preparedness and capability that can be relied on. Such emotions are validated for the reader by the way Charteris located his plots in genuine, familiar locations, with

³⁴ Rowland, *From Agatha Christie*, 40.

³⁵ See *Prelude for War*, 81-83, and "The Appalling Politician", in *The Brighter Buccaneer*, 138.

carefully enunciated detail of streets, landmarks and geographical features, and are accentuated by the feeling of intimacy generated by Charteris' frequent descriptions of Templar's innermost thoughts. In stark contrast to the harsh criminality of even his most outwardly respectable opponents, he conveys a satisfying and comforting aura of ruling class protective power, of a beneficent master who can be relied upon to put things right. His wealthy, luxurious lifestyle was not offensive to those who could never hope to attain it because such a lifestyle is appropriate for a ruling class hero. Referring to detective heroes, Dennis Porter has argued that "a commitment to civilized living" suggests "a rootedness within a stable and harmonious social order".³⁶ In a not dissimilar way, the Saint's gentrified lifestyle reinforces and reaffirms the solidarity of the existing system.

When upper class criminals are defeated and humiliated by the Saint, it is because they – like the perceived real-life incompetent and uncaring governing class – have acted dishonourably. They have abnegated their responsibility by not behaving the way men of their station in life are supposed to behave – administering society paternalistically and wisely, or promoting prosperity through legitimate business enterprise, taking responsibility for those below their station. Their downfall at the hands of the upper class Templar revalidates the importance and centrality of that class – represented by the Saint – when it does what it is supposed to do. No matter how repugnantly the Saint's enemies are presented in the narratives or how much he is depicted as loathing them, the ideological message the texts convey is that the cause lies ultimately with them as individuals, not with the social order.

One of the best examples of this process can be seen in "The Simon Templar Foundation", the 1934 novella where the villain is the government bureaucrat mentioned earlier, Lord Iveltdown. Lord Iveltdown is a large, pompous man who always speaks indirectly and in a restrained and genteel manner. He is linked with the catastrophe of the Great War through the nature of his corrupt activities, which involved the acquisition of below standard military equipment in return for secret payments, an especially heinous form of corruption in a society still recovering from the massive casualties of that conflict. His evil is heightened by the contrast between, on the one hand, the responsibilities of his office, his imperious presence and self-important ostensible acceptance of his

³⁶ Porter, *Pursuit*, 182.

duties – he is “one of those permanent Government officials who do actually run the country”³⁷ – and on the other his insidious criminality. The latter is further intensified by his willingness, with his equally corrupt associate who is a well-known Member of Parliament, to commit murder – but in a cowardly way, at a distance, through intermediaries.

The representative of the police in the narrative, Chief Inspector Teal, is not corrupt but is naive and essentially powerless to deal with the aristocratic criminals, ultimately being left ignorant of everything that had happened. His inability to make any progress is a metaphor for authority and government in early 1930s Britain, where not the police but Simon Templar defeats and punishes the evildoers, outsmarting and mocking Teal as he does so. He ameliorates the circumstances of ex-servicemen through his establishment of the “Foundation” of the title, an institution to help ex-servicemen and the families of war dead, funded by the money he has extracted from the criminals. In this way the upper class Saint excises corrupt elements, and re-establishes a legitimate traditional responsibility for those beneath him.

Another example from the prewar period demonstrates the way the Saint deals with international business magnates who are ruthless criminals. The treasure-hunter Kurt Vogel, from the novel *Saint Overboard* (1936) is fabulously wealthy, can do anything he wants and is clearly a force in the highest levels of society; cold and murderous, he will stop at nothing. He is portrayed essentially as a maritime figure, and the plot is entirely centred on maritime activity. This allows implicit reference to Templar’s piratical persona – his 25-ton yacht, for example, is called the *Corsair* – but as a wealthy gentleman he is “taking a millionaire’s holiday at Dinard”³⁸ on the Channel Islands coast of France, with his manservant Orace along to help out. Vogel is a law unto himself until he comes up against the Saint, who brings down the powerful Vogel and his minions where the formal authorities could never do so.

When the Saint defends ordinary persons against exploitation or injustice, even if his opponents are not indisputably criminal, they are obnoxious and morally corrupt. In the 1930s short story collections, he usually hoists confidence men by their own petard and not infrequently also turns the

³⁷ “The Simon Templar Foundation”, in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal*, 36.

³⁸ *Saint Overboard*, 12.

tables on wealthy and exploitative tycoons. Probably the best example is the story flagged in Chapter IV, “The Sleepless Knight”, published in *Boodle* (1934). In this adventure, the fat, super-rich pillar of the community Sir Melvin Flager, who has ruthlessly exploited the drivers he employs in his road transport company, is kidnapped by the Saint and set up in a truck simulator where, in an experience which his name parodies, he is forced to drive continuously with a whiplash descending on his back every time he makes a driving error. Needless to say, after this he reforms and grants his drivers major concessions. In the collection *The Brighter Buccaneer* (1933), another story tells of the come-uppance of the extremely unpleasant – he is described as “poisonous”, “septic”, an “excrescence” – Major Bellingford Smart, a wealthy ex-military gentleman who owns a number of apartment buildings and exploits the little old ladies who are his tenants. The Saint frames him for armed robbery.³⁹

This approach of defending ordinary, often working class people against confidence men and wealthy exploiters is an important dimension of Templar’s vigilante activities. Much of it fits comfortably with perceptions of exploitation at the time, and reemphasizes the idea of the betrayal of common people by the wealthy and privileged. But again, the avenger who brings the criminals down is the upper class Saint, himself wealthy, privileged and paternalistically condescending in his direct contact with the working class. It is probably not going too far to suggest that Templar’s actions amount to a type of *noblesse oblige*, the idea that those in aristocratic and privileged circumstances should demonstrate an honourable responsibility to others over whom they are placed. Like the medieval knight-errant who looked to the welfare of the weak, the Saint takes responsibility for the modern underprivileged. In addition to his special abilities, he has the power that his wealth and class status provide, facilitating his ability to confront evildoers of high social standing and render them accountable.

Addressing Decline

References in the 1930s Saint fiction to national decline, usually associated with upper class bureaucratic or political incompetence, underscore the need for a reformer like Simon Templar. There are many short, sarcastic comments by both the Saint and the narrator throughout Charteris’

³⁹ “The Unpopular Landlord”, in *The Brighter Buccaneer*, 153; 154.

prewar work about the poor state of the country; in 1938, for example, the narrator of *Prelude for War* bemoans, over almost a whole page, the discomfort, age and general foulness of Paddington Railway Station, one of the biggest in London, and Templar also laments “the antediluvian cart-tracks that pass for roads in this country”.⁴⁰ In the same novel, Templar often complains about waste and inefficiency, ranging from issues such as police resources misspent on trivial issues like pubs that sell alcohol outside opening hours to more serious problems. In a 1933 novella, for example, the Saint is caught in a traffic jam on a hot day as a result of road works. The narrator complains about the incompetent and greedy Whitehall traffic commissioners, paid by the ignorant taxpayer who suffers as a result:

The slobbering Sultans of Whitehall thought about the colossal tax on petrol, and rubbed their greasy hands gleefully at the idea of the tens of thousands of gallons that were being spewed out into space for the pleasure of keeping engines running between two-yards snail’s-rushes; while the perspiring public stifled in the fetid atmosphere, and wondered dumbly what it was all about – being constitutionally incapable of asking why their money should be paid into the bank balances of Traffic Commissioners nominally employed to see that such conditions should not exist.⁴¹

An especially powerful, heartfelt and telling paragraph appears in “The Green Goods Man”, a short story in *The Brighter Buccaneer* (1933). It relates to a disguise the Saint has adopted in order to bring down a confidence man. The Saint appears as

an under-nourished, under-exercised, middle-aged man without hopes or ambitions, permanently worried, crushed out of pleasure by the wanton taxation which goes to see that the paladins of Whitehall are never deprived of an afternoon’s golf, utterly resigned to the purposelessness of his existence, scraping and pinching through fifty weeks in the year in order to let himself be stodgily swindled at the seaside for a fortnight in August, solemnly discussing the antics of politicians as if they really mattered and honestly believing that their cow-like utterances might do something to alleviate his burdens, holding a crumbling country together with his own dour stoicism and the stoicism of millions of his own kind...⁴²

⁴⁰ *Prelude for War*, 134; 101.

⁴¹ “The Man from St Louis”, in *The Saint and Mr Teal*, 99-100.

⁴² “The Green Goods Man”, in *The Brighter Buccaneer*, 203.

Both these passages would have been meaningful for many in troubled 1930s Britain. Both depart from the light-hearted mockery that characterizes so much of Charteris' writing at the time, but demonstrate his ability to powerfully contrast the miserable circumstances of the ordinary person with the perceived idle, luxurious existence of those who rule. The latter are demonized as greedy overlords with greasy hands and large bank balances, or uncaring dilettantes whose silly actions and comments are meaningless and unable to rectify a bad situation. In the first extract, the image of pollutant fumes, sweat, fetid air and wasted resources accentuates the damaging impact of their irrelevance in an atmosphere of nausea, foulness and disgust. In the second, their selfish perfidy is contrasted with the honest, trusting, downtrodden individuals who bear the real burden of a nation in decline. In both, the inability of the authorities to manage the country's wealth, agonizingly extracted in taxes from those who cannot afford it, is a particular betrayal, as is the powerlessness and pathetic ignorance of the ordinary people who are condescendingly assessed as "constitutionally incapable", and "solemnly discuss" politicians' irrelevant antics. The passages justify and legitimize the need for action by a superior but caring champion – action to alleviate the horrific circumstances of the people, action such as that taken by the Saint in the absence of action by those who should be taking it: the rulers, the politicians. Again, there is no challenge to the existing social and political system. Apathy, fatalism, despair and depression, rather than revolutionary sentiment, were the common response to mass unemployment during the Depression.⁴³ The idea of "dour stoicism", the acceptance of hardship by the British people for the sake of the nation, like acceptance of the existing order, inhibited political extremism. It facilitated and ultimately legitimized support for reform through less radical solutions, like the fictional corrective actions of Simon Templar.

The assertions of national decline found in Charteris' work are often characterized by an astringent cynicism. This cynicism, it was explained in Chapter II, is an increasing feature of Charteris' fiction as the decade of the 1930s progresses, and beyond. In *Prelude for War* (1938) the narrator combines cynicism with elitism to complain about the "apathy of the great dumb populace" that inhibits action against corrupt and crooked businessmen, and earlier in the novel there is a long interpolative paragraph inferring ignorance and shallowness on the part of everyday people, in the form of sarcastic criticism of "a large boiled-pink woman with two bug-eyed children" who dithers and

⁴³ See Stevenson and Cook, *Britain in the Depression*, 294-295.

fumbles in a railway ticket-office queue, annoying and delaying the Saint.⁴⁴ Such comments reinforce the idea that the problems of the nation are best dealt with by superior persons like Templar, strong, capable and benevolent, who can lead and guide those incapable of helping themselves.

The Saint provides satisfaction in other ways. His missions recreate the spirit of an inspired world where energy, inventiveness and decisive action, imagined to have made Britain and its empire great in the Victorian era, can reverse the trend of decline. In prewar Britain the Victorian ideology of empire was still extant: no matter how humble his circumstances or class at home, an Englishman was part of a great nation that was the centre of the world, directly ruled over much of it, and was inherently superior to people of other ethnicities and cultures. In the 1930s the message of English God-given responsibility to bring “civilization” to the far-flung subjects of the empire was still promulgated in schools, the mass media and public life. This was an English ruling class ideology, but one shared by the middle and working classes, acting as what Haseler calls a “trans-class unifier”,⁴⁵ a perception that transcends class divisions and tensions. The Saint is clever and ingenious, both outwitting and outfighting his opponents – for readers the essence of his actions was the same as those believed to have raised England above other nations, aligning him with heroes who had made the nation great. The Saint’s superior qualities, especially where his enemies are foreign, define him as a national champion of a type who in real life could turn back the downward trend, in doing so enhancing his heroism and increasing his popularity.

A 1930s Outlaw Folk Hero

Circumstances like those of Britain in the 1930s are conducive to the creation of outlaw folk heroes. Historically, such figures are seen as defenders of the community in circumstances where the conventional authorities fail to do so or are themselves oppressors. Their exploits are known and appreciated by large numbers of people. Within his fictional world, the Saint is such a figure, and emulates for readers the folk hero as a phenomenon in the real world. Templar’s standing as a folk hero is an important dimension of his 1930s heroism.

⁴⁴ *Prelude for War*, 246; 226-227.

⁴⁵ Haseler, *English Tribe*, 47.

The folk hero is a broad concept that can be defined in a number of different ways. The famous American folklorist Richard Dorson suggested half a century ago that a folk hero comes into existence “when a close-knit group of people spins tales and ballads about a character celebrated in their locality or occupation”.⁴⁶ Graham Seal, in his more recent encyclopedia of folk heroes, simply refers to “heroism as it exists in folklore”, the latter being defined as “the informal expressions and practices of social collectivities that exhibit a strong sense of identity and communality”.⁴⁷ It is probably simplest to see the phenomenon as a popular hero acclaimed in folkloric expressions such as tales, songs, customs and beliefs. A very wide range of ancient and modern figures can be seen as folk heroes, including imagined warriors like Achilles and Siegfried as well as actual historical personages. Folk heroes, Seal has noted, “often transgress the normal margins, borders, boundaries and ‘rules’ of everyday behaviour and expectation in the societies where they are celebrated”.⁴⁸ This quality reflects that of the hero as “different”, or “special”, operating outside the laws, regulations and requirements of normal society. The outlaw as folk hero, operating against injustice or as a substitute for incompetent authorities, is very common, his actions symbolizing extra-legal justice in periods when “social conceptions of justice deviate from the formal bureaucratic justice of the State”.⁴⁹ In his classic study of the outlaw hero as social bandit, Eric Hobsbawm notes that this type of hero is one of the most universal and uniform historical social phenomena, with the role of the noble robber “that of the champion, the righter of wrongs, the bringer of justice and social equity”.⁵⁰ Seal’s 2009 study sums up twelve motifs in the outlaw hero tradition, among which are the hero’s opposition to oppressive or unjust forces, his support by social groups, his righting of wrongs and assistance to the poor, his courteous, kind and moral behaviour, his cleverness, flair and often supernatural abilities, his ultimate betrayal and death, and a subsequent pervasive belief that he lives on in secure obscurity.⁵¹ Richard E. Meyer notes very similar qualities in his classification of twelve elements in the conception of the outlaw as an American folk figure.⁵²

⁴⁶ Richard Dorson, *American Folklore* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1959), 199.

⁴⁷ Graham Seal, *Encyclopedia of Folk Heroes* (Santa Barbara, Calif.; Denver, Colorado; Oxford, England: ABC Clío, 2001), xi.

⁴⁸ Seal, *Encyclopedia*, xix.

⁴⁹ Paul Kooistra, “Criminals as Heroes: Linking Symbol to Structure”, *Symbolic Interaction* 13, 2 (1990): 222.

⁵⁰ Eric Hobsbawm, *Bandits* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 42.

⁵¹ Graham Seal, “The Robin Hood Principle: Folklore, History and the Social Bandit”, *Journal of Folklore Research* 46, 1 (2009): 74-75.

⁵² Richard E. Meyer, “The Outlaw: a Distinctive American Folk Type”, *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, XVII, 2-3 (May-December 1980): 96; 101.

As we have seen with the Robin Hood figure, style and charisma are also important; the outlaw hero carries out his activities with daring and cleverness, and is handsome, witty and jocular, often dressing colourfully. His moral code ultimately ensures his support among the community, seen in particular in the circumscribed nature of his targets and of the violent acts he commits, his distribution of spoils to the poor, his chivalrous behaviour towards women and his concern for the weak. He will never target honest citizens for personal gain like a common criminal, but may rob or even kill those who are seen as exploiting ordinary people. His extra-legal actions also allow his community the satisfaction of vicarious rebellion against perceived incompetence or injustice. His “name” is very great; he is traditionally acclaimed through folklore media such as ballads, tales and songs, in particular after his death, in more modern times through poets, artists, newspapers and filmmakers. He is not, strictly speaking, a criminal; while the criminal, as argued in Chapter IV, can be attractive and ethical, in the folk hero context there is a distinction between the concepts of the “outlaw” and the “criminal”. The criminal is “one whose acts are unmitigatingly reprehensible to all sectors of society”, but the outlaw lives outside the law and defies it, in circumstances that can readily be seen as honourable where the law is misused or is unable to achieve justice.⁵³ The honourable outlaw limits his illegal activities to what is perceived as just and fair.

The Saint, a warrior hero, is also an outlaw folk hero. While he is not a fugitive and lives lawfully within the community, he is informally known and acknowledged as an outlaw, and his attitudes and activities align with many of the characteristics outlined above. There is, certainly, nothing in Charteris’ fiction to suggest that the Saint has personally suffered some injustice or oppression; he is not betrayed, nor does he die and his death generate a legend about his return. And while outlaw heroes are usually rural, Templar is essentially an urban phenomenon. But he pursues and punishes criminals and evildoers, especially those who are rich and powerful; he strives for social justice; he targets totalitarians who seek to control society. Known far and wide, he is seen as just and fair by the general population (even, occasionally, by the police), donates much of what he acquires to charity, and kills only those who have committed monstrous crimes. He is also the epitome of style and flair in his dress, speech, manner and life-style. Acting outside the normal boundaries of society, he continually breaks the law, flouts convention and thumbs his nose at accepted rules.

⁵³ Meyer, “The Outlaw”, 116.

It is a widely held view among historians and anthropologists that outlaw folk heroes ultimately support rather than undermine the ruling elites of the society in which they operate.⁵⁴ Benevolent outlaws tend not to seek the overthrow of established centres of power, and thus indirectly condone the system ultimately responsible for the oppression and exploitation they target. In effect, they are reformers rather than revolutionaries, in the final instance allowing the traditional order to continue.⁵⁵ As discussed earlier, this can be seen in Templar; no revolutionary, his actions in targeting evildoers heal and reform society – they do not change it. The Saint does, however, go further than many outlaw heroes in seeking to capture or punish all types of criminals or evildoers where the police are unable, unwilling or simply unavailable to pursue them. Templar works to cleanse society, or even save it from war, whether his opponents are corrupt corporate magnates, warmongers, gangsters or petty exploiters of ordinary people.

He is also a patriot, even if his patriotism is usually filtered through his conceptual opposition to fascism and Nazism. There is nothing unusual in an outlaw hero being patriotic. In her study of the emergence of King Arthur and Robin Hood as British national heroes, Stephanie Barczewski argues that the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century reconstruction of the Robin Hood legend included many aspects of the traditional British conception of the outlaw hero, including the separation of legal and true justice, the idea that honest men are driven to banditry, and, “above all, the patriotic character of the outlaw’s actions”.⁵⁶ It was noted in Chapter IV that Robin Hood and his men become increasingly patriotic from the early nineteenth century, representing the Anglo-Saxons against the conquering Normans.

An outlaw folk hero cannot rely solely on fighting prowess but must be nimble and elusive, possessing skills of deception, resourcefulness, daring, trickery and disguise to maintain his freedom and ability to act.⁵⁷ And his popularity and standing, which is predicated on the support and admiration of his followers and his community, benefits from outwitting and humiliating corrupt

⁵⁴ See Seal, “Robin Hood Principle”, 67.

⁵⁵ This point is well made by Anton Blok in “The Peasant and the Brigand: Social Banditry Reconsidered”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 14, 4 (September 1972), and in his *Honour and Violence* (Malden, Mass.: Polity Press, 2001), as a qualification to one aspect of Hobsbawm’s original argument.

⁵⁶ Stephanie Barczewski, *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 41.

⁵⁷ See Graham Seal, *The Outlaw Legend* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.

exploiters and unjust authorities in amusing ways. Often the outlaw will defeat them by wily or comical ruses rather than by sheer force, demonstrating to his following that the evil high and mighty are fools who can be overthrown and defied. The clever, playful dimension of the outlaw hero is a reflection of the trickster figure – impudent with a sense of humour, he taunts and derides, an “upstart, rebel, lawbreaker, liar, thief, and malefactor”.⁵⁸ These features, along with the other attributes and characteristics discussed above, fit Simon Templar like a glove.

The “Second” Saint: American Operative

Charteris’ three full-length novels and seven novellas published during the Second World War and in the late 1940s are all set in the United States, where he lived, apart from extensive travel periods, from 1939 until returning to England in the 1960s. This Saint of the 1940s for the most part operates as a US Government counter-espionage or domestic security agent. The thrilling and captivating nature of Charteris’ prewar narratives ensured the ongoing popularity of his hero for years after the issues and ideologies of 1930s Britain had faded, but in the new ideological environment of wartime and postwar America the reconstruction of the Saint reinvigorated the character and generated a new primary layer of his heroism. Still a warrior hero, he now becomes a tough, independently self-reliant and ruggedly individual American – cynical, professional, with a no-nonsense directness of action and energetic know-how, qualities that accorded with American perceptions of what was good in a man. The close relationship between Charteris and his hero discussed in Chapter II is very evident; Charteris now lived within this ideological environment and it can be seen in his own manner, lifestyle and business dealings.

All the prewar Saint narratives, with the notable exception of *The Saint in New York* (1935), are set in the United Kingdom, mainly in London, or in Europe,⁵⁹ but Templar was well-known and popular in America through Charteris’ American editions. 1930s America also, of course, experienced the misery and dislocation of the Depression, compounded by devastating drought (the “Dust Bowl”) in the Great Plains region. These circumstances were ideal for the reinvigoration of the outlaw hero phenomenon discussed above. Many such figures, both real and fictional, appeared in the United

⁵⁸ Orrin Klapp, “The Clever Hero”, *The Journal of American Folklore* 67, 263 (Jan.-Mar. 1954): 21.

⁵⁹ *Thieves’ Picnic* (1937) is set in the Spanish Canary Islands.

States, and it is not surprising that an avenging hero like the Saint who targets wealthy, exploitative businessmen was a popular character there also. Much of the English Saint already conformed to the American values noted in the preceding paragraph, and similarities between the qualities that empire hero and vigilante figures bequeathed to the Saint and those of the iconic American frontier hero meant that a figure like the prewar Templar inherently fulfilled some American expectations of a hero. The later wartime and postwar Americanised Templar could readily be seen as an urban frontier hero, with the wild world of counter-espionage his metaphorical “West”. In the wartime novella “Arizona” (the first novella in *The Saint Goes West*, 1942), the Saint is in effect a cowboy, combating Nazi spies in a region synonymous with the far West.

It should not be forgotten that aspects of the 1930s Saint also fulfilled contemporaneous American expectations of what an *English* hero should be like. There have always been international stereotypes in crime fiction, where readers expect particular nationalities to act in particular ways. Dennis Porter suggested many years ago that readers of detective fiction like Americans “lean and tough”, Frenchmen “skeptical, tolerant and worldly-wise” and English “upper class and urbane”.⁶⁰ It is debatable whether this is the case today, but the examples he offers – Chandler’s Philip Marlowe, Simenon’s Maigret and Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes – span a period that includes the 1930s Simon Templar. While the Saint is a thriller hero rather than a detective, in his upper class urbanity American readers were still offered the reassuring certainty of the stereotype English figure.

The Saint’s goals and missions in the 1940s focus primarily on American national interests – defending the nation and shaping it for future greatness. Some of his enemies are, naturally enough, Nazi spies and saboteurs who have infiltrated America. In *The Saint in Miami* (1940) he is still a fully independent English figure, becoming involved in a hunt for Nazis while searching for a wealthy friend who has vanished after inviting him to the United States. The events of the novel take place before the United States entered the war, and in the last pages arguments for American intervention are put in the mouth one of the primary characters, the shrewd, no-nonsense Sheriff Newt Haskins.⁶¹ In subsequent novels, now an American in speech, attitude and manner, Templar remains in America, continuing his government work even after the war. While technically a

⁶⁰ Porter, *Pursuit*, 217.

⁶¹ *The Saint in Miami*, 296-299.

government employee, he is in practice a free agent, a hero still alone and superior, still with his “unquenchable fighting recklessness”.⁶² In effect he continues to operate according to his own vigilante code, with all the ideological satisfaction for readers that role provides. The illegality and violence he uses to overcome his enemies is now even more justified than in his English period, because he is now, as a government agent, *formally* acting on behalf of society. But still like a knight-errant he travels through the country, risking his life like those in battle, enjoying the thrill of adventure and giving satisfaction to wartime readers, as he deals with odious Nazi spies and saboteurs on his quest.

Charteris’ prewar narratives set in England conveyed to readers a satisfying reaffirmation of the blame ascribed to the traditional ruling class for the many problems of the country in the interwar period, while paradoxically re-establishing that class’s “proper” role when the Saint as a hero of the same social standing restored the situation. While the differences between English and American society meant that a similar perception was not as prominent in the United States, the enemies created by Charteris for Templar’s American adventures, apart from obvious German Nazis like Dr Julius Ludwig, the villain in the novella “Arizona”, often represent what some might call an American ruling class. They are wealthy and influential figures, prominent in political, government or social circles. Most similar to the 1930s corporate villains is the fascist industrialist Hobart Quennel, the Saint’s opponent in *The Saint Steps In* (1943). Quennel’s selfishness, criminality and fascist outlook threatens to undermine American society at a time when many had sacrificed themselves to preserve the nation. The wealthy, well-connected Saint, whom even Quennel in effect acknowledges as an equal, is a weapon that can confront this type of corrupt elite at their own level and on their own terms, without fear of inferiority or intimidation, making them satisfyingly accountable for their misdeeds for readers on both sides of the Atlantic. Once again Templar is a noble vigilante, this time a white knight defeating evil black knights on behalf of the ordinary people bearing the brunt of the war effort. In the same way that his nature and actions confirm the “proper” role of the English traditional ruling class, by defeating Quennel he purifies and revalidates for the reader an imagined benevolent American elite that can meet the aberrant corporate tyrants on their own terms, bring them down and re-establish harmony. The unnamed all-knowing, all-powerful, all-protective government

⁶² “Arizona”, in *The Saint Goes West*, 48.

organization behind the Saint – so powerful it can overrule police forces, ignore legal requirements and provide resources of any kind – reinforces this perception.⁶³

These circumstances maintained the Saint's popularity as a hero, notwithstanding his lifestyle of elegant wealth while millions among his readers and their families were fighting and dying or suffering wartime hardships of various kinds. Of course, this lifestyle continued to offer vicarious pleasure in a period of austerity, especially for 1940s small town America. Readers could enjoy the Saint's experiences in cities like Washington, Chicago and especially New York that had an aura of glamour and excitement, or in attractive destinations like Palm Springs and Hollywood, where in two of the novellas in *The Saint Goes West* (1942) Templar is apparently on holiday. But his enjoyment of the best hotels, gourmet meals and beautiful female company was acceptable to readers enduring the privations of wartime, because it was appropriate for a benevolent member of the wealthy elite who could destroy that elite's corrupt, traitorous elements. Where his opponents are not criminal American leaders and simply Nazi agents, like Julius Ludwig or Siegfried Maris in "The Sizzling Saboteur", the second novella in *The Saint on Guard* (1944), it is notable that the action takes place in more distant locations and the opulence and luxury associated with the Saint is less overt.

A secondary theme in the Saint's wartime period, primarily in *The Saint Steps In* but also in "The Black Market", the first novella in *The Saint on Guard*, is not dissimilar to that of the pompous incompetence and selfish irrelevance in business and the bureaucracy seen in the 1930s narratives. In what was still very much an America of small communities that had sent sons off to the war, Templar's cynical mockery of Washington armchair warriors, and his contrast with them, conveys to readers a reaffirmation of widely-held prejudices and intensifies rapport with himself as a hero.

After the war there were two more major Saint publications before Charteris' postwar short story period. These are the novels *The Saint Sees It Through* (1946) and *Call For The Saint* (1948), the latter incorporating the novellas "The King of the Beggars" and "The Masked Angel". In *The Saint Sees It Through* the Saint is a form of national purification. He is still working for the government, chasing the perpetrators of a drug-smuggling racket who use sailors of the Merchant Navy to ferry the goods. The focus is on the exploitation of the young sailors, and the primary evildoer is a corrupt and

⁶³ In one immediately postwar novel, a US Treasury agent whom the Saint has rescued readily defers to its authority. See *The Saint Sees It Through*, 255-256. The organization is clearly intended to be the Office of Strategic Services.

lecherous society psychiatrist, a sophist who pontificates falsely on human nature – a social version of the upper class corporate criminal. But it is the personal habits and attitudes of the other villains that, especially to late 1940s conservative American readership, make them abhorrent. Most prominent are Cookie, a gross, obscene and vicious woman – with a “big, friendly bawdy boys-in-the-lavatory-together smile” – and her companion, a “gaunt, stringy-haired woman with hungry eyes”⁶⁴ who writes vulgar poetry. There are allusions to what would then have been called homosexual decadence, and the women’s male associate, who turns out to be the *eminence grise*, is negatively depicted as homosexual in a way certain to align with the attitudes and prejudices of the 1940s. These characters are contrasted with the honest naivety of the exploited sailors, still implicitly identified as the boys whose sacrifice won the war, with the strong masculinity of the dedicated undercover Treasury agent who is rescued by the Saint, and of course, with the tough, masculine sophistication of Templar himself. In an America entering a period of superpower status the hard, street-wise, all-conquering Saint, a representative of the US government and a benevolent member of the American elite, with a strong-hearted, brave and attractive lady by his side, maintains and ensures the wartime “masculinity” of the nation against the “danger” of effeminacy and gender deviancy in peacetime. This met readers’ expectations in both America and Britain about the sort of heroic Americans who, in contrast to the gross and revolting decadence of the enemies Templar excises, could bring the country to its peak of greatness and power. The wartime external enemy has been dealt with; now the Saint is a hero by cleansing the nation and ensuring its suitability for new responsibilities as leader of the Western world.

In *Call For The Saint* (1948) Templar is once again a totally private vigilante figure. “The Masked Angel” is a boxing mystery set in New York, but in “The King of the Beggars” the villain is once again a wealthy high society figure, a matriarch who criminally oppresses and exploits Chicago’s underprivileged community while outwardly purporting to assist them. The woman’s husband is a genuine philanthropist who turns out to be innocent; the wealthy, sophisticated Saint tears down his criminal spouse who betrays the benevolent elite and its traditional philanthropic responsibility to the poor.

⁶⁴ *The Saint Sees It Through*, 25; 20.

The provenance of the two novellas of *Call for the Saint* is different from that of other Saint narratives; they were originally written by Charteris as scripts for radio production. Apart from a short experiments in Ireland and Britain in 1939/1940, Saint radio programs ran in the United States during 1945, and more substantially from 1947 to 1951. The 1945 episodes were mostly adapted from earlier Charteris stories, the later series comprising new scripts produced mainly by others. The programs contributed to the Saint's popularity as a crime fighter but were, like the early Saint films, a vastly more limited medium for the character than the 1960s television series. Of varying success, they are unlikely to have had a significant impact, as the television series undoubtedly did, on perceptions of the book character. According to Burl Barer, Charteris did not favour radio as a medium for the Saint, feeling that radio could not properly represent his idea of the character: "I knew from my excursion into radio that the Saint as a person was fundamentally and categorically impossible to transport into any such medium".⁶⁵ Barer has discussed the influence of the radio series in the characterization of Patricia Holm, the Saint's female partner, in the second novella of *Call for the Saint*, "The Masked Angel". There is a remarkable difference between the submissive, decorative, not over-bright Patricia of that novella and the feisty, capable and adventurous outlaw Patricia who partners Templar in adventures such as *Getaway* (1932) and other 1930s narratives. Describing the 1948 Patricia as "a ditz typical of American radio", Barer is probably correct in ascribing this change to "the representation of female 'assistants' and 'girlfriends' common to that era [1940s America]".⁶⁶ But he is on less firm ground claiming that both novellas in *Call for the Saint* are "unmistakable 'radio Saint' portrayals [that] place them outside the center of the Saint saga".⁶⁷ Certainly, some aspects of the Saint, such as his banter with Hoppy Uniartz, his gunman follower, in "The Masked Angel" have an artificial, almost belittling flavour absent from earlier narratives, and probably reflect the radio production; but the Saint of "The King of the Beggars", the first novella, is essentially the Templar hero of old.

It is instructive to compare the Saint with Chandler's enormously popular Philip Marlowe, who operated primarily in the 1940s period, though unlike Templar he was not involved in the war effort. While the alienated Marlowe is more complex and flawed than Templar, he may be seen as a modern

⁶⁵ Quoted in Barer, *A Complete History*, 82. No source is provided for the quotation.

⁶⁶ Barer, *A Complete History*, 81.

⁶⁷ Barer, *A Complete History*, 82.

frontier hero who, like the Saint, fights for justice in his urban “West”. He is also a modern knight-errant. Like Templar, Marlowe confronts corruption and criminality among a decadent elite in government and business. He is quite prepared to act illegally, in effect as a vigilante, to achieve his goals. Again like Templar, he can operate efficiently in the outside, in the world of crime, and he is self-reliant, street-wise and independent with a personal code of honour and integrity. Both characters have little respect for wealth, power or traditional institutions. Like the eloquent ancient or medieval warrior hero, both demonstrate power through words: Marlowe the wisecrack, Templar the jocular witticism, which helps them to establish dominance and control and also functions as a protective barrier in verbal interactions. Especially in Charteris’ 1940s fiction, but also notably in the 1935 *The Saint in New York* and even in many of his London-based 1930s narratives, the Saint frequently courts danger in a dark, dangerous, city environment similar to that of the hard-boiled private eye Marlowe.

There are also, however, substantial distinctions between the two. Marlowe is usually seen as a “common” man, a man of the people, whereas the Saint is not. Marlowe is betrayed by seductive, manipulative women – his fight against crime often involves female criminals and can be seen as a way of bolstering a threatened masculine dominance, an aspect of him paralleled less subtly in the famous tough 1950s private eye Mike Hammer created by Mickey Spillane. Some of Spillane’s novels include clever, devious women villains (in one case a female impersonator), and Hammer is more physically brutal to women. While Charteris’ stereotyped portrayal of women boosts the Saint’s status and power, Templar’s dominant, patriarchal maleness is never threatened, never questioned; he has relatively few female opponents, and defeats them without difficulty. The women with whom he closely interacts are eager and willing to help, sometimes falling in love with him. Nor is the Saint fundamentally divided between his inner reverie and his tough outward approach to others, as Stephen Knight has pointed out is the case with Marlowe.⁶⁸ Marlowe struggles to deal with problems ingrained in his society that ultimately cannot be resolved, and he cannot keep himself free from their corrupting influence; he endlessly seeks something decent, something just and fair in the sea of depravity he is unable to escape. Templar, on the other hand, happily roots out each aberrant

⁶⁸ Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 142-143. See also his “‘A Hard Cheerfulness’: An Introduction to Raymond Chandler”, in *American Crime Fiction: Studies in the Genre*, ed. Brian Docherty (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 81.

corruption and continuously redeems and restores society to its proper state. The Saint is joyous and supreme, not world-weary like Marlowe. He remains above Marlowe's "mean streets", not in them.

Marlowe's world has been described by Carl Malmgren as one of "decentredness". This world, suggests Malmgren, has no "solid ground"... "no absolute center, no repository of justice, wisdom, stability, or order. The settings are fluid, and the chain of events is the product of hazard and circumstance".⁶⁹ Both the world and the characters within it conceal a sometimes grubby reality beneath a superficial glamour or skin-deep façade. Nothing is certain, nothing can be relied on. Malmgren argues that Marlowe's knightliness is largely predicated on decentredness, in that in this confused environment he is the one entity that is "essential, secure, stable", the one decent, just and positive force in a "foundering world".⁷⁰ The Saint's similarities with Marlowe at first suggest that Templar operates in a similar world. The Saint rejects order and convention, and many of his opponents, outwardly pillars of the community and symbols of its strength, are in reality morally and criminally corrupt. Templar counters them by running great risks, with events sometimes dependent on chance and circumstance.

But there is a major difference. Templar's 1940s America, and his England of the 1930s, are predicated on an underlying immutable stability more similar to the "centredness" that Malmgren identifies in what he calls "mystery fiction", the clue-puzzle mysteries best known through the novels of Agatha Christie. Centredness predicates an essentially unchanging, almost inert world where rationality and logic reign supreme, society and human nature are immutable, motivation is transparent and self-evident and disruption and its perpetrators can always be dealt with: the world of the English country house as imagined in Christie's work. Templar operates within a world not dissimilar from a country house; his society is ultimately orderly, the evildoers are aberrant entities whose identity, motivation and ultimate overthrow can, like Christie's murderers, notwithstanding some fortuitous coincidences, be determined by the hero largely through rational procedures. The law, though so frequently broken by the Saint, is a permanent bastion of stability and security that ensures his freedom to operate – he is unable to be arrested without clear evidence, and has many other legal safeguards which he readily utilizes. While he personally punishes many evildoers, he not

⁶⁹ Malmgren, *Anatomy*, 74.

⁷⁰ Malmgren, *Anatomy*, 104.

infrequently hands them over to the authorities to be dealt with according to law. His police foils are comical figures in their dealings with him, but otherwise are capable and efficient. In many of the Saint's wartime and postwar American adventures, the vast, benevolent government organization behind the Saint asserts an overriding continuity of rational order and control. Malmgren has noted that centredness is not related to size, quoting the example of the centred village of St Mary Mead, the home of Agatha Christie's mystery-solving spinster Miss Marple;⁷¹ in the same way, while infinitely larger, both the imagined America and England of the Saint narratives are, ultimately, an enclosed space not dissimilar to that of the Christie country house. In the final instance Templar is a hero of stability and rationality who counters orderly threats to a timeless, enduring and secure system.

The "Third" Saint: Playboy Knight-Errant

By the 1950s Charteris, wealthy but restless, was travelling the world continuously. After three failed marriages he had married yet again in 1952, and continued to travel, though in a more orderly way, for the next ten years. The Saint travelled with him, adventuring all over the world. The lifestyle and outlook of the older, wealthy Charteris, who had lived life to the full for many years and was no longer the youthful and passionate writer of the early 1930s, is very evident in the Saint of the 1950s. In this period the character was again reconstituted, in the image of his pleasure-seeking, globe-trotting, proud American creator. At a time marked by the early years of the Cold War Templar is also a showcase for the perception that American wealth, sophistication and power could make the world a better place. This Saint exhibits the final layer of heroism associated with the character's reconstruction.

The Saint was now less intensely defined. The Templar of the nine volumes of postwar short stories, commencing with *Saint Errant* in 1948 and ending with *The Saint in the Sun* in 1963, retains his ideals and mission, but is older, less given to violent action and more focused on pleasure and relaxation as he travels the world alone, enjoying life. The joyful sparkle of the 1930s narratives is even more distant than it is from Charteris' 1940s work. Although the Saint does appreciate his celebrity status, he is occasionally reluctant to embark on new adventures, accepting them as his

⁷¹ Malmgren, *Anatomy*, 31, note 1.

“destiny”. He now manifests vast life experience and is no longer surprised by anything; his comments and those of the narrator about life and society, expressing the increasing cynicism mentioned earlier, reflect an older, sardonic Charteris. In one short story, he defends British colonialism with crude racist gusto.⁷² Both the Saint and the narrator in this period also tend to promote, more than previously, a lifestyle of sybaritic luxury; in the late 1940s and early 1950s Charteris regularly contributed to the famous food magazine *Gourmet*, and many postwar Saint stories include information about exotic cuisine. In the final story of *The Saint in the Sun* (1963), the very last one included in this study, the Saint and the suave villain, an internationally acclaimed gourmet, subtly try to outdo each other in smooth-talking knowledge of food and wine.

In 1950s America conditions conducive to the emergence of popular fictional outlaw heroes were not as they were in the Depression era. The absence in the 1950s of both the 1930s environment of helplessness, incapable government and a decaying society, and of the 1940s immediate threat of a world actually at war, meant that in the later postwar period the Saint no longer tackles ruthless corporate businessmen, corrupt elites or wartime enemies. Nor does he combat huge international conspiracies, prevent wars or save nations. His opponents are enormously varied individuals, including out-and-out gangsters, confidence men, murderers and just plain unpleasant people. They are not dissimilar to those in the three collections of Charteris’ prewar short stories, but most of the latter are set in England with the upper class corporate villain appearing more frequently, and both the Saint and the narrator are younger, less worldly and more attuned to thrills and adventure.

For much of the period economic conditions were booming and the country was in prosperity. There was, of course, considerable anxiety about a national challenge from the Soviet Union, and a concomitant concern that American capabilities in many areas were falling behind those of potential enemies. There was also the related McCarthyist perception that the nation was threatened by communist infiltration and the subversion of national institutions. These fears, however, unlike those of the 1930s, tended to generate a patriotic, aggressive intolerance both in government and the population. The best-known fictional vigilante of the period, if he can be called that, is Mickey Spillane’s tough private eye Mike Hammer flagged earlier. Hammer was enormously popular in the 1950s; Lee Horsley notes that Spillane’s six Hammer novels written between 1947 and 1953 sold

⁷² See “The Water Merchant”, in *The Saint to the Rescue* (New York: Macfadden Books, 1968), 91-92. [1959].

fifteen million copies within that period.⁷³ Hammer's name depicts his nature; essentially a working-class street fighter, he aggressively pursues and punishes those he sees as debauched and corrupt, weakening the moral fibre of America, and those considered politically subversive or seditious. But unlike the Saint of the 1930s, he is less a substitute for weak or incapable authority than an extension of government power in its destruction of those who would challenge conservative American values; in many ways he is an agent of the police, and sometimes even refers to himself as a policeman. The legal system and civil rights, the latter ignored by the dominant McCarthyism of the period, are Hammer's true enemy. This is a very different situation from the outlaw vigilante Templar, who fights for justice and fairness against ruthless criminals, warmongers and vicious exploitation. It was noted earlier that Charteris found the right-wing ideologies of 1950s America distasteful. In a few cases, for example in the introductions to the various narratives in *The Second Saint Omnibus* (1951), he makes disparaging remarks about communism and communist threats, but these are mild compared with the heartfelt horror of Nazism and fascist thinking that permeates his early fiction. The Saint is no Cold War combatant, having Cold War adversaries in only three short stories.⁷⁴

During the 1950s many of Templar's traditional activities remain a central feature of his existence as an international celebrity. In every story he rights a wrong, brings a criminal to justice, or assists a damsel in distress. He continues to acquire money as spoils from those who deserve to lose it. He retains his lean, piratical appearance, his supreme physical fitness and fighting ability, and while the vigour of youth is no longer stressed, his devilry, ideals and hunger for the excitement of the "old days" are just beneath the surface. He continues to pursue evildoers whom the law cannot touch, still seeks excitement, though sometimes reluctantly, and occasionally still kills his enemies. This "new" Saint continued to be popular, and sales of Charteris' very successful earlier narratives remained at substantial levels.

By the end of the decade, however, a reduction in the general reprinting frequency of his books suggests sales were declining. Templar's lack of direct inclusion in the dominant anti-communist

⁷³ Lee Horsley, *Twentieth Century Crime Fiction* (Oxford, England and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 90.

⁷⁴ These are "Vancouver: The Sporting Chance", in *The Saint Around the World* (1956); "Lucerne: The Russian Prisoner" in *The Saint in the Sun* (1963); and "Jamaica: The Black Commissar", in *The Saint on the Spanish Main* (1955). In "The Helpful Pirate", a short story in *Trust the Saint* (1962), there is a marginal Cold War dimension, as well as a reference to the Saint doing one more favour for his old "boss" Hamilton.

ideologies of the Cold War period reduced his attraction as a hero, and the circumstances and ideologies of 1930s England that so emphatically defined his earlier heroism had by then faded. Even those of the more recent wartime America were becoming less relevant. Overall reader interest in the character, while still high, had begun to wane. Charteris, by this time in his mid-fifties, was considering retirement – it will be recalled that he ceased to write stories personally after 1963 and moved to collaborative writing around the time that interest in the Saint began to be strongly rejuvenated by the ITV television series.

Reference to the Saint by the narrator as a modern knight-errant is strongest in the 1950s. His international cosmopolitan persona adds to his power; he is wealthy enough, strong enough, tough enough, sophisticated enough and knowledgeable enough to tackle anything. He has seen it all and done it all; he is the force all readers want on their side. And he does what he does emphatically as an American – standing supreme as a hero of America, showcasing to the world what America can do, how joyful it is to be an American, and the righteousness of America in the world. It is argued in the next chapter that ultimately he is a champion of Western civilization, a Western paladin who demonstrates the inferiority of non-Western ideologies like communism; as such, despite Charteris' reluctance, the Saint, indirectly, does participate in the Cold War.

It is highly likely that readers' enjoyment of the Saint was enhanced by the exotic and romantic locations of his adventures – Europe, North America, Latin America and beyond, and once again by vicarious pleasure in his luxurious lifestyle. The travel of the 1950s Saint provides readers with an entry into the then fantastic world of the international jet set, in a similar way to the exploits of Ian Fleming's James Bond, most of whose adventures in book form overlap chronologically with those of the later Saint. The Bond novels are noted for the inclusion of detailed and comprehensive descriptions of, and even instruction in, good living, tourism, and leisure and sporting pursuits. As with some early English thriller narratives, much is made of sport and games, and in a way reminiscent of many empire heroes, Bond sees his secret service missions as a game. In the Saint narratives, sport and sporting-related detail is almost completely absent, though Templar can refer to his activities as a game that he enjoys.⁷⁵ Similarly, Bond's sexual adventures, presented as part of his

⁷⁵ For example the Saint, referring to his wartime responsibilities, reflects that “this game mattered so much more than the old games he had played for fun”. “The Sizzling Saboteur”, in *The Saint on Guard*, 209.

exciting, enviable lifestyle, and his general deprecation of women are not seen in the Saint. It is clear that Templar has affairs with some of the beautiful women that cross his path, but these are always understated. It should not be forgotten that the Saint, unlike Bond, is a gentleman; it was mentioned in Chapter II that, notwithstanding his liberated and unconventional lifestyle, there is an intimation of Galahad-like purity in his commitment to his wartime missions, something also seen in his purification role in *The Saint Sees It Through* (1946), and more generally, in his overall cleansing of society from evildoers.

Bond is a walking advertisement for international pleasure, the latest and best products, and fun in exotic parts of the world, a phenomenon that not only was a response to growing postwar consumerism but also helped mask for readers the marginal relevance of Britain and British secret agents during the Cold War dichotomy of superpowers. It will be recalled that Charteris did not like the James Bond novels; he even referred to Bond as “a tiresome slob” and “a Mike Hammer in an Old Etonian tie”.⁷⁶ But Simon Templar, a master of good living and high-class travel, is not dissimilar in meeting readers’ consumerist and spectator interests; indeed, Templar’s upper class, wealthy standing may well overshadow Bond in this regard as Bond, despite his experiences, is ultimately a type of civil servant. Further, the very American portrayal of the Saint, a representative of what was seen by many at the time as the most politically, militarily and culturally powerful nation on earth, places him, unlike Bond, automatically at the forefront of wealth, glamour and power.

The subjects of Charteris’ short stories are unusual and interesting, his subsidiary characters attractive and colourful, his plots exciting with clever twists and turns – all enhancing readers’ appreciation of the Saint. Even the cynical and sarcastic social comment quite prominent in the stories, while reflecting world-weariness in Charteris and probably alienating some readers, undoubtedly struck a chord with others, especially older conservatives in an era of change. The latter, who had grown up with the Saint and who were by this time ageing themselves, could identify with the emotions of the older Templar, including his occasional reluctance or hesitation. But Templar is still a vigilante and white knight, roaming the world, bringing down criminals, helping and rescuing ordinary people. And further, the Saint of the postwar short stories is a hero because he now represents for readers in

⁷⁶ Charteris, “The James Bond Phenomenon”.

America and other Western countries a supreme exemplar of the pleasure and superiority of American civilization.

This chapter has argued that three further primary layers of the Saint's heroism were generated by political, social and ideological conditions in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. There are two major dimensions of the character's heroism that supplement these layers, primarily in the prewar period. These, his anti-war sentiment and his standing as a defender of Western civilization, are examined in the next, final chapter.

CHAPTER VI

ANTI-WAR CHAMPION AND WESTERN PALADIN

The central argument of the final chapter of this study is that the heroism of the Saint figure was enhanced by two further, supplementary dimensions of the character generated by the political, social and ideological environment of the 1930s and 1940s. The first is the Saint's attitude to war; despite being a warrior hero, in the 1930s he is in the mainstream of that decade's anti-war feeling, but accepts in the 1940s that war is necessary to destroy what are seen as barbaric threats to society. The second is his role as a heroic defender of English and American civilization against various "others", who can both represent the monstrous enemies of the traditional quest hero and be perceived as contemporaneous threats to the values and even survival of the societies in which Charteris conceived and wrote his narratives. Found in his 1930s and 1940s work, and appearing during the early Cold War, these figures range from graphically depicted non-Western villains to menacing European and American enemies.

Anti-War and Anti-Fascist Sentiment

The Saint's views on war are forcefully and overtly stated very early in Charteris' fiction. They include, as was common in the 1930s, strong opposition to international arms merchants who are portrayed as deliberately fomenting conflict for massive financial gain. Such figures constitute memorable villains in Templar's adventures. In later narratives, from the late 1930s through the Second World War, war is linked to the barbarism and totalitarianism of Nazism and fascism and, while retaining his hatred of global conflict, the Saint reluctantly accepts the need to oppose these ideologies by force.

Anti-war sentiment of many different kinds was prominent in the British society of the 1930s. It developed in response to the savagery of the Great War, and was as strongly emotional as it was intellectual. Many different peace organizations, including religious and feminist groups, sprang up; among the more prominent were the League of Nations Union, formed in 1918, and the No More War Movement, set up in 1921, which included both religious and secular approaches to pacifism

under a single umbrella. Much anti-war feeling originated on the political left. The bitterness arising from the economic pressures of the early 1920s noted in Chapter V, as well as enthusiasm on the left generated by the establishment of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the former Imperial Russia and the weakening of working class deference in the wake of the conflict, encouraged broader socialist and leftist perspectives in society. Many argued that capitalism had caused the War and by its very nature would create further conflicts. Sixteen Members of Parliament in the first, short-lived UK Labour Government (January-November 1924) had been pacifists during the Great War, including the leader and Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald.¹

Notwithstanding its emphasis by the left, anti-war feeling surfaced in a wide cross-section of society,² and even those few who advocated rearmament as a form of deterrence had little desire for actual conflict. There was a widespread belief that the country's leaders had deceived the populace about the Great War's nature, origin and purpose. Many people, whether actual members of organizations or not, were committed to never again experiencing the horrors it brought. Numerous pamphlets, statements and demands were published on pacifism, disarmament and the abolition of war – among the best-known public expressions were the Anti-Conscription Manifesto of 1926 and its 1930 counterpart the Manifesto against Conscription and the Military Training of Youth, each signed by prominent British and international figures. At the formal, international level important moves in the pursuit of future peace were made, such as the establishment of the Covenant of the League of Nations (1920), the Locarno Pact signed by several European powers to guarantee peace in Europe (1925), and the Kellogg-Briand Pact (1928), where sixty-five countries agreed to renounce war as a means of conducting foreign policy. Strong publicity given to Mahatma Gandhi's non-violent methods in support of Indian independence, a combination of Western pacifism and the Hindu doctrine of *ahimsa* which culminated in the famous 250-mile Salt March of March-April 1930, underscored anti-war feeling in Britain. In 1930 Albert Einstein made his famous "two percent" speech, in which he noted that if only two percent of the world's male population refused to fight, there would be no more war. As Brock sums it up:

¹ See Peter Brock, *Twentieth Century Pacifism* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970), 109.

² Graves and Hodge, *Long Weekend*, 261.

In the pacifist ranks stood supporters of the class war and apologists for the Soviet Union as well as advocates of League [of Nations] sanctions and spokesmen for an armed international government, alongside believers in the gospel of reconciliation and in the practical power of non-violence.³

The British writer and socialist Douglas Goldring, in his 1932 pamphlet *Pacifists in Peace and War*, echoed the thoughts of many when he asserted “My generation was betrayed, swindled, exploited and decimated by its elders in 1914”.⁴ Youth – in particular educated and articulate young men like Leslie Charteris – was drawn to anti-war sentiment as a reaction to the older generation who were perceived as not only having caused the 1914-18 conflict, but also as having failed to create the conditions to prevent another catastrophe and to build a new, decent society.

Similar attitudes appeared in the United States. Americans became disillusioned with President Wilson’s wartime crusade to make the world safe for democracy, many believing involvement in the Great War had been a terrible disaster. As in Britain, there was a widespread perception that the political leadership had misrepresented the War to the American people. Against a background of increasing isolationism, the American anti-war movement was active in calling for disarmament and legal action to prevent future war. Pacifist organizations gained publicity and support through popular novels such as Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), various memoirs, essays and articles, theatre pageants, declarations and actions such as the 1935 Student Strike for Peace and the veterans’ Washington peace march in April of the same year.⁵ Polls suggested a strong reluctance on the part of the population to countenance national military action.⁶ Government was more responsive to these concerns than in Britain, even if action was primarily aimed at keeping the United States out of foreign wars. An early important step, sponsored by Secretary of State Frank Kellogg and French foreign minister Aristide Briand, was the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 mentioned above. Later, the US Government passed a series of Neutrality Acts, laws that banned arms sales and loans to countries in conflict, and in the mid-1930s the famous Nye Committee investigated whether false information,

³ Brock, *Pacifism*, 128.

⁴ Douglas Goldring, *Pacifists in Peace and War* (London: Wishart, Here and Now Pamphlet No. 1, 1932), 18.

⁵ The impact of literature on anti-war sentiment in the United States in the interwar period is examined comprehensively in Christopher Nank, “World War I Narratives and the American Peace Movement, 1920-1936” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2005).

⁶ Nank, “Narratives”, 6.

ruthless bankers and unscrupulous arms manufacturers had manoeuvred the United States into the Great War, concluding that the US had entered the War for essentially commercial reasons.

The idea of the arms merchant as a type of war criminal is an important dimension of both British and American anti-war sentiment of the 1920s and 1930s. There was a perception that such figures, even more than incompetent older politicians, weak diplomats or aggressive military policies, had been responsible for the catastrophe by deliberately generating conflict in order to create profits from the sale of their products. This pervasive belief is probably most effectively documented in H.C. Engelbrecht and Frank Hanighen's *Merchants of Death* (1934).⁷ A best-seller, the book convincingly argues that major arms suppliers developed monopolistic and extremely lucrative positions within national economies by claiming special, patriotic relationships with the governments of the countries in which they operated. Usually given favourable and preferential treatment, the suppliers were assisted in their activities, it is claimed, by international bankers who influenced events, people and policies to create tensions and war scares to create a demand for armaments. The prominence of socialist thinking and the important position of the left in the anti-war movement gave impetus to wide acceptance of such claims. As Charteris himself put it: "In those days there was a genuine widespread suspicion, which I was inclined to share with a great many of my generation, that modern wars were plotted and planned and deliberately engineered by vast mysterious financial cartels for their own enrichment."⁸

The Saint makes two references to *Merchants of Death*, both in *Prelude for War* (1938). In the first instance, the title provides a context and explanation for the danger posed by the arms dealer Kane Luker:

Kane Luker is probably the only serious rival that our old friend Rayt Marius ever had. And now...Luker stands alone – the king-pin of what somebody once called the Merchants of Death. It's interesting to have met him, because I've often thought that we may have to liquidate him one day.⁹

⁷ H.C. Engelbrecht & Frank Hanighen, *Merchants of Death: A Study of the International Armament Industry* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1934).

⁸ Leslie Charteris, foreword to *The Saint Closes the Case* (New York: Fiction Publishing, 1964). [*The Last Hero*, 1930]. Charteris also states that he held this belief at that time in the foreword to *The Avenging Saint* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964). [*Knight Templar*, 1930].

⁹ *Prelude for War*, 39.

Luker's perfidy in the warmongering process is intensified by his prominence – standing alone, as “king-pin”. The extent of concern about such figures among Charteris' generation is clear from his assumption that his readership would both understand the reference and be supportive of Templar's enmity towards Luker, even to the point of contemplating his assassination.

The second reference is directly to the text itself. The Saint is examining documents that had belonged to a murdered anti-war campaigner, seeking information that will help him fight Luker and his associates, but

...there was nothing in that bulky collection of documents that seemed to be worth much more than the paper it was written on... here were the usual notes on the organization of the arms ring, principally taken from the British end, but none of it was very new. Much of it could have been found in such detailed surveys as *Merchants of Death*.¹⁰

Again, the primary message in the passage is that the odious nature of arms merchants is well-known and familiar to the community. Mere revelations of their activities will serve little to combat them, and Templar must look further to bring about their destruction.

It is contempt for and anger at arms merchants, war profiteers and corrupt officials that forms the focus of the anti-war sentiment bestowed on the early Saint by Charteris. The views expressed by Templar and the consequent actions he takes are presented to readers as something a hero would believe in and do, in order to preserve society. These are mainly in the two 1930 novels *The Last Hero* and *Knight Templar*, the novella “The Simon Templar Foundation” in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal* in 1934, and the 1938 *Prelude for War*. Strong anti-war argument is presented in *The Last Hero*, where the arms merchant Marius, seeking massive profits, wants to initiate world conflict by acquiring a terrible new weapon also sought by the British Government. Although they are loyal to Britain, the Saint and his companions decide that no nation should have the weapon, so it will have to be destroyed and the extreme step taken of assassinating the scientist who invented it.¹¹ The Saint's concern about arms merchants is clear:

¹⁰ *Prelude for War*, 245-246.

¹¹ *The Last Hero*, 50.

All at once, in both England and America, there's some funny business going on in the oil and steel and chemical trades... We don't know exactly what's happening, but we do know that the big men, the secret moguls of Wall Street and the London Stock Exchange, the birds with the fat cigars and the names in *-heim* and *-stein*, who juggle the finances of this cockeyed world, are moving on some definite plan... Iron and oil and chemicals. If you know any other three interests that'd scoop a bigger pool out of a really first-class war, I'd like to hear of them...¹²

This emotional statement by Templar builds on the lasting memory in the Britain of 1930 of the misery of the Great War. It reflects the ideological perception that someone must have been *to blame* for the War; the idea that political, historical and economic tensions and rivalries might have made the conflict and its concomitant suffering all but inevitable was too hard to accept. Many, naturally enough, blamed a militarist, imperialist German Empire, but allocating responsibility to a personalized entity like the immensely rich, ruthless arms merchant provided a satisfyingly direct explanation that helped people to believe that another war could be prevented. The Saint's familiar, colloquial and assertive phraseology is readily comprehensible to the ordinary person, and his hint of mystery and furtive, secretive moves – “funny business”, “secret moguls” – avoids the need to specify any particular persons while reinforcing readers' fears about behind-the-scenes manipulation of governments and societies by devious individuals. “Fat cigars” implies heartless, selfish luxury, and the type of names mentioned reaffirms the then popular belief, noted in Chapter VI as reflected in some fictional villains of the period, that most major international speculators, profiteers and capitalist manipulators were Jewish.¹³

The type of arms merchant envisaged is probably summed up by the popular image of Sir Basil Zaharoff (1849-1936), an enormously rich international arms dealer of Turkish-Greek descent who was acquainted with many European leaders, and who appears to have been both influential in manipulating national policies and developing close political relationships to his commercial advantage. Jack Adrian, in his obituary for Charteris, suggests that Marius, the villain in *The Last*

¹² *The Last Hero*, 47.

¹³ McKibbin, *Classes*, 55-56.

Hero and Knight Templar, is based on Zaharoff.¹⁴ Marius, usually clad in an expensive morning suit that accentuates by contrast the grotesqueness of his appearance, personifies the horror of war.

The Saint's opposition to war does not detract from his ultimate standing as a warrior hero. His position is carefully explained in *The Last Hero*, where Templar and his companions acknowledge that while they personally live for the thrill of battle, this should not be assumed for others:

Fighting is one of [our] ideals...But there aren't many like us. There are too many – far too many – who are utterly different. Men and boys who don't want war. Who don't live for battle, murder and sudden death. Who wouldn't be happy warriors, going shouting and singing and swaggering into battle. Who'd just be herded into it like dumb cattle to the slaughter, drunk with a miserable and futile heroism, to struggle blindly through a few days of squalid agony and die in the dirt.¹⁵

This important extract makes clear that the warrior hero Saint and his companions need the excitement and joy of combat and are quite prepared to die. Fighting is a pleasure, a meritorious action that distinguishes the hero from ordinary mortals – “there aren't many like us” – this ideal being accentuated by the inclusion of the phrase “battle, murder and sudden death”, the term from the Church of England Great Litany used by the Saint as a personal credo. Templar is a heroic man of action, strong and brave, a superior champion. But he is also a hero because he uses his warrior power to protect the ordinary person from war. He and his companions are strongly contrasted with the ordinary man forced to fight, whose wretched lowliness by comparison intensifies the heroic nobility of the Saint; these ordinary folk are so pitiful that they are merely “dumb cattle” who need to be led, who are incapable of anything but “futile heroism”, whose pathetic fate it is to “die in the dirt”. But the upper class warrior Saint manifests his true heroism, as he does with his vigilante activities, by taking responsibility for such people, seeking to save them from death and destruction, reaffirming the traditional role of his class as leaders and protectors of society.

Prelude for War, in which Kane Luker seeks to generate major conflict by conspiring with a French fascist organization called the Sons of France, contains the strongest and most intense anti-war and

¹⁴ Jack Adrian, “Obituary: Leslie Charteris”, *The Independent*, 20 April 1993, accessed 10 May 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-leslie-charteris-1456319.html>.

¹⁵ *The Last Hero*, 46.

anti-fascist sentiment in Charteris' writing. Early in the novel the narrator describes the response of a massed audience whipped up by a stirring fascist speech:

A hoarse frenzied howl, shrill and hideous as the clamour of ten thousand hungry wolves maddened by the smell of blood, an inarticulate animal roar that scarcely seemed as if it could have come from human throats. Wild, savage, throbbing with a horrible blood-lust, it fouled the peaceful night with visions of flame and carnage, of mad mindless mobs, of torture and the crash of guns, of shattered broken buildings and the shattered broken bodies of men and women and children. And then came the music...¹⁶

This passage is so powerful that war, shown as the natural consequence of fascism, descends to inhuman, bestial mania. Heightened by an image of spine-chilling music and relentless throbbing, fascism and war are equated with insanity and horrific visions that recall the horror stories of H. P. Lovecraft.¹⁷ Later in the novel there is a chilling depiction of a British Nazi as a young thug.¹⁸ Prominent among the Saint's opponents are fanatically anti-communist upper class British conservatives, implicitly supportive of Nazism and fascism, and the fascist organization, the Sons of France. The weak and corrupt characters Algernon Fairweather and Brigadier-General Sir Robert Sangore and his wife espouse an ultra-right view of the world. The primary villain Luker – rich, domineering and superior, his harsh name a play on the word "lucre" – has no problem with right-wing politics, but his primary concern is to maximize his profits regardless of the effect of war on society. It is notable that the Saint and his cause are eventually saved by an about-face by Sangore, whose militarized public school values can no longer tolerate Luker's perfidious duplicity. Sangore reveals all to Templar's companions before shooting himself. The way Templar praises him at the end of the novel, notwithstanding the otherwise very negative characterization of all the upper class characters, once again hints at the ultimately positive way that traditional upper class responsibility is treated in Charteris' work.

Readers of Charteris' novels could warm to a champion who, while himself a valiant warrior, also viewed the impact of war on ordinary society with horror, and could bring down corrupt leaders of

¹⁶ *Prelude for War*, 11-12.

¹⁷ Most of Lovecraft's fiction was published in the interwar period. There is no evidence that Charteris read his work, but given his enormous range of reading it is certainly possible.

¹⁸ *Prelude for War*, 287-288.

society who condoned violent conflict and betrayed their responsibilities to others. Aristocratic British fascists are, of course, a historical phenomenon. Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Fascists is well known; examples of other prominent sympathizers were Lord Londonderry, Air Minister 1931-35, Sir Montague Norman of the Bank of England, and Geoffrey Dawson, Editor of *The Times* in the 1930s. All were members of the Anglo-German Fellowship and admirers of Germany as an example of vigorous power and a bastion against communism. Their sympathies were shared by other important conservatives. One source notes in September 1936 that the Conservative Member of Parliament (later Sir) Henry Channon and his wife Lady Honor Channon of the well-known and wealthy Guinness family thought “Ribbentrop a fine man, and that we should let gallant little Germany glut her fill of the reds in the East and keep decadent France quiet while she does so.”¹⁹

The upsurge of anti-war feeling from the late 1920s is very evident in the literature of the period. In Britain, notwithstanding the broad links between such feeling and socialism, the socialist novel, if thus it can be termed, focused prior to the Depression primarily on mainstream issues of the left such as the 1926 General Strike, unemployment and socialism in the Soviet Union.²⁰ From about 1927, however, a sudden upsurge in writing about the Great War, mainly fictional and semi-autobiographical accounts in novel form, both mirrored and enhanced anti-war sentiment, primarily in Britain and Europe but also in North America. This upsurge, known as the “war-book boom”, was given great impetus by the enormous popularity in Europe and the United States of what is probably the most famous exemplar of this literature, first published in 1929: Erich Maria Remarque’s *Im Westen Nichts Neues* (“In the West Nothing to Report”), better known in its English translation *All Quiet on the Western Front*.²¹ Another widely-read book was Ernest Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) mentioned earlier, along with Robert Graves’ *Goodbye to All That* (1929), Siegfried Sassoon’s *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), and many others.²² A common theme is the failure

¹⁹ Harold Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters 1930-39*, ed. Nigel Nicolson (London: Collins, 1966), 273.

²⁰ Gustav H. Klaus, “Silhouettes of Revolution: Some Neglected Novels of the Early 1920s”, in *The Socialist Novel in Britain*, ed. Gustav H. Klaus (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), 90.

²¹ After its first appearance as a serial in a Berlin newspaper in 1928, *Im Westen Nichts Neues* was published in January 1929, with its English translation reportedly reprinted eight times by April 1929. See Harvey, *Muse of Fire*, 139. In 1930 it was made into an enormously popular film, directed by Lewis Milestone and starring Lew Ayres.

²² Further well-known examples are Arnold Zweig’s *Der Streit um den Sergeanten Grischa* (*The Case of Sergeant Grischa*) (1928), Edmund Blunden’s *Undertones of War* (1928), Robert Sherriff’s play *Journey’s End* (1928), Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero* (1929), Charles Yale Harrison’s *Generals Die in Bed* (1930), Frederic Manning’s *Her Privates We* (1930) and elements of John Dos Passos’ *U.S.A.* trilogy (1930-1936).

of ideals in war, and useless sacrifice at the hands of uncaring and incompetent military authorities. These are the sentiments expressed by Simon Templar, who voices the revulsion of his creator's generation at the catastrophic impact of modern conflict.

In his discussion of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, historian Modris Eksteins notes that “veterans and youth appear to have been the most avid readers of war books as a whole”. He argues that the mood of “dissatisfaction, confusion and yearning” exuded by *All Quiet*, and indeed the entire interest in war books at the time, related to the confusion and frustrations of the “distraught” generation of 1929.²³ The anti-war sentiment among young people, including Leslie Charteris who turned 22 on 7 May 1929, focused on the search for a better world and answers to society's problems. In *The Last Hero* (1930), the youthful Saint refers to the war book boom. He despairs that literature about war will fail to deter young men from seeking glory in war:

...even if we are on the crest of a wave of literature about the horrors of war, do you think that cuts any ice? I tell you, I've listened till I'm tired to people of our own age discussing these books and plays – and I know they cut no ice at all. It'd be a miracle if they did. The mind of a healthy young man is too optimistic. It leaps to the faintest hint of glory, and finds it so easy to forget whole seas of ghastliness.²⁴

This view both reflects the feeling of many at the time that the idea of glory in war was a chimera, while also acknowledging its seductive attraction among the young who have not experienced war's terror and destruction. With memories of the trenches still strong, the disparagement of military glory would have struck a chord with many of Charteris' contemporaneous readers. The Saint's angry concern that the “lure of glory” will override proper revulsion at war underscores the superior standing of himself and his companions, justifying their actions as heroic champions defending the nation and saving ordinary young men from their own delusions. This contrasts them with weakness or connivance on the part of discredited authorities, especially where the latter still extolled values like national prestige. Even extreme action, such as the assassination of the scientist who invented the terrible weapon in *The Last Hero*, is justified if society can be preserved.

²³ Modris Eksteins, “All Quiet on the Western Front and the Fate of a War”, *Journal of Contemporary History* 15 (1980): 362.

²⁴ *The Last Hero*, 43.

The war-book boom declined after 1930, though books with similar themes continued to be published, such as the briefly popular *War, Wine and Women* (1931) by the South African author H. P. Lamont (writing as Wilfred Saint-Mandé). Today one of the best known anti-war publications of the period, apart from *All Quiet on the Western Front*, is the haunting autobiography of the pacifist and feminist author Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth* (1933). This work is now familiar to many as a result of its “rediscovery” and republication in the 1970s and 1980s along with her subsequent books, and from the award-winning 1979 BBC television series of the same name. Widely-publicised events such as the famous Oxford Union debate of February 1933 that saw the House overwhelmingly vote that it would not fight for its king and country, benchmarked the progress of the peace movement. Events like these, along with ongoing anti-war literature, kept anti-war sentiment strong through the decade.

The Saint’s anti-war sentiment evolves. His early views, close to complete pacifism or total disarmament, morph into a reluctant acceptance of the need to combat totalitarian ideologies so evil that even war on an international scale had to be endured to destroy them. After the Second World War was under way the Saint accepts what has to be done to counter the threat. Charteris’ first wartime novel is *The Saint in Miami* (1940), which, as noted earlier, openly advocates American participation in the war. In the opening sequence the Saint is very concerned when the Nazis try to blame the sinking of an American ship, which they carried out themselves, on a British submarine – propaganda which of course could have influenced American policy away from support for Britain before the United States entered the conflict. Later, in the 1942 novella “Arizona” in *The Saint Goes West*, with the United States fully in the war, the Saint has commenced his wartime counter-espionage role. Nazi scientists try to obtain war mineral supplies from a mine on a ranch in Arizona, and the Saint’s position is clear as he addresses a female character in the story. The passage underscores the widespread impact of the conflict and the importance of the war effort in even the most remote places, directly associating this with a focus on destruction of the enemy:

Do you happen to remember that there’s a war on? ... Well, this is part of it. Even here. Just a little frontier skirmish that the history books will never write about. But one day thousands of men will be killed and cities will

be blasted with what there is on this ranch. I'm trying to make sure that they're the right men and the right cities.²⁵

The Saint's change of perspective – still finding the actual process of war abhorrent, but supporting national use of armed force because there is no alternative – echoes the dilemmas within British and American society in the later 1930s. The rise of Hitler, and especially the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, saw a growth in anti-fascist feeling.²⁶ Differences intensified in Britain between those who continued to oppose war in all its forms and those who could see little alternative other than to deal with fascist or Nazi extremism either through some sort of League of Nations-sponsored collective security or by intensified national rearmament. Similar dichotomies appeared in America. Albert Einstein probably typified the dilemma best: after the Nazis came to power in Germany, he effectively renounced pacifism as he came to believe that only the armed force of the democracies could maintain peace against such an evil. By the time war broke out, the need to oppose totalitarianism by armed force was overwhelmingly supported. This conclusion is also reached by the fictional Simon Templar; he is now a hero not because he is preventing war, but because, now that war has proved to be unavoidable, he is prepared to use all his warrior skills in support of the ordinary people who have had to be mobilized to oppose a terrible threat to civilization.

The Saint's perception of fascism and Nazism as evil, justifying his change of view, is very evident in *The Saint in Miami* (1940), the novella "Arizona" (1942), *The Saint Steps In* (1943) and two novellas in *The Saint on Guard* (1945). In the first of these, robot-like Nazi seamen conjure up a terrible image:

And the Saint had a frightening prescience of the holocaust that must lay waste the earth before free and sentient men could triumph over those swarming legions from whom everything human had been stolen but their bodies and their ability to carry out commands. They were the new zombies, the living dead who existed only to interpret the ambitions of a neurotic autocrat more sinister than Nero...²⁷

²⁵ "Arizona", in *The Saint Goes West* (1952), 43.

²⁶ This can be seen in Charteris' writing. In the novella "The Spanish War" (in *The Ace of Knives*, 1937), the Saint's opponents, representatives of Franco's "Spanish patriots", are depicted especially unpleasantly.

²⁷ *The Saint in Miami*, 271.

Here the Nazis are portrayed as the living dead, monstrous, swarming entities that make the skin crawl. The text conveys an image of demonic legions led by a malevolent, irrational despot – clearly Hitler. Elizabeth Neail has shown how zombies were othered as exotic non-human threats to the white American population in the 1930s and 1940s, in particular through the popular films *White Zombie* (1932) and *I Walked With A Zombie* (1942).²⁸ The depiction of the wartime enemy as a non-human, diabolical force from the bowels of Hell creates an other that both validates the need for war and accentuates by contrast the heroism of the Saint as a champion of “free and sentient men”. Templar’s personal enjoyment of his warrior activities is now given less prominence in the face of such horrific enemies and the suffering needed to overcome them. Sometimes he must adopt the cruellest of behaviours; in one wartime novella he has the unpleasant task of intimidating and threatening an attractive and innocently naive woman, seduced by an evildoer who has undermined the war effort. He has fleeting doubts, but when he thinks of “the nameless men dying in foxholes or plunging out of the sky in flaming fortresses”, he knows it is “all right”.²⁹

The threat of fascist thinking is seen in an American context in *The Saint Steps In* (1943). Here, as explained in Chapter V, the Saint battles the fascist American industrialist, Hobart Quennel. Quennel is as ruthless in his approach to war profiteering as is Kane Luker, the villain in *Prelude for War*, or the celebrated Rayt Marius. While not actually working for the Nazis, he follows an ideology little different from the fascism of the Sons of France in *Prelude for War*. He is seen by the Saint as “exactly the same type as the Big Business men who backed Hitler to preserve their own kind of Social Stability.”³⁰ Quennel asserts that while all men were created free and equal, they do not all develop equal abilities, so “...there are bound to be great masses of people who need to be restrained and controlled and brought along gradually...we can’t do without a strong and capable executive class who knows how to nurse these masses along and feed them their rights in reasonable doses.”³¹

In doing so he is advocating what is in effect a Hitlerian master race dominating enslaved masses, with himself and others like him in charge. A similar wealthy, charming and ruthless high society

²⁸ Elizabeth Neail, “The Signification of the Zombie,” 10-12, accessed 20 June 2014, <http://www.huichawaii.org/assets/neail,-elizabeth--the-signification-of-the-zombie.pdf>.

²⁹ “The Black Market”, in *The Saint on Guard*, 119.

³⁰ *The Saint Steps In*, 178.

³¹ *The Saint Steps In*, 159.

figure who seeks to exploit the sale of essential war metals for his own benefit through murder appears in the 1944 novella “The Black Market”. Expressing feelings almost identical to his condemnation of warmongering profiteers in the early 1930s, the Saint is outraged because “a lot of poor damn helpless lads (are) having their guts blown out and dying in the muck so that some crook can buy himself a bigger cigar”.³² In bringing such men to justice the Saint once again defends the ordinary person, defeating enemies who are outwardly patriotic, benevolent American aristocrats, but in reality nothing more than fascist criminals. Readers were presented with the Saint as heroic, not only for dealing with direct Nazi threats, but also in confronting those more insidious dangers that draw on Nazi ideology and exploit the war, undermining American democracy and freedom while the country’s bravest are dying to preserve these ideals.

In “The Sizzling Saboteur”, the second novella in *The Saint On Guard*, the Saint destroys the Nazi sabotage organization in the United States. The leader of the organization is disguised as the barman at a club in Galveston, Texas, where local prominent citizens are compromised to ensure the authorities will not inquire too closely into the club. It is “the local focus of infection”, that uses “... the human failings of the American scene to undermine America.”³³ This time the Nazi organisation is like a cancer, fastening onto small flaws in the body of America – the human weaknesses of its citizens – and gradually spreading its evil, ultimately destroying its host. These horrific concepts and the entities that embody them must be destroyed, at any cost – there is no honourable enemy here. The Saint knifes the villain in the throat; this extreme violence and, by extension, the prosecution of the war, is not only justified by his saving society from these monsters, but supremely heroic.

The Saint’s “Othered” Enemies

It was mentioned earlier that some opponents of the Saint are enemies who fit contemporaneous concepts of the other, and that the dreadful nature of these opponents is likely to have helped justify in readers’ minds the illegality of the Saint’s vigilante activities. Such opponents could readily represent for Charteris’ readership a physically, morally and emotionally abhorrent other that is unequivocally foreign and different. Templar’s vanquishing of these enemies, and his contrast with

³² “The Black Market”, in *The Saint on Guard*, 15.

³³ “The Sizzling Saboteur”, in *The Saint on Guard*, 224.

them, underscores his heroic stature. Certain important villains defeated by the Saint, and the extremist fascist and Nazi systems he combats in wartime, are directly associated in the narratives with common perceptions of hostile aliens feared in Western society in the various periods in which he wrote. Early twentieth century fictional villains like Sax Rohmer's Chinese master-mind Fu Manchu generated such perceptions, and enemies of the Saint like those described later in this section are othered in similar ways, sometimes with what amounts to non-human attributes. The nature of this othering allows the Saint to be heroic as a defender of both English and broader Western civilization.

But before examining this phenomenon, it should be noted that these opponents can also represent the literally monstrous myth and folklore adversaries of the traditional quest hero, of whom Simon Templar is an exemplar as discussed in Chapter II. The quest hero's opponents in such earlier textual contexts, while sometimes disguised, are essentially physically grotesque in appearance and nature. This is especially so where the folklore element is strong. Whether it is Odysseus and the Cyclops, St George and the Dragon, Arthur and the giant of St Michael's Mount or of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Beowulf, Grendel and Grendel's mother, Roland and the Saracen giant Fernaguz in the twelfth century "Pseudo-Turpin" text, or any of a host of other hero/monster opponents, the supernatural enemy must be defeated by the hero. Dragons, giants and ogres are very common. In quests set in the modern era the enemy may be more metaphorically monstrous, though this can also occur in ancient quests as well – for example the "monster" Troy in the *Iliad*, or the Suitors as a collective "monster" in the *Odyssey*. Importantly, as discussed below, the monstrous enemy can be presented as a negative mirror image of the hero.

While the Saint does not battle supernatural entities, the way Charteris describes his hero's adversaries often generates an image of horrible grotesqueness. The early enemy Marius is "a giant ... hideously ugly ... neolithic stature ... that hideous, rough-hewn, nightmare expressionlessness, like the stone carved face of a heathen idol".³⁴ Another opponent is a blackmailer known as the Scorpion, who is grossly fat, dispassionate beyond even cold-blooded ruthlessness or granite impassivity, empty of compassion and quite insane.³⁵ In a 1933 novella, the primary villain is Abdul

³⁴ *The Last Hero*, 114.

³⁵ See "The Inland Revenue", in *The Holy Terror* (1932).

Osman, a drug smuggler and white slaver whose face resembles “the fat of a bloated and malignant slug”, whose “glittering eyes [leer] with unutterable things”, whose paunch has a “horrible softness” and who screams profanities in “unleashed savagery”.³⁶ Even in later narratives, when Charteris’ writing had evolved and his villains are described less dramatically, similar portrayals can be seen. The Nazi agent Dr Julius Ludwig of the wartime novella “Arizona” has been sent to America to secretly acquire vital minerals. With small red lips and a pink, sweating bald head, he uses sugary speech and smirks and sniggers as he tortures captives and plots to kidnap innocents and send them to concentration camps.³⁷ Even where the Saint’s enemies are not physically monstrous, Charteris effectively accentuates their moral monstrousness by contrasting their usually outwardly aristocratic and refined demeanour with the reality of their extreme beliefs or hideous crimes. Examples already discussed are Lord Iveldown, self-righteous civil servant and corrupt war profiteer; Sir Hugo Renway, aristocrat, criminal mastermind and murderer; and Hobart Quennel, corporate leader, fascist and murderer.³⁸ These figures are the Saint’s giants, ogres and dragons, the monsters whose defeat is essential to his successful completion of his quest.

They are in many respects reverse images of the Saint, a not uncommon phenomenon in the relationship between hero and villain in traditional quest hero narratives. Faye Ringel discusses at some length the question of the resemblance between the hero and his adversary. Using as one example the relationship between Beowulf and Grendel in *Beowulf*, she shows how the enemy as a villain or monster may be a negative reflection of the hero, with both their fates intertwined. Monsters can “mirror the basest functions of the warrior-hero”; they are negative doubles, grotesque mirror images. Monsters murder, while the hero’s killing is sanctioned; Beowulf’s dragon enemy hoards its wealth, while Beowulf as king is generous to all; Grendel is “the guest who breaks hospitality, just as Beowulf is the guest who restores it”.³⁹ This reversal can also be seen in the outsider status of the hero and his adversary – where, as discussed in Chapter II, the hero uses the special abilities or knowledge that mark him as an outsider to defend the community, while his monstrous opponent, despite a possible appearance of outward respectability, is an outsider as

³⁶ “The Death Penalty”, in *The Saint and Mr Teal*, 153;177.

³⁷ “Arizona”, in *The Saint Goes West* (1942).

³⁸ Respectively in the novellas “The Simon Templar Foundation” and “The Art of Alibi” in *The Misfortunes of Mr Teal* (1934), and in *The Saint Steps In* (1943).

³⁹ Ringel, “Patterns”, 143, 146.

negative to society as the hero is positive. Ringel argues that modern authors have depicted hero-villain negative and positive images since the Romantic period, referring to Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as an example of hero-villain duality in the one body.⁴⁰ Similarly, in his discussion of dragons and dragon-slayer texts, the medievalist Jonathan Evans has noted that a human warrior fights to protect and preserve his community against the dragon, who has an "anti-social habitat" – living in wilderness, away from society. Contrary to the hero's benevolent distribution of wealth, the dragon malevolently hoards its treasure; the dragon's physical features demarcate it from the human hero, and its "characteristic behaviours" distinguish it as a villain.⁴¹

The Saint's enemy Marius is as old, physically unattractive and grossly huge in size as the Saint is young, handsome and of superb physique – a contrast that can be seen at least as far back as the ancient David and Goliath motif.⁴² He is taciturn where the Saint is garrulous; utterly unscrupulous where the Saint is honourable; totally uncaring of the survival or welfare of his own men, whom he controls by fear, where the Saint is a true friend of his companions and others; as ruthless on the path of evil as the Saint is ruthless in pursuing justice and fairness. The drug lord and white slaver Abdul Osman similarly reflects Templar negatively, and Ludwig's Nazi master race ideology confronts the Saint as a fighter for democracy. Lord Iveldown is fat, corrupt and the epitome of falsity and humbug, compared with the fit, straight-talking, genuine Templar. Hobart Quennel as a large, older, domineering American fascist dedicated to increasing his power and war profits is a "monster" of the 1940s period, in direct physical, emotional and ideological contrast to the Saint. A female example is the gross, vulgar, utterly evil woman Cookie in *The Saint sees It Through* (1946), who contrasts not only with the female protagonist, the beautiful, sweet and intelligent Avalon Dexter, but with the handsome, polite, morally-driven and cultured Templar. Cookie, for example, thumps out vulgar, bawdy songs on the piano, whereas the Saint's "fingers ripple[d] over the keys, idly and aimlessly...into the refrain of *September Song*".⁴³ When the older, reflective, playboy Saint roams the world in the postwar short stories, the negative contrast with his enemies is not as sharp, but is

⁴⁰ Ringel, "Patterns", 147/8; 157.

⁴¹ Jonathan D. Evans, "Semiotics and Traditional Lore: the Medieval Dragon Tradition", *Journal of Folklore Research* 22, 2/3 (Folklore and Semiotics) (May-Dec 1985): 100.

⁴² The importance of this motif "in the Christian iconography of the Middle Ages" is noted in Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, monsters and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999), xi.

⁴³ *The Saint Sees It Through*, 24-25; 45.

still discernible. His enemies are neither gallant foes nor respectable opponents. Where the Saint is honest, caring and compassionate, his opponents, in their actions and thoughts, are devious, selfish and cruel. Where they are cunning, the Saint is knowing and clever. Where the Saint is masterfully capable, they can be incompetent or even stupid and buffoonish. But even at this late stage in his career, like earlier monster-slaying quest heroes, Simon Templar continues to destroy his shadows.

The “monsters” destroyed by the Saint are othered as entities distant from the physical, cultural and emotional norms of Western society. The othering dimension of Charteris’ early work, like most othering, can have a strong racial element. In these cases the Saint’s whiteness and purity stands against enemies associated with darkness and evil. The most consummate example is the repulsive Middle Eastern Abdul Osman. His dark, slug-like physical foulness is contrasted not only with the clean-cut Saint but with the formerly young, strong Englishman Clements, who mocked Osman at the English school they both attended and whom Osman has enjoyed turning into a cringing, whining drug addict, whipping him as he begs for cocaine.⁴⁴ Osman is finally killed by Clements while attempting to rape a beautiful young Englishwoman.

A similar situation occurs in “The Million Pound Day”, a novella in *The Holy Terror* (1932). Here, a crime lord uses a huge, monster-like African, Ngano, to torture a captive with a whip and a hot iron, somewhere in the English countryside. The prisoner manages to escape, pursued by Ngano, and runs down the highway at dawn past the Saint who happens to be resting in his car nearby, taking a break on a journey back to London. The Saint hears a scream of “sheer shrieking horror”, uttered by “a man whose reason has tottered and cracked before a vision of all the tortures of the Pit...”⁴⁵ In an unabashedly racist juxtaposition reminiscent of the empire hero, the text contrasts the green, unpolluted English environment and the white English champion Templar with a bare-footed monster, a huge black African clad only in a loin-cloth, a “brute-man”, a “pursuing beast”, [with a] “primeval lust of cruelty in the parting of the thick lips and the glitter of the eyes”, as the Saint “seemed to smell the sickly stench of rotting jungles seeping its fetid breath into the clean cold air of that English dawn”.⁴⁶ As with his portrayal of the war-hungry mob in *Prelude for War*, Charteris

⁴⁴ “The Death Penalty”, in *The Saint and Mr Teal*, 153; 177.

⁴⁵ “The Million Pound Day”, in *The Holy Terror*, 118-119.

⁴⁶ “The Million Pound Day”, in *The Holy Terror*, 121-122.

stresses the bestial nature and lustful, uncontrolled feral savagery of Ngano by using negative animal imagery, in effect turning Ngano into a vicious, dangerous non-human. This may be contrasted with his frequent portrayal of Templar, as noted in earlier chapters, as possessing *positive* animal qualities like lithe, sleek strength or acute sensory ability that extend his already mighty human power to an even greater level.

In such othering primitive savagery was perceived as dominant even when overlaid by civilized behaviour, which was ridiculed in figures like Ngano as an irrelevant, presumptuous and even absurd veneer. When the Saint by chance passes Ngano in a central London street, their eyes meet and Templar registers “a kind of panoramic expression of a brilliantly purple suit, lemon-coloured gloves, a gold-mounted cane, a lavender shirt, spotted tie”.⁴⁷ While the context of the passage is one of menace, this description nonetheless belittlingly implies that the African is laughably incapable of proper dress and is absurdly out of place, even further removed from normal humanity.

The Saint’s eastern European enemy Marius is hardly less dramatic; pitiless, he kills without hesitation, instils terror into his own men and plots the destruction of civilization for financial gain. He is othered against the English Saint whose actions as an Englishman are ethically based and who fights to save England and Western Europe from Marius’ monstrous schemes. There is also Kurt Vogel, the ruthless millionaire treasure hunter in *Saint Overboard* (1936). In contrast with British or American perceptions of wholesome literal and figurative fairness, Vogel, whose name and appearance suggest a cold, Germanic bird of prey,⁴⁸ has a “long swarthy black-browed face with a great eagle’s beak of a nose”; his “thin lips spread in a smile... (that had) all the artless geniality of a snake’s”.⁴⁹ The Nazis depicted in *The Saint in Miami* as robotic, swarming zombies, and the enemies discussed earlier in this chapter, while less racially othered, are equally distant from the righteous Western purity represented by Templar. The horrific woman Cookie whom the Saint must expunge to heroically ensure a new, purer America is fit to lead the world represents the disgusting, decadent underside of the postwar United States.

⁴⁷ “The Million Pound Day”, in *The Holy Terror*, 145.

⁴⁸ “Vogel” is “bird” in German.

⁴⁹ *Saint Overboard*, 14, 47.

The type of othering seen in these villains was certainly believed by Charteris to be acceptable to his readership when the books in which it occurs were first published. A major othering discourse of the time that ran alongside the prominent imperialist ideology is “orientalism”, itself notorious for creating others. This is defined by Edward Said as “a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient”,⁵⁰ and is evident in villains such as Abdul Osman. The Orient, like the Occident, was a Western conceptual construction of societies, political entities, cultures, ideas and attitudes, roughly equivalent to the British geographical concept of the Near East (Middle East) and Far East. Much of the Orient was colonized by England and other imperial powers; orientalism maximized the differences between the rulers and the ruled. Orientals, essentially anyone from the Middle East or Asia, were made into others, their strangeness a justification for domination by the “normal” English or other Western colonial powers. The Orient was othered not only as mysterious and seductive, but also as barbarous – a dangerous place in the English ideology of empire. England and the West were perceived as advanced in science and technology and as socially and politically developed, while the Orient was backward, brutal and decadent. The Englishman – in Charteris’ 1930s fiction represented by the quintessentially English Simon Templar – was strong, brave and honourable, while the Oriental was devious and treacherous, even savage and bestial.

Such depictions are frequently found in late nineteenth and early twentieth adventure, thriller and detective literature, and were meaningful for readers in England, America and other Western countries. Little distinction was made, or was necessary, between different locations; all Eastern or distant cultures were, with a few differences, defined by their imagined contrast to Occidental civilization. The infamous Oriental other Fu Manchu is ethnically Chinese but his machinations are often associated with the Middle East. Contrasted with his opponent, the valiant English empire hero Nayland Smith, Fu’s othering is all the more intense because of his physical infiltration into the imperial homeland, and, in addition to his Eastern knowledge and “oriental cunning”, his use against Western countries of Western technology, the symbol of imagined Western superiority over the Orient. This makes Fu terrifying: Urmila Seshagiri has argued that Fu’s exploitation of Western innovation and technology, and his ability to operate effectively in the physical heart of the empire, in

⁵⁰ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 3.

London and on the Thames, not only demonstrate the failure of Western power but ultimately signal the dystopic dimension of technocratic modernity itself.⁵¹

Villainous Chinese others can be found in Edgar Wallace's interwar thrillers, such as *The Yellow Snake* (1926). The Middle Eastern other as opponent to the empire hero appears in A. E. W. Mason's *The Four Feathers* (1902), the adventure tale mentioned earlier that pits the upper class Englishman Harry Feversham against Muslim apocalyptic fanaticism as he seeks to redeem his honour; and in John Buchan's *Greenmantle* (1916), where several empire heroes struggle against a mysterious, alien Islamic charisma stirred to anti-British *jihad* by the German enemy. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) and Buchan's *Prester John* (1910) include African others as enemies, as do a number of Edgar Wallace's Sanders stories discussed earlier, and, occasionally, the slightly later thrillers and historical novels of Dennis Wheatley.⁵² An other not dissimilar to the Saint's adversary Ngano is found in the early Sherlock Holmes novel *The Sign of (the) Four* (1890); the killer, a "savage" known as Tonga, though a pygmy, resembles Templar's opponent with his cruelty, bestiality, thick lips and burning eyes.

A further vilification of difference found in the Saint's pantheon of enemies is that of the traditional Gothic other. Gothic otherness is well known through the famous examples of the nameless monster created by Dr Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (1818), in the personality of Mr Hyde in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), and in the eponymous vampire of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897). Ruth Bienstock Anolik argues that fear originally directed at the inhuman, supernatural Gothic other was later relocated to a racial and social other, "becoming, ultimately, as horrifying, threatening and unknowable as the typical Gothic manifestation".⁵³ Gothic otherness, in other words, evolved to manifest itself as a demonized distinction between racially and socially constructed normalities and

⁵¹ Urmila Seshagiri, "Modernity's (Yellow) Perils: Dr. Fu-Manchu and English Race Paranoia," *Cultural Critique* 62 (Winter 2006): 162-194.

⁵² For example in Wheatley's black magic thriller *Strange Conflict* (1941).

⁵³ Ruth Bienstock Anolik, "Introduction", in *The Gothic Other*, ed. Ruth Bienstock Anolik and Douglas L. Howard (Jefferson, North Carolina and London: McFarland & Company, 2004), 2-3.

differences. It can thus readily be linked to Oriental otherness in all its manifestations; Sax Rohmer, in creating Fu Manchu, used dark Gothic settings and fantasies to magnify Fu's otherness.⁵⁴

It has been argued by Cannon Schmitt that English perceptions of national identity were underscored by contrasting them with non-English, foreign, depraved Gothic villains, thus associating the fear and loathing of Gothic otherness, like Oriental otherness, with English notions of superiority and national pride.⁵⁵ This phenomenon can be seen in the contrast between the early Saint and, again, his European enemy Marius. Marius' otherness certainly derives from his horrifying appearance – his monstrous stature and terrifying visage – and his dispassionate, ruthless manner, accentuated by hints of wild rage, flashes of his underlying demonic nature. This is more the inhuman Frankenstein monster than the racial Gothic other; Marius with his hideous face and morning suit recalls “the image of the hidden beast under the elegant and genteel surface” that John Cawelti associates with reader fascination for vampires.⁵⁶ But there are also elements of the racial Gothic other in Marius. His nationality is a mystery; he is possibly German, but his circumstances and associations imply a more remote European origin, with a hint of Dracula's Transylvania. His cruelty and vaguely Eastern origins recall the traditional ruthless, barbaric Russian other feared by Western Europe,⁵⁷ modernized by the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and the fear that communist doctrines would spread to the West. Russian otherness can be seen in fiction of Dennis Wheatley, in Sydney Horler's thrillers, for example *The Spy* (1931), and among some of the plotters and villains that constitute “Bulldog” Drummond's opponents in the 1920s.

In Charteris' work, apart from some minor instances,⁵⁸ Russian otherness is primarily evident in one of his few short stories with a Cold War theme: “Vancouver: The Sporting Chance”, in *The Saint Around the World* (1956). Here the Saint, while pursuing international narcotics dealers, is captured, along with a female FBI agent, in a remote area of Canada by a Russian submarine officer who is

⁵⁴ See Karen Kingsbury, “Yellow Peril, Dark Hero: Fu Manchu and the ‘Gothic Bedevilment’ of Racist Intent”, in Anolik and Howard, *Gothic Other*, 104-119.

⁵⁵ Cannon Schmitt, *Alien Nation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

⁵⁶ Cawelti, *Adventure*, 102.

⁵⁷ Russian otherness in centuries past is discussed in Vilho Harle, *The Enemy With a Thousand Faces* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger, 2000), 68-71.

⁵⁸ There are instances in the 1930s Saint narratives where the primary villain's subordinates have Russian-sounding names like Trusaneff, Borieff and Ivaloff. In “The Russian Prisoner”, a short story in *The Saint in the Sun* (1963), the Saint turns the tables on a Russian female agent, but she is not portrayed as an other.

trafficking drugs to Western countries. The officer is depicted as a physically powerful, brutal, grinning, lustful automaton who believes the most simplistic and mindless Soviet propaganda. This is once again in contrast to the Saint, whose chivalrous behaviour towards the female prisoner and rational comments in discussion with the grotesque Russian asserts the superiority of both America and Britain, and all Western civilization, in its struggle against what is portrayed as non-Western barbarism.

The helpless woman prisoner in “Vancouver: The Sporting Chance” resembles the Saint’s partner Patricia as a vulnerable female during his struggle against Marius in *The Last Hero* (1930). The two texts were published a quarter of a century apart, but are linked in that the prisoner in the short story, Marian Kent, is the niece of the Saint’s companion Norman Kent, who in *The Last Hero* sacrificed his life to save the Saint and his mission. The villains in both cases have characteristics of the Gothic other. Schmitt has suggested that Gothic un-Englishness can be accompanied by a constructed Englishness represented, at least in the early nineteenth century, by threatened or victimized female or feminized figures in such works as Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1797) and Thomas de Quincey’s *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821, revised 1856).⁵⁹ While he argues that by the end of the nineteenth century “woman” in the Gothic had developed a different, predatory role,⁶⁰ the earlier idea of the vulnerable female as bearer of Englishness does resonate with the female characters in the two Charteris narratives discussed. This threatened England (in “Vancouver: The Sporting Chance” in the form of Western civilisation menaced by the Gothic Russia) is saved by the hero Simon Templar, who is heroic both as a modern chivalric knight defending his lady and as a saviour not only of his society or nation but of Western civilization itself. Ultimately, the Saint’s defeat of all his othered enemies, who are directly contrasted in appearance, character and morality with himself, justifies his vigilante activities and further defines him as a hero and champion of the West. He is an ideological figure who embodies the values of white, Western society and the nations within it, in particular Britain and the United States, values held by many when the Saint books were first published. For Charteris’ British, American and other Western readership of the time, the Saint’s actions comfortingly calmed their fears as he defeated enemies who fitted their prejudices, in a range of different circumstances that also satisfied feelings of national pride and ethnic superiority.

⁵⁹ Schmitt, *Alien Nation*, 2; see also his Chapters 1 and 2.

⁶⁰ Schmitt, *Alien Nation*, 160-161; see also his Chapters 4 and 5.

The type of satisfaction that readers could draw from the Templar character in this way diminished in the second half of the twentieth century as old verities and ideologies became less relevant in a far more complex world, and as modern readers became more aware of relatively simplistic and dated demonizing. Yet with a stereotyping that is often hardly more sophisticated or less blatant, action heroes to the present day frequently embody similar attitudes, and on a large scale. The concept of struggle between Western civilization and alien enemies has been prominent in recent decades in popular literature and across multiple entertainment media outlets, maintained by ongoing Western perceptions of Russia and China, and Western military intervention in Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. Since the destruction of the World Trade Centre in 2001 and the subsequent prominence of Islamist terrorism in Western perceptions of threat, now enhanced by the recent depredations of extremist militias in the Middle East, innumerable thrillers and films have appeared featuring *jihadi* terrorist threats countered by Western heroes. Ultimately Simon Templar, despite his anachronous outward form and dated circumstances, as an ideological weapon and Western champion continues to be relevant in the twenty-first century.

This chapter has argued that the Saint character's original and evolved opinions about war, and his portrayal as a champion of Western civilization, enhanced his standing as a hero in the ideological world of the 1930s and 1940s, and, in the latter case, in the 1950s. Among his many opponents the oriental, Gothic and eastern European/Russian other can be seen, and his enemies often recall the monstrous adversaries of the traditional quest hero. These dimensions of Templar extend beyond the important drivers of his heroism discussed in previous chapters, allowing him to meet further expectations and perceptions of what constitutes a hero. The Conclusion to this study will now sum up the overall argument and outline the extent to which the study has achieved the aims enunciated in the Introduction.

CONCLUSION

The Introduction posed three interrelated questions “what sort of a hero is the Saint?”, “where does his heroism come from?” and “why was he such an enduring and popular hero?”. This study has sought to comprehensively answer these questions in the context of Charteris’ fiction from the late 1920s to 1963. It has included examination of the various types of fictional figures and prior heroes whose attributes, innovatively adapted by Charteris, shaped the nature and behaviour of Simon Templar, as well as specific ideological, historical and social circumstances that further defined the Saint’s heroism. It has argued that fundamental influences integral to the formation of the character can be seen in Charteris’ personal identification with his protagonist, in the concept of the Western warrior hero and in the hero’s journey or quest. In addition, it has shown how Charteris’ exciting plots and his entertaining writing style helped to define Simon Templar as a hero. Its conclusions collectively provide answers to the questions by throwing light on what made the Saint heroic over the thirty-five years in which Charteris was the sole author of Saint fiction, and on what made Templar the popular figure he became.

Fundamentally, the Saint is an expression of the Western warrior heroic tradition inscribed in readers’ consciousness since the days of Homer, especially as the nineteenth century perception of the knight-errant of chivalry. He is also a quest hero who defeats monstrous enemies with benefits for himself and his community. Charteris’ conceptualization of his hero as an imagined form of himself impacted on the Saint’s heroism in various ways, especially in the 1950s when Charteris chose not to directly associate the character, by then an American hero, with the dominant political ideology in that country at that time. But the attributes of the Saint – an upper class, wealthy vigilante champion, skilled in combat, who fights crime and rights wrongs in his community according to his own moral code, exulting in his battles – evolved more specifically from the various heroic protagonists of nineteenth and early twentieth century adventure and crime fiction. Prominent among these is the empire hero, an early English fictional adventure and thriller hero similar to the iconic American frontier hero. While some aspects of the empire hero are not found in the Saint, that figure’s core attributes as a gentleman of independent thinking with special abilities with which he defends society are an essential part of Simon Templar. In addition to the empire hero, early non-official crime solvers, romantic criminals and urban vigilantes purveying justice according to their own moral code

introduced concepts to crime fiction that can be seen in the Saint. Fictional outlaws, highwaymen and pirates added a further dimension; it is these latter graphic figures – superb fighters, flamboyant righters of wrongs and gallant lovers, the stirring heroes of Charteris’ youthful reading, that bequeath to Templar some of his most striking features. Charteris drew on all these types of figures, modifying and adapting their features to create a new, memorable hero.

The Saint’s heritage in these precursor heroes constitutes what the study argues are the first two of the primary layers of his heroism. Additional primary layers are seen in an unusual aspect of the character: while retaining his essential characteristics and mission, he is reconstructed in different periods, changing from a young, strong, idealistic gentleman vigilante in 1930s England to a tough, streetwise yet sophisticated American government agent during and after the Second World War, and finally to an older, less driven celebrity playboy traveller in the 1950s. These developments mirror the course of Charteris’ life and his changing circumstances and attitudes, but importantly also reflect major political and social ideologies in each period that are reaffirmed by the Saint. The process is strongest in the 1930s and 1940s; in particular, the character revalidates the perception of a traditional benevolent and elite leadership in both British and American society, notwithstanding his continuous mockery and condemnation of hypocrisy and corruption in aberrant members of that elite, who frequently constitute his enemies in the narratives. In the prewar decade, his exploits as a vigilante alternative to incompetent and distrusted government authorities mark him as a fictional folk hero, whose activities also alleviate feelings of national and social decline. In both decades his enemies conform to the type of figures seen by readers of those periods as major threats to society, and during the actual war are Nazis whose evil nature warrants their destruction. He is also depicted as a defender of Western civilization against alien others of various kinds.

In the 1930s, the Saint’s heroism takes a surprising direction for a warrior hero: the expression of strong anti-war sentiment. Here his warrior prowess functions to preserve his people and nation from national war. After war breaks out, he fights to ensure victory and the destruction of what is clearly shown as the barbarism that generated international conflict. In the 1950s his ideological reaffirmations are less intense; his activities are not directly related to the rampant anti-communism of the period, and only in a few exceptional cases does he fight communists. In this period, however, he presents to readers an America of power, affluence and pleasure, suitable for world leadership at a

time of Cold War challenge, and is thus indirectly involved in that struggle. Throughout all periods he remains a vigilante and modern knight-errant, and a warrior hero in the Western tradition.

There are certain notable and unusual aspects to the Saint as a hero, not found in other prominent crime fiction figures of his time: his mocking, devil-may-care impudence, his liberated approach to life and the comical, jocular atmosphere that surrounds him. Strongest in the 1930s, becoming less prominent in the 1940s, these features are a hallmark of the character. In the older Saint of the 1950s, they are still discernible, but muted. The attitudes of his creator become particularly evident in him from the late 1930s; by this time Templar, who already exhibits a degree of elitism, begins to express a growing cynicism about life and society, the latter intensifying further in the 1950s alongside an increasingly hedonistic appreciation of the good things of life.

The Saint, then, is a hero of many dimensions. Over the long period of Charteris' fiction covered by this study Templar is heroic because a wide range of factors and circumstances indicate that his nature is what a hero's nature should be, that his actions are those a hero would be expected to undertake, and his victories are those that a hero should achieve. He is superior and isolated; stronger, braver, more attractive than common humanity, he defeats society's enemies and helps people. All these attributes are inherent in his heroic heritage and can be seen in the popular heroes from whom he evolved. The political, social, historical and ideological situations in which his adventures and missions are set allow his attributes to come to the fore, providing countless opportunities for the Saint to demonstrate that he is, and performs as, a hero.

People liked to read about a figure like Simon Templar. His attractiveness, strength and cleverness, his fighting ability, his overcoming of setbacks to emerge triumphant through the pleasing defeat and humiliation of opponents widely perceived as threatening society and the nation, his righting of wrongs and defence of the weak and exploited, and his symbolizing of a benevolent elite who can protect society – all were conducive to readers warming to him, finding him satisfying and enjoying his imaginary activities. Pleasure and interest in the character was enhanced in particular by the sparkling wit, impudent mockery, comical asides and captivating use of language that accompanies the Saint's pursuit and destruction of evildoers, enlivening his every move. In Charteris' primary period narratives, written in the depressed and challenged world of the 1930s, these colourful aspects

of Simon Templar are very prominent and were undoubtedly effective in making him attractive. Other factors, such as Templar's excitingly liberated approach to life, his wealthy and luxurious lifestyle, and his later fascinating world of jet-set travel, enhanced the potential for readers' delight.

While many other crime fiction heroes evolved from sources similar to those of the Saint figure, there is a uniqueness in his form and nature, enlivened by Charteris' originative and eclectic interpretations of contemporaneous ideas about crime fiction heroes, that distinguishes the Saint from others in the genre and creates his distinctive attraction. It was noted in the Introduction that Charteris had imitators, in the sense that some other authors based the heroes they created on the Saint; but these figures are bland and anodyne in comparison with Templar, in particular with the merry Saint of the 1930s, but also with the tough sophisticate of the 1940s and the celebrity playboy knight-errant of the 1950s. Other important crime fiction characters who appeared in serial narratives like those of Charteris and who were at least partly contemporaneous with the Saint – such as Philip Marlowe, Mike Hammer or, in spy thrillers, James Bond – share certain attributes and origins with Templar, but as we have seen differ from him in many important ways. The “hybrid” Saint novels, those authored by others with Charteris' collaboration or oversight after 1963, and Burl Barer's two Saint novels, published four years after Charteris' death, are interesting and entertaining fiction but clearly do not derive from the pen of the Saint's creator. Crime fiction heroes in the second half of the twentieth century, unlike the inimitable Templar, tend to become more psychologically complex, flawed mixes of good and bad, of success and failure, of tension and obsession – such as Patricia Highsmith's chilling anti-hero Tom Ripley, Ian Rankin's dour, gruff Rebus, and, in spy thrillers, both Bond and the ruthless, neurotic fighting machine Quiller created by Adam Hall (Ellston Trevor). Charteris' rollicking, near-flawless hero stands alone.

As such, the Saint occupies a special and specific place in twentieth century crime fiction. There is really nothing else like him. He is a figure, in his original and later constructions, very much of his time, and very much a product of Charteris' personality and experience. Charteris' emotions about the hero he created are an unusual phenomenon. In 1939, after Templar was established as a thriller hero, he summed up the character in a memorable passage:

I have been trying to make a picture of a man. Changing, yes. Developing, I hope. Fantastic, improbable – perhaps. Quite worthless, quite irritating, if you feel that way. Or a slightly cockeyed ideal, if you feel differently. It doesn't matter so much, so long as you feel that you would recognize him if you met him tomorrow.¹

A number of elements in the Charteris-Saint relationship surface in this statement. It is personal and emotional, in line with Charteris' feelings about his hero. He cleverly manipulates language, with an initial faux acknowledgement of potential criticisms of the Saint that subtly accentuates the sudden and abrupt power of the invitation to the reader to hesitate and ponder the character as a man of “cockeyed” ideals – a unique idealism, unconventional, outside the mainstream, but worthy for all that. The passage shows how Charteris saw Templar as a living element of his imagination, a literary depiction of all that he admired, something that he hoped people would acknowledge and that would continue to evolve.

Notwithstanding his imitators, Charteris' work from 1928 to 1963 did not start a trend. The Saint narratives are a distinct phenomenon within a historical period, with publications and sales falling away in the last quarter of the twentieth century. While the republication of Charteris' fiction from 2012 in both paper and digital form suggests a core of ongoing interest, this is highly unlikely to approach the enthusiasm of the 1930s or the television-driven revival of the 1960s. Simon Templar is a historical circumstance, one of the last heroes in crime fiction uncomplicated by weaknesses or failings. Yet the concept of a hero like the Saint has not disappeared; near-flawless Western warrior heroes like him can still be found, and still be relevant, even in the twenty-first century's complex world. It was, for example, argued in Chapter V that the sort of standing Templar manifests as a champion of Western civilization has not infrequently been echoed by fictional defenders of Western values and interests in an age of *jihad* ideology and assault. More broadly, Chapter I discussed John Carroll's identification of the Western hero archetype in, for example, modern football, which shows us how in the eyes of thousands of adoring fans who readily ignore complexities or deficiencies of character, motivation and personality, sporting champions can stand out as valiant, noble and ultimately warrior heroes. The dearth of Templar-like champions in crime fiction does not mean a figure like the Saint is no longer meaningful. It was also noted in Chapter I that Charteris called the Templar of the 1930s “an old-style hero” – unabashedly romantic, handsome, idealistic, fun-loving.

¹ *The First Saint Omnibus*, vi; 900.

Even with the later changes in the character, these words sum up the Saint. The creation of the character and his continuation through many decades, in different countries and in differing social, political and ideological environments, is Charteris' prodigious contribution to crime fiction.

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