

“Occult Sympathy”: Geoffrey Household’s *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs**

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Drawing on the Edwardian adventure tale’s theme of hunter and hunted exemplified by John Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915), Geoffrey Household’s *Rogue Male* (1939), his best-known thriller, dramatizes the exploits of an unnamed narrator who, after unsuccessfully attempting to assassinate an unspecified Central European demagogue, is literally run to ground in the Dorset countryside. A belated sequel titled *Rogue Justice* (1982) christens this persona Raymond Ingelram, fictionally the descendant of fifteen British generations whose aristocratic standing has been marginalized by interwar upheavals in the social order.¹ Of immediate interest, though, is what transpires at the end of *Rogue Male*. After eleven days of being besieged in his subterranean redoubt by pseudonymous Major Quive-Smith, an anglicized Nazi agent, Ingelram contrives a ballista and kills his adversary by impaling him with an iron spike. Noticing their facial resemblance, the displaced representative of English nobility then alters his appearance to replicate the photographic image in Quive-Smith’s forged passport and thereby ensure his departure from the United Kingdom disguised as a Latin American “gentleman” still intent on completing his earlier mission (181).

Such plot-driven (re)doubling differs from the familiar nineteenth-century *topos* of the *Doppelgänger*. In James Hogg’s *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824), Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Double* (1846), and Robert Louis Stevenson’s *The Strange Case of Dr.*

*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debsnyder0222.htm>>.

Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1886), to cite only a few novels, the projected "other" inversely mirrors the putative "self." Narratives of this kind usually introduce us early on to the operative binary and its reversal, thereby proving fertile texts for psychoanalytic critics.²

Things are less predictable, however, in the modern thriller. We thus do not discover until *Rogue Male's* dénouement that its protagonist is prepared to abandon his ancestral identity for Quive-Smith's fraudulent impersonation or that, once he has adopted the ruse, Ingelram will pursue again his appointment with destiny. The governing dynamic of this mode of fiction, consequently, is far removed from the orientation of Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) in which we encounter valorized emblems of Britannia's inevitable triumph over the combined forces of darkness. Dispensing with such reductive polarities, the genre of the thriller as we know it today first flourished during the 1930s when, in the aftermath of World War I, former constructs of inviolability such as the morally unassailable nation-state, universally shared codes of value, and an integrated, perspicuous "self" were rapidly unraveling.³ The best of Household's books reflect these changes while sometimes explicitly framing them in relation to manifestations of Edwardian stability.

His character Raymond Ingelram, for example, deviates from such "Clubland heroes" as Buchan's Richard Hannay and Childers's Arthur H. Davies in two important ways.⁴ First, whereas *Rogue Male* depicts him as "a bored and wealthy Englishman" in the mold of Hannay (1), *Rogue Justice* casts Ingelram as the offspring of a British father and Austrian mother, no doubt in part to account for how his bilingual fluency facilitates his reentry into the Third Reich. But beyond such practical considerations Household seems committed in several of his productions to denationalizing their protagonists, as though to intimate the obsolescence of ethnocentric or chauvinistic justifications for individual action. The second difference is that the first-person narrator of both *Rogue Male* and *Rogue Justice* figures as a moral casualty haunted by his wartime experience. Household's 1939 novel suggests that this trauma is linked not only to Ingelram's torturous ordeal after his initial capture but also to a subsequent crisis of

conscience because his assassination attempt was motivated by the Fascists' murder of his fiancée. *Rogue Male* therefore concludes with its central character's pondering whether the "ethics of revenge" are the same as the "ethics of war" (181). *Rogue Justice* expands the rationale for his crusade:

What had begun as a personal vendetta became my response to all those guilty of hurling a civilized world into war, of murdering political opponents, of enslaving defenceless [*sic*] workers, and above all of herding into slaughter-houses a helpless, warm-hearted, gifted people whose religion and customs slightly differed from the national norm. My use of arms was as justifiable as if I had been under military command. (39)

This retrospective vindication in Household's sequel erases Ingelram's earlier qualms about his motivation by invoking the atrocities perpetrated by Adolf Hitler. Two of the author's later thrillers delve further into *Rogue Male's* pattern of *dédoublement*. Both *Watcher in the Shadows* (1960) and *Dance of the Dwarfs* (1968), which I shall discuss inductively because neither is widely read, develop this theme in divergent ways, but at their core is a comparable fascination with the phenomenon of "occult sympathy" (*Watcher* 223).

The phrase signifies a hidden and unforeseen affinity, or sense of kinship, that develops between hunter and hunted in the course of their pursuit of one another. Its import becomes especially interesting in light of Household's most definitive statement about his fiction in a midlife autobiography titled *Against the Wind* (1958). After reporting that the sole charge brought against him by reviewers six years earlier involved his "searching out and elaborating the exotic," the novelist writes: "It is true that I often take my subjects from war or very foreign parts or Iron Curtain politics or any situation which will allow me to show individual man and woman in direct relationship—that is to say, with no protection but their own character or integrity—to unfamiliar circumstance" (230-31). "Character" and "integrity," however, are by no means fixed attributes. As *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs* demonstrate, the postulate of "self" may mask fissures which, under the pressure of physical danger, can lead to

anthropological atavism. In this regard an observation by critic LeRoy L. Panek is relevant. Noting that by the mid-1950s Household increasingly distanced himself from the oversimplified thematic oppositions of Buchan's adventure sagas, Panek remarks that "Household never broke Buchan's grip on his fiction" in the rendering of plot action (161). More so than any of Household's other novels, *Watcher in the Shadows* attests to this Buchanesque influence on a story that culminates in a scenario of doubling between erstwhile foes.

Watcher in the Shadows: Mirrored Antitypes

Household's eighth thriller, as both Gina Macdonald and James Purdon have observed, reverses the conceptual design of *Rogue Male* by having a French aristocrat named Raoul Philippe Humphrey, Vicomte de Saint Sabas, stalk Charles Dennim, whom St. Sabas mistakenly believes to have been responsible for his wife's death at Buchenwald. Initially these antagonists are portrayed as radically different from one another. Unlike his monomaniacal adversary, identified only in the novel's final fifty pages, forty-three-year-old Dennim, formerly an Austrian count and spy for Great Britain at the infamous concentration camp where St. Sabas's wife died, has been leading a sequestered life as a zoologist whose primary field of research is the red squirrel. Meanwhile his aggrieved opponent has been consumed by an obsession with exacting blood vengeance.

Dennim's peaceful existence is shattered on the morning of 20 May 1955 when a bomb explodes at his London residence, killing the postman who delivered the package. Disinclined to rely on police investigation of the case because of "the vulgarity of crime and its publicity" (12), he contacts "an old friend in the Ministry of Justice at Vienna" who had been his supervisor in "the private war which we carried on under instructions from London" (15). From this source Dennim learns that his assailant has already tracked down and summarily executed three Buchenwald war criminals. Household's protagonist then communicates with his World War II handler in Eng-

land, Colonel Ian Parrow, who reluctantly assists his friend in trying to flush out the unknown watcher.

Despite this profiling of Dennim and St. Sabas as antitypes, Household's novel makes clear even in its beginning that they share more than either yet recognizes. For his part Dennim opens the narrative by saying, "I look back on my course of action as lunacy; and yet at the time it seemed the only way out. Pride, probably. One can never quite escape from one's ancestors" (3). Shortly thereafter he comments:

And now I must confess my secret. Even today I hate to put it on paper. Yet I suppose every one of us, whatever the nationality, who fought without a uniform or, worse still, in the enemy's, must have memories which defile him and from which he shudders away. Perhaps the aristocratic tradition of my family made it harder for me than most. (19)

Much later we learn that St. Sabas, roughly the same age as Dennim, had been a leader in the Resistance during World War II who, under the cryptonym of Savarin, "carried on his own private war against the German occupiers" (196). Both men, in other words, are linked not only by their principled opposition to Fascism but also by the burdensome legacy of class descent and its prescribed code of conduct. The stage is thus set for their climactic one-on-one confrontation.

First, however, *Watcher in the Shadows* evokes a milieu that harks back to the Edwardian era, betraying Buchan's impact on his successor's fiction. While focusing on the opponents' preliminary skirmishes in the west Midlands countryside to which Dennim has retreated, Household delineates character types and gender relationships unmistakably associated with a bygone time. Foremost among the secondary figures are Aunt Georgina, a fiercely independent woman in her sixties with whom the protagonist has been living quietly in London ("We were both survivors from another age," remarks her nephew [10]); retired Admiral Peregrine Cunobel, a former suitor of Georgina ("He was an arbitrary old charmer whom long years at sea had preserved from most modern thinking" [56]) who presides unofficially over the Cotswolds village of Chipping Marton; and graphic artist Benita Gillon, daughter of a local vicar, who bridges the novel's two

settings of country versus city as a bucolic “wood nymph” employed by London advertising agencies (130). In addition to several rustics who round out the region’s social hierarchy, this ensemble frames the protagonist’s attempts to lure his adversary outside England’s metropolitan capital. Household’s inclusion of these personae allows him to develop a romantic sub-plot involving couples from two generations, Aunt Georgina/Admiral Cunobel and Charles Dennim/Benita Gillon, through whom *Watcher in the Shadows* limns an older set of cultural values that presumably epitomize an ideal. Charles’s growing love for Benita, twenty years his junior, also serves as an index to his difference from St. Sabas, psychologically crippled as the latter is by the loss of his wife during the Holocaust.

All the while Household concentrates on the battle of wits and tactical maneuvering between his main adversaries. In this contest Dennim’s stalker seems at the outset to have the advantage because of his ability to pass himself off as a British squire, but the protagonist eventually outflanks his opponent. In the novel’s first section titled “Burning Bright,” which alludes to William Blake’s poem “The Tyger,” former spymaster Colonel Parrow advises Dennim that “If one is going to tie out a fat goat for a tiger, it is essential to let the tiger think he has found it for himself.” Not fond of this trope for its being “too typically and heartily English” (26), the narrator proposes another:

What had started as Ian’s crude goat and tiger was now beginning to have more resemblance to the German Intelligence chess, in which a player never sees his opponent’s men at all. He is told by a referee when a move is impossible and when he has taken or lost a piece. From that he must construct his own picture of the squares which are occupied and the pattern occupying them. (61-62)

Dennim’s preference of metaphors suggests that he wishes not simply to avoid the peril of being staked out as unsportsmanlike bait but also, in keeping with his ancestral code, to regard the challenge as one that involves imagination and established rules. Ironically, then, he elects

to rely on instinct rather than intellection, remarking that "I give all this analysis of my thoughts as accurately as I can; but at the time my approach to the problem far more resembled the wordless pictures in an animal brain than the calculations of a computer" (47). Such atavistic reversion is not unusual in Household's fiction, as *Dance of the Dwarfs* graphically demonstrates. In the finale of *Watcher in the Shadows* it surfaces when the paired combatants, each embracing the medieval paradigm of chess, decide to settle their differences via a duel that only superficially formalizes a far older ritual of Darwinian predation.

The culminating struggle between Dennim and St. Sabas occurs after their face-to-face meeting outside a village inn where, with loaded pistols trained on one another, they agree to reenact a time-honored tradition. "Whatever century we were in," comments the protagonist/narrator in a curious aside, "both of us were in it" (205), as though suggesting the anachronistic resurgence of their aristocratic past's protocol for resolving peer conflict. Knowing that he "could never kill Savarin in cold blood" (197), Dennim stipulates a plan whereby each man will take up his starting position near a hilltop barn and commence the manhunt. After Household painstakingly recounts their feints and ploys in "the end game of this blind chess" (208), Dennim recognizes the emergence of an "occult sympathy between us," which he attributes to "intense concentration upon the other's mind" (223). Their "true duel" thus fulfills what is required by a shared class legacy, in the course of which transpires an almost telepathic doubling, but otherwise the standoff amounts to a "savage hunting" (226, 225).

Shortly before the end game reaches its bloody climax, Household inserts an odd hallucination by the protagonist/narrator that reveals a gendered gap in the text. Although earlier he had maintained that the prospect of a future life with Benita Gillon sustained him in his fight to the death with St. Sabas, Dennim records a countervailing *mise en scène* after both men have suffered multiple gunshot wounds:

For me the night returned. I was hunting through dark woods, trying to find Benita or sometimes hunting Benita herself with an appalling sense of guilt which I tried to persuade myself I had no need to feel. There were policemen in Gestapo uniforms, though I knew they were British, and the forest extended over the whole sphere of the world so that there was never any way out of it and never any more light to be. (236; my emphasis)

One hesitates to read too much into this passage, yet its first sentence reverberates with anti-feminist overtones traceable to the Edwardian era when the New Woman and the suffrage movement were arousing a misogynistic backlash in some quarters.⁵ The segments I have italicized suggest that the price of masculinist warfare, albeit governed by the rules of chess, is victimization of the female principle and, by extension, the apocalyptic end of all normative human relationships. So construed, I think, the brief interpolation indicates not Household's own views regarding women but rather some of the cultural bias he inherited via his sentimental attachment to Buchan's era. Another and equally valid way of interpreting the excerpt, however, is to see it as an extension of his indebtedness to Blake's famous poem, the first two incantatory lines of which are "Tyger! Tyger! Burning bright / In the forests of the night." The symbolic association of "forests" and "night" with the primordial, more pronounced in *Dance of the Dwarfs*, suggests that in *Watcher in the Shadows* Household is using the image to signify a barbarism that threatens to reclaim the "whole sphere of the world."

True to both modern expectations of successful romance fiction and his thriller's formative literary influence, *Watcher in the Shadows* ends with Dennim's professing his love to Benita Gillon while also reciting his aristocratic commitment to a dying peer. "[T]he evidence of collusion between St. Sabas and myself was suspicious" (246), asserts the narrator in a multivalent statement. Whatever we make of this admission by one of Household's two mirrored antitypes, the novel closes with the antagonists' gripping each other's right hand and reaffirming their exclusive bond of parity. "'No one,' St. Sabas muttered. 'No one knows enough. Only Dennim,'" to which the latter responds, "'I have always understood, Savarin'" (248).

Dance of the Dwarfs: Atavistic Doubling

Eight years later, after three intervening novels—*Thing to Love* (1963), *Olura* (1965), and *The Courtesy of Death* (1967)—that met with desultory reviews, Household struck out in a bold new direction with *Dance of the Dwarfs*. Although book-jacket copy is notoriously inflated, the publisher's blurb came close to an accurate assessment by averring that in his twelfth production Household had "rivalled (some say surpassed) his own best-known books," including *Rogue Male* and *Watcher in the Shadows*. The promotional piece then went on to claim that in *Dance of the Dwarfs*, "as never before, he explores the mute, almost mystical collaboration between the hunter and the hunted, the victim's response to pursuit, and its translation into the human emotion of sheer animal panic." Despite the copywriter's penchant for sensationalist rhetoric, laughably evident when he or she warns that "THIS NOVEL SHOULD NOT BE READ AFTER DARK," the appraisal again is not too far off the mark. At a time when Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression* (1966) and Desmond Morris's *The Naked Ape* (1967) were widely discussed bestsellers, Household once more plumbed the phenomenon of "occult sympathy," but this time from an unsettling anthropological angle that left far behind the Buchanesque cast of *Rogue Male* and *Watcher in the Shadows*.

The shift manifests itself in part by Household's choice of a protagonist and narrational strategy. At age thirty-three Dr. Owen Dawnay, an Argentine agronomist educated in England who, having "opted for British nationality," worked as a field researcher for the "British Tropical Agricultural Mission" in Colombia (27, 8), suddenly disappears in late May of 1966. Upon his skeleton's being discovered, along with that of a young female, at his compound twelve miles distant from Santa Eulalia in the border region between grasslands and tropical forest, he is assumed to have fallen prey to guerilla revolutionaries affiliated with the Colombian National Liberation Army. Six months later a metal box containing Dawnay's handwritten diary, which constitutes Household's first-person narrative, is delivered to the publisher of his monograph titled *Fodder Plants of the New World*.

Dawnay's motive for compiling this confessional text, declares its isolated scribe at the start, is "to marshal the facts of my relationship to my environment and compel myself to think about them." Informing this goal is an existential "questioning of the self" driven by some "background sense of insecurity—well, not exactly of insecurity but of something unfinished—which I am unable to analyze" (7). This disquieting intimation haunts Dawnay in the "no[-]man's[-]land" he inhabits (8), soon becoming the novel's recurrent metaphor of a metaphysical "blank spot" (11). Then, coincidentally it would seem, the scientist learns of ghostly presences in the adjacent tracts of primeval forest that indigenous residents of Santa Eulalia refer to as "duendes," and he is drawn into investigating the mystery.

At the same time as Dr. Dawnay becomes increasingly intrigued by such reports, he expatiates further on the yawning chasm in his personal life, one that he describes as an all-pervading sense of *néant*:

We are able, when in good spirits, to preserve the self in a solid piece; but if anything disturbs this integrity we expand into nothingness. Alcohol is a cure, and the llaneros [grasslands inhabitants] give themselves to it as I suspect they do to a woman: very quickly and then to sleep. Myself, when [...] my sheer inability to extract straight answers to straight questions [...] gets me down, I feel that the gift of speech is useless and wish that I could revel in the nothingness like my ancestor, the running ape, when he first broke out from the crowded darkness of the trees. (50-51)

This admission by one of Western civilization's discontents suggests that Household's deracinated protagonist has recognized an inescapable void in his day-to-day existence despite his earlier decision to lose himself in the Colombian hinterland. When Dawnay almost simultaneously finds that a fifteen-year-old Peruvian castoff named Chucha has been sent his way by anti-guerilla loyalist Captain Valera and that his compound is under siege by unidentified creatures from the neighboring forest, he becomes more alert to external danger. Meanwhile, in the safety of his walled compound, Dawnay revels in erotic fulfillment: "For civilized man—if I still am—it is a refreshing experience to be sexually and aesthetically satisfied, yet not emotionally involved. Love, no. Tenderness, yes. No concern for the future

beyond a firm intention to preserve her [Chucha] as she is" (167). Clearly operative here is a mythic paradigm of the "Noble Savage,"⁶ no less disturbing because it involves the Europeanized Dawnay's sexual fascination with a Third World girl less than half his age.

Counterbalancing this regressive idyll, however, is the protagonist's curiosity about the forest denizens that, shortly after Chucha's arrival, have breached his estancia's outer perimeter of defense. "[N]o longer interested in fortifying [him]self against a blank spot which isn't there" (69), Dawnay unaccountably determines that he must teach his young consort to ride horseback in order that she might appreciate the milieu's "horizons" beyond the "oasis" of their outpost (75). In these joint excursions he gradually guides Chucha closer toward the forest, which according to local legend is rumored to be the sinister haunt of either pygmies or dwarfs. Now unconstrained by his official duties as a researcher for the British Tropical Agricultural Mission, Dr. Dawnay, when not accompanying his Peruvian mistress on these forays, elects to probe the surrounding glades on his own, impelled as he is by the prospect of becoming "the discoverer of *Homo Dawnayensis*" (87). This aspiration, given the vanity of how he would designate a hitherto unknown species, suggests not only that he has implicitly anthropomorphized such creatures but also that he conceives of them as atavistic precursors of humankind. Such doubling is borne out when Household's protagonist finds himself drawn irresistibly into the forest's deeper recesses, where Dawnay becomes the hunter committed to tracking down a primordial variant of himself.

What the adventurer actually finds, however, is a grotesque parody of his expectations. Far from being even remotely anthropoid, the duendes, when Dawnay at last confronts a pair of them near a swamp, are not fanciful "little people" (143), as earlier he had affirmed (see 139), but rather vampiric predators that dispatch their prey by biting down on a victim's medulla oblongata with powerful fangs before lapping up the blood. In outward appearance, concludes the taxonomically minded researcher, "they belong to the family of the Mustelidae, not the Viverridae" (180), but, Latin nomenclature notwithstanding, his scientific detachment soon gives way to abject terror. After killing

one mustelid and fatally wounding its mate, Dawnay is stalked to his very door by other such duendes. If previously the protagonist/narrator wished that he “could revel in [...] nothingness like my ancestor, the running ape, when he first broke out from the crowded darkness of the trees,” he now recognizes an altogether different anthropology that reduces him to being “a connoisseur and analyst of fear” (191). In the novel’s final stretch, just as Dawnay is planning to leave Colombia and marry Chucha, both he and she are besieged at their estancia, the agronomist who once described himself as a “hunting ape” realizing under these circumstances that he is merely “a hunted mammal” (142, 207). The circle comes full round as the narrative pattern of doubling completes itself, but Household gives nothing away. *Dance of the Dwarfs* ends in mid-sentence as Dawnay rushes to defend his compound’s threshold.

Before the “intimacy” and “curious companionship” of his several encounters with the forest-dwelling mustelids (254), Dr. Owen Dawnay was amused by Santa Eulalians’ superstitious fears of duendes, later inferring that “the power of myth is vaster than I ever imagined” (230). However, when he repeatedly raises the subject with the villagers’ shaman, an evasive man named Joaquín, the outsider receives only cryptic responses that fail to satisfy his need for demystification. One of their dialogues nevertheless seems to shed some light:

I told him that I had seen his duendes and that they were solid as ourselves, though I could not yet put a name to them.

“How do we know what we are, we men? So how can we tell if duendes are the same?”

He kicked a log, exactly like Doctor Johnson refuting Berkeley, but drawing a different conclusion.

“Is my foot? Is the log? I only know what my toe feels. When we are afraid, that is the duende. That is what a duende is.” (166-67)

Although Dr. Dawnay is unsure of having translated accurately Joaquín’s replies in Spanish, he goes on to paraphrase their gist as meaning that “The only reality is [...] fear” (167). Later he echoes the same exact point (see 191), leading the reader to believe that something like it is the thematic undercurrent of Household’s twelfth

novel. Behind the often blithe assumptions of post-Enlightenment rationalism, he suggests, lies an equivocal fascination with savagery.

Conclusion

In this essay I have focused on the motif of “occult sympathy” in *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs* as it relates to the thriller’s emergence as a popular genre. Implicit has been an argument that Household’s most successful fiction of this kind dramatizes situations in which, under circumstances of extreme fear, the concepts of autonomy, integrity, and self are undermined by discovery of a preternatural affinity between hunter and hunted. The visceral thrill elicited by such literature derives from its audience’s being vicariously positioned in an imaginary borderland where we, like the protagonists in both of these Household novels, must come to terms with some form of abjection.

Although scholarship on this genre is relatively scant, two early studies—Ralph Harper’s *The World of the Thriller* (1969) and Jerry Palmer’s *Thrillers: Genesis and Structure of a Popular Genre* (1978)—provide illuminating theoretical frameworks for clarifying the trope of “occult sympathy” more fully in connection with Household’s re-vamping the Buchanesque tale of adventure and straightforward ratiocination. The two critics’ different approaches are instructive and, when overlaid as templates, reveal more than one might expect about the dynamics of *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs*.

Harper presents a “phenomenology [...] of reading thrillers” that concentrates on their “existential themes” and the “psychology of the reader’s involvement” (ix, viii). Among his operating premises is the idea that, “[i]f thriller literature is typical of the twentieth century, it is because of its content[,] not its form. We do not usually think of thrillers as examples of new or experimental writing” (8). That caveat established, Harper goes on to propose that thrillers constitute a new “literature of boundary situations” wherein “millions of us meet

ourselves at a level we are at pains to deny at other times" (51, x). Terror, not merely fear, stems from the "experience of being hunted" or of "being stalked or [...] watched" (55, 56). Mentioning *Rogue Male* in passing, he adds that "[t]he fictional subject of the thriller differs from the heroes of other adventures not only because he is both hunter and hunted, but [also] because of a transformation of identity that must take place when he elects to take on evil single[-]handed" (114). This transformation, posits Harper, entails "the unhinging of the one thing in human existence that we can count on[—]namely, the central nature and stability of the self" (114-15), reinforcing our recognition of a putatively core self's tenuous nature.

Nine years after Harper's assessment, reflecting a then current (though short-lived) shift in literary theory, Palmer published a structuralist analysis that began by asserting the following: "Thrillers have their own morality. It is a morality [...] of unequivocal self-assertion tempered only by an entirely personal sense of decency. Sometimes even that minimum restraint is lacking, and then it is the morality of the jungle" (5). Palmer's exposition is often frustrating because it favors the *noir* crime novels of Raymond Chandler and the James Bond potboilers of Ian Fleming as leading examples of the genre, but he nonetheless advances the insight that "individualism is fundamental to the thriller" (67). In the course of discussing the form's sociology, he demonstrates that it projects the legacy of a debate harking back to John Stuart Mill and Thomas Hobbes about the threatening import of "men's competitiveness" (163). By the late nineteenth century, argues Palmer, this difference of opinion had been filtered through Herbert Spencer's notion of "social Darwinism" to lay the groundwork for a concept of "competitive individualism" that became the modern thriller's inspiration and field of literary scrutiny (see 153-80).

How, then, does this pair of critical models pertain to Geoffrey Household's *Watcher in the Shadows* and *Dance of the Dwarfs*? For one thing, we can hypothesize that the backward-glancing elements of the former novel, including its Buchanesque invocation of an Edwardian ethos, may reflect a sentimental nostalgia for some supposedly simpler age than the post-World War II world. At the same time, cultivat-

ing the characteristic *frisson* of terror associated with the Gothic *Schauerroman* as an antecedent of the thriller, Household discerns a dark competitiveness, Palmer's "morality of the jungle," that cannot be superseded or annulled and in fact is more pronounced than ever in modernity. The otherwise paranoid "experience of being hunted," of "being stalked or [...] watched," as Harper states, then becomes definitive of the contemporary anti-hero's confrontation with the self as a simulacrum, which in turn fuels the reversionary mechanism of "occult sympathy." To be connected, however fleetingly, with the primordial, after all, is preferable to a nothingness that masquerades as a suspect individualism. Such, intuits Household in these overlooked novels from the 1960s that build on his early success with *Rogue Male*, is the bleak situation faced by latter-day reincarnations of Raymond Ingelram in their pursuit of authenticity.

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NOTES

¹For a further discussion of this issue, see my "Confession, Class, and Conscience in Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Male*."

²During the 1960s and 1970s there appeared numerous scholarly discussions of the three nineteenth-century novels I cite. Usually they invoked Gothicism's literary history and Sigmund Freud's construct of the unconscious, although sometimes one can detect the imprint of R. D. Laing's "anti-psychiatric" writings. See, for example, Masao Miyoshi's *The Divided Self: A Perspective on the Literature of the Victorians*. Another useful source, published just when revisionists Jacques Lacan and Julia Kristeva were coming to the fore, is Elizabeth Wright's *Psychoanalytic Criticism: Theory in Practice*.

³I have explored these points more fully in "Eric Ambler's Revisionist Thrillers: *Epitaph for a Spy*, *A Coffin for Dimitrios*, and *The Intercom Conspiracy*."

⁴Richard Osborne coined the term "Clubland heroes" in his 1953 book of the same title. For more on what the descriptor signifies, see David A. T. Stafford's "Spies and Gentlemen: The Birth of the British Spy Novel, 1893-1914."

⁵See Ann Heilmann and Lucy Delap's six-volume compendium of primary documents titled *Anti-Feminism in Edwardian Literature*. Their sixty-page introduction to Volume 1 is particularly illuminating.

⁶By way of textual support for this claim, Dawnay records the following about Chucha: "She has the innocence and goodness of the savage. Well, more the animal than the savage. The complicated mind of the savage is repulsive to anyone but an anthropologist. Chucha is all simplicity. I suppose that's what I mean" (68).

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