

Baroness Orczy's
The Scarlet Pimpernel

A Publishing History

Sally Dugan

BARONESS ORCZY'S
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Ashgate Studies in Publishing History

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The Scarlet Pimpernel
A Publishing History

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*To David, for putting up with this
elusive third person in our marriage.*

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Preface

This book covers the Scarlet Pimpernel's manifestations in a wide variety of genres; in order to limit confusion, I have referred to *The Scarlet Pimpernel* in italics only when discussing the novel, play or film. I have used plain font when referring to the Scarlet Pimpernel as a series of books or films, as a fictional character and as a cultural phenomenon.

Following Orczy's own preferences, I have used the Hungarian version of Christian names, i.e. Emmuska rather than Emma, and Bodog, rather than Felix for her father. Her husband's name, Montagu, is spelt without an additional e, although it is mis-spelt in many sources.

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Parts of Chapters 5 and 6 first appeared in 'Anarchy and Magic: Film Versions of the Scarlet Pimpernel myth', *Peer English*, Issue 5 (2010), and I am grateful to Ben Parsons on behalf of the University of Leicester for permission to reproduce these. Formal acknowledgement for permission to quote from manuscript material is also due to the executors of Orczy's literary estate, AP Watt Ltd on behalf of Sara Orczy Barstow-Brown; to the Karpeles Manuscript Library Museums; the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center; The University of Texas at Austin and the Wilson Library; The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Picture acknowledgements are given with the list of illustrations.

I am grateful to the staff at Birkbeck, Senate House, Bodleian and Guildhall Libraries; the Sound Archive, Rare Books and Manuscript rooms of the British Library; the Victoria and Albert and University of Bristol Theatre Collections; the Royal Academy Archive and the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham. Patrice Fox at the Harry Ransom Center, Robin Davies Chen in the manuscripts

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Finally, I would like to thank James Lewis for his creative playing-card style cover image, printed from an original linocut. This, for me, perfectly captures the Scarlet Pimpernel's multi-faced personality and the enigma of his continuing appeal.

*Sally Dugan
Oxfordshire, July 2012*

List of Abbreviations

BFI	British Film Institute
BL	British Library
DNB	<i>The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
EC	<i>The English Catalogue of Books</i>
LCP	Lord Chamberlain's Plays
OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i>
Ransom MS –	Manuscripts at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin
UNC Watt MS –	A.P. Watt Archive, General Manuscripts, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
TLS	<i>Times Literary Supplement</i>

Works by Orczy

<i>Adventures</i>	<i>The Adventures of the Scarlet Pimpernel</i>
<i>Band</i>	<i>Sir Percy Leads the Band</i>
<i>BB</i>	<i>Beau Brocade</i>
<i>Candlesticks</i>	<i>The Emperor's Candlesticks</i>
<i>Cavalier</i>	<i>The Laughing Cavalier</i>
<i>Elusive</i>	<i>The Elusive Pimpernel</i>
<i>Hits Back</i>	<i>Sir Percy Hits Back</i>
<i>JTW</i>	'Jasper Tarkington's Wife'
'Juliette'	'Juliette: A Tale of the Terror'
<i>League</i>	<i>The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel</i>
<i>Links</i>	<i>Links in the Chain of Life</i>
<i>Lord Tony</i>	<i>Lord Tony's Wife</i>
<i>Mam'zelle</i>	<i>Mam'zelle Guillotine</i>
<i>Repay</i>	<i>I Will Repay</i>
<i>Rosemary</i>	<i>Pimpernel and Rosemary</i>
'Shamrock'	'The Sign of the Shamrock'
<i>SP</i>	<i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i>
<i>SPLW</i>	<i>The Scarlet Pimpernel Looks at the World.</i>
<i>SP Play</i>	<i>Orczy-Barstow, The Scarlet Pimpernel (1903)</i>
<i>SP Prompt Script</i>	Revised version of the 1903 play, in Bristol University Theatre Collection
<i>Way</i>	<i>The Way of the Scarlet Pimpernel</i>

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Introduction

‘The Baroness Orczy’, Englishness and the Scarlet Pimpernel

The global success of film and musical versions of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* have ensured a place for this elusive hero in popular culture. His daring rescues are as much a part of the French Revolution as the howling mob and the toothless *tricoteuses* knitting at the foot of the guillotine. In many people’s imaginations, he is Zorro crossed with Superman, with a dash of eighteenth-century elegance.

As the mild-mannered man who shows one face to the world, but is secretly a man of action, the Scarlet Pimpernel has spawned a race of hidden heroes. Yet to his creator, Baroness Emmuska Orczy (1865–1947), he was something more: an English gentleman spreading English values among the benighted; an aristocrat rescuing aristocrats. Thus *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905) can take its place alongside the many other British *fin de siècle* narratives that ‘pluck traditional aristocracy from the historical dustbin’.¹ The mystery is why Orczy’s patrician imperialist crusader has not only survived the decline of the metanarratives surrounding his birth, but continues to enthral a multinational audience. Solving this mystery suggests ways in which popular historical fiction can be taken seriously, depicting consumers not as gullible victims of marketing but as transgressive ‘readers’ – in the widest possible sense – who can see beyond nationalistic and class bias. It also involves unlocking the story’s complex origins and uncovering the mythic tropes that have enabled the Scarlet Pimpernel to endure through the vicissitudes of publishing imperatives and the nightmare of history.

The nationalistic concept of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was a league of titled heroes, who hide bravery and devotion to the aristocratic cause in the French Revolution behind a foppish disguise. All are imagined as part of a glamorous set surrounding the Prince of Wales (afterwards George IV), led by the dashing young Sir Percy Blakeney. In this book, for the first time, I trace the emergence of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* from two of Orczy’s short stories featuring plots against the Russian Tsar. The metamorphosis of her hero from Polish anarchist plotter to counter-revolutionary Englishman suggests a myth that transcends politics; it also indicates that a dialogue on questions of nationality forms an integral part of Orczy’s work. I chart this dialogue through the Scarlet Pimpernel’s first appearance on stage in 1903 and as a novel in 1905; through novels and short stories published up until 1940; through film, musical, even children’s ballet – and its reinvention in popular culture.

The Scarlet Pimpernel’s ability to cross genres, and the way each sheds light on our understanding of the source text(s), makes Orczy’s creation an ideal study

¹ Len Platt, *Aristocracies of Fiction* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), p. 39.

in adaptation. Given the remit of the Ashgate Publishing History series, I place particular emphasis on print culture. I demonstrate the vital role of the paratext² – especially where it highlights Orczy's own aristocratic status – in creating the popular image of the *Scarlet Pimpernel*. I show how magazine packaging of *Pimpernel* stories, coupled with film versions, initiated a shift in emphasis from gallant English gentleman to pistol-wielding multinational hero. However, the overriding aim is to provide a nuanced picture of the trope of the *Scarlet Pimpernel* and this is only possible by bridging the boundaries of academic disciplines.

Book historians tend to focus on *The Scarlet Pimpernel* as a publishing phenomenon, citing the volume of copies printed and the global reach of a novel that within two years of its first appearance had been translated into six European languages, and had reached the furthest corners of the British Empire.³ The stage play – which survives only in manuscript – is generally treated as an adjunct to the theatrical careers of its principal actors, Fred Terry and Julia Neilson.⁴ Few people under the age of 50 have read the original novels, but many will know of at least one TV or film version. The cinematic emphasis on spectacular action and glossy production values has led several critics to dismiss the original story as yet another costume drama. When it is asserted that, between 1900 and 1935, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was part of a 'turn from history as the generator of horror ... to history as a lifestyle', the limitations of genre-based criticism become clear.⁵ It is true that Orczy's politicised message has become increasingly diluted on film; that does not make it retrospectively true of earlier versions, nor of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*'s first formulation on stage and in print.

Perhaps partly because they are ideologically less contentious, Orczy's detective stories have attracted more critical interest than her historical novels, particularly in the United States; in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* she appears in the *British Mystery Writers* volume.⁶ Yet these stories represent a relatively small proportion of her output (see Appendix E). Reference books carry brief entries on *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, but rarely mention its 11 sequels.⁷ The centenary of its first

² Gérard Genette, 'Introduction', in *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–13.

³ See for example, Kate Macdonald, 'The Fiction of John Buchan, With Particular Reference to the Richard Hannay Novels' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, University College, 1991), p. 17, and pp. 352–6.

⁴ Orczy-Barstow, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1903). BL Add MS 65665. LCP 1903/23.

⁵ Billie Melman, *The Culture of History: English Uses of the Past 1800–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 248.

⁶ Katherine Staples, 'Emma, Baroness Orczy', in *British Mystery Writers, 1860–1919*, ed. by Bernard Bernstock and Thomas F. Stacey, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol.70 (Detroit: Gale Research, 1988), pp. 229–34.

⁷ See for example, 'Scarlet Pimpernel, The', in Sandra Kemp, Charlotte Mitchell and David Trotter, eds, *The Oxford Companion to Edwardian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 353–4. This unsigned article mentions 'several sequels' (p. 354), but even the two that fall within the Edwardian timeframe do not have individual entries.

appearance as a novel prompted editions with scholarly introductions, but these show no awareness of the story's earlier incarnation in print.⁸

Table I.1 *Scarlet Pimpernel* stories in print: first UK publication

Date	Title	Publisher
1898	'The Red Carnation' (precursor)	<i>Pearson's Magazine</i>
1903	'The Sign of the Shamrock' (precursor)	<i>Daily Express</i>
1905	<i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i>	Greening
1906	<i>I Will Repay</i>	Greening
1908	<i>The Elusive Pimpernel</i>	Hutchinson
1913	<i>Eldorado</i>	Hodder & Stoughton
1917	<i>Lord Tony's Wife</i>	Hodder & Stoughton
1919	<i>The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel</i> (short stories)	Cassell
1922	<i>The Triumph of the Scarlet Pimpernel</i>	Hodder & Stoughton
1927	<i>Sir Percy Hits Back</i>	Hodder & Stoughton
1929	<i>The Adventures of the Scarlet Pimpernel</i> (short stories)	Hutchinson
1933	<i>The Way of the Scarlet Pimpernel</i>	Hodder & Stoughton
1936	<i>Sir Percy Leads the Band</i>	Hodder & Stoughton
1940	<i>Mam'zelle Guillotine</i>	Hodder & Stoughton

It might be thought that the vagaries of the *Scarlet Pimpernel's* reputation could be charted by a variation of D.F. McKenzie's teaching trick of getting students to guess the era of a blank book from the quality of the paper.⁹ Certainly, early British editions of *Scarlet Pimpernel* novels evoke elitist notions of the manuscript with their high quality paper and frontispiece foldout facsimiles of documents.¹⁰ Moreover Hodder & Stoughton's marketing of all Orczy's works from 1913 onwards as part of 'The *Scarlet Pimpernel* Series' (Figure I.1) recalls the literary heritage of Sir Walter Scott's 'Waverley' novels.

However, in parallel with these aspirational volumes aimed at wealthier readers were equally collectible sixpenny paper-covered editions. These were available at stationers and railway bookstalls across the British Empire. Surviving despite the fragility of their cheap paper, examples of those sold in Australia can still be seen in the Rare Books Collection at Monash University (Figure I.2). It is a reminder,

⁸ Gary Hoppenstand, 'Introduction' in Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Signet Classics (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2000), pp. ix–xviii; Sarah Juliette Sasson, 'Introduction' in Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2005), pp. xiii–xxx.

⁹ D.F. McKenzie, 'What's Past is Prologue: The Bibliographical Society and the History of the Book', in *Making Meaning: 'Printers of the Mind' and Other Essays*, ed. by Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), pp. 259–75 (p. 259).

¹⁰ Orczy, *I Will Repay* (London: Greening, 1906), hereafter *Repay* and Orczy, *Eldorado* (London: Hodder, 1913).



Fig. I.1 Dust jacket of Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, [1913]). Princeton University Library.

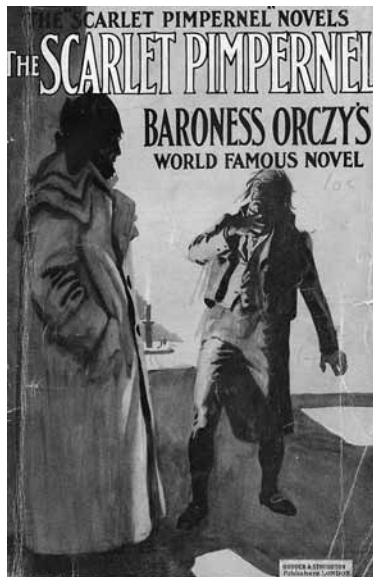


Fig. I.2 Cover of sixpenny paper edition of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, [1913]). By kind permission of Monash University Library, Rare Books Collection.

if one were needed, that hardback ‘Colonial Editions’ were not the only means of the worldwide transmission of imperialist ideas in fictional guise.

Close examination of Figures I.1 and I.2 illustrates the way in which Hodder targeted different markets by highlighting the foppish aristocratic persona of the Scarlet Pimpernel for the more expensive hardback, and the shadowy action hero for the popular paperback. The dust jacket of the two-shilling edition emphasises the richness of Sir Percy Blakeney’s golden costume, his immaculate white stockings and lace cuffs, and his aloof aristocratic demeanour. The cover of the paper edition stresses mystery and adventure.

The popular and elitist strands came together in the last of the Scarlet Pimpernel series, *Mam’zelle Guillotine* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1940). The first edition may have been a hardback, but it was printed on war economy paper with a dust jacket almost indistinguishable from pulp fiction. Hodder’s attempt to make Orczy to historical romance what Zane Grey was to the Western ensured that her literary reputation suffered from what David M. Earle has called the ‘prejudice of form’.¹¹ However – like the mass-market paperbacks of the 1950s and 1960s – it also highlights the possibility of a global, cross-class appeal for Orczy’s aristocratic hero.

Publishing practices continue to reflect a wide divergence of marketing tactics. Is *The Scarlet Pimpernel* spy/adventure fiction, thriller, mystery, historical romance or ‘children’s classic’? The Folio Society chose the historical novelist Hilary Mantel to introduce its 1997 ‘classic’ version, covered in vegetable parchment, with knowing post-modern illustrations by Lucy Weller (Figure I.3).¹² The Random House Modern Library edition (2000) covers all bases with an introduction by the historical mystery writer Anne Perry; a reader’s group guide; a soft focus cover suggesting historical romance and an endorsement from popular culture scholar Gary Hoppenstand, citing *The Scarlet Pimpernel* as ‘arguably the best adventure story ever published’ (Figure I.4).¹³

The sole surviving manuscript page of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* has a few last-minute changes in Orczy’s handwriting that heighten the discourse of romance; an indecision about whether to describe her heroine’s hair as ‘ardent’ or ‘golden’, and the addition of the colour of her eyes (Figure I.5). Orczy’s choice of this page as a sample for *Story-Teller* magazine suggests a willingness to be perceived as a romance writer.¹⁴ She herself wrote that her focus was on ‘pictures, love-scenes,

¹¹ David M. Earle, *Re-covering Modernism: Pulp Fiction and the Prejudice of Form* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009).

¹² Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, with introduction by Hilary Mantel (London: Folio Society, 1997).

¹³ Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, with introduction by Anne Perry (New York: Random House, 2002). The quotation on the cover comes from Gary Hoppenstand, ‘Introduction’ in Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, Signet Classics (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2000), pp. ix–xviii (p. ix).

¹⁴ Orczy to Newman Flower, 12 January 1909, Karpeles Manuscript Library Museums.

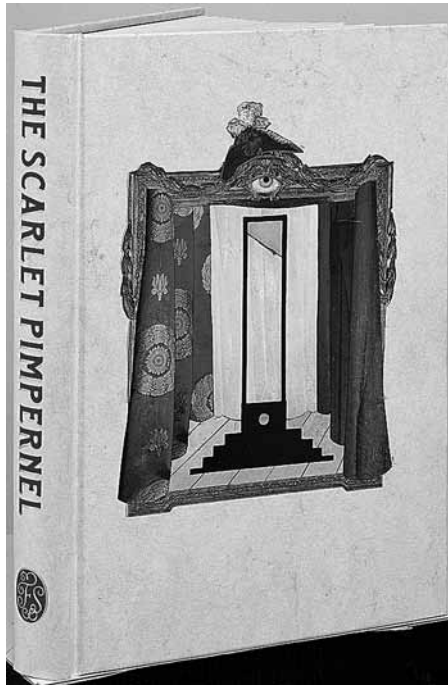


Fig. I.3 *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (London: Folio Society, 1997). Binding illustration © Lucy Weller. By kind permission of the Folio Society.

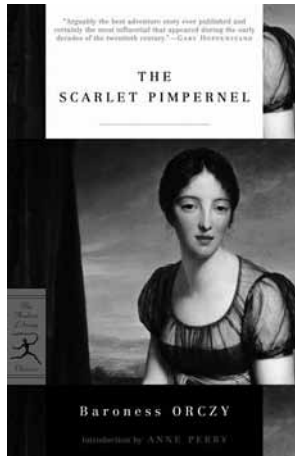


Fig. I.4 *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (New York: Random House, 2002). Book cover © 2002 by Modern Library. By permission of Modern Library, a division of Random House, Inc.

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"Danger? I? —. Nay, Madame, your solicitude does me honour. As you say, I have some influence, ~~at court~~ my intention is to exert it before it ~~is~~ too late."

"Will you allow me to thank you at least?" ~~she pressed softly~~

"Nay, Madame," he said coldly, "there is no need for that. My life is at your service, and I am already more than repaid."

"And mine will be at yours, Sir Percy, if you will but accept ^{it} in exchange for what you do for Armand," she said ~~(impulsively)~~ ^{as she stretched} out both her hands to him. — "There! I ~~will~~ not detain you Farewell!"

How lovely she looked in this morning sunlight, with her ~~soft~~ ~~golden~~ hair streaming around her shoulders. He bowed very low and kissed her hand; she felt the burning kiss and her heart thrilled with joy and hope.

"You will come back?" she said tenderly.

"Very soon!" he replied, looking ~~he~~ ^{she} looked longingly into her ~~eyes~~ ^{blue} eyes.

"And . . . you will remember?" — she asked, as her eyes, in response to his look, gave him an infinity of promise.

Fig. I.5 Manuscript page of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. By kind permission of the Karpeles Manuscript Library Museums and A.P. Watt Ltd on behalf of Sara Orczy Barstow-Brown.

adventures both comic and tragic, thrilling moments, dramatic scenes, and above all character – always character'.¹⁵ Although Orczy's comments about her own work have to be treated with caution, this contains an important clue to the *Scarlet Pimpernel's* longevity. Behind the wigs and Mechlin lace cuffs lies an enduring human story of love, misunderstandings, conflict of loyalties, audacious bravery – and a dramatic double life.

The transmutation of Orczy's hero from a Polish anarchist to an English aristocrat in the French Revolution underlines this sense of the a-historical quality of her story. It might also appear to complicate the popular equation between the *Scarlet Pimpernel* and Englishness. However, while Orczy identified Sir Percy Blakeney with *upper class* Englishness, his subversive roots clearly relate to that strand in the English national psyche identified by Cole Moreton as being 'under the radar, belonging to the people, bawdy, iconoclastic and dissenting'.¹⁶ This element – which cuts across accidents of birth – is another important factor in the *Pimpernel's* survival.

From the moment Orczy wrote the dramatic opening page of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905), with its 'surging, seething, murmuring crowd', she was establishing her territory as a popular fiction writer. It was a move that incorporated English nationalistic fictions and the exoticism of her Hungarian origins to create that eminently marketable commodity: 'The Baroness Orczy: Author of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*'.¹⁷ 'The Baroness' carries associations of elitism, whilst minimising the professionalism and shrewd sense of the market that made Orczy one of the most successful novelists of her generation.

The early identification between Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and Englishness can clearly be seen in an article in the London society newspaper, the *Sketch*, in 1908 (Figure 1.6).¹⁸ The news 'peg' is the opening of the London stage version of *Beau Brocade*, her story about an eighteenth-century Robin Hood-style highwayman. However the headline – 'Creators of the New Everlasting Flower' – makes the link to her better-known work. The hand-drawn frame of wheat sheaves signifies Orczy's literary harvest, invoking the image of the tiny red flower that grows in shadowy spaces at the corner of fields. At the same time, Orczy – in her impractical pale-coloured long lacy dress – is clearly the lady of leisure. Her husband and dramatic collaborator, Montagu Barstow, and their son, John, appear at her side in only one picture, the son's pose mimicking that of the father. This is the aristocratic and creative Englishwoman, with supporting cast.

¹⁵ Orczy, *Links in the Chain of Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1947), hereafter *Links*, p. 97.

¹⁶ Cole Moreton, 'England's Daft and Pleasant Land', *Guardian*, 12 February 2010. <www.guardian.co.uk>[accessed 27 June 2012]

¹⁷ Orczy took the title of Baroness on the death of her father in 1892, adopting it as part of her professional persona both as an artist and a writer. She is listed as Orczy, E. (Baroness) in the catalogue for the 1892 Royal Academy annual Exhibition. *The Exhibition of the Royal Academy, 1892* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 1892), p. 75.

¹⁸ 'Creators of the New Everlasting Flower', *Sketch*, 17 June 1908, p. 301.

JUNE 17, 1908

THE SKETCH.

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CREATORS OF THE NEW EVERLASTING FLOWER,
 "THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL," WHICH HAS ALREADY BLOSSOMED 802 TIMES.



THE BARONESS ORCZY AND HER HUSBAND, MR. MONTAGU BARSTOW, WHOSE NEW PLAY,
 "BEAU BROCADE," WAS PRODUCED THE OTHER DAY.

The Baroness Orczy, author, with her husband, of that remarkable success, "The Scarlet Pimpernel," was born at Turnau, Hungary, and was educated in Brussels and Paris. She first studied painting, and had several pictures in the Academy. Her career as writer began in 1900. In the third photograph is the Baroness's son.

Photographs by Sassano.

Fig. I.6 *Sketch*, 17 June 1908, p. 301. © The British Library Board. Shelfmark ND52 NPL.

Thus, despite the *Scarlet Pimpernel*'s anarchist roots, their creator was marketed as living the comfortable life of an upper class Englishwoman, at home in the country among her flowers and animals. The servants who made this lifestyle possible are nowhere to be seen; but the implicit model is that of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, where happily giggling kitchen maids bustle and the Dickensian landlord, Mr Jellyband, pronounces with horror on the revolutionary activities of 'them Frenchy devils over the Channel'.¹⁹ The 'author of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*' tag brought reassurance of a story that would celebrate a largely mythical past of rural stability as opposed to a problematic present of metropolitan uncertainty. It was an insular, Establishment version of 'Englishness'.

The 1980s Englishness 'industry', which exploded in reaction to Thatcherite patriotism and the growth of regional nationalism in Britain, has politicised even the mildest statement about national identity.²⁰ However, Colls and Dodd (1986) provided a useful framework by limiting the debate to the period between 1880 and 1920, the authors believing that 'it is within the shadow of that period, and its meanings that we still live.'²¹ The League of the *Scarlet Pimpernel* was born in the middle of this timeframe – and, although the final novel in the series was not published until 1940, its values remained that of the era of its birth. Wars, revolutions and accompanying social change may have spelt the decline of the aristocracy, but Baroness Orczy provided its swansong. By the same token – despite her attempts to respond to shifting national sentiment by using 'Britisher' interchangeably with 'Englishman' – her hero and his followers remained in the mould of the *fin de siècle* Englishman. Sir Percy Blakeney's French mother notwithstanding, Orczy's emphasis on his height and Anglo-Saxon blue eyes link him to 'the gene pool of high class Englishness' and the idea of a caste born to rule.²²

Successive adaptations aimed at a multinational audience have highlighted the extent to which *The Scarlet Pimpernel* is identified with imperialist notions of Englishness. Its rebranding as a 'classic' has enabled film and TV producers to historicise its jingoistic elements while eroding divisions between 'high' and 'low' culture.²³ At the same time, transgressive responses and post-modern appropriations of the myth provide a subversive commentary on its relationship to white masculinity. Diana Wallace suggests that Orczy's use of an effeminate disguise for her hero indicates an understanding that masculinity itself is a

¹⁹ Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (London: Greening, 1905), Ch. 2, p. 17. Hereafter *SP*.

²⁰ On the 1980s as a key decade for the reassessment of Englishness, see Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 'Preface', pp. ix–xxi.

²¹ Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, 'Preface' in *Englishness: Politics and Culture 1880–1920*, ed. by Robert Colls and Philip Dodd (London: Croom Helm, 1986) [n.p].

²² Platt, p. 31.

²³ See Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of Christ* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 177–8.

masquerade.²⁴ Following the work of Colley and Hobsbawm on the artificial construction of national identity, I would suggest that she is similarly knowing about nationalistic fictions.²⁵ The pages of her fiction abound with examples of the ‘invention of Britishness’.²⁶

As a polyglot Hungarian aristocrat who only came to England when she was 15, and lived much of her adult life in Monte Carlo, Orczy had a complex relationship to nationalism. Lucy Sloan’s comment that Orczy’s ‘frequent reference to the Englishness of certain qualities itself sounds distinctly un-English’ pinpoints this element of the outsider in Orczy’s approach.²⁷ It is another factor in the Scarlet Pimpernel’s adaptability, as Orczy’s nationalistic gloss is unsubtle and thus easily removed.

The Myth of the English Gentleman

Englishness as portrayed in the Scarlet Pimpernel is inextricably bound up with the idea of the English gentleman.²⁸ It is an idea that taps into myth and induces nostalgia by evoking characteristics from a bygone age – yet is also more subversive than it might appear.

Crucial to Orczy’s original mythmaking is the imaginative link between chivalry, the aristocracy and the monarchy. With increased social mobility popularising the idea that a gentleman could be made, not born,²⁹ it may seem perverse for Orczy to create a League whose founder members all belonged to the nobility. However, to criticise her stories for offering a conservative definition of gentlemanliness is to misunderstand them. Their roots lie deep in nationalist legend, from the mystical chivalry of the knights of King Arthur’s Round Table to the God-like worship of figures such as Gordon of Khartoum.

In Sir Percy Blakeney and his followers, Orczy sought to personify the qualities that she saw as having made Britain great – the characteristics of the English gentleman. In this, she was following Edwardian revivalists of chivalry, including that great patriotic mythmaker Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the Scouting

²⁴ Diana Wallace, *The Woman’s Historical Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008), p. 41.

²⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction’, in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 1–14.

²⁶ Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992; repr. London: Pimlico, 2003), p. 1.

²⁷ Lucy Sloan, ‘Orczy, Baroness’, in *Dictionary of Women Writers*, ed. by Janet Todd, (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 516–19 (p. 517).

²⁸ As Christine Berberich has pointed out, the terms ‘English’ and ‘gentleman’ have become inextricably linked as ‘a symbol for quintessential Englishness’. Christine Berberich, *The Image of the English Gentleman in Twentieth-Century Literature* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 12.

²⁹ See Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981), pp. 2–4.

Movement. The English gentleman as portrayed in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* can be taken to mean any or all of the following: a highly developed sense of duty and consideration for others (especially women and children) ultimately derived from a chivalric code of honour; altruistic heroism and a sense of 'fair play'; humour, individualism, ingenuity, eccentricity – and a deeply romantic core hidden behind a façade of modest indifference.

However, her work outside the *Scarlet Pimpernel* series suggests a greater awareness of the problematic nature of English gentlemanly values than might at first appear. The imperial adventurer in *By the Gods Beloved* (1905) and the flamboyant highwayman in *Beau Brocade* (1908) are subversive gentleman heroes as anarchic as Sir Percy's original incarnation. These elements combine with chivalric myth to provide a rich, multi-layered conception that helps to explain the *Scarlet Pimpernel*'s longevity.

By the Gods Beloved (1905) and the Gentleman Adventurer

Orczy's *By the Gods Beloved* (1905) was an imperialist 'lost race' adventure story in which, as a contemporary *New York Times* critic put it: '[Orczy], with her pen, invaded ancient Egypt with two Englishmen from Hammersmith'.³⁰ Orczy herself described it as 'A Romance', but one critic has called it 'a sadistic Haggardesque fantasy'.³¹ I would dispute the word 'sadistic', since – although there are some extremely sensational scenes – there is no evidence that either the author or her heroes enjoy the gruesome violence that is described. Equally, although Orczy clearly owes much to H. Rider Haggard – the trope of the treasure map, the quest for the survivors of a lost civilisation and a *femme fatale* reminiscent of Ayesha in *She* (1886) – her relationship to the imperial romance genre is more complex than this.

Nicolas Daly's argument for *fin de siècle* romance as 'a form of narrative theory of social change' can be borne out by closer examination of *By the Gods Beloved*.³² The trajectory in Orczy's novel from scholarly expedition to bid for power and domination might appear to place it firmly in the territory of those adventure tales that were, as Martin Green has put it, 'the energizing myth of English imperialism'.³³ However, there is also an ambivalence about the portrayal of the Englishman abroad that suggests a *fin de siècle* awareness of the fragility of empire and – in Elleke Boehmer's words – 'the fatigues of toting the white man's

³⁰ 'Author of *Scarlet Pimpernel*', *New York Times*, 2 August 1908, Resort and Fashion Section, p. X7.

³¹ Unsigned entry in Kemp, Mitchell and Trotter, p. 303.

³² Nicholas Daly, *Modernism, Romance, and the Fin de Siècle: Popular Fiction and British Culture, 1880–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 5.

³³ Martin Green, *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire* (London and Henley: Routledge, 1980), p. 3.

burden'.³⁴ Orczy's sense of the human cost of the imperial adventure goes against the simple dichotomy, posited by Edward Said, of 'popular' versus Conradian modernist.³⁵ Her novel may have elements of triumphalist imperialism, but its plot and narrative voice have a questioning self-consciousness that underline the artificiality of Said's distinctions and give Orczy a place alongside writers of 'high' culture.

By Orczy's own account, her interest in ancient Egypt dates back to a visit to the studio of the painter Edwin Long when she was still an art student (*Links*, p. 56). Long was working on a picture depicting the trial of the dead, and she was impressed by his opinion that the keynote to a country's character lay in its mode of administering justice. This theme is prominent in *By the Gods Beloved*, as in a now forgotten short story, 'The Revenge Of Ur-Tasen', which appeared in *Pearson's Magazine* in 1900.³⁶ This is a melodramatic tale of sacrifice and revenge, presented as notes found written on papyrus fragments in an ancient Egyptian temple. The writer is a jealous husband who has killed a young priestess in order to bring shame on his family and make his wife an outcast. His punishment is to be buried alive in the temple caves; his reward is the knowledge that, despite his death, his wife will never be able to marry again.

Orczy reused the name, Ur-Tasen, for an un-related central character in *By the Gods Beloved*, and some of the atmosphere of the short story persists in the novel. However, while 'The Revenge of Ur-Tasen' is set firmly in the past and has no English characters, *By the Gods Beloved* introduces twentieth-century English adventurers into an ancient Egyptian setting. This not only stretches credulity, but also adds a problematic dimension in an era when the hegemony of the British Empire was increasingly coming into question. J.A. Hobson's classic, *Imperialism*, had been published in 1902, and Orczy herself came across strong Anglophobic and anti-imperialist sentiment in the French reaction to the Boer War (*Links*, p. 87). This dimension is less obvious in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* since Sir Percy Blakeney and his followers have the mannerisms and dress of Regency fops, even though in every other respect they behave like Edwardian gentlemen adventurers. Where Sir Percy's moral authority goes unchallenged – despite occasional episodes of treachery – this is not the case here.

The uncertainties of the English gentleman abroad are dramatised in *By the Gods Beloved* by the use of two voices. One is the dry questioning tone of the narrator, Mark Emmett, a 'prosy medical practitioner' whose surname is resonant of an archaic word for ant.³⁷ The other is that of his old school friend, the

³⁴ Elleke Boehmer, 'Introduction', in *Empire Writing: An Anthology of Colonial Literature, 1870–1918*, ed. by Elleke Boehmer (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. xv–xxxvi

³⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993; repr. Vintage, 1994), p. 227.

³⁶ Orczy, 'The Revenge of Ur-Tasen', *Pearson's Magazine*, 9 (June 1900), pp. 668–76.

³⁷ Orczy, *By the Gods Beloved* (London: Greening, 1905), hereafter *Gods*, p. 66.