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## *'East is West and West is East': Lewis Grassie Gibbon's Quest for Ultimate Cosmopolitanism*

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James Leslie Mitchell, better known by his pseudonym Lewis Grassie Gibbon,<sup>1</sup> was early on an eager literary explorer of other worlds. Douglas Young tells us that the young Leslie Mitchell's 'favourite authors were Jules Verne, Conan Doyle, [author of *The Blue Lagoon*, Henry] De Vere Stacpoole, and most of all Rider Haggard' (Young 1973: 4). Mitchell grew up reading varieties of adventure fiction that can broadly be categorised as colonial. In each there is a quest: in science fiction, to expand earthly (i.e. Western) parameters and defeat the aliens; in detective fiction, to rescue the imperial metropolis from the foreign criminal 'other'; or in the imperial exploits of Haggard, to discover the authentic Africa. Colonial adventure fiction forms part of the wider imperial quest. This quest is transgressive in that, as Elleke Boehmer notes, it goes 'beyond the frontiers of civilization' (Boehmer 2005: 2). Beginning as the quest to find and colonise new lands, initial conquest becomes the ongoing, highly populist desire to save the 'West' / civilisation from the 'East' / barbarism (see, for instance, John Buchan's *The Power-House* or Ian Fleming's Bond novels). In his own fiction, Gibbon uses the imperial quest motif in order to subvert imperialism, just as his quest-book *Nine Against the Unknown* (1934) romanticises the beginnings of modern Western exploration, yet is critical of colonial conquest. Particularly in his Egypt-based fiction, surveyed in this chapter, Gibbon's quest is to shatter the colonial conception of East and West and return to an age of cosmopolitanism – an idea anticipating the anti-imperial relatedness of cultures central to contemporary conceptions of postcoloniality.

Egypt was important to Mitchell. He was stationed there (and in Palestine, Mesopotamia and India) during his years (1919–23) in the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC).<sup>2</sup> Egypt is fundamental, too, to the diffusionist theory of civilisation. 'All human civilisations originated in Ancient Egypt' (Gibbon 2001b: 4), according to Gibbon's 'The Antique Scene' (1934). The importance of diffusionism to Gibbon, both as a personal belief-system and as a theoretical scaffold for his work, is well known to critics of modern Scottish literature; it is perhaps less obvious to general readers of his work who are most likely to read, or be asked to study at a Scottish secondary school, *Sunset Song* (1932), voted 'Scotland's

favourite book' in 2005 (Maley 2005). However aware critics in Scotland may have been of diffusionism's centrality to Gibbon's work, few have examined this relationship at book length. Douglas Gifford's *Neil M. Gunn and Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (1983) understands the importance of the quest, but detaches this motif from diffusionism; like many critics, Gifford believes diffusionism mars Gibbon's art. Ian Campbell considers Gibbon's diffusionism under the chapter heading 'Civilisation' in his *Lewis Grassie Gibbon* (1985). Campbell points out with justification that 'Gibbon was not alone, nor a far-out heretic, in his [diffusionist] view, but part of a widespread movement which shaded into others' (Campbell 1985: 28). This is an important consideration, with theoretical ramifications for our understanding of Scottish literary history in relation to broader historical, political and theoretical movements. In rethinking Gibbon's diffusionism we can now place his work within the scope of a postcolonial-inflected cosmopolitanism.<sup>3</sup>

It is impossible here to give an extended survey of a complex theory such as diffusionism, but of prime importance is that anthropological diffusionists such as Gibbon's gurus, Grafton Elliot Smith and William J. Perry, believed the origins of civilisation to be in Egypt. Elliot Smith and Perry believed that originary moments in civilisation's development, such as the invention of metallurgy or the vital innovation of irrigation, must have begun in one particular place in time (cf. Elliot Smith 1911: x). They rejected the idea that cultures had evolved independently and unbeknownst to one another and so, also, they were suspicious of humanist claims for the psychical unity or sameness of different peoples. Humans, for these diffusionists, are more imitative than inventive, and the core of the inventive cultural action at civilisation's beginnings belonged respectively to the proto-Egyptians and ancient Babylonians, diffusing to Europe via the Mediterranean littoral.

The political geographer J. M. Blaut claims that diffusionism was 'a foundation theory in Western thought' and that, far from being confined to a minority of academic anthropologists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the theory still 'lies at the very root of historical and geographical scholarship' (Blaut 1993: 17, 1). Adapting Samir Amin's (1989: 24) phrase, Blaut's thesis is that 'Eurocentrism', in particular Eurocentric pedagogy, is a species of 'spatial elitism' (Blaut 1993: 12) creating the idea of core / periphery, inside / outside. This model of centre and margin serves European interests by asserting that European precedence was purely internally generated, acquiring everything from the native inventiveness and superiority of Europeans alone, when in fact it owed much to the colonisation of non-European lands from 1492 onwards. Echoing Fanon's thought that 'Europe is literally the creation of the Third World' (Fanon 1990: 81), Blaut argues that Europe was built on the back of colonisation and then covered its own tracks; Europe has denied its other to create its self.

Whereas Orientalism is Edward W. Said's term for the ideology informing Western representations of 'the East', Blaut is concerned with Europe as an ideological formation and how the ideology of 'the West' has been diffused. For

Blaut, scholars have textually mythologised European historical identity to make an über-territory he calls 'Greater Europe', a powerful amalgam of the dominant world states: western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand. But Blaut argues that European historiography has further stretched the boundaries of 'Greater Europe' to include the 'Bible Lands', which reach 'from North Africa to Mesopotamia' (Blaut 1993: 3). Egypt, in the north, is not the 'real' Africa, which is black Africa; indeed, Elliot Smith claims that 'the composition of the racial mixture in Britain and Egypt presents many analogies' (Elliot Smith 1911: 152). If diffusionists such as Elliot Smith have claims that Egypt is the origin of civilisation, then European colonialism must subsume Egypt in 'Greater Europe' for European primacy to be maintained and the Hegelian hierarchy of master / slave, civilised / barbarian to remain in place. (As Robert Young reminds us, 'it was Hegel, after all, who declared that "Africa has no history"' (2007: 33).) Consequently, if civilisation has its roots in Greater European culture then it is necessary for European culture to be diffused through colonialism to those less advanced places on the world atlas. Whilst Blaut argues that diffusionism is not directly responsible for the core / periphery model, he believes that Eurocentrism in large measure generates diffusionism. Given that proviso, Blaut believes diffusionism to be 'the central intellectual doctrine that explains and rationalises the actions and interests of European colonialism and neocolonialism' (Blaut 1993: 39). As we shall see, Gibbon's use of diffusionism, centred as it is on the recapturing of a mythical cosmopolitan Golden Age, contradicts Blaut's analysis.

The textual battle for possession of civilisation and its origins is one that informs and is informed by colonial conquest. According to Niall Ferguson, '[t]he occupation of Egypt opened a new chapter in imperial history. Indeed, in many ways, it was the real trigger for the African Scramble' (Ferguson 2004: 233). Said cites Egypt as 'the focal point' of Orientalism (2003: 84). Egypt was officially established as a Protectorate during the First World War, although the British had been in informal occupation from 1882. Egypt was, then, in all but name, a British colony when the diffusionist Leslie Mitchell was stationed there with the British army. But his army years also saw the political birth of modern Egypt, from the insurgency of 1919 to a compromised form of independence in 1922.

Nationalist revolt in Egypt unquestionably invigorated the fiction Gibbon set in that country, although he fervently claimed to despise the ideology of nationalism:

About Nationalism. About Small Nations. What a curse to the earth are small nations! Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Finland, San Salvador, Luxembourg, Manchukuo, the Irish Free State. There are many more: there is an appalling number of disgusting little stretches of the globe claimed, occupied and infected by groupings of babbling little morons – babbling militant on the subjects (unendingly) of their *exclusive* cultures, their *exclusive* languages, their *national* souls, their *national* genius. (Gibbon 2001b: 106)

This outburst from 'Glasgow' (1934), included in *Scottish Scene*, a book Gibbon co-authored with Hugh MacDiarmid, sounds as if it comes from an imperialist opposed to the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated nations. But Gibbon's real gripe is with what he believed to be the reactionary, quasi-fascist basis of nationalist movements, in particular the modern Scottish Renaissance promoted by MacDiarmid. In spite of Gibbon's scepticism, this 1920–30s cultural movement – if movement it was – can now be seen through a postcolonial lens as resistant to British political and cultural centralisation. Gibbon's own 'Scottish' fiction, in particular *A Scots Quair*, made a key contribution to the Scottish Renaissance by employing a uniquely local vernacular voice to speak of universal concerns. Gibbon, however, resisted inclusion as 'a member of a homogenous literary cultus', as he jeeringly called the Scottish Renaissance (2001b: 109). And it was an internationalist political position – what we can now see as a form of radical cosmopolitanism – and the broader cultural sympathies inspired by his reading of diffusionist anthropology which ignited his suspicions of the Scottish movement.

Gibbon, who as a young journalist in 1917 Aberdeen addressed Communist meetings and was a member of the Aberdeen Soviet, argues in 'Glasgow' that the poverty of the poorest inhabitants of Scotland's largest city would not be alleviated by the reinvigoration of Scottish culture or even by self-government from Edinburgh. A progressive solution to the iniquities of capitalist civilisation will not be found in cultures or nations declaring their independence from each other but in the revelatory realisation of their essential oneness: 'Glasgow's salvation, Scotland's salvation, the world's salvation lies in neither nationalism nor internationalism, those twin halves of an idiot whole. It lies in ultimate cosmopolitanism, the earth the City of God' (Gibbon 2001b: 108).

Gibbon's idealistic model of a cosmopolitan future is deeply informed by his reading of the past as adapted from diffusionism. For Gibbon, contra Blaut, diffusionism's view of how civilisation began has what can arguably be characterised as postcolonial implications. If cultures did not evolve independently by spontaneous generation but arose fortuitously from one place, then, notwithstanding Egypt's historical importance, in the present world order no particular culture can rightly claim cultural superiority over others, and no particular folk should imagine their nation justified in pursuing what Amin describes as a 'global political project' (Amin 1989: 75), or as having a chosen or ethnically determined imperial destiny. Like others on the Left in the 1930s, Gibbon was searching for an active principle in history with which to defeat Fascism's reactionary theory of national and racial particularity. He – like other notable creative writers – found what he needed in diffusionism. W. H. Auden, for example, also saw a link between the diffusionist theory of the past and a leftist politics for the future. Auden was briefly involved in the Republican bid to defeat the Nationalist Franco in the Spanish Civil War, and his 'Spain' (1937) plots the history of civilisation from a diffusionist perspective and sets this against the peril to civilisation of the present Fascist threat:

Yesterday all the past. The language of size  
 Spreading to China along the trade-routes; the diffusion  
 Of the counting-frame and the cromlech;  
 Yesterday the shadow-reckoning in the sunny climates.  
 [. . .]

Yesterday the classic lecture  
 On the origin of Mankind. But to-day the struggle.

(Auden 1979: 51, 52)

Auden had been reading W. J. Perry (cf. Fuller 2007: 284), whose *The Children of the Sun* (1923) is the theoretical source for many of the leitmotifs in Gibbon's fiction. Here Perry argues that pre-civilisation food-gatherers consisted of 'entirely peaceful' communities practising sexual equality, and that savagery was not the evolutionary starting-point for humanity on the Great Chain of Being from primitive brute to *Homo sapiens*, but rather the result of 'culture degradation' (Perry 2004: 490, 469). This undermines the developmental timeline and imperial dualities (core / periphery, civilised / uncivilised, mature / immature) of Enlightenment, which parallels the theory of early humans as savage with racism towards existing underdeveloped nations. 'Civilization [is] no progress from the beast, but a mind-tumour and a disease' (Gibbon 1995: 111), realises Maudslay in Gibbon's *The Thirteenth Disciple* (1931). Primitive humanity and barbarism are not comparable; and civilisation is neither inevitable nor unchangeable, but still to be won.

In spite of Elliot Smith's contention in *The Diffusion of Culture* (1933) that culture diffusion is not to be confused with the migration of populations but rather ideas, diffusionism is in reality a spatial theory mapping the movement and intermixture of peoples and cultures: a theory which, whilst not entirely undermining the claims of autochthony, maintains that cultures did not evolve, do not exist, and cannot be studied in isolation. In this respect it can be seen as a prototype for contemporary theories of cosmopolitanism. As Kwame Anthony Appiah says in *Cosmopolitanism*, '[c]ultural purity is an oxymoron' (Appiah 2007: 113). Gibbon displays a proto-postcolonial understanding of the hybrid nature of culture in his Egyptian stories. Most of these centre on Cairo, his first Egyptian work being *The Calends of Cairo*. Collected by Jarrolds in 1931, and with a puff by H. G. Wells, many of these short stories originally appeared over 1929–30 in the *Cornhill Magazine* as 'Polychromata'. 'He Who Seeks', the first tale in *Calends*, opens with the meaning (literal and metaphorical) of Polychromata: 'Many-coloured [. . .] one of the names of our little Cairo' (Gibbon 2001b: 224). Cairo is a great, many-coloured cosmopolitan city, and Gibbon's stories will reflect this.

The narrator of Gibbon's Egyptian work is a White Russian in exile from the Bolshevik Revolution. In *Calends* and *The Lost Trumpet* (1932) this is Anton Saloney, 'dragoman, guide, ex-colonel of horse in the army of Deniken, and one-time Professor of English Literature in the Gymnasium of Kazan' (224); in the 'Egyptian Nights' section of *Persian Dawns*, *Egyptian Nights* (1932) – and

'Egyptian Nights' surely echoes *Arabian Nights* – the Saloney surrogate is Sergei Lubow, another White Russian. That Gibbon should choose a White Russian narrator indicates a concern with the effects of revolution and the decline and fall of civilisations. Saloney, a cultural outsider like the reader, is our guide round a once great civilisation. As the beneficiary of his homeland's pre-revolutionary inequalities he is no ordinary dragoman but a cultivated guide who has now fallen on harder times, as both dynastic Russia and Egypt have suffered cultural decline. With bitter irony, Saloney says: 'I have left my country for my country's good' (Gibbon 2001a: 184). Russia, for Saloney, is under occupation by the Bolsheviks, as Egypt's degeneration is underlined by the British presence.

Former professor of English Literature, Saloney speaks our language (although his 'non-Standard' English is Gibbon's somewhat ham attempt to convey a Russian inflection) and intimately understands the literary culture of Egypt's coloniser. In 'The Epic', Saloney describes English as 'this wayward, featureless, fatherless tongue', as if it now belongs to no one and everyone, and thinks it may even be a more subtle interpreter of 'Cairo's soul' than Arabic (Gibbon 2001b: 237). 'The Epic' centres on John Connan, a disillusioned English – and, Saloney thinks, part-Irish – poet who is brought back to life and writing by his desire to write the epic of Cairo, 'The Epic of Khalig' (Cairo's main street). Saloney describes Connan as 'the bull-man', and questions how someone with a despotic will-to-power resembling '[t]he Nietzsche, the fascist, the bolshevik' (240) could ever write a great poem redolent of the spirit of many-coloured, cosmopolitan Cairo. Connan imagines his epic will reveal what he believes to be the essentially feminine soul of Cairo, but '*The Spirit of the Khalig, the woman I had created!*' (248), embodied in a mute Sudanese slave, is never revealed to anyone except Saloney as Connan's vision destroys himself and the Sudanese. Connan, a 'sick man' (238), is on an illusive and doomed quest to capture the essence of the East, a culturally imperial quest undermined by Gibbon throughout his Egyptian fiction.

Such subversive tactics are shown to comic effect in 'Siwa Plays the Game' from 'Egyptian Nights'. Another English writer, George Mentieth Elvar de Selincourt, comes to Cairo looking for the authentic East. Selincourt is author of the bestsellers *Purple Sands*, *A Dahlia in the Desert* and *The Yellow Silence*, Egyptian romance novels, but this is actually his first visit to Egypt. 'I have come to Egypt', he declares pompously to Sergei, 'to gain a deep personal acquaintance with that mysterious East whose life I have hitherto known only intuitively' (Gibbon 1998: 261). Imagining, indeed hoping, that the East in reality is the stereotypical metaphysical conundrum portrayed in his books, Selincourt is one of Said's professional Orientalists, making a huge profit selling back the Western representation of the sensual, enigmatic East to Western readers jaded by instrumental reason. Selincourt does not want to stay in Cairo, which he decides is too civilised to be the real East, but instead wants Sergei to take him out to the desert lands and the Siwa Oasis: 'I've heard rumours there's a tribe of a lost white civilisation in that neighbourhood [. . .] – and there at least the True East still

lives unchanged' (261–2). Selincourt's Orientalist equation runs as follows: the 'True East' is isolated, hence racially pure, which equals white, plus fixed in time, which equals uncontaminated by either modernity or cultural mongrelisation. Selincourt is the archetypal rich tourist in search of unspoilt difference, and he is about to be fleeced.

Unfamiliar with the Siwa area, Sergei hires local guide Selim Hanna, who 'was neither taciturn nor sinister, as were all good guides in the books of George himself' (263). Selim has an ethos of self-help that would have made Samuel Smiles proud; aptly, his name is a comic contraction of 'sell 'im', while novelist George also sells, if in higher circles. If Selincourt sells the East, or the West's representation of it, to the West, then Selim, too, sells the East to the West – at any rate, the East the West wants to buy. But Selim's East is one that has already been contaminated by the Western popular culture of gramophone records ('My Baby's a Wow') and vulgar materialism – vulgar, at any rate, to the wealthy Western visitor, but a necessity for the hard-pressed indigene.

Continuing the theme of human and cultural commodification in a colonial environment, Selim's mother, 'a Greek woman sold from bidder to buyer' (267), bore the beautiful Greek Zoë, Selim's half-sister, and Zoë's ambition is to marry a Westerner. To get George to marry her, Zoë pretends she is the daughter of a Greek professor imprisoned by Arabs and that she is to be married against her will to one of her father's captors; George, hero of romance, must save her. Never losing his light comic touch, Gibbon is subtly playing with notions of originary myth, and mocking what Aijaz Ahmad has described as the fictitious cultural continuity of 'this Athens-to-Albion Europe' (Ahmad 2008: 183). To the Eurocentric George, Zoë the Hellene is of Western origin and her heritage the very origin of 'the West'. Yet Greek origins, it has been argued, actually owe much to the Levant; indeed the Greeks liked to think they had Egyptian forebears (Bernal 1987; Amin 1989: 89–103). Zoë claims her contentious Western inheritance, while George the dupe buys the myth of Western origins and thinks he has saved 'West' (Greek) from 'East' (Arab). Like George Selincourt, Gibbon was writing for an English-speaking audience and, with at least one eye on that market himself, he is inviting Westerners to laugh at themselves as naïve yet deserving victims of the duplicitous East. As Jeremy Idle has pointed out, Gibbon's Cairo stories contain elements of 'complicity with Orientalist cliché' (Idle 1994: 222). But if he trades in stereotypes for comic effect at one level, Gibbon simultaneously collapses those stereotypes from within by marrying 'East' and 'West' in a comedy of errors.

'East is West', from *Calends*, upsets the cultural apartheid signalled in Kipling's famous line. 'Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet', declares Kipling's poet in 'The Ballad of East and West' from *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1890). Kipling's line is axiomatic of the binary opposites of colonial discourse. 'East' and 'West' exist not merely as geographical markers, points on the compass, but are capitalised as signifiers of an idea, a culture, a whole way of life. Kipling's insistence that 'never the twain shall meet' isolates 'East' and



'West' as pure, stand-alone entities, cultures that developed independently and will continue to resist any form of miscegenation. 'East is East and West is West': according to Saloney, this is 'the heresy pitiful, the concept pre-Copernican' (Gibbon 1931: 195). Imperialists like Kipling are culturalist flat-earthers who see the globe like a map on the wall, with fixed geo-historical coordinates – an idea so reactionary as to take us back metaphorically before Copernicus (1473–1543) demonstrated that the earth circles the sun. (Copernicus's heliocentric astronomy also hints at the diffusionist interest in sun gods and Perry's pre-civilisation Egyptian children of the sun. Gibbon uses sun imagery a lot in his fiction, most notably *Sunset Song* which narrates the death of a community and its way of life, or the phrase 'the cheated of the sunlight' by which he means the wretched of the earth.) But Saloney knows that 'East is West and West is East; they merge and flow and are the compass-points of a dream' of a cosmopolitan world (Gibbon 2001b: 334).

'East is West' concerns Simon Mogara, French with a 'Goanese half-caste' (337) grandfather and Cretan grandmother. Mogara is attempting to develop an ornithopter, a helicopter-like machine that flies by flapping its wings like a bird. Researching in America he finds himself described by aeronautical colleagues as the 'nigger birdman' (338) and rumours he has been with a white woman see him lynched and facially scarred, so he comes to Egypt, where his colour will be less of a barrier to experimental advance. Mogara's work attracts the interest of the blonde English aristocrat Joyce Melfort, whose 'type' Saloney describes as '[t]hese the English, the Aryans ultra-bred, dominant, blood-proud, apart. How apart from all the lesser breeds, they of the pigmentation, "without the law"!' (340).

Despite Saloney's typecasting of Joyce, and Mogara's initial scepticism – 'English – and I'm a mongrel. Your people' (349) – Melfort and Mogara marry. Their relationship is crudely, flagrantly idealistic; their children, the future generation, will be citizens of 'the Republic in the skies' (351), concerned only with the quest for the evolution of humanity beyond 'tribe-taboos' and the Kiplingesque 'whining rhymes of cultures troglodyte!' (334–5). Interbreeding, the merging of East and West, will bring the Republic of the skies on earth, final victory in the battle to be free of race. A proto-postcolonial idealism wins through here, at least for one couple. The story implies that scientific advance (Mogara's ornithopter) may represent the pinnacle of our modern civilisation, but similar progress needs to be made in human relations towards the kind of cosmopolitanism science reveals in.

Mogara and Melfort commit to the 'high Adventure' of the quest for a better, non-racialised world, ethically rising, as Mogara's ornithopter rises, 'from the slime to the stars' (347). Their adventure is tonally reminiscent in its childlike excitement and what-ho derring-do of colonial fiction such as Kipling's *Kim* (1901) which, as Said argues, masks the violently hierarchical colonial meeting of East and West in a boy's adventure story, the Great Game of imperialism (see Said 1994: 159–96). Yet, just as Simon and Joyce agree that Mogara's invention

will not be sold to the military, so Gibbon's 'high Adventure' is ideologically opposed to Kipling's Great Game.

'Revolt' from 'Egyptian Nights' was also published in the *Cornhill* as 'One Man with a Dream'. Chief protagonist Thomas O'Donnell is described by the Englishman Robert Sidgwick, in conversation with Sidgwick's brother-in-law John Caldon, as 'a half-caste – an Irish–Sudanese, of all grotesque mixtures' (Gibbon 1998: 185) – recalling the English–Irish Connan of 'The Epic' and Mogara, of French–Goanese stock; significantly, even O'Donnell's 'Western' side is colonised. Accused of trying to rape Clare Caldon whilst at an English theological college, on coming to Egypt O'Donnell has renamed himself Rejeb ibn Saud and is fighting the British in the Arab revolt for 'The Green Republic of Islam' (188). His son, Hassan, gravely ill, ibn Saud's revolt against the European quarter of Cairo is personalised by Gibbon as an attempt to lift all of 'the pitiful Cohorts of the Lost, the Cheated of the Sunlight' (182) out of the poverty and oppression of Cairo's Black Warrens where live, in ibn Saud's description, '[w]e miserable "natives"' (183). O'Donnell / ibn Saud intimately understands why the British, and the rest of European Cairo, contemptuously label the Arab population as 'natives'; Sidgwick explains O'Donnell's supposed attempted rape of Clare as his native blood inevitably getting the better of him: 'The nigger attempted to act according to his nature' (186). Sidgwick blames the present revolt on '[t] his damn self-government foolishness [. . .] Treat a native as a native' (184), and a French couple anxiously avoid ibn Saud, the 'crazed native' (188). Natives are uncivilised, fanatical, aggressive; they must be controlled.

In a key passage, ibn Saud enters a bookshop and opens a book at a poem that has acted as his inspiration for a decade 'since, a homeless vagrant, he had landed at Suez to his dream of Egyptian Renaissance':

One man with a dream, at pleasure  
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;  
And three with a new song's measure  
Shall trample a kingdom down.

(189)

Unnamed by Gibbon, the lines are from 'Ode' by Arthur William Edgar O'Shaughnessy (1844–81) – significantly, born British to Irish parents. O'Shaughnessy's poem whimsically evokes Shelley's defence of poets as 'unacknowledged legislators', and correlates imagination and reality, poetry and politics, narration and nation. Gibbon slyly leaves out the revealing preceding couplet: 'And out of a fabulous story / We fashion an empire's glory'. Ibn Saud's knowledge of O'Shaughnessy's poem shows the civility of this elite-educated 'native', who knows both the culture of occupied and occupier. But its use here is also a postcolonial manoeuvre. Ibn Saud is employing the English verse as a tool to defeat the British; he is turning their own literature, a key tool in colonial conquest, against the invader.

'Revolt' concludes with ibn Saud's refusal of the stereotype of violent native. Finding Clare Caldon's lost and vulnerable young daughter in the bazaar, with whom he shares a feeling of instinctual affiliation, and being told of Hassan's death, he calls off the nationalist revolt. Gibbon can certainly be criticised for extinguishing the Cairene's legitimate insurrection against a foreign occupier, especially as this happens through the actions of a protagonist of part-Western extraction. There are no strong indigenous characters in 'Revolt'; as the Egyptians are ruled by the imperial British, so the half-Irish, English-educated O'Donnell leads the insurrectionists. O'Donnell, his death approaching, sees – through Western eyes? – the rebels as a 'mob' and they misname him 'Englishman' (198). Nevertheless, O'Donnell does not simply suffer a fateful momentary ambivalence over the prize of independence for a people not his own; rather, he rejects the present pressing claims of nationalism in the name of a humane cosmopolitan future:

Never his generation, but some time, it might be, *theirs*, would yet win a wide path through all the tangles of breed and creed and race, reach even to that dream that might yet be no dream – the Brotherhood of Man. (195)

O'Donnell / ibn Saud, one of Gibbon's heroic mongrels, himself composed of East and West, attempts to breach the ontological rupture between 'East' and 'West' but pays for this with his life, killed by his own faction for his betrayal. He becomes martyr to a different cause than originally intended, that of nationalist revolt, because he finally understands that nationalism offers no escape from the imprisoning dualities of colonialism, being merely the rebel flip-side to the violent currency of imperialism.

In his Egyptian work Gibbon largely refuses the essentialism inhering in the concepts 'East' and 'West'. Yet his cosmopolitanism, in league with his diffusionism, is a faith, an adventurer's quest for the evolutionary beyond, a form of metaphysics – that is, a belief that the essence of things, the Real, is hidden by reality. In *The Lost Trumpet* (1932), his only novel set in Egypt and one that relies heavily on his diffusionist message, Gibbon brings together a disparate group of characters in search of Joshua's lost trumpet that brought down the walls of Jericho. But their respective quest is really to raze the walls of inner repression behind which is hidden the true self, and the tool that will blast the walls away is not psychoanalysis but diffusionism. 'The cure in Diffusionism [. . .]: *Be your essential self*' (Gibbon 2001a: 139). However, as the diffusionist Dr Adrian says, '[o]ur trouble is this little matter of human nature' (137).

Leszek Kołakowski writes that '[t]he conception of human nature is at the same time a description of man's proper calling' (Kołakowski 2005: 179). Two contending ideas can be broadly identified. Gibbon's diffusionists, like Rousseau, believe that human nature is originally good, but has been distorted and hampered by Western notions of civilisation. This Romantic or utopian ideal

imagines that humanity (subject) can regain unity with nature (object). Most proponents of this philosophy are on the political Left and favour forms of communalism. The opposing tradition might be described as Hobbesian, and sees humans in a natural state as savage. This is the political basis of our individualist capitalist democracies. As Kołakowski points out, the utopians have to answer why, if people are good, we are not all freely living the good life of the Golden Age imagined by Gibbon. Yet equally, for Samir Amin, capitalist imperialism must answer the indictment of uneven development in its peripheries:

The Eurocentric universalism of capitalism is not critiqued in order to allow the construction of a new universalism; all aspirations for universalism are rejected in favor of a 'right to difference' (in this context, differences of cultures and forms of social organization) invoked as a means of evading the real problem. This is what I call 'provincialism'. (Amin 1989: 146)

Gibbon's cosmopolitanism, the national 'synthesis' (Gibbon 2001a: 268) envisioned at the end of *The Lost Trumpet*, is, indeed, in Kołakowski's terms, utopian, but it is also a necessary quest to escape provincialism and imagine a new anti-imperial universalism that is ultimately postcolonial.

## NOTES

1. J. Leslie Mitchell wrote most of his books, the 'English work', under his real name. Only the 'Scottish work' was penned by Lewis Grassie Gibbon. For ease of understanding, I will throughout this chapter refer to the writer as Gibbon and the man as Mitchell. This deliberate mistake is redressed in the bibliography.
2. Mitchell's period in the 'Orient' is, suitably, mysterious; his only biographer so far, Ian S. Munro (1966), takes no more than a few pages to recount Mitchell's RASC years.
3. See Schoene (2008) on 'Cosmopolitan Scots'.