Secrets, Leaks and the Novel: Writers, British Intelligence and the Public Sphere after World War Two

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This article makes a pioneering effort to explore the relationship between spy fiction, intelligence and the public sphere in Britain after World War Two. The secret British achievements of code-breaking, atomic science and deception in the World War of 1939—45 were outstanding. Similarly, the British contribution to spy fiction in the twentieth century has been seen as exceptional. However, the complex interconnections between the history and fictions of intelligence in the post-war decades have never been closely examined. This is a period during which the British state aggressively sought to suppress memoirs and histories written by wartime secret warriors. Other writers who chose to disclose aspects of their intelligence work through the idiom of spy fiction, however, met with a rather different response. In this period, we argue therefore, the relatively unpoliced spy story emerged as a tolerated form of leakage for wartime secrets.

The public reputation of the British security establishment underwent a serious decline in the post-war years, in the wake of successive scandals and defections. British intelligence made a number of attempts to repair its battered image in this era, for example publicising a key case involving a Soviet double agent working for the West. However, fiction remained a key terrain on which an ongoing battle for the reputation of British intelligence continued to be fought out. From the early 1960s a significant new form began to emerge: the 'New Realism' of John le Carré. Widely accepted as an authentic image of the British intelligence 'circus,' these stories portrayed the British secret state in a strikingly harsh and revealing light. Working directly in response to le Carré, writers like John Bingham sought to counter with an altogether more positive impression of secret service. Again, the spy novel provided a key terrain on which struggles over the public image of intelligence were fought out. In this way the essay draws together the history and fictions of the post-war decades to reveal an intimate correspondence between writers, secret service and the public perception of the intelligence community.

Introduction

From the time of the Second World War, a culture of secrecy intensified around British Intelligence. The press were largely compliant, accepting *de facto* censorship on matters of national security through the D-Notice system[1]With few exceptions, histories and memoirs by serving and ex-officers were suppressed. In the wake of

[1] The D-Notice system, established in 1912, was essentially a gentlemanly arrangement through which editors accepted civil service guidance on matters of security.

spy scandals which threatened permanently to undermine public trust in the agencies, propaganda value was extracted from Soviet defectors where possible. However, almost all attempts to report on the internal culture and modes of operation of British intelligence met with determined resistance. Despite this, we suggest, one cultural form emerged in which disclosures of officially guarded secrets were treated with surprising indulgence: the spy novel. This article examines the emergence of spy fiction as a tolerated form of leakage from the 1940s onwards. In an era of official refusal, we argue, it was often fiction that provided the public with an understanding of British intelligence's successes, but also influential pictures of its corruption and decay. In this way, fiction becomes a key terrain on which struggles for the reputation of British intelligence are fought out in the aftermath of World War Two. The article examines the key moments in this battle of representation, from early stories of wartime triumphs to the arrival of John le Carré's New Realism – a scathing first-hand portrait of the British intelligence 'circus' that would shape public perceptions for a generation.

In the inter-war period, the celebrated cases of two authors who had served in intelligence and who ventured to write on espionage set important precedents on how disclosures were likely to be met. Compton Mackenzie published the espionage novel *Extremes Meet* in 1928, his wartime work in intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean providing "the material for the novel." Meeting with no official sanctions, he drew further on personal experience for a second spy novel *The Three Couriers* (1930). Although both novels contained significant disclosures, this was lost on reviewers who praised his comic invention at the "expense of realism" (Mackenzie 1967: 129). When Mackenzie turned to the writing of his wartime memoirs, *Greek Memories* in 1932, however, he met with a very different response. It was with this third instalment, that Mackenzie, this time writing more specifically about his work in wartime MI6, fell foul of the authorities and was successfully prosecuted under the Official Secrets Act (Masters 1987: 66–76). Although he was allowed to "plea bargain," (Hooper, 1987: 65) and was fined only £100, the book was banned on its first day of publication.

Somerset Maugham encountered difficulties even when publishing his fiction. He had made a considerable impact on the genre with his veiled autobiographical

stories centred on the agent *Ashenden* (1928), which had emerged with only faint official resistance. However, a further fourteen stories prepared for publication in the same realistic style were allegedly burnt by Maugham after he had been advised by Winston Churchill that they went too far in disclosing official secrets (Morgan 1980: 206). The experiences of Mackenzie and Maugham seem to indicate that the spy-author could face difficulties in presenting personal material whether in factual and fictional form. However, Maugham's experience seems to have been a very unusual one and we should look to Mackenzie as the influential precedent for the spy-authors who would follow. Espionage experience presented as fiction was much more likely to escape the ire of the authorities than any account of sensitive material presented as 'fact.' As the Second World War drifted into the Cold War, this difference in treatment seems to have become entrenched. At a time when the authorities were highly reluctant to disclose anything about war-time intelligence, including atomic secrets, code-breaking and deception operations,[2] the novel often seemed to enjoy an unspoken exemption.

Writers and British Intelligence after World War II: Selling (out) the Secret State

> Upon the fringe of the Deception Section of the Joint Planning Staff there were innumerable people in MI5, MI6, MI9, ISSB, SOE, the FO, MEW, PWE and other bodies who knew a limited amount about Deception operations; but only the seven officers who formed that Section know the whole truth and not one of them has published anything about our activities. The available accounts are a sprinkling of facts among a bulk of speculation. (Dennis Wheatley 1976: 87)

The Double-Cross System run by J. C. Masterman and the deceptions on which Dennis Wheatley worked are widely acknowledged to have helped shape the course of World War Two. According to one of the most influential figures in this field, Commander Johnny Bevan, strategic deception had proved itself so vital in the war that, in his words, it "may almost be classed as a new weapon" (quoted in Andrew

[2] While there was seemingly no direct attempt to suppress a spy story in the post-World War Two decades, there was still vigilance. John le Carré, significantly, recalls the legal adviser to MI5 agonising over "literary defector" Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana* (1958) for being too revealing of an agent's operational relations with his embassy. In the event, the novel was allowed to publication (2017: 20—21).

2010: 318).[3] In the immediate post-war period, however, most aspects of the intelligence campaign that had helped the Allies to victory remained officially guarded secrets. From a strategic point of view, MI5 and MI6 had sound reasons for insisting on this – many techniques employed during the war were still in use and a major escalation of the intelligence war with the Soviet Union was looming. However, this policy of silence also had an important downside. Politically, the early 1950s were a difficult time for the security establishment, with a series of high-profile defections and other security scandals working to undermine public trust. Both MI5 and MI6 had made major contributions to the war effort but were almost completely unable to take credit for their successes. In this context, many of the writers who had been involved in wartime espionage argued strongly for the benefits of publishing their stories. Right up until the 1980s, nevertheless, the instinct of both government and senior officials was to deny permission. Most forms of public disclosure, even less sensitive ones, were strongly opposed. When the Head of MI5, Sir Percy Sillitoe, sought to publish his memoirs in 1955, for example, he encountered determined resistance. As Art Cockerill says in his biography:

> He was obliged to submit the manuscript to the Home Office for approval, and almost everything of interest about his MI5 intelligence work was rejected. Later, discussing the censorship with a former colleague, he remarked with some bitterness, "The government tore the guts out of the book and completely emasculated it." To his family he was equally blunt: "They've torn the bloody guts out of it, torn it to shreds." (Cockerill 1975: 178)

The view of the Head of the Civil Service, Edward Bridges, and Head of the Foreign Office, William Strang, was the same: that intelligence officers simply should not write at all. "Anything he writes will in some measure reveal the man, and anything that reveals the man will give an insight into the mind of the official and the climate and ways of thought of his department" (quoted in Harrison 2009: 786).

This position remained largely unchanged for more than twenty years, as John Masterman discovered when he repeatedly tried to publish his account of wartime deception in *The Double-Cross System* (1972). When the book finally emerged with Yale University Press in the United States, he was told by the serving head of MI5, Sir Martin Furnival Jones, that, "I consider your action disgraceful and have no doubt

[3] See Howard (1995) and Holt (2004).

that my opinion would have been shared by many of those with whom you worked during the war" (quoted in Andrew 2010: 317–18). It is true that Masterman's history of the Double-Cross System had been written immediately after the war for official consumption only. At that time its purpose had been to capture important lessons learned in strategic deception during that conflict. As the public reputation of British Intelligence continued to decline through the 1950s and beyond, however, Masterman began to see a stronger and stronger case for its publication. His first representations in 1954 elicited a firm refusal from the Director General of MI5, but from 1961 he began to press again. Writing to the prominent Conservative Philip Cunliffe-Lister, Earl of Swinton, he argued that, "publication now would increase public confidence and help stop the curious from criticising and enquiring too much into the methods of security departments" (quoted in Harrison 2009: 789). To the heads of MI5 and MI6, Roger Hollis and Dick White, he argued even more explicitly that, "publication would create confidence in the value and efficiency of the Security Service, and impress public opinion with the need of allowing it to work 'anonymously'," without which the service would be "hamstrung" (quoted in Harrison 2009: 790).

In the 1960s (?), British Intelligence was about to be hit by some of the most damaging scandals in its history, including the Profumo affair and the defection of double-agent (?) Kim Philby. As the British press became steadily more critical, the agencies' reputational problems deepened. Commentary on Philby in the popular *Evening Standard* on 2 July 1963 typified this: "the real culprit in his case is the Security Service. Our intelligence service has spent millions and achieved nothing but darkness" (quoted in Harrison 2009: 791). By publicising some of MI5's striking successes, Masterman hoped to combat such negative assessments and begin to set the record straight. Nevertheless, even after four further years of declining public confidence and bruising coverage, the agency remained steadfastly opposed to his plans to publish. Government records document Hollis' position in full, as set out to Burke Trend, then Cabinet Secretary and later… (?), at the Cabinet Office in 1965:

> While I appreciate Masterman's concern for the reputation of this Service, I have been and remain strongly opposed to the publication of his booklet. My main reasons are as follows:

> I believe it is essential to maintain the position that no member or ex-member of the Security Service is permitted to publish material about its activities. If such permission is given to one, I should have great difficulty in justifying the withholding of it from others; and where is the line then to be drawn? I have been fortified in this view by the example of other departments.
>
> The booklet deals in detail with techniques which are still employed in intelligence and counter-intelligence work. While the existence of these techniques is perhaps well known, this fact does not, to my mind, justify publishing an account of our view on the value of these techniques, of the extent to which the intelligence community depended on them during the last war and of the lessons we drew from our experiences at that time. I think G.C.H.Q. would also view with disfavour the proposed publication of an account so revealing of their successes.
>
> An authorised publication on this subject would undoubtedly encourage editors and writers to believe that a relaxation in the official attitude towards accounts of clandestine operations had taken place. In other words, I fear it would add to our difficulties in securing compliance with the existing 'D' Notices covering current Security Service activities. As you know this has been a very uphill struggle at times.[4]

Twenty-seven years after the end of the war Masterman's campaign finally bore fruit, at least to the extent that he was allowed to release the book with an overseas publisher without being prosecuted at home. Ultimately, according to Richard Aldrich, it was his contacts and social prestige that forced the matter:

> Masterman managed to persuade Whitehall to relent on its secrecy because he was the ultimate 'insider.' He was a governor of the most eminent public schools and a famous amateur sportsman. As History tutor at Christ Church he had taught a remarkable number of the 'great and the good.' Whitehall's senior inhabitants, and indeed the Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, had been taught by him at Oxford. Remarkably, his former students were reluctant to argue, regarding themselves as inferior in rank. (Aldrich 2004: 931–2)

Later, as Aldrich records, Douglas-Home recalled to historian Michael Howard:

> Let me tell you an extraordinary thing about J. C. [Masterman] . . . You won't believe this, but when I was Foreign Secretary they tried to make me lock him up. They actually tried to make me lock him up. It was that book of his. Both MI5 and MI6 were determined to stop his publishing it. MI5 pushed it up to the Home Secretary, and he pushed it over to me. I squashed it pretty quickly, I can tell you. Lock up the best amateur spin bowler in England? They must have been out of their minds. (Aldrich 2004: 931–2)[5]

Masterman's long battle to publish invites a revealing comparison to the experience of Sir Alfred Duff Cooper with his novel *Operation Heartbreak* (1950), which drew clear inspiration from an actual wartime deception operation. The two texts have an important difference, though: Cooper's text uses the idiom of fiction, while Masterman's is a work of history. However, they also have a key similarity: both

[4] Roger Hollis, Letter to Burke Trend. Plans to publish intelligence related works by Sir John Cecil Masterman and Sir Peter Fleming, 4/1/1965 (CAB 301/422).

[5] For an outline of the sequence of events leading to publication of *The Double-Cross System*, see Moran (2013c): 264–273).

reveal significant official secrets about the conduct of deception in World War Two. While, as we have seen, Percy Sillitoe met with a united front of resistance and a rigorous process of censorship when trying to publish his (much less sensitive) memoirs two years later, Cooper's diary reveals that in late 1950 when publishing *Operation Heartbreak*, only "[f]aint resistance was offered by certain branches of the secret service, but I was able to overcome them" (quoted in Norwich 2005: 481). Emerging only five years after the end of the war, the publication of *Operation Heartbreak* therefore marks an important milestone in the history of intelligence leakage after World War Two. While the writing of memoirs remained strongly discouraged and direct disclosure actively opposed, fiction was beginning to emerge as a medium through which the operation of Britain's secret state could be revealed, with relative impunity for the writer.

In *Operation Heartbreak* Cooper's revelations concern Operation Mincemeat, the now-famous deception operation to cover the Allied invasion of Sicily in July 1943. The latter was strategically important in allowing the Allies to establish control over the central Mediterranean and formed a prelude to the fall of Mussolini, so Mincemeat can be reasonably regarded as one of the most important deception operations in the war. Its aim was to deceive the German High Command into believing that the Allies intended to launch an attack on Greece, so that they would draw their defences away from the real target, Sicily. This was achieved by arranging for the body of a (fictional) British officer to be discovered off the Spanish coast, bearing (fake) top secret documents purporting to lay out Allied battle plans. In reality, the body was that of a rough sleeper Glyndwr Michael, who had died in January 1943 having eaten rat poison. He was dressed in the uniform of an officer of the Royal Marines and, together with a briefcase containing the faked top-secret documents, despatched by a British submarine just off the Spanish coast where, as planned, the body was discovered and turned over to authorities who informed the German Abwehr. In Cooper's *Operation Heartbreak*, a deception operation is mounted in the Mediterranean along exactly the same lines:

> A military operation of immense magnitude is in course of preparation. That is a fact of which the enemy are probably aware. Its success must depend largely upon the enemy's ignorance of when and where it will be launched. Every security precaution has been taken

> to prevent that knowledge from reaching him . . . It is our business to provide him, through sources which will carry conviction of their reliability, with information that is false.
>
> In a few days from now, Colonel Osborne, the dead body of a British officer will be washed ashore, on the coast of a neutral country, whose relations with the enemy are not quite so neutral as we might wish them to be. It will be found that he is carrying in a packet that is perfectly waterproof, which will be firmly strapped to his chest, under his jacket, documents of a highly confidential character – documents of such vital importance to the conduct of the war that no one will wonder that they should have been entrusted to a special mission and a special messenger. These documents, including a private letter from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to the General Officer Commanding North Africa, although couched in the most, apparently, guarded language, will yet make perfectly plain to an intelligent reader exactly what the Allies are intending to do. (Cooper 1973: 141–2)

In Cooper's text, as in the actual deception, the body is dropped off the Spanish coast bearing a trove of secret documents to be found by enemy intelligence. In the real operation, the dead man was styled as 'Major William Martin.' In Cooper's novel he is, almost identically, 'Major Willy Maryngton.' In operation Mincemeat, it was decided that Martin should be made as believable as possible on a personal level. A photograph of a girl in a swimsuit purporting to be his fiancée and a suitably penned love letter were supplied by MI5 secretaries to help establish his character. Even in these small details, Cooper's novel follows suit almost exactly. *Operation Heartbreak* may have been published in the form of a novel, but there is no doubt that it discloses both the substance and many of the details of an important wartime intelligence operation. The impunity with which Cooper was able to make this classified information public, then, is certainly significant.

After 1945, Operation Mincemeat remained top secret, like other key aspects of wartime intelligence including the successful code-breaking activities at Bletchley Park. A senior Conservative politician, Cooper had been head of the Security Executive at the time it had taken place and as such had detailed oversight of it. According to the official historian of MI5, Christopher Andrew, Mincemeat's success impressed Cooper profoundly, prompting him to brief Winston Churchill for the first time on the range of deception operations currently being carried out by British intelligence. Churchill's "evident fascination" (Andrew 2010: 284), prompted MI5 to begin preparing a monthly report on current operations for him from that time. These reports substantially upgraded the Prime Minister's appreciation of the contribution deception could make to the war effort, laying the groundwork for the

"bodyguard of lies" (Brown 2002: 10) created to cover the Normandy landings fourteen months later.

Seen in this context, Cooper's decision to brief Churchill on operation Mincemeat can be argued to have had some importance within the larger history of the war. Certainly, he can have been in no doubt whatsoever that Mincemeat was a classified operation, protected under the British Official Secrets Act. All the more surprising, then, is the brazen way in which he was willing to disclose its major details in his novel. As a high-ranking member of the British establishment, why did he choose to do so? If a motive for leaking the details of operation Mincemeat can be gleaned from Cooper's diaries, it was not the desire to glorify the achievements of wartime intelligence or any other higher purpose, but simply financial. On 28 December 1949, Cooper wrote of concerns over money and the way his writing helped to keep his family afloat. "My *Sergeant Shakespeare* appeared at the end of November. I have written 13 articles this year, 9 of them for the *Daily Mail* at £200 each, and I got a new cinema job which is worth 3,000,000 francs a year, but my contract runs only until the end of 1950 . . . it is rather alarming to find I have spent over £4,000. I have no idea how much Diana has spent, she keeps no account" (Norwich 2005: 475). Cooper clearly did not much enjoy writing the book, commenting: "I doubt whether fiction is my affair" and certainly worried that the book might "probably, prove a complete failure" (Norwich 2005: 475—6). When *Operation Heartbreak* achieved strong sales on its release, however, he felt that his efforts were justified. "Nearly 30,000 copies were sold by Christmas. I am hoping it will do as well in America. I am selling the film rights there for 40,000 dollars" (Norwich 2005: 481).[6]

That financial rather than political motives drove the publication of *Operation Heartbreak* also helps to explain an important difference between Cooper's narrative and its historical model, Operation Mincemeat. One key area where Cooper does make substantial changes is in the characterisation of the operation's central figure. Glyndwr Michael, whose dead body was used in 1943, was destitute and homeless, the son of a father terminally affected by syphilis who had eventually died of

[6]In the event, there was no Hollywood film.

pneumonia in 1925. For the purposes of the operation, he was given a very different persona – that of officer William Martin, an up-and-coming member of the Royal Marines. In *Operation Heartbreak*, is Cooper's protagonist modelled on Glyndwr Michael or William Martin? In effect, we would argue that Willy Maryngton effectively hybridises these two figures, as an honourable man and a soldier who, nevertheless, leads a lonely and unfulfilled life. Cooper decides against rat poisoning for his hero, instead allotting him the fate of Glyndwr Michael's father, death from pneumonia. Like Martin, Willy's love life is central to his characterisation, but like Michael, he is repeatedly beleaguered by setbacks. Importantly, though, these are filtered through a mood of heroic melancholy, building towards the historic role he will play after his death. Glyndwr Michael himself evidently enjoyed few life chances: in composing his novel, Cooper clearly shies away from reproducing the conditions of abject privation he endured. In *Operation Heartbreak*, Willy certainly finds that key opportunities elude him, but the problems he faces are matters of duty and the heart rather than bare subsistence. "It seemed to be his fate, he sometimes thought, to be a soldier who never went to war and a lover who never lay with his mistress"(Cooper 1973: 90). In the novel's title, substituting the word 'micemeat' for 'heartbreak,' the author underlines these dynamics. In a gesture towards Michael's desolate circumstances, Cooper makes him homeless towards the end of the novel when his house is destroyed in the Blitz. Again, however, this situation is given a romantic twist when he is taken in by the girl he loves and she at last allows him into her bed.

If his life has been lonely and his patriotic dreams unfulfilled, Maryngton is redeemed at the climax of Cooper's novel by the service he performs after his death. At last – albeit posthumously – he is able to play a pivotal part in the progress of the war, fulfilling all his heroic ambitions. Clearly, once again, this treatment stands in contrast to that of Glyndwr Michael, who seems to have been regarded as worthless by the intelligence officers running the operation. As Ben Macintyre observes/states, Ewen Montagu himself wrote of Michael as "a ne'er do well, and his relatives were not much better . . . the actual person did nothing for anyone ever – only his body did good after he was dead" (quoted in MacKintyre 2010: 55). One effect of the romantic and patriotic filter through which Cooper casts Willy's narrative is to

foreclose the ethical questions implicit in this dismissive attitude towards Michael, including the use of his body without family permission. It also allows him to avoid themes of destitution and social exclusion which Michael's actual story would inevitably have required him to explore. *Operation Heartbreak* would certainly have made more of a challenging read – perhaps less suited to a mass-market paperback – had it attempted to do so. Cooper, however, seems to have been as careless about authenticity to his subject matter as he was about disclosing classified details of a major wartime operation. The evidence suggests that his concern was with money, and little more.

In a significant irony, the fact that *Operation Heartbreak* disclosed key details of a classified wartime operation was not initially recognised by the British press. The *Observer* praised Cooper's inventiveness in imagining how a dead body might be used in a deception operation, a device "so well used that you can forget its improbability" (12 November 1950). *The Daily Telegraph* was similarly impressed with the appearance of truthfulness Cooper had managed to create in a text which "is in fact a work of fiction" (17 November 1950). From a historical perspective, however, *Operation Heartbreak* would prove to be an important milestone in intelligence leakage after World War Two. As we have already suggested, it was certainly not the first work of fiction to include significant disclosures about the modes of operation of British intelligence. However, it did help to reinforce the status of the novel as a form in which leakage of classified information was often officially indulged.

Before the beginning of the war, both John Masterman and Dennis Wheatley – central figures in British wartime intelligence services [or something of that sort to remind your readers of who they were – just a suggestion] had established themselves as successful novelists: both would avail themselves of this permissive attitude towards leakage in the novel during the 1950s. Each of them had written historical accounts of their work immediately after the war and each received firm discouragement when they moved to publish. As we have seen, despite Masterman's influential position and high political contacts he was not able to do so for more than a quarter of a century. Wheatley's historical account *The Deception Planners* did not see the light of day for even longer, finally emerging in 1980 after

the author's death. In the meantime, both Wheatley and Masterman published novels in which sensitive aspects of their wartime experiences were incorporated. Significantly, both Wheatley's novel *Traitors' Gate* (1958) and Masterman's *The Case of the Four Friends* (1957) were allowed to proceed to publication unhindered.

Traitors' Gate is a light-hearted spy thriller featuring Wheatley's established hero Gregory Sallust. As with its forerunners in the Sallust series, it combines a number of real historical elements with a generous dose of light-hearted escapism. Among the former elements there is no doubt that Wheatley draws directly on his experience in wartime intelligence and takes liberties with classified material. Sallust is posted – just as Wheatley was – to a division within the Joint Planning Staff of the War Cabinet, under a commander named 'Johnny' who is clearly a portrayal of the real Deception Controller, Johnny Bevan. In the novel Flight Officer Sallust – like Flight Office Wheatley – works with a small team of deception specialists who formulate plans to cover major offensives such as *Operation Torch*, the Allied invasion of North Africa. Like Wheatley, he also becomes involved with MI5's plan to cover the Normandy landings, a grand deception to disguise the Allies' real target on D-Day. As we have seen, a key concern of officials at this time was that revelations of any kind by those involved in intelligence operations might reveal the culture and ways of thinking of their organisation. In Wheatley's novel, several scenes cut directly across this policy, depicting the culture and organisation of an intelligence outfit which, although it is not named as such, is plainly the London Controlling Section. Both the existence of the LCS and its wartime activities remained classified at the time the novel was published. Similarly, while Wheatley does not name the Double-Cross System, his novel freely discloses the nature of its work including its central achievement, control of the entire Nazi espionage network in Britain. In Chapter twenty-one of *Traitors' Gate*, for example, Sallust consults with a colleague in deception planning:

> I'm on pretty good terms with one or two people in M.I.5 , and they tell me that they have the Nazi spy system taped. If one is parachuted in or lands from a U-boat, they can nab him within twenty-four hours. So all the leaks that take place are through the neutral Embassies and Legations … and they get the stuff out in the Embassy bags. (Wheatley, 1961: 307—9)

Would the novel have been less engaging as a thriller if it did not include such disclosures? Probably not, we would argue. The fact that it was able to do so with apparent impunity for its author, however, is again significant.[7]

In Masterman's *The Case of the Four Friends*, details of wartime intelligence are incorporated into the back-story of one of the central characters, Toby Bannister. During the war, we learn, he worked as a double agent for the British out of Lisbon, one of the key hubs through which deception and counter-intelligence were indeed conducted during World War Two. In the novel, we discover how double agents are run through the city, the modes of their interactions with German intelligence and how they could be used to spread disinformation to the enemy. Clearly, Masterman's wartime experience as chair of the XX committee gave him an unprecedented understanding of these matters. What is less clear, however, is why they needed to be incorporated into a murder mystery set in Oxford and around a London law firm. While being energetically suppressed as a historian of wartime intelligence, Masterman (like Wheatley) seems to have recognised that in relation to the novel, a culture of surprising permissiveness could be enjoyed. Fiction, in other words, was becoming established as a tolerated form of leakage.

One notable exception, a historical text which did find its way to publication after the war, was Ewen Montagu's account of Operation Mincemeat *The Man Who Never Was* (1953). Unlike its fore-runner *Operation Heartbreak*, Montagu's text explicitly presents itself as a true, first-hand account and goes so far as to reproduce a range of classified documents, including operational orders, letters from senior commanders, the procedures adopted by the submarine which dispatched Michael's body and some of the faked documents which accompanied it. Given the refusals meted out to Masterman and others, on the surface it seems extraordinary that such a text was allowed to be published. The circumstances surrounding *The Man Who Never Was* themselves therefore reveal something about the treatment of intelligence disclosures in this period. Three years earlier, according to Richard

[7] Following *Traitor's Gate*, Wheatley appeared emboldened enough to publish some of the 'War Papers' he had been invited to prepare in the first year of the war. *Stranger than Fiction* (1959) also revealed some aspects of the writer's involvement in wartime deception, but notably refrained from disclosing anything about the big deception operations centred on double-cross or D-Day.

Aldrich, one of the main ways in which Duff Cooper had silenced official opposition to *Operation Heartbreak* was by claiming that his knowledge of Operation Mincemeat had come from Winston Churchill himself. Since "no one was going to prosecute Churchill or his circle under the Official Secrets Act" (Aldrich, 2004: 929), Cooper therefore enjoyed an exemption from official sanction over the novel. Actually, as we have already seen, it was Cooper who had briefed the Prime Minister back in 1943. In practice, however, Cooper's senior social and political position meant that he could behave as if he was above the law, Aldrich argues. Notably for our argument here, however, it was also Cooper's untouchability which opened a path to publication for Montagu:

> In the preface to his account, Montagu gives the impression that the authorities wanted him to write the book to correct previous accounts, a veiled reference to Duff Cooper. But the authorities did not want further material in the public domain. In reality, Montagu fought a bitter struggle in order to publish by pressing the Attorney General to prosecute Duff Cooper. Cooper had been warned not to publish, he complained, but had "flouted these objections" and published, "relying on his eminent position as protection against prosecution." While Duff Cooper enjoyed the pleasure and profit of publishing, Montagu was specifically ordered to deny all knowledge, in response to frequent newspaper enquiries. By January 1951, as Montagu explained to a friend, he was busy "putting on pressure that they should either allow me to publish or prosecute Duff Cooper…." "I have been slogging away hard," he added. By March 1951, he had forced "their capitulation" and was at last allowed to publish. (Aldrich, 2004: 930)

As in Cooper's case, the writing of Montagu's book seems to have been motivated less by the desire to glorify British intelligence than from a more basic desire to secure financial gain for himself. *In The Man Who Never Was* Montagu's account is certainly self-aggrandising, minimising the roles of many others who, in reality, helped formulate and operationalise the Mincemeat deception. After publication, Aldrich writes, he "immediately contacted *Life* magazine "who are the best payers of this sort of thing." They had offered him between $2,500 and $3,000, but Montagu suspected that this was their starting price and was "suggesting more." He was also looking for serialisation in the *Sunday Express* and the possibility of films" (Aldrich, 2004: 930). In 1956, his efforts bore fruit when Twentieth Century Fox released a major film version of *The Man Who Never Was* with Academy Award nominee Clifton Webb starring in the central role, as Royal Navy Lieutenant Commander Ewen Montagu.

Scandals and Defections: Managing the Public Perception of Intelligence and Security

> It is difficult not to adopt a tone of journalistic hysteria when writing of the spy 'scandals' and 'revelations' of the past thirty years which have provided so much sensational newspaper copy. (Barley 1986: 84)

Public understanding and awareness of intelligence and security was transformed following the war. While the authorities and intelligence community vainly sought to preserve their traditional stance of secrecy and silence regarding security matters, the vastly changing landscape of espionage in the post-World War Two period meant that details of spy trials, high-profile cases of treachery, and various breaches of security found their way to the public. Principal among the new sources of information were several official enquiries conducted into Soviet espionage, first in Canada, then in the United States and Australia. *The Report of the Royal Commission* into the Canadian spy case published in 1946, gave extraordinary insight across its 733 pages into the extent and operations of a Soviet spy network rooting out military and political secrets. Several US American reports, including *Soviet Atomic Espionage* (1951), *The Shameful Years: Thirty Years of Soviet Espionage in the United States* (1952) and *Exposé of Soviet Espionage* (1960), were representative of the mounting hysteria in that country to the 'Red Menace.' In 1955 the *Report of the Royal Commission on Espionage*, at 483 pages, recounted in detail the Soviet espionage effort in Australia. While not strictly intended for the general public, such reports were pounced on by reporters, and extensive details and widespread commentary appeared in the press. Popular accounts of the various spy cases appeared, drew heavily on the official reports, and further spread awareness of espionage matters. Early examples in Britain included *The Red Spider Web: The Story of Russian Spying in Canada* (Bernard Newman 1947), *The Soviet Spy System* (John Baker White 1948), *Soviet Atomic Spies* (Bernard Newman 1952), *The Atom Spies* (Oliver Pilat 1954) and *The Spy Web* (Francis Noel-Baker 1954).

Journalistic interest in intelligence and security reached a new height in the saga of the 'missing diplomats,' which, from the spring of 1951, unfolded before an enraptured public. The mystery followed intriguingly close on the heels of Bruno

Pontecorvo, the 'missing atomic scientist,' and it was widely suspected that Burgess and Maclean of the Foreign Office, and Pontecorvo of Harwell, the government's atomic establishment, had defected to Soviet Russia. This fact would only be confirmed some years later, and the tight-lipped attitude of the authorities, dubbed the "Four Years' Silence" by a frustrated press, added to the fervent speculation of press and public (Seaman & Mather 1955: 18). Historian Anthony Glees has seen in the case of the 'missing diplomats,' "the making of a national obsession" and a revelation that "horrified an innocent nation" (1987: 1, 7). The populist *Daily Express* offered on two separate occasions (June 1951 and April 1953) a reward of £1000 for information which would clear up the mystery, and this was increased to £10,000 by the rival *Daily Mail* in September 1953 (Seaman & Mather 1955: 22, 87). The Government's belated attempt to smooth over the crisis with the *Report Concerning the Disappearance of Two Former Foreign Office Officials* of 23 September 1955 only succeeded in adding fuel to the fire and led, in the words of the *Daily Express*, to a "National Uproar" (quoted in Seaman & Mather 1955: 141; see also Purdy & Sutherland 1963: 34–44). Critics were stung into action by what they considered a farcical handling of security, by what was felt to be evasive tactics, even deceit by the Foreign Office, and by unwarranted denouncement and vilification of media reporting over the scandal. There inevitably followed accusations of a hopelessly incompetent Security Service, of Establishment cover-up, and of 'special protection' afforded its privileged sons. The case of Burgess and Maclean marked the beginnings of a sustained period from the 1950s through the 1980s in which press and public hung on every twist and turn of a seemingly never-ending sequence of security disasters and intelligence cock-ups.

The accumulation of lapses and blunders, and persistent questioning from newspapers and MPs, led to a series of enquiries in which the British authorities sought to exonerate officials and calm disquiet by proposing a tightening of procedures. *The Romer Report* (1961) came in the wake of the Portland spy case, *The Radcliffe Report* (1962) followed on the heels of double agent George Blake, *The Report into the Vassall Case* (1962) inquired into the spy at the Admiralty, and the best-selling *Lord Denning's Report* (1963) investigated the humiliating Profumo scandal in which the Minister of War was exposed in a love triangle with a Soviet

naval attaché.[8] The British press and its public were treated to an unprecedented insight into the activities of Soviet intelligence and British counter-intelligence, and this was reinforced by popular accounts of recent treachery such as John Bulloch and Henry Miller's *Spy Ring: The Full Story of the Naval Secrets Case* (1961) and E.H. Cookridge's *Traitor Betrayed: The True Story of George Blake* (1962). The occasional defector, minor spy case, and intelligence fiasco such as the 'missing frogman' affair of 1956, kept journalists' pens active and the mounting national obsession was kept well-stoked.

The critical nature of much of the press coverage of security matters, the various popular accounts of treachery, and occasional awkward questions in Parliament led a reluctant intelligence service into attempts to improve its public perception. In essence secretive and silent, the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS) and MI5 were forced onto the defensive. The public image of intelligence and security, they began to realise, was something that needed to be managed. This situation mirrored that in America, where, in face of the disastrous misadventures of the U2 overflights of Russia and a failed coup in Cuba, the Central Intelligence Agency had been publicly depicted as "a monster on the rampage" (de Gramont 1962: 13). Facing a "serious image and credibility problem" and under attack, "a beleaguered CIA went on a charm offensive" (Moran 2013a: 337, 338; Willmetts 2015a, 2015b). In Britain, the late 1940s and '50s saw a handful of tentative efforts to manage the image of, and deflect criticism from, the intelligence services. Lieutenant Colonel Grigori Aleksandrovich Tokaev, the first senior Soviet official to defect to the British, was triumphantly presented to the world's press in London at a tumultuous meeting in 1948 (*The Times* and *Daily Telegraph*, 7 September 1948). With assistance from MI5, Alexander Foote, a disillusioned former agent of the GRU (Soviet Military Intelligence), published his story as *Handbook for Spies* (West 1993: 11). In an effort to offer a more balanced account and possibly help mend Anglo-American relations in the face of British incompetence and perfidy, Alan Moorhead was given MI5 support to publish *The Traitors: The Double Life of Fuchs, Pontecorvo and Nunn May* (Goodman 2005: 145). A prominent example of authority relaxing its vigilance came

[8] Indicative of the exceptional nature of press interest, the tribunal appointed to inquire into the Vassall case consulted some 250 separate press articles which had appeared following the exposure of the spy: 4.

in the early 1960s, a difficult period for the intelligence community. In March 1961, the trial of the Portland Spies was held in open court which allowed unfettered access to the press. A commentator at the time explained the unusual decision in terms of a response to Russia's indignant stance to the West's spying in the recent U2 incident, the British authorities deciding "to make full use of this unexpected propaganda gift" and to publicise the hypocrisy of the Soviets who were clearly seeking out military secrets (Bulloch & Miller 1961: 10).

The furore that was whipped up by the scandal of the 'missing diplomats,' and the seeming negligence and incompetence surrounding the Portland, Blake, Vassall and Profumo scandals of the early 1960s, drew the intelligence and security services into ever more urgent need to counter their damaged image. In her widely read study into treachery published in 1964, Dame Rebecca West wrote of the "quickening march past of spies" in these years and contributed her own elegant yet cutting criticisms of officialdom and the intelligence and security establishment to the outcry (1964: 294).

A further, literary dimension was brought to Cold War propaganda in the form of spy memoirs exposing Soviet machinations. Such publications offered the opportunity to trump up recent triumphs, discredit the enemy, and sow seeds of doubt among opposition intelligence organisations. Under mounting pressure, both the CIA and British Intelligence were dealt a perfect opportunity in the Oleg Penkovsky case of the early 1960s to stem the tide of criticism and gain some much-needed credibility, as well as deal the Soviets a wounding blow. In a jointly-mounted operation, the Red Army colonel provided extensive military, political and technical information to the West, which, among other things, enabled President Kennedy to call the bluff of Premier Khrushchev over the siting of Soviet missiles in Cuba. The unprecedented decision was taken to exploit this extraordinary espionage coup by publishing an edited version of Penkovsky's notes and jottings as *The Penkovsky Papers* (1965, extracts serialised in the *Washington Post* and London *Observer*), and by allowing Greville Wynne, the British businessman who acted as courier on the operation and who had served 18 harrowing months in a Soviet gaol, to give a serialised account of his experiences in the *Sunday Telegraph*, to promote *The Penkovsky Papers* through news conferences in America (see for example *Daily News*

(Chicago) 11 November 1965), and to publish his adventures as *The Man from Moscow* (1967). Asked why he was free to publish his story, Wynne dutifully claimed his book to be a ground-breaking account of a peace-time operation and that it was "about time we blew our trumpet" (*Guardian*, 8 September 1967).

The Russian counter to these initiatives was to publish accounts of its own recent espionage successes in the West. The first of these was *Spy. Twenty Years in Soviet Secret Service* (1965), the memoirs of Gordon Lonsdale (Konon Trofimovich Molody), the head of the Portland Spy Ring. In a highly public spy swap, Wynne literally rubbed shoulders with Lonsdale during an exchange in 1964. Wynne judged the publication of Lonsdale's *Spy* to be an "extraordinary turnaround in Soviet policy against discussing Moscow's intelligence activities," an action no doubt provoked "by word that *The Penkovsky Papers* would be published" (*Washington Post and Times Herald*, 12 November 1965). Later in the decade, the KGB staged its biggest publishing coup with Kim Philby's *My Silent War* (1968), his account of serving as a traitor within British Intelligence. There was considerable press interest in all of this, the *Guardian*'s communism expert Victor Zora sensing a "new school of literature that combines a spy's adventures with psychological warfare, intelligence intrigues with political propaganda, and publishing with money-making" (22 October 1965); and the *Observer* declaring an "East-West war of spy books" (10 September 1967), and heralding in a new phase of the 'spy story', one where "the memoirs of an agent may prove as useful to Intelligence as a microfilm" (10 September 1967).

Writers, Spy Fiction and the Image of British Intelligence

> The perfect spy-story is one that you can not only swallow but also accept as being the way things really do happen. (Maurice Richardson, review of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, *Observer*, 15 September 1963)

By the early 1960s, then, the reputation of British intelligence was caught up in a full-blown war across a range of media at home and abroad. Once again, we would argue, fiction proved to be a key idiom within these struggles. The sometimes symbiotic relationship between espionage fact and spy fiction has been

acknowledged by historians like Christopher Moran, who has demonstrated how the leading spy novelist Ian Fleming promoted the image of the CIA in his James Bond novels (2013b). Like other national intelligence agencies, the CIA pursued a policy of anonymity, secrecy and silence. Through the popular representations of Fleming, Moran argues however, the CIA was given a "public identity," and through his writings "millions of people learned about the CIA for the first time" (Moran 2013b: 128).

The public image of MI6 was also undoubtedly given a boost by the Bond novels and the films that followed them. Overall, however, the circumstances in Britain were a little more complex.[9] If Bond provided a strongly affirmative image of British intelligence, the more disturbing aspects of post-war developments in British security were reflected in a cycle of stories which could be described as 'novels of treachery.' The first of these was Nigel Balchin's *A Sort of Traitors* (1949, scientists seek to circumvent the publishing ban put on their secret work), which appeared in the wake of the exposure of the first atom spy Alan Nunn May and his conviction in May of 1946. The series included John Pudney's *The Net* (1952, rogue security officer tries to spirit scientist behind the Iron Curtain) and Hugh McLeave's *The Steel Balloon* (1964, a conspiracy of communist scientists attempt sabotage at British atomic establishments).

Literary critic Clive Bloom has seen the Cold War spy thriller as being marked by its treatment of the conditions governing traitorous behaviour. The genre type and the essentially paranoid style were encapsulated, he suggests, in Robert Harling's *The Enormous Shadow* (1955), in which a secretly communist Labour politician cultivates a Harwell scientist for defection. Such novels, distinct from the previous generation of adventurous spy stories, make an appeal to the 'real' through an invocation of history. This is achieved through reference to real-life traitors in the stories. In *The Enormous Shadow* Harling has the investigator refer to the conspiracy he is facing as a "Pontecorvo-Nunn May-Burgess-Maclean story all rolled in one"; the

[9] In his review of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, Maurice Richardson found le Carré's spy boss Control "much less of a joke than James Bond's M" (*Observer*, 15 September 1963).

compounded litany of actual traitors, according to Bloom, serving as a "talisman of realism" (Bloom 1990: 9).[10]

Fiction scrutinising the darker side of British intelligence took on a new intensity in the early 1960s with the appearance of the espionage novels of John le Carré. In most cases, these were sophisticated variants on the 'novel of treachery,' *Call for the Dead* (1961) centring on suspected betrayal by an official in the Foreign Office, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963) treating a false defector from British Intelligence, and *A Small Town in Germany* (1968) involving a man-hunt for a suspected traitor who has absconded with classified files from the British Embassy in Bonn. In the inaugural novel, le Carré establishes the sense of realism and authenticity typical of the established cycle, making reference to the actual traitors Klaus Fuchs and Donald Maclean (a diplomat in the Foreign Service) and portraying the key suspect in a way that is clearly intended to be comparable to the latter.

The breakthrough novel for le Carré was the phenomenally successful *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, which the reviewer at the *Guardian* significantly described as a "spy story documentary" (11 October 1963). This was a publication which even the security agencies took seriously, with a book reader at the American Federal Bureau of Investigation alerting the Soviet section of the organisation to its appearance and potential significance (Burton n.d.). One of the most widely commented on aspects of le Carré's story was its depiction of a cynical and self-serving intelligence service, and one that, most disturbingly, was in moral and operational equivalence with its totalitarian counterparts. The mystique established for British Intelligence in the period before the Second World War, one robustly promoted in the contemporary spy literature, began to disintegrate. Carré's disgruntled agent Leamas, callously treated by his own service, could now bitterly describe the profession of spying, in a famous passage in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, as "a squalid profession of vain fools, traitors too, yes; pansies, sadists and drunkards, people who play cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten lives" (le Carré 1964a: 246). While patiently looking over the literature of spying during preparation of his ground-breaking novel, "the extraordinary variety of espionage

[10] Harling was a friend and wartime associate of Ian Fleming in Naval Intelligence, and therefore another writer of spy fiction who had some intelligence experience.

shook down into a kind of nightmare" for le Carré. It seemed to the author that it was a world in which "men betray one another by instinct and spies are drab, ordinary creatures who take to betrayal as they might have taken to shoplifting." Weaving an imaginative thread out of the recent public history of espionage, le Carré constructed a pessimistic image of Intelligence that was to prove profoundly influential. "It seems to be a world where the corrupters are corrupted"; "one visualises an anarchy of treason" he concluded (1964b). Reviewers readily acknowledged the realism and downbeat quality of the narrative, most apparent in its emphasis on "the ruthlessness, treachery and deliberate frightfulness of contemporary espionage," in contrast to the fanciful "glamour, sex, impudent daring and masterful heroics" exemplified by the rival James Bond stories. Not for the last time, and a significant point in the appreciation of a sense of realism, the reviewer speculated on whether the author with his thoroughgoing respect for practical details had some previous experience in intelligence (*The New York Times* 10 January 1964).

Other writers constructed a more sympathetic image for the intelligence and security services. James Barlow's *The Hour of Maximum Danger*, a further 'novel of treachery' (historical referents, Fuchs, Pontecorvo, Blake and Lonsdale), presents a deliberate riposte to le Carré's spy fiction. First published in 1962, the story is comparable in its literary accomplishment, in its portrayal of a run-down urban national landscape, and in its Hoggartian distaste for 'massification' and the shiny insubstantiality of consumer society.[11] Barlow's story carefully details the establishment of a Soviet spy ring in London, aimed at ensnaring Antonov, a defected Russian rocket scientist and bringing him back into the fold.[12] In a signed statement presented on the jacket of the paperback edition of the novel, Barlow acknowledges his debt to the recent public history of espionage, explaining that he made "detailed study of the known Communist techniques of infiltration and espionage" in preparing the story, and there are clear borrowings from *The Report of*

[11] Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* was published in 1957 and quickly established itself as an influential critique of popular culture. It is in the author's oft-mentioned distaste for Ian Fleming and his agent James Bond that le Carré's correspondence with Hoggart is most evident.

[12] Antonov was likely based on the Soviet aeronautical scientist G.A. Tokaev who defected to the British from East Germany in 1948 and published his story as *Comrade X* (1956).

the Royal Commission of Canada, for example. In his painstaking re-creation, though, and in obvious contrast to le Carré, he aimed for a sympathetic portrayal of Intelligence, wanting "to show how infinitely difficult in a democracy is the work of the security forces" (Barlow 1963). The writer's intention is achieved through the characterisation of the security officer Sam Bellamy, conscientious, dedicated, without noticeable disillusion, and broadly in harmony with his counter-intelligence service. There is no question that he will resign in disgust as does George Smiley in le Carré's *Call for the Dead*.

John Bingham's *The Double Agent* (1966), another 'novel of treachery,' offers the most revealing comparison with le Carré. Unknown to the reading public at the time, Bingham was a serving officer with MI5 and something of a mentor figure for David Cornwell (le Carré) when he worked there in the late 1950s. Bingham, an established writer of crime fiction, encouraged Cornwell to emulate him, helped get the younger man taken on at his publishers Gollancz, served as one of the principal models for le Carré's spymaster George Smiley, and possibly provided the pen name under which Cornwell would publish, the young author adopting his first name and adding le Carré (Square), this being the nickname he ascribed to the older man (Sisman 2015: 200–213; Jago 2013: 186).

The Double Agent was Bingham's first spy story, and this time he was encouraged to follow in the footsteps of Cornwell after the huge success of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*. However, his aim was wholly different, understandably so given the "fundamental differences of ideology" between the two writers (Jago 2013: 188). *The Double Agent* was clearly constructed to counter the critical image of British Intelligence found in le Carré's novels. One way to achieve this was to base the story on the successful Penkovsky-Wynne operation, which was unfolding at the time of the writing of the novel. Bingham similarly has an English businessman serve as a 'courier-agent' for British Intelligence, who is snatched by the Soviets in Vienna after unexpectedly flying over Budapest (Wynne was taken in the Hungarian capital), and flown to Moscow for interrogation. For those readers who needed a reminder, the Penkovsky case is referred to in the story and serves as the main historical referent for the unfolding action.

In *The Double Agent*, Bingham makes acknowledgement of the spy stories of le Carré, before countering their overt cynicism with regard to the intelligence hierarchy. Bingham had been amused to find himself a model for Smiley, if somewhat put out by the character's plainness and ugly demeanour (Jago 2013: 182). Alert readers of le Carré will notice that Bingham's response is to use the exact same simile when he describes his spymaster Ducane as "frog-like," which is over-used in the story to pointed effect. The narrative draws parallels with *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* in particular, and similarly centres on a protagonist who is to offer himself falsely to the Soviet secret service, in fact retaining his loyalty to British Intelligence, the purpose of the exercise to flush out a 'mole' burrowed at London HQ . Bingham treats this relationship entirely differently, however. His intentions are laid out in a 'Foreword,' unusually affixed to the novel, where he makes explicit his concern with image-making and the intelligence community. Bingham's biographer refers to this as a "broadside against critics of the intelligence services" (Jago 2013: 191). "There are currently two schools of thought about Intelligence services" Bingham asserts in the 'Foreword' (?). The first school, an obvious if unstated reference to le Carré, "is convinced that they are staffed by murderous, powerful, double-crossing cynics." The second school is the image prevalent in parts of the press, somewhat jaded after reporting endless treachery and bungling, where the impression is given that "the taxpayer is supporting a collection of bumbling, broken-down lay-abouts." Dismissing these images as false, Bingham refers readers to factual accounts such as (revealingly) *The Penkovsky Papers*, and, in an explicit endorsement of authority, to official reports, "where the size and complexity of the struggle involved" can be more properly assessed. The reader is thus, from the outset, primed to resist the kind of representations evident in both le Carré and in the popular press, and to be receptive to a "more balanced" portrayal (Bingham 1970: 5).

In a famous passage in the novel *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, the spymaster Control muses on the ethics of modern espionage. "I would say that since the war, our methods – ours and those of the opposition – have become much the same" he asserts. "I mean you can't be less ruthless than the opposition simply because your government's policy is benevolent, can you now?" (le Carré 1964a: 24).

This is seemingly sufficient justification for sending the agent Leamas on a dangerous mission into East Germany, erroneously briefed, likely to face hard interrogation, perhaps torture and even death. The aim of the mission, the precise opposite of what Leamas believes, is the saving of Mundt, the head of counter-intelligence in the Abteilung, a vicious former Nazi, Jew-hater, but crucially London's man. In a high stakes game, Leamas is expendable. All of this is anathema to Bingham, indeed a gross slur on the integrity of a hard-pressed service. Accordingly, he constructs an entirely different agent-handler relationship, more humane and socially responsible. Ducane, the spymaster in the novel (?), endures sleepless nights agonising over the "deceit and ruthlessness" of the whole game, accepting that the "conflict between ethics and professionalism … was one which every officer of the service had to face from time to time," and acknowledging that "you had to cling to some spar of integrity or you were a lost soul"[13] (1970: 72–73). Accordingly, all efforts are made to ex-filtrate his fallen agent; Sugden, like Wynne, is exchanged in a spy swap, neatly in this case, with the traitor finally unearthed in Ducane's own department. Musing on his hard knocks profession, Ducane is prepared to face the "public sneers and jeers," aware that all the security advantages lay with the police state, prepared to balance the triumphs and the defeats "with a hard scaly-eyed philosophy," and gratefully taking what might be learned from them (1970: 116).

Conclusion

In the post-war decades, the British intelligence and security services were subject to unprecedented strains and stresses after coming under public scrutiny to a degree previously uncontemplated. Former secret warriors eager to cash in on their war-winning intrigues, coupled with widespread reporting of scandals in the press and awkward questions in parliament, all led to accusations of paranoia, inefficiency, ineptitude, even corruption, and greatly tainted the image of the intelligence community.

[13] The latter phrase is repeated throughout the novel.

For a secretive service, the writer is an ambivalent figure. Intensely useful for their bold thinking and flair in putting operations together and conceiving of deception strategies; a problem when they wish to write up their adventures or draw on them in an uncomplimentary form of spy fiction. In terms of the former, Air Marshall Sir Lawrance Darvall praised the "uninstructed imagination, vision, and ability to write attractively" of Dennis Wheatley as a great asset when harnessed for wartime intelligence (1959: 13). Of the latter, John le Carré has recalled several occasions when he had been button-holed by irate serving intelligence officers referring to him as an "utter bastard" for insulting the honour of the service and for perpetuating what was felt to be a grossly unflattering image of the intelligence community (Burton n.d.).

Historians of security and intelligence have begun to appreciate the significance of spy fiction in shaping the public image of the secret services and hence the politics of intelligence. "As a result of secrecy, popular culture found itself in a unique and privileged position," Christopher Moran has asserted. Against a backdrop of official silence, "culture had the opportunity to fill a vacuum" (2013b: 121). Because of the official suppression of information and internal perspectives, press coverage of security scandals, coupled with the stories offered by novelists and filmmakers, supplied the dominant images of intelligence and national security for public consumption. Spies-turned-writers such as John le Carré became credible figures with the reading public, and therefore worrying for the authorities. After all, as Mark David Kaufman has argued, "those responsible for the nation's security were also those most likely to compromise it—not out of any treasonous intent, but simply out of an impulse to write" (2017).

In the aftermath of World War Two, as we have argued, fiction in particular seems to have emerged as a form in whose pages disclosures of British intelligence operations were tolerated, which would have been vigorously suppressed if presented as 'fact.' Following Compton Mackenzie's example, Dennis Wheatley and J.C. Masterman were allowed to publish unhindered when portraying wartime intelligence activities and deceptions in their stories. In contrast, both faced full-blooded official intransigence when they attempted to publish factual accounts of their intelligence contributions. In the case of John le Carré, while there was

seemingly no question of the stories revealing sensitive secrets, the novels' vastly more critical portrayal of the intelligence community was profoundly unwelcome, helping to impel the authorities into unprecedented actions to improve their public image. As we have shown, spy-author John Bingham felt so strongly on this matter that he rushed to the aid of his service with his own fiction, penning *The Double Agent* specifically to counter the negative image of intelligence created by le Carré, which was fast gaining traction with the British public.

In this period, as we have argued, fiction provided one of the primary frames for public understanding of intelligence. Some of this fiction, such as Fleming's James Bond novels, peddled compensatory fantasies that made little claim to realism. Other novels, such as le Carré's, were received as highly authentic and helped to entrench a culture of public distrust. More work is required to understand the function of these and other writers as intermediaries between intelligence and the public sphere. Authors have sometimes been discussed by intelligence scholars, and some spy fiction criticism touches on the history of espionage. However, the historic place of writers in the evolution of British intelligence remains little understood. The spy-turned-writer, in particular, has been a prominent figure in British intelligence, as both participant (valued) and commentator (unwelcome so far as the service was concerned). The close integration of writers with intelligence is therefore something that also warrants further investigation. Thus far, there have only been selective overviews of writers who undertook secret service (Masters 1987). Future research, as begun here, should deal more carefully with the writer's relationship to, and influence on, the internal culture of intelligence: their precise value and contribution to operational strategy; the peculiar overlap of aptitudes and insights shared by the author and the spy; the author's subsequent constructions of the ideology, image and culture of secret service; and the effects of their portrayals on the public image of intelligence.

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