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BEYOND BOND

Spies in Fiction and Film

Wesley Britton

The logo features a stylized leaf motif to the left of the text.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

When I began work on *Spy Television* (2004), my first book on fictional espionage for Praeger, two motivations prompted the project. First, I wanted to write about a subject I enjoyed, a genre that had fascinated me since childhood. Second, to my delight and surprise, no one had written such a book before. When I began compiling the first notes for this, my second foray into the world of spies, I discovered I was in the same happy position. As of this writing, I am aware of no other attempt to pull together spy-oriented fiction, film, and fact from over a century into one book-length overview.

Some may find this doubtful, with the wealth of books on espionage available on seemingly every related topic. Such doubts are most appropriate when discussing spy literature. Excellent studies of novels and novelists include books by the likes of Julian Symons, Robin Winks, John G. Cawilti, Bruce Rosenberg, and Frederick Hitz. Among the various encyclopedias on mystery and spy writers, Donald McCormick's *Who's Who in Spy Fiction* (1977) is an invaluable reference source about writers up to the publication date. Likewise, Andy East's quirky *The Cold War File* (1983) also surveys such novelists with an emphasis on pulp paperback writers.

In addition, the important writers in spy fiction, particularly through the 1970s, have all earned in-depth analysis from a variety of perspectives. Studies of Ian Fleming, John Le Carré, and Len Deighton are not rare. Writers like John Buchan and Eric Ambler have been examined in more than one full-length appreciation. Web sites on the Internet contain information about Jack Ryan that Tom

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Clancy has likely forgotten. With all this, what can a new author contribute that isn't merely a synthesis of these sources, updating information through the new millennium?

First, I've tried to focus on trends within the genre from the nineteenth century to the present, showing how influential and popular authors were participants in a continuum of shifting social tides. No doubt, many readers will find sins of both omission and emphasis here. I spend most of these pages seeking connections between the generations of writers, relationships between film and literature, and how "reality" was, and was not, woven into hardcover and paperback adventures. In short, I was interested in the contexts of the espionage milieu and seek to look at spy literature as one important thread in our popular thoughts regarding the "world's second-oldest profession."

Exploring films dealing with spies and related projects was a different challenge. For example, there is no lack of studies on Alfred Hitchcock. But the emphasis in such books is more on the director's techniques and canon as a whole than on spy projects per se. I gleaned what I needed from a variety of these sources and think an entire book on the subject has yet to be written. Of course, James Bond is the topic of a bottomless pit of interest. Any new thoughts on 007 can only be compilations of available information pointing to the most important responses to the saga. Beyond Bond and Hitchcock, looks into spy films tend to be found in short overviews of specific decades, notably the 1940s and 1960s. Perhaps the most detailed overview to date is Michael Strada and Harold Troper's 1997 *Friend or Foe: Russians in American Film and Foreign Policy (1933–1991)*. Their emphasis is strictly applied to the cold war duels between the Soviet Union and the Western powers, showing how American and British movies reflected governmental policies during these crucial decades. While a valuable resource, the overview doesn't intend to examine films in the context I've pursued. Other helpful books by J. Fred Macdonald, Michael Barson, and Stephen Heller also deal with cold war themes.

This leads us to the third important theme of this book, the role of real espionage in popular culture. Looking into the history of espionage in film, novels, television shows, radio dramas, and even comic books is tracing cultural changes that often worked in tandem. Still, without question, "realism" in print and in film is far more a reflec-

tion of what those outside the intelligence community perceive it to be than much actual unveiling of the covert world. True, many writers for the page and screen brought their experiences from undercover pursuits into their works, from the veterans of British Imperial wars to firsthand reflections on the war on terrorism. So, where fact overlaps with fiction is one motif of this book. But in a wider view, I believe my use of historical contexts helps demonstrate why we have seen our covert protectors the ways we have and how this has changed—or not—over the years. One surprising theme of this book turned out to be that fiction may try to emulate fact, but as often as not, reality often follows both intended and accidental prophecy of the imagination.

However, I fear that since most published looks into the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), in particular, point to either failures or misdeeds, I'm not certain that I've been as balanced in my portrayals of our secret agencies as I would like. Let me make it clear—I believe we need our covert warriors, but I also despair of the marching orders they are often obliged to obey. True, it is naïve to think intelligence agencies can function usefully without performing both illegal and immoral actions. But I share the commonplace notion that our fears of shadow conspiracies are due, in large part, from presidents who create their own units outside of constitutional oversight to further their own political agendas. The failed Bay of Pigs invasion, Watergate, and Iran-Contra are but a few examples of such thinking. On the other hand, as of this writing, it seems apparent that the war in Iraq launched in 2003 was fueled not only by faulty “Intel,” but also by an organizational mind-set within the CIA that saw weapons that weren't there. Law enforcement and intelligence organizations alike are often victims of self-inflicted wounds.

But such policies, as demonstrated in spy fiction, reveal something more widespread in Western culture. In Len Deighton's 1966 *Billion Dollar Brain*, British agent Harry Palmer ironically said the idealistic mad general wanting to instigate World War III was trying to bring “freedom and Coke” to countries behind the Iron Curtain. For many of our global neighbors, our interest in their affairs seems more to do with selling soft drinks than establishing voting rights. For another example, in Adam Hall's 1994 *Quiller: Salamander*, one operative bit-

terly complained the West was disinterested in the “Killing Fields” in Cambodia because the country held neither oil nor industry. No wonder former Peace Corps volunteers who had served in Peru and Chile told me one of their difficulties was the belief among townspeople that all Americans worked for the CIA. America, in the common wisdom, was more interested in ruthless dictators opposed to Communism than freedom or democracy. Such troubling issues are part of our collective history, and the role of undercover agents in the international theater is but a window into wider concerns.

In addition, I would like to echo Norman Mailer’s explanatory notes written as an appendix for his 1991 *Harlot’s Ghost*. Describing his attempt to fictionalize history based on extensive research, Mailer said there is no single CIA—even insiders only know or knew aspects of the agency from their often compartmentalized viewpoints. A writer, Mailer claimed, can find much of the tone and fundamentals of spycraft even if he or she is not either a major or minor player in the covert world. Like Mailer, my purpose is to use research to show how culture responded to what we saw and believed our protectors were up to based on fact, propaganda, speculation, and fears in an increasingly cynical climate. Therefore, the contexts I sketch from chapter to chapter focus on how views changed as we learned more and more about the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), FBI, CIA, National Security Agency (NSA), and British agencies, and how both information and disinformation made their way into our collective consciousness. If our perceptions were off the mark, well, they were nonetheless the context from which we drew our views of espionage.

I must admit that many of my choices regarding films and fiction were governed by my own informal study of spies that began in the 1960s when, while in the fifth grade, I recorded in a scrapbook that I wanted to grow up to be a “secret agent.” I remember well the day this dream died. In my classroom, I carefully studied career brochures from the FBI and learned they recommended a background in accountancy for anyone interested in joining the bureau. After that mathematical dose of cold water drowned my illusions, I contented myself with reading everything I could find, from novels to nonfiction to *Newsweek* articles to fanzines and books on television series. So when I think of “popular culture,” I am reminded of all the headlines and reviews of films and books widely available during my lifetime.

Along the way, I had other interests and earned a Ph.D. in American Literature. I put all my spy interest aside as mere hobby. Did I say “mere”? When I began work on *Spy Television* and this book, I first drew from my files, bookshelves, and boxes of material from my basement to my attic. Then I put all my scholarly skills to work. I must confess, as I looked for insights and ideas about movie projects, in particular, I found myself damning theoretical studies as more dissertations than readable sources, at least for my purposes. I became suspicious of any text that took forty to fifty pages to explain the jargon to be used before the critic got around to telling the reader about the ostensible subject implied in the title. I wasn’t interested in post-lesbian Marxist deconstructionaltarianism, shaken, stirred, or on the rocks of abandoned critical trends. While I felt a responsibility to look over such studies, I should tell all readers of this book that this overview is not an exercise in using the spy genre to promote a new critical theory, nor is it an academic treatise designed to impress graduate students or their learned mentors. From beginning to end, I had the general reader in mind, from casual fans to devoted aficionados of the wide, wild world of spies and/or secret agents. I hope experts will find fresh ideas and approaches here, but I trust that all any reader needs to appreciate this book is an interest in at least one aspect of spies in fact and fiction.

Another commonplace—books like this one are framed by pages demonstrating the author’s debts. The last pages of this book comprise a bibliography listing print and electronic sources I poured over looking for clues and open secrets uncovered by others; the paragraphs here express my deep gratitude to friends and contacts who took time and effort to help this project become what it is. To begin, I must thank Internet friends Emily Kelley, Tim Naumann, James South, Bill Koenig, James McMahon, Bev Wiles, Aloma Pedersen, Thomas Rucki, Eric Whitfield, and Betty Glass, all of whom helped with research and insights. Bond experts Matt Sherman, Robert Short, Jon Heitland, Lee Pfeiffer, and Vic Flick helped with my photo hunt and contributed much to the content of this book. While bribed with extra credit points, even though a few didn’t need them, I wish to acknowledge my English students who did online research for me. Thanks to Dale Masters, Rebecca Novac, Sonia Souchet, Amy Weikert, and Matt Windish. Thanks also to Jon Foulk at OTRCAT.com

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(Old Time Radio Show Catalog) for very unselfishly providing me a number of rare radio shows, and Philip Nel, who helped me shape my brief discussion on Don DeLillo. I'm also grateful to Matt Cvetic, Jr., who shared his memories as son of the man who inspired *I Was a Communist for the FBI*. I regret I couldn't include more of his observations. In addition, Peter Earnest and Amanda Abrell provided support and information from the International Spy Museum.

Two people I cannot thank enough are Kevin Bochynski, master of my Web site, and my wife, Betty, a longtime sufferer of my interests. Neither of these folks share any of my passions (in terms of spies, that is), but they have contributed immeasurably to all my projects. My parents, Royce and Betty Britton, helped with online research as well. I must also thank Eric Levy, acquisitions editor at Praeger Publishers, who first signed me on to do *Spy Television* and then immediately supported me when I floated the idea of this book. I here thank the various friendly voices that answered the reference desk phone at the East Shore Public Library, and Diane Wiedemann, mistress of interlibrary loans at the McCormick Library at Harrisburg Area Community College.

Before diving into the origins of modern spy fiction, I must make at least a passing explanation of what I mean by “espionage,” “spy,” “covert action,” and related terms in this book. Many studies are very particular about their terms, and histories of actual intelligence operatives and agencies do need to be as specific as possible to clarify distinctions between various job descriptions and responsibilities. In terms of popular culture, however, these concepts are largely what we have perceived them to be, whether based on fact or not. This book begins with a Hollywood producer and an ex-spy discussing two types of secret agents—patriotic and mercenary spies—but the genre quickly widens even in the first decades of the twentieth century. “Espionage” has been very loosely applied to acts of gathering intelligence and counterintelligence performed by anarchists, informants, saboteurs, strike forces, assassins, sleepers, adventurers, moles, couriers, Ninjas, engineers, historians, art restorers, recruiters, handlers, innocents being pulled into nasty business, you name it. In fact and fiction, spies have numbered children, grandmothers, committed terrorists, coerced criminals, sophisticated gentlemen and ladies, brutish terrorists, code-breaking mathematicians, sexy high-heeled “swallows,” and Mr. Ed,

the talking horse. (Well, perhaps Ed has a valid claim for inclusion. A distant ancestor, the Trojan horse, was an early example of creative spy technology.) Some spies deal in international geopolitics, others in criminal activity. Some agents work for sanctioned agencies, others shadow entities with questionable authority. Others are lone wolves who stumble across conspiracies and nefarious plots. As a result of such multiple approaches, some resources simply avoid any specific labels at all. Covert adventures are largely stacked in “thriller” sections in bookstores. Most secret agent films are labeled merely “action adventure.” No wonder critics often disagree on just whom should be included in their studies.

In my view, “espionage” has become a very inclusive concept that gives breadth and depth to the genre, even if some of the depths are very low indeed. This book is therefore peppered with quotes from print and film sources that sometimes are quick tastes of the writers or movies discussed, but many are slices of works from different time periods showing how attitudes and concepts echo and reverberate throughout history. In addition, I think our connections to the covert world are not as removed as some might believe. After learning more and more about the corporate and bureaucratic framework of intelligence agencies, I became convinced that the day-to-day activities of most spies are not much different from those of any worker in a large institution. As discussed in my *Spy Television*, fans of the ruthless Section One in *La Femme Nikita* related to the series because they felt their own workplaces were as cold, amoral, and prone to interoffice spying as those with licenses to kill. In 1965, actor David McCallum observed that his success in *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* was partly due to his belief that:

[W]e all live in an atmosphere of intrigue. These days there’s as much scheming in the dry goods wholesalers or the college classroom as in the UN to the degree that we’re daily schemers, we strive to be invisible, since you can’t pull any fast ones if you’re very much in sight and can be seen through. (Britton 2004, 331)

I suspect these thoughts are truer now than when McCallum first uttered them. Like the “Red Scare” of the 1950s when all citizens were asked to be vigilant about Communists in local neighborhoods, we

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now live in an era where surveillance includes cameras at city intersections and we have again been asked to become watchers of potential terrorists in the post-9/11 world. According to a report in the November 2004 *Atlantic Monthly*, businesses are now often better at getting international intelligence, as the American government is not considered credible in some quarters. At home, if we choose, we can spy on our own families. Minicams disguised as smoke detectors are easily available. Anyone can stick these to their walls to watch the results from their own personal computer. As I write this, my online server is suggesting I download its “Spy Sweeper” to protect my computer from Spyware programs seeking information about me.

I remember one day at a Dallas airport in December 2003, my arms and legs forced wide apart, as a security officer asked me questions to determine if this blind English teacher might want to blow up the plane on his flight home. “We didn’t start this war,” he told me as he ran the magic wand from my head to toe. “Neither did I,” I replied, remembering Richard Hannay and all the reluctant agents drawn into matters well outside of their normal lives. The following spring during an “Orange Alert,” I tried to send videotapes of my talk show appearances promoting *Spy Television* to friends and family. Two of these packages were picked out by postal inspectors and sent for checking in their Atlanta office. For two months, the packages disappeared. When they were finally tracked and sent to their addresses, the postal supervisor said, “We’re at war, and these things will happen.” In this climate, to one degree or another, we are now all spied on or are potential spies, whether armchair or active. Your mission: to discover your history in these pages.

***The 39 Steps* : Creating a Genre**

In principle, I should lay it down that the existence of secret agents should not be tolerated, as tending to augment the positive dangers of the evil against which they are used. That the spy will fabricate its information is a commonplace. But in the sphere of political and revolutionary action, relying partly on violence, the professional spy has every facility to fabricate the very facts themselves, and will spread the double evil of emulation in one direction and of panicked, hasty legislation and unreflecting hate in the other.

Alfred Hitchcock, quoting Joseph Conrad's *Secret Agent*

On December 13, 1937, film director Cecil B. DeMille stepped to his usual place behind the microphone as host for the CBS *Lux Radio Theatre* broadcast from Hollywood.¹ As he did each week, DeMille introduced the evening's program, invariably an audio adaptation of a successful movie. In this case, Robert Montgomery and Ida Lupino starred in their version of Alfred Hitchcock's 1935 film, *The 39 Steps*, the British director's own adaptation of the 1915 book by John Buchan, the story widely held as the first modern spy novel. As it happened, this broadcast was an unintentional watershed in fictional espionage. For one matter, the radio drama and its intermission interview featuring special guest Major C. E. Russell of U.S. Army Intelligence showcased America's views on spycraft between the world wars. In addition, the actors onstage, standing side by side with an actual spy, were unknowingly foreshadowing elements in American popular culture that lasted into the twenty-first century.

That evening, DeMille introduced the drama proclaiming that there are two types of spies—mercenary and patriotic. Of course, the program's hero, Montgomery's Richard Hannay, was cast from the latter mold. Then, after the second act in the hour, DeMille brought Major Russell to the stage, noting his guest had trained spies in World War I, worked with Scotland Yard, and written an espionage manual. Reflecting the spirit of the times, DeMille asked Russell about those who viewed secret agents as "vicious, double-dealing scoundrels who'll stop at nothing to obtain their ends." Prefiguring later propaganda efforts during World War II, the cold war, and beyond, Russell defended his profession, saying, "These people would change their minds if they realized that spies are one of the greatest forces for world peace." Patriotic spies, and not the other kind, he said, keep their country informed and enable it to prepare itself against enemies. A prepared country, he read from his script, is rarely attacked.

With this in mind, DeMille wondered what the qualifications would be for a good spy. Russell replied that the requirements hadn't changed since biblical times. Just like Moses, modern spymasters send out those trained in observation and memory, and gifted with descriptive skills, "the least developed of all human traits." Education, common sense, the ability to take orders, and hopefully knowledge of foreign languages were key assets, in Russell's opinion. DeMille wondered about how women served in this profession of "brains instead of bayonets." Women compared well with men, Russell replied, "up to a point." Stating a view still debated behind closed doors and on the silver screen, Russell said, "A woman's heart will rule her head more quickly than a man's. . . . We've learned that, if you want a man to talk, send in a pretty woman. And when we want a woman to talk, we make her jealous." To underline his point, Russell told of one actual case when a female singer was discovered to be a spy carrying secrets on an undergarment. The unlucky woman was tripped up because she wore a starched petticoat out of season.

After laughing at such anecdotes, a modern listener would likely then raise his or her eyebrows hearing both DeMille and Russell agree that spying has changed little over the centuries except in new technologies. Most twenty-first-century audiences would be amused to hear the two speakers discussing how a map of a country could be etched on a single flake of Lux Soap—the program's sponsor. As would

become true for so many espionage projects over the next seventy years, fact, fiction, and commercial interests would become inseparable, as was shown in that 1937 advertisement.

To close their discussion, DeMille and Russell returned to the theme of patriotism in espionage. DeMille recalled the famous phrase by French general Ferdinand Fauch telling his agents, “You will die a thousand deaths before oblivion comes. While the man in the trenches dies but once.” Agreeing with this sentiment, Russell concluded the interview by telling the audience the story of Revolutionary War spy John Honeyman. Because Honeyman’s services were unknown, he was seen as a scoundrel and outcast before George Washington publicly announced what Honeyman had done behind enemy lines. “His example will always remain a shining light to Americans,” Russell read, “who seek to serve in the silent, secret, and sometimes inglorious ways of espionage.” After thunderous applause, Russell retired and the play began anew, the story of two bantering and reluctant partners saving their country, running from the enemy and the law alike, and finding love on the battlefield of honor.²

On a number of levels, Major Russell’s short discussion of a spy’s character, the roles of women, and new technologies in spycraft point to ways in which fact, fiction, and cultural perceptions have merged in the many realms of espionage. In addition, the various versions of *The 39 Steps*—from print to screen to radio broadcast—can serve as benchmarks demonstrating how public attitudes about the covert world have changed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For example, Major Russell was called to the microphone not only to describe some history of intelligence gathering, but to defend and seek popular support for his profession. While such an approach might surprise those raised in a culture where spycraft has permeated entertainment and the evening news alike, before the 1930s, there was little mainstream interest in real or fictional spies in America. Overseas, however, the situation was quite different.

THE ORIGINS OF MODERN ESPIONAGE FICTION

In 1981, new CIA director William Casey drove to the agency’s Langley, Virginia, headquarters and noticed the standing figure of America’s most famous spy, Nathan Hale. The statue of a man bound

by his feet and hands with a rope around his neck didn't represent the service Casey hoped for in his agents. He thought a statue of his old boss, General William "Wild Bill" Donovan, would better represent American intelligence. After all, Hale had been caught (Persico 1990, 213).

The new spy master had several reasons to prefer Donovan as a more representative image of espionage. Casey knew that Donovan, the founder of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services) in World War II, believed that Americans wished to exclude espionage from their perceptions of the country's character. He felt Americans refused to embrace the covert world as part of the work of the Founding Fathers. In 1958, Donovan had encouraged Casey to write a book based on Donovan's collection of documents about George Washington's use of secret agents. For Donovan, Washington wasn't only father of his country, but also father of American espionage (Persico 1990, 99). Washington hadn't only emphasized using secret agents, he had been one himself when, in 1753, the then twenty-one-year-old British soldier went behind enemy lines to listen to drunk French officers (Persico 2001, 90). In July 1976, William Casey indeed published a book on the subject, *Where and How the War Was Fought: An Armchair Tour of the American Revolution*. This study dealt with an era that had been long neglected, even in fiction.

Still, the notion of "patriotic spies" championed by Major Russell in *The 39 Steps* broadcast was a central theme in a novel considered among the first books to employ American settings, characters, and situations. The story of Harvey Birch in James Fenimore Cooper's 1821 *The Spy: A Tale of the Neutral Ground* planted several seeds developed in future works. First, Birch's disguise as a traveling merchant, or "peddler spy," was a precursor to later operatives using business covers to give them means and reasons to go behind enemy lines. Living in a secret hideaway, Birch was a master of disguise, able to play both genders and two races, telling one man falsely accused of espionage, "The man who fights and kills and plunders is honored. But he who serves his country as a spy, no matter how faithfully, no matter how honestly, lives to be reviled" (Cooper 1971, 371). Like the history of John Honeyman as recounted by Major Russell, Birch's hardships and sufferings from those he was sworn to aid underlined that espionage is often unrewarded labor undertaken in self-sacrificing patriotism above and beyond battlefield valor.

While being far less fanciful than later writers such as John Buchan and Ian Fleming, Cooper's use of extensive research regarding the history of western New York during the Revolutionary War made *The Spy* an early fusion of literary romance with credible, footnoted realism, an approach that would have much to do with later fictional secret agents. For example, according to James H. Pickering, Cooper was keenly interested in his conversations with former New York governor John Jay, who served on "several highly secret committees organized to detect and defeat conspiracies among the large Loyalist elements in New York" (Cooper 1971, iii). Jay chose his spies from poor, ignorant men who were "cool, shrewd, and fearless by nature." Such agents, like Birch, turned down pay, saying patriotism was its own reward. The "literary nationalism" of *The Spy* was thus an early example of using secret agents to promote cultural values. This would be an important aspect in much twentieth-century espionage fiction.

However, Cooper's *The Spy* was something of an anomaly in the 1800s in English and American literature. In the early part of the century, passing references can be found to "cloak-and-dagger" stories, which were earlier "cloak and sword" French and Spanish romantic dramas characterized by mystery, espionage, intrigue, and melodrama in which the main characters were from the ranks of society that wore cloaks and swords.³ Two Edgar Allan Poe stories have been proposed as early spy yarns. "The Purloined Letter" (1845) featured C. Auguste Dupin who, in at least one critic's opinion, was more spy than detective. As Donald McCormick notes, the story's ingredients included a top-secret document stolen from a royal apartment. The main culprit was suspected of being a highly placed minister. The secret police first searched the apartment, fearing the influential suspect must be caught with the evidence before prosecution could be considered. Dupine was called in to assist, just as today MI5 (U.K. Security Service) or French Counter-Espionage would be asked to aid authorities (1977, 154). In addition, McCormick suggests, Poe's "The Gold Bug" (1843) can also be considered to be a spy story, as the focus was on the author's interest in ciphers and codes.

In England, a handful of other literary characters such as Sherlock Holmes, who occasionally worked for British and foreign secret services in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle stories, were also clearly important predecessors to twentieth-century detective and espionage fiction. For one matter, Sherlock was the younger brother of Mycroft Holmes, the

shadowy head of the British Secret Service. According to English-born Alfred Hitchcock, seeds for his own spy projects, most notably his famous “McGuffins,” came from the writings of British novelist Rudyard Kipling, the man who dubbed espionage “The Great Game.” “Most of Kipling’s stories,” Hitchcock said in 1967, “were set in India and they dealt with the fighting between the natives and the British forces on the Afghanistan border. Many of them were spy stories and they were concerned with the efforts to steal the secret plans out of a fortress. The theft of secret documents was the original ‘McGuffin’” (Truffaut and Scott 1967, 98). Beginning in the 1930s, Hitchcock made such McGuffins staples in his films, describing them as “the device, the gimmick . . . or the papers the spies are after” (1967, 98).

In Hitchcock’s home country, a variety of writers had used espionage in their stories at the beginning of the twentieth century. There was William Le Queux, who wrote fiction impressing the then prime minister Arthur Balfour, although later critics believed Le Queux wasn’t especially literary and was questionable in his factual information. But, according to Kingsley Amis, realism wasn’t yet the point. In his view, espionage based on imagination rather than actual life began at the beginning of the century “with the almost completely free-lance status of a Bulldog Drummond” and William Le Queux’s Duckworth Drew (Amis 1965, 2). Drew’s early adventures were precursors to later ones focused on new technology, such as when he encountered an “electronic eye,” an Italian device that detonated mines (Amis 1965, 2). In addition, Le Queux’s novel *The Great War in England in 1897* (1894) was an early example of literary speculations about an invasion of England. *The Secret Service* (1896) dealt with Jews in Russia, and *England’s Pearl* (1899) was an early novel shifting British fears from the French to Germany. This fear continued in *The Invasion of 1910* (1905) in which Germans wormed secrets out of shipyards, arsenals, factories, and individuals (McCormick 1977, 112). Le Queux’s later books, *No. 70, Berlin* (1915) and *The Mystery of the Green Ray* (1915), had increasingly preposterous plots. Despite the extremely minor literary contributions of these fanciful adventures, Le Queux can be seen as a logical predecessor to Tom Clancy and the subgenre of “speculative fiction” that became popular in the 1980s and 1990s.

Fellow UK novelist A.E.W. Mason’s *The Courtship of Morrice Buckler* (1896) also fared better with contemporary critics than it does

in hindsight. One reviewer claimed this book put Mason “in the forefront of cloak and dagger writers” (McCormick 1977, 134). More successful, in terms of output, was E. Phillips Oppenheim, who produced 115 novels and 39 short story collections, many of which were Edwardian spy stories emphasizing gambling and secret diplomacy, as in *The Mysterious Mr. Sapine* (1898). Praised by John Buchan as his “master in fiction,” Oppenheim spiced up his tales with local color in major city settings, as in *Mr. Grex of Monte Carlo* (1915). Oppenheim was also later lauded by Eric Ambler as one of the earliest outstanding writers of cloak-and-dagger stereotypes including “the black-velveted seductress, the British Secret Service numbskull hero, the omnipotent spymaster,” and the appeal to the snobbery of readers of the era (McCormick 1977, 144). Kingsley Amis saw Oppenheim as a logical forefather to Ian Fleming (1965, 87). Perhaps the best of Oppenheim’s output was *Kingdom of the Blind* (1917) featuring raids by submarines and zeppelins.

An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist because he prefers a great moment to everything. An artist disregards all governments, abolishes all conventions, the poet delights in disorder.

G. K. Chesterson, *The Man Who Was Thursday*

In the first decade of the twentieth century, British espionage was colorful in both fact and fiction. According to some sources, the actual profession had become so amateurish that the first twentieth-century British spy in Germany was the Hamburg representative of the Courage and Co. Brewers, who pressured their agent to send home reports of harbor traffic and military movements. After two years of non-specific instructions, he began making up his reports and no one noticed. In 1909, the founder of the modern British Secret Service was former sea captain Mansfield George Smith Cumming, a colorful figure known for his peg leg, the fact he’d been retired from the navy because of his propensity for seasickness, and his cheerful boasting that espionage was “a capital sport!” (Richelson 1995, 10). A similar attitude could be seen in novelist G. K. Chesterson’s surreal classic, *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1908). While not the first spy novel some have claimed it to be, the fanciful story has more undercover agents

than most books of the era. In this case, one agent thinks he's investigating a group of anarchists who are only disguising themselves as anarchists because their leader says that if anyone trumpets their beliefs out loud, no one will take them seriously. Chesterson's spy joins the inner circle of seven scheming bombers, six of whom turn out to be police informants spying on each other. The evil leader is the mysterious Scotland Yard official who'd hired them in the first place. Clearly, this parable used spies as a means to comment on British social conditions, a humorous seed for future writers with similar purposes, from Eric Ambler to John Le Carré. More seriously, FBI double agent Robert Hanssen thought highly of *Thursday*. He gave at least one copy to a fellow agent. Author David Wise thought Hanssen might have named his dog, Sunday, after one character (Wise 2002, 6).

They seek him here, they seek him there,
 Those Frenchies seek him everywhere.
 Is he in heaven or is he in hell,
 That damned elusive Pimpernel?

From the film *The Scarlet Pimpernel*

Other fanciful adventures looked to the past, as in the "Scarlet Pimpernel" series penned by the baroness Orczy (whose full name was Emma Magdalena Rosalina Marie Josepha Barbara Orczy). First appearing in a play in 1903 and then in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1905), Percy Blakeney was a brave and efficient English secret agent rescuing kindly, victimized French aristocrats from the guillotine under the noses of French revolutionaries. He was something of a Robin Hood figure in reverse, saving the lives of the rich who were unfairly tormented by a cold-blooded government ostensibly run on behalf of working peasants. While the Pimpernel appeared too early to be a commentary on Soviet totalitarianism, it's difficult not to see comparisons between French revolutionaries calling each other "citizen" in the same fashion as later discussions between Russian leaders and spies calling each other "comrade."

Blakeney was a character masking his heroism behind seeming idleness and frivolity, a master of quick disguises in a series of books including *I Will Repay* (1906), *El Dorado* (1913), and *Sir Percy Hits Back*

(1927). In the first film adaptation of the character, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1935), Sir Percy (Leslie Howard) admits to a British admiral that he's partly motivated by his belief his French wife (Merle Oberon) is a collaborator for the government—which he learns is untrue—but he also jokes about his adventures with words similar to those of the actual Mansfield Cumming: “I’ve got a smack in the eye, and I’ve become engaged in sport. And what a sport! What a game.” This attitude remained popular in England, especially on television. In 1982, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was a British Television movie starring Anthony Andrews and Jane Seymour. In 1999, the story became a three-part miniseries (rebroadcast on American A&E) starring Richard E. Grant and Elizabeth McGovern.

Not always focused on such costumed derring-do, the baroness Orczy also wrote *The Spy of Napoleon* (1934). Filmed in 1936, the story centered on a French aristocrat married to a daughter of Napoleon III who infiltrates a ring of traitors. In a similar vein, Italian-born Rafael Sabatini's *Scaramouche* (1902) was set during the French Revolution and featured pistol duels and disguises. Like his contemporary Joseph Conrad, Sabatini wrote in a language not his own, but ostensibly based some of his fiction on his wartime experience in intelligence (McCormick 1977, 160).

Then the famous and trusty secret agent, so secret that he was never designated otherwise but by the symbol [triangle] in the late Baron Stott-Wartenheim's official, semi-official, and confidential correspondence; the celebrated agent [triangle], whose warnings had the power to change the schemes and the dates of royal, imperial, grand ducal journeys, and sometimes caused them to be put off altogether!

Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent*

Still, in the first decades of the new century, British literature pointed to serious concerns. In the spirit of William Le Queux, English fears about possible invasions from France and Germany led to a series of magazine stories and films about secret German armies infiltrating England. One notable author was Edgar Wallace who wrote a number of serialized stories like *Code No. 2*, which appeared in *The Strand* magazine in

April 1916. The adventure was later published in paperback as *The Little Green Man* and in various anthologies. The plot anticipated technology of the future including a computer-controlled hidden camera and infrared photography (McCormick 1977, 181–84).

Novels with these characteristics included Erskine Childer's 1903 *Riddle of the Sands*, a book based on the author's own yachting adventures in a clear warning against coming militarism. In the view of later critics, the book was a blend of realism, particularly in the author's precise descriptions of settings and commonsense approach to the coming war, along with elements of "pure adventure" (Sauerberg 1984, 9). During this era, spies were often far from champions of patriotic virtues. For example, Joseph Conrad's 1907 *The Secret Agent* is frequently dismissed in discussions of spy literature, but many points in this complex novel are worthy of reexamination. Often mentioned with Conrad's Russian set *Under Western Skies* (1911), which also deals with prerevolutionary anarchists, *Secret Agent* does, in fact, contain motifs and themes characterizing the espionage genre.

Based loosely on an actual bombing, the story focuses on Mr. Verloc, a lazy and vulgar "secret agent" assigned to spy on anarchists while posing as a small business owner. In the opening pages, Verloc's supervisor, Mr. Vladimir, the first secretary of a foreign embassy, pressured him to bomb the Greenwich Observatory so the British people would renew their European responsibilities. While far from a model of a "patriotic spy," Verloc believed such action would be irrational and likely to spark an antianarchist campaign by the London police. As Frederick Hitz noted, Verloc was an early example of literary trade-craft—he sent messages by moving his wares around his store window—but the spy believed such practices were useless and that revolutionary activity would only result in harm to innocents (Hitz 2004, 73). Thus, Verloc preceded many later fictional spies who were characterized by their distrust in their superiors' methods and goals long before the term "collateral damage" became commonplace.

Many character types in spy fiction can be traced to *Secret Agent*. For one, the plodding detective, Chief Inspector Heat, was a methodical man unable to work beyond conventional, standard procedures to solve crimes. Like Sherlock Holmes adventures, this concept was often a staple of espionage and mystery stories when amateurs and maverick operatives accomplished what restricted law enforcement

could not. Another character type was a tragic foreshadowing of terrorists in fact and fiction into the twenty-first century. Professor X (a name all too typical in later pulp fiction and similar endeavors) was portrayed as the perfect anarchist. Like later villains in film and literature, he had grand visions of creating the perfect detonator. For protection, he strapped explosives to his own deformed body, and supplied Verloc with the explosives for the bombing. However, Verloc relied on a pawn, the imbecilic brother of his wife, who bungled the attack and blew himself up instead. Such moments evoke later news stories about Palestinian and Chechen terrorists in modern times, as does the speech by “spymaster” Vladimer justifying terrorism:

There could be nothing better. Such an outrage combines the greatest possible regard for humanity with the most alarming display of ferocious imbecility. . . . And there are other advantages. The whole civilised world has heard of Greenwich. The very boot-blacks in the basement of Charing Cross Station know something of it. See? (Conrad 1992, 44)

The Secret Agent warrants continuing consideration beyond its text. In 1923, a four-act play was produced based on the novel; in 1936, Alfred Hitchcock adapted the tale into his film, *Sabotage*. In this version, the Verlocs (Sylvia Sidney, Oscar Homolka) owned a movie theater. John Loder played an immoral police officer, suspicious of the husband while pursuing the affections of the wife. In this adaptation, a child is the innocent victim when the bomb he carries explodes prematurely. In the end, the wife kills her husband in revenge and escapes with her new lover.

Hitchcock expert Donald Spoto believed the director chose the novel because “he shared several of its concerns, the banality of evil, the transference or assumption of guilt . . . the duplicity inherent in the enterprise of espionage, and the enterprise of tracking down the spies” (1983, 172). Richard Porton believed the film showed Hitchcock’s mistrust of criminal elements and of law enforcement as well. The police were bland and the agents in the film were “shadowy terrorists” with ambiguous motives. *Sabotage* “immerses the audience in the destructive urges that Conrad kept at arm’s length” (Porton 1999, 20). Even in this early project, both sides of the conflict were characterized by flaws. No single participant can be described as heroic. Graham Greene, though not a Hitchcock

fan, found much in the film to praise, saying the script retained some of the ruthlessness of the original book with admirable dialogue. He noted that the motif of disturbed domesticity was seen in settings such as the scene where a bomb maker worked on his craft surrounded by children's toys and ordinary laundry. Later, we see the mother learning of her child's death as she passes the theater audience watching a Disney movie in which voices sing the children's song "Who Killed Cock Robin?" (Greene 1980, 122–23).

The film also demonstrated that many espionage-oriented projects took on trappings of topical issues that gave the stories more weight than simple detective mysteries. According to actor Tony Curtis's introduction to the LaserLight DVD edition of *Sabotage*, the movie was produced in London when England was full of espionage fears as no one knew yet what to expect of Adolf Hitler. Curtis related these concerns to Conrad's novel, saying Hitchcock's theme of warning about the Nazis echoed the earlier book's backdrop of worries before World War I. Of course, when current issues are central to a plot, the story can become quickly dated. New interpretations must find other means to keep the source material relevant for new audiences. For example, *Sabotage* wasn't the last attempt to bring Conrad's story to the screen. In 1997, Christopher Hampton directed a more literal adaptation, *The Secret Agent*, focused on a reconstruction of the nineteenth-century London anarchist milieu at a time when the Unabomber was the newest representation of such characters (Porton 1999, 22).

How I loath our new manners in foreign policy! The old English way was to regard all foreigners as slightly childish and rather idiotic, and ourselves the only adults in a kindergarten world. That meant we had a cool, detached view and even-handed, sympathetic justice. But now we have gotten into the nursery ourselves and are bare fighting on the floor.

John Buchan, *The Three Hostages*

But the first important shift in literary, and later film and television adventures, came from the work of novelist John Buchan and his fellow British "Clubland" writers. With tales beginning in World War I, Buchan, Dornford Yates, and Sapper set the stage for many characteristics in all subsequent spy fiction.

Significantly, in 1915, John Buchan worked as head of the Department of Information during World War I, describing his work as “part propaganda, part politics, and part espionage . . . something of a conundrum. I have queer macabre recollections of those years meeting with odd people in odd places, of fantastic duties which a romancer would have rejected as beyond probability” (Bold 1988, 92–96). From this background, Buchan established several important aspects in espionage literature, notably the formulas for plot development and the importance of interesting settings (Osbourne 1953, 92–94).

As Robin Winks observed, one typical plot first seen in Buchan was to transport a code, person, or device from point A to point B, getting past any number of obstacles (1982, 48). In such stories, the adventure often began with someone observing a trivial detail that launched into an investigation involving an evil plot with potential grave consequences to the world, or worse, English-speaking civilization. Buchan’s Richard Hannay and later spies were often uncertain about their mission’s goals, so the reader learned what was going at the same time as the agent. Hannay and his successors were frequently surrounded by a pyramid of opponents—the villain, unsuspecting policemen, and even the agent’s own controllers. Often, like Richard Hannay, the agent couldn’t seek help, as this would compromise his cover (Winks 1982, 50). There was usually a time frame with an ominous deadline. Such templates, established during World War I, would be expanded and layered over the next century, but few books, films, or other media endeavors would stray far from the format laid out by John Buchan.

Later that evening, I found myself waiting in the rose garden reflecting that each part of the world seemed to have its own peculiar disadvantage for undercover work. During the past few years, in the practice of my profession, I had slogged through Arctic bogs full of tangled laurel, fought my way across snow covered mountains, and sweated over deserts full of spiny cacti. Now I had honeysuckle and roses to contend with. Only the people remained the same. And the job.

Donald Hamilton, *Murderer’s Row*

In addition to these formulas, according to Robin Winks, location and a sense of place remain of special importance in spy fiction, a

motif established by Buchan. Beyond allowing writers to describe both native and exotic places in realistic detail, knowing the terrain was an important influence on any agent's course of action, especially in Buchanesque tales where the hero spent considerable time outdoors running from his hunters and was forced to adapt to the landscape. As James Bond himself put it in *Man with the Golden Gun*, "The first law for a secret agent is to get his geography right. His means of access and exit assure his communications with the outside world" (Fleming 1965, 26). Such was true of other authors, as in Eric Ambler's *Send No More Roses* (1977) in which the hero looked to his role model, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, the actual founder of the Boy Scouts and former spy. "He believes that both spies and Boy Scouts need to blend with their surroundings. They must use landscape rather than allow it to hamper them" (Wolfe 1993, 205).

Beyond giving stories descriptive settings, the need for interesting locations added romance to such tales. According to Lars Sauerberg, Buchan's Scottish landscape was, and is, considered exotic, even among native English islanders (1984, 23). More importantly, the descriptive transitions from normal, everyday life into fantastic situations helped ground readers. As the agents went abroad, they also moved from the real to the unreal (Sauerberg 1984, 29). In addition, taking agents out of their home settings made their actions of more consequence than those of normal detectives limited to crimes of local interest. On a more commercial level, when the spy boom of the 1960s began in earnest, thrillers were designed for an international market. James Bond, in particular, was a globe-trotting tourist with many travel scenes in Fleming's books. Such descriptions appealed to readers who were traveling themselves, after picking up these titles in airports and terminals (Lindner 2003, 65).

Before all that, despite Buchan's emphasis on setting and chase plots, his primary character, Richard Hannay, was an unimportant archetype in spy fiction. Most significantly, he was a gifted amateur able to accomplish remarkable things because of his military background. In the original *39 Steps*, in a plot dropped by Hitchcock, Hannay prevented naval secrets from getting to the Germans before the outbreak of war. While being seen as an innocent in the game of espionage, Hannay had learned from the natives in South Africa how to throw knives and catch them in his teeth, how to wander quietly in the

heath, and how to take out an opponent by pressing on the body's pressure points. While being drawn into the secret world by accident in *The 39 Steps*, he became an agent by design in the sequel, *Green Mantle* (1916). In *Green Mantle*, Hannay, a master linguist and disguise expert, helped keep the Near East and Asia from going ablaze and opposed to the allied effort. In the opinion of Christopher Hitchens, *Green Mantle* was Buchan's masterpiece. Reflecting an interest in Islam and jihad, Buchan showed his fascination with German abilities to use their Turkish allies to enlist Muslim sentiment against the British Empire (Hitchens 2004, 104). In his fiction, Buchan wrote, "The Persian Muslims are threatening trouble. There is a dry wind blowing in the East, and the parched grasses wait the spark." In fact, Buchan helped light the spark. From his propaganda office, the novelist suggested that American reporter Lowell Thomas meet with his personal friend, T. E. Lawrence. Directly, Buchan thus helped launch the legend of famous intelligence officer "Lawrence of Arabia" (Hitchens 2004, 105).

Other harbingers of the future also appeared in Buchan's fiction. In *Mr. Standfast* (1919), Hannay posed as a pacifist to uncover a German spy planning to destroy the English army by releasing anthrax germs on its mainline of communications. In Buchan's last Hannay novel, *The Three Hostages* (1924), powerful international demigods manipulated groups like women's suffragettes and trade unions to stir up social discontent with brainwashing and hypnotism. As Richard Osbourne noted, this novel featured important characteristics of books not set during war. In the relatively peaceful decades after World War I, nations and ideology tended to recede in the stories of thrillers, so private villains and criminal cartels came forward. In such adventures, writers had to "pile on the personal devilishness of their foreign villains to make their capture . . . worthwhile" (Osbourne 1953, 212). Without a political background, the more villainous the opponent, the more acceptable the violence used to end their schemes. Heroes like Buchan's Richard Hannay tended to kill in the name of government service without authority or moral questioning. They didn't need them—gentlemen didn't murder in the name of petty quarrels, but they felt little legal constraint when defending their homeland (Osbourne 1953, 6). Of course, such killings in fiction were more for dramatic effect than any moral statement. The justice dealt