

Classics of 20th and 21st Century Spy Fiction

Summary:

Spy stories reach back even to ancient times. In North America and Europe, the genre reached mass proportions during the Cold War, when the US-USSR rivalry was at its height and secondary powers tried to influence the balance of power. Political players have changed but the spy tale has endured. Through classics such as *The 39 Steps*, *Epitaph for a Spy*, *Our Man in Havana* and *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, we will consider the essential ingredients of the spy story (gadgets, travel, evil villains, reluctant heroes), its cultural relevance, and its future since the so-called “end” of the Cold War.

Resources:

Film clips, presentation slides, lecture, group discussion

Weekly reading schedule/authors:

Week 1: John Buchan, *The 39 Steps* (establishing modern spy story form)

Week 2: Eric Ambler, *Epitaph for a Spy* (critiquing British society via pulp fiction)

Week 3: Ian Fleming, *Goldfinger* (the blockbuster, sex and consumer culture)

Week 4: Graham Greene, *Our Man in Havana* (parody of spy fiction, critique of the West)

Week 5: John Le Carré’s *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* (existential angst, “high literature” spy tale)

Week 6: Charles McCarry (“The End of the String”) and Joseph Finder (“Neighbors”) (Developing World spy settings, postmodern spy tale)