CLASSICS OF THE SPY NOVEL

Week 1: John Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps*
Week 2: Eric Ambler’s *An Epitaph for a Spy*
Week 3: Graham Greene’s *Our Man in Havana*
Week 4: Ian Fleming’s *Goldfinger*
Week 5: John Le Carré’s *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*
Week 6: Joseph Finder, Charles McCarry, “End of the String” and “Neighbors”
WHAT IS A SPY?

- **“Spy”**: A person who secretly collects and reports information on the activities, movements and plans of an enemy/competitor.

- **“Morality”**: An internal, personal code or set of principles about right and wrong conduct.

- **“Ethics”**: An external set of rules or source of right and wrong conduct.
ICEBREAKER: WHO ARE YOU?

How good are you at deceiving/dissembling?

- Get into groups of 2 or 3
- Write down 3 traits about yourself – but 1 trait is true, 2 traits are false
- Share your traits with your partners
- Partners guess which trait is true

Questions: If you successfully fool your partners, what helped you do this?
HISTORY OF SPYING - CHINA

In China, Sun Tzu, military strategist: “Know yourself and your enemy.”

Tzu’s spies:

- secret informant - steals copies of enemy secrets
- penetration agent – accesses enemy commanders
- disininformation agent - feeds mix of true/false details to confuse the enemy
- double agent - recruited from ranks of enemy spies
1550s – Elizabeth I/Mary Queen of Scots
1700s – France/Britain use police spies to infiltrate/monitor dissidents
1800s – France/Britain/Spain use industrial spies to steal technology secrets
   Britain plays the “Great Game” in Asia vs. Russia – to protect “crown jewel” of India
1800s cont – Britain/others post-Crimean War develop “military attachés”
  + Work in embassies, gather info/recruit spies

1900s – TE Lawrence/Gertrude Bell, etc.
  + Adventurers/map-makers/archeologists
  + Influence imperial policy/gather info in Asia/Mid East
1900s cont – European nations create military intelligence organizations:

- Britain, 1873, Intelligence Branch
- France, 1871, Deuxieme Bureau
- Germany, 1889, Abteilung
- Russia, 1880, Okhrana / 1917, Checka
- Britain, 1909, Secret Service Bureau (MI5/MI6)
Starting Points

Different opinions about spy fiction:

- **Justin Cronin**, author – Likes spy stories about the average person thrust into history

- Youtube reviewer/former **French spy**: Realistic is best type of spy story; must be written by a former spy

- **Wesley Wark**, U of T history professor – Spy fiction is fantasy, faking reality by theorizing about history
IDEAS: WHAT IS SPY FICTION?

ordinary person drawn into history

realistic, based on real life experiences

fantasy, pretending to be real through theories of history
INFLUENTIAL SPY NOVELS

- 1821 – Fennimore Cooper, *The Spy*
- 1898 – Oppenheim, *Mysterious Mr. Sabin*
- 1903 – Childers, *The Riddle of the Sands*
- 1907-11 – Conrad, *Secret Agent/Under Western Eyes*
- 1928 – Somerset Maugham, *Ashenden*
- 1936 – Ambler, *The Dark Frontier*
- 1939 – Greene, *The Confidential Agent*
STORY PLOT: BASIC EVENTS

ASSIGNMENT → QUEST → OBSTACLE

CONCLUSION → RESOLUTION → PURSUIT
SPY STORY STRUCTURE

- **Assignment** – Spy recruited by Chief or Chance/Necessity
- **Quest** – Leave home, enter abnormal, hidden spy world
  - process of maturing (bildungsroman)
  - normal/naïve world threatened by villain
  - spy steps outside normal order to protect/restore “home”
- **Obstacles** – Overcome barriers to truth/key information
  - hero beset by out-of-ordinary evil forces
  - citizens in normal world unknowingly block hero
TENNYSON: “THE LOTUS-EATERS”

... Here are cool mosses deep,
And thro' the moss the ivies creep,
And in the stream the long-leaved flowers weep,
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep....
Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,
And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
While all things else have rest from weariness?
All things have rest: why should we toil alone....
Why should we only toil, the roof and crown of things?
Pursuit – Overcome barriers with help
- seek to catch villain / find truth/ key information
- allies from normal world or enemy world (change sides)

Resolution – Villain prosecuted or dies
- restore normal world for price - hero loses naivety/ matures but no integration (bildungsroman askew)

Conclusion – Return home
- status quo preserved for others but not for spy
STORY ELEMENTS CONT.

- **Hero** - Independent, resourceful, adaptable, charming to men and women

- **Villain** – Foreigner, physically and mentally unhealthy or repulsive; good organizer, intelligent

- **Helper** – Assist on quest, reflect values of hero, temporary

- **Love interest** – Foreign, different values from hero, temporary, help quest
STORY ELEMENTS CONT.

- **Chief** - Father-son, god-man, headmaster-pupil relationship with spy

- **Technology** – Tools of trade or trade-craft skills; distances spy from ordinary people

- **Abroad** – Contrast to the Home to be saved
  - Exotic “other”
  - Travelogue interlude
  - Opportunity for adventure, luxury or hardship
Moral questions appeal to adolescents – why is it right or wrong? Who is a legitimate authority?
Why read/write spy fiction?

Furst on writing spy fiction (1:50):
- Interested in a certain period of history
- Wanting to read a book not yet written

Buchan said the same. Consider:
- What kind of spy story is 39 Steps?
- Why do we still read it?
- What is the significance of Hitchcock’s film?
Buchan’s dedication to friend explains:

- He loves the “dime novel”
- Ran out of “shockers” while convalescing
- Wrote his own version

39 Steps bestseller during WWI:

- Article by S. Rimington
RECIPE FOR POPULARITY

Buchan uses all spy story elements except love

Key elements are:

- Hannay – positive, lighthearted, sincere
- Speed of story action – quick pacing, episodic
- Language – simple, modern prose, dime novel
MAP OF EVENTS

ASSIGNMENT — QUEST — OBSTACLE

CONCLUSION — RESOLUTION — PURSUIT
KEY EVENTS & ELEMENTS

 Assignment – Stop European war?
  - Meet Scudder – murder (3)
  - Cool Hannay – natural subterfuge (7)
  - Finish Scudder’s job – patriot (20)

 Quest – Evade villain & thwart plan:
  - Adopt identities & make friends (54-57, 63-67)
  - Solve cypher & find real problem (40, 43-47)
EVENTS - ELEMENTS CONT.

- Quest cont.
  - Fall into villains’ lair (76-78), escape (83-87)
  - Rural goodness & simple Scots (94-98)

- Quest – Pursue the villain:
  - Powerful ally explains situation (99-107)
  - Hannay’s activeness, duty (112-115)
EVENTS - ELEMENTS CONT.

- **Quest – pursuit cont.**
  - Hannay’s tech skills, leadership (125-28)

- **Resolution – Spies’ false appearance** (133-35)
  - Gesture reveals identity (146)
  - Spies caught but war inevitable (148)

- **Conclusion**
  - England’s military secrets saved
  - Hannay to war
BUCHAN’S STYLE: SUM-UP

- **Friendship** – Likeable, human hero who likes others

- **Amateur spy** – Readers empathize/relate to hero’s bewilderment

- **Suspense** – Realistic experiences of fear; tension with fast pacing
SUM-UP CONT.

- **Suspense cont.** - Readers feel the same emotions, physical qualities

- **Nature** – Outdoor skills gives hero personality, status
  - Rural vs. urban - love of nature morally positive, city of corruption/idleness
  - Rural Scotland, local dialect as exotic “abroad”
SUM-UP CONT.

- **Providence** — Luck favours hero:
  - Serendipity provides shelter, friends, tools, etc.
  - Shows hero is on the *right* side

- **Politics** — External enemies threaten Britain:
  - Buchan against Anti-Semitism
  - Buchan anti-anarchy/German empire
  - Buchan pro Free Trade/colonies
  = Libertarian within British value system
John Buchan Bio

- 1901, Private Secretary to High Commissioner for South Africa
- 1907, Marries
- 1910, Fiction writer; Unionist (pro Free Trade, suffrage)
- 1914, Works in publishing; WWI reporter; writer in War Propaganda Bureau
1915, *The 39 Steps* published; works in Intelligence Corps

1917, Director of Information, British Army

1930, Supports Zionism

1935, Hitchcock’s “39 Steps”, appointed Lord Tweedsmuir & Governor General of Canada
FILM: HITCHCOCK’S “39 STEPS”
HITCH FILM CONT.

- Buchan’s view — Different story
  - Little to do with novel/heroism
  - Emphasis on romantic comedy

- Technique — German Expressionist film:
  - Shadows & camera on angle
  - Build up to revealing/informative shots
  - Suggestion of sinister, suspense drawn out
Themes — Vice punished
Self-interest, ignorance of crowds
Music hall – pleasure first
Sexual tension – below the surface

Scenes: Keep viewers wondering
Opening – Where are we?
Mysterious lady – ‘Call me “Smith”? ’
Ending - full circle - Mr. Memory - “Am I right?”
CULTURAL ICEBERG - AVERAGE PERSON

REGULAR PERSON

Appearance, behaviour, habits

Surface self - actor displays to others

Life - Public - visible to others

Core self - inner mental life of actor

Life - Private - hidden from others

Thoughts, feelings, beliefs
What is a cultural iceberg applied to society and organizations?
SPY STORY – CHARACTER EVOLUTION

Simple hero - flat villain

Ambler – Epitaph for a Spy

Emotional hero - simple villain

Le Carré – Tinker, Tailor

Complex hero - emotional villain

Greene – Our Man in Havana; McCarry - “End of String”

Complex hero - complex villain

No easy pattern?
Goldfinger/Bond/Galore; Finder’s “Neighbours”
TYPES OF SPY STORIES

- Amateur yarn (Stevenson)
- Straight-forward spy – Agent works for organization (Buchan, Fleming)
- Conspiracy story - Stop villain within bureaucracy (Le Carré)
- Moral ambiguity - Critique home values (Greene)