CLASSICS OF THE SPY NOVEL

Week 1: John Buchan’s *The Thirty-Nine Steps*
Week 2: Eric Ambler’s *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: McCARRY & FINDER, “End of the String” and “Neighbors”
Weeks 1 to 5 covered British authors. Themes of interest centre on British values and culture:

- What is a British gentleman?
- What are British loyalties – personal or political?
- When is it morally and ethically right to spy?
- How is the British class system replicated in the spy situation/world?
What we’ve seen so far:

- Buchan – Invasion yarn, boys adventure, romantic/patriotic language, amateur hero
- Ambler – Spy-for-hire, exchange value of information; what is national loyalty bought with?
- Greene – Working man loyal to family; simpleton pulled into upper class bureaucracy; mocking the “serious”
- Fleming – Early thriller; spies as glamorous; cold, professional as tool of British power establishment
- Le Carré – Questioning British future, liberal values; amateur spy-turned-bureaucrat; weak post-war England
ACTIVITY – HERO AND VILLAIN?

Week 6 readings written by Americans - “End of the String” and “Neighbors”.
Consider:
- Who is the hero?
  + Easy to identify - why or why not?
- Who is the villain?
  + Easy to identify - why or why not?
Do spy institutions reveal the values of a culture?

- McCarry & Finder
  + Former CIA -> Realism = professionalism
  + Simple, plain prose
  + Absence of extensive psychological analysis – “show don’t tell”
  + Action-oriented – plot moves by key action scenes
  + Usual thriller plot moves by following the hero’s pursuit/evasion of the villain

- What happens in these 2 stories? Not sure who the villain or hero are – reader on the outside?
American Spy Fiction - McCarry

American version of Le Carré?

- Simple, streamlined prose – usually 1st person POV
- Long-term, pro spy – “singleton” -> No help from the American embassy, traveling on ordinary passport
- Reliance on dialogue, not description
- Questions of legitimacy – Who decides when a regime must change? What means work best? Recognition?
- Other works: Paul Christopher books; Shanghai Factor – Discovering mole in CIA -> growing power of China
1950s-1960s - Operated as a “singleton” CIA agent -- alone, goes where he pleases - no help or acknowledgment from US embassy

"My job involved covert political action.... Its whole basis is to find a sympathetic person who wishes to accomplish something which is in his and your interest and to make it possible for him to do that. It's like being in love: periods of intense gratification, long periods of anxiety, jealousy, despair and boredom."
“END OF THE STRING” – NDALA, AFRICA
US CIA agent undercover in Ndala, Guinea coast:

- Post-colonial era -> Eisenhower term (1953-61)
- Charles Brown meets Benjamin, head of nat’l police
- Benjamin wants to overthrow President Ga – corrupt – and hold elections
- Issue is “local” problem - US to stand aside during coup, help after
- Charles observes the coup - capture of Ga - trial and execution (49-51)
- Style of death requested by Ga – African sunrise (51)
CHARACTER - “END OF THE STRING”

- Who is Charles Brown? Man of many names
  - One of many names used in Africa - CIA agent-runner
  - Trusted, known by police -> “good deeds” done in Ndala
  - Mischief under British (11-12)
  - Witness to the justness of coup (13) – radio message (47)

- Who is Benjamin? British & Traditional
  - Head of national police – skilled pro, intelligent (3-4, 13)
  - Naïve in sincerity to establish democracy? (21-22)
  - Patriot, mixed values – behavior (controlled, “Victorian”, Christian); dress (Western & local)
  - Strike to kill a prince – fangless Black Mamba tool of coup = “bad luck” (13-14); dream book of women (28-29); public sees curse (38)
  - Support of army (20); paranoia about curse, police in control (34-35)
Character - “End of the String” cont

- Who is President Ga? Many faces (28)
  - Likeable, educated in US south – American college pleasure (24)
  - Greedy tyrant, many faces -> wanting Western luxuries, stealing (7, 28)
  - Wanting to preserve a mythical, superior African past (26)
  - Killer -> executing the beggars (16-17, 20)
  - Extravagance of African zoo, soldiers – menagerie of control (23-24)

- What is “Washington” - Charles’ chief?
  - Skeptical - experienced with coup leaders (17)
  - Ruthless & cynical – what does coup leader personally want?
  - Job to secure US interests – what is the coup’s stance to the US? Avoid failure, embarrassment – Do what President can’t (19)
  - Rich, educated, tweedy -> US = endless source of cash money
WHERE/WHAT IS NDALA?

Common name in central/southern Africa – A village in Mozambique; a “name to inspire joy and consolation”:

1. Honorific title, given to royal family
   + Prince or Princess

2. Palm branch
   + Symbol of triumph/victory, joy/celebration.
   + Sign placed on house of a bereaved family - sign of comfort, reminder of hope in resurrection

Conclusion: “Going back to civilization or just going back”
“You can't design your life. You can go through the doors that open.”

"If you're a born writer... it's almost impossible to refuse experience.... It goes into the conscious mind.... It may be lost for 35 or 40 years, but eventually it rolls back."

"Fiction depends on its facts being believable, so it's always useful to know the way things really work."

An old friend says, "When I read his books I see occasionally something I recognize, a character or a name .... But he makes composites, not one character totally drawn from anyone I knew."
“The world of power is stranger than anyone thinks. It’s not more sinister but far more innocent.”

“Before going to Washington, I imagined that the United States was run by calm, snowy-haired gentlemen in dark suits, who were in full possession of the facts.”

"On the basis of my experience with the people who run the world,... it is a mistake to believe that somewhere is a hidden room, and inside that room is a vault, and inside that vault is a book containing the secret of life.”
1930 – Born in Massachusetts
1948 – Accepted to Harvard, no money to attend
1948-51 - Joined US Army, went to Europe, worked as reporter for Bremerhaven base newspaper
1950s - Newspaperman in Ohio, married
1950s - Speech writer for Labor Secretary, Eisenhower era
1958 - Recruited to CIA by Allan Dulles
1958-67 - Deep cover, “singleton” spy - Europe, Asia, Africa
1960 - Speech writer for Nixon-Cabot Lodge campaign
1960-67 – CIA singleton agent
1968 – Writer magazine articles & novels; influences Maugham and Ambler
No outline. Starts with a character and an opening sentence. Then I "let the characters write the book. I don't know what I'm doing on a conscious level."

Paul Christopher novels: One long saga of this family of spies. Ambler on *The Miernik Dossier* (1973): “The most enthralling and intelligent piece of work” he had read in years.

Books not written in chronological order; span 300 years, going to the end of the 20th century.

Locales range from Massachusetts to Washington, to Europe, Asia and Africa.

Goal is a style “that is invisible. The writer should not be there... Characters speak directly to the reader.”
American thriller – corporate, espionage, fear-culture:

- Streamlined prose – action-based plot
- “Neighbors” -> Unrealiable narrator, identity?
- Fox news culture - [https://www.foxnews.com/tech/3-ways-to-check-out-your-neighbors](https://www.foxnews.com/tech/3-ways-to-check-out-your-neighbors)
- Use of dialogue, internal monologue to slow-reveal
- Role of US in int’l politics – Why is it threatened? Who threatens it domestically/internationally? How will a threat occur?
- Questions of legitimacy – What is American society founded on? What do pro law enforcement/spies think vs. the enemy? Why is a terrorist afraid of other terrorists?
Matt Parker suspicious of new neighbor Jimmy Nourwood – an Arab terrorist? Boston preparing for bomb threat
Matt more paranoid, spies on Jimmy – prejudice or legitimate fear? (102, 118)
Computer searches = no information to corroborate Jimmy’s personal revelations about work and college (99)
Few facts about Matt revealed – frequent moves, a brother, he’s an engineer, knows about search engines (98-99, 105)
Matt’s fear of terrorists or FBI agents? (104, 120, 128)
Who is the doctor – what’s his news? (116, 121, 128)
Against tyranny, Big Brother, threat to freedom (118, 128)
Planning and preparing for the bombing (129)
FINDER FAQ – WRITING APPROACH

- Research – Background as Russian studies expert
- Outlining – Sketching out the plot’s main points
- Starts writing investigative journalism – first book about Dr. Armand Hammer (billionaire industrialist/CEO of Occidental Petroleum) - he once worked for the Russian NKVD
- Decided to avoid libel threats by writing thrillers - influenced by Robert Ludlum and Frederick Forsyth
- As thriller writer, Finder wants to get technical details right – about satellites, cell/mobile phone telephony, computer forensics, surveillance devices, etc. – extensive research into these details
JOSEPH FINDER – BIOGRAPHY

- 1958 - Born in Chicago, Illinois
- 1960s - Early childhood in Afghanistan and Philippines
- 1970s - Family returns to US, lives in Washington and New York
- 1980-90s - Yale, undergraduate degree, Russian studies; Harvard, Master's degree from Russian Research Center; teaches as Harvard faculty; recruited to CIA
- 1983 - Non-fiction - *Red Carpet: The Connection Between the Kremlin and America's Most Powerful Businessmen*
- 1991 – 1st novel, *Moscow Club* - a coup against Gorbachev, published months real coup occurred
Corporate world - Full of material - it's the place where most of us spend most of our days, yet novelists rarely write about it.

It hasn't yet been done to death like law firms or police departments - it's fresh to most readers.

Sociopaths in the corporate world - "Snakes in Suits" - There's something about the corporate world, with the stakes so high, that encourages certain people to get away with all the bad stuff they can.

They are a minority, but they're fun villains. And as anyone who's worked in a company can testify, some of these snakes can achieve a great deal of power - and make your life hell. Which is why so many of my readers love it when my heroes finally get their revenge.
American thriller is quite different.... clean, spare, lots of plot and action

British thrillers are slower, more atmospheric, often grittier – and a lot more violent than American readers would put up with!

When it comes to classic spy novels -- Eric Ambler, Graham Greene, Len Deighton, John Le Carré -- the Brits beat us

Brits have been doing [spying] a lot longer than we have; the British class system and its signaling are integral parts of the British secret intelligence service, and British writers are attuned to this
McCarry:

- The CIA, like its predecessor, the OSS, copied from the British a spy organization based on a class system based on loyalties.
- It was the very comfort of this system, with its assumption of loyalty from and to those within it, which made betrayal so facile.
- Spies often must work with the evil. “What mattered was that it should be channelled, tricked into working for your own side.”
“The Americans” – 2013-2018; TV series
+ Soviet spies pose as an American couple in the suburbs of Washington, DC – to 4:25
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IgF8S7eTjxE

+ Violence is a national sport. An Arab king sends two suitcases carrying bombs to a terrorist to blow up Israel and the US, after the King learns the US wants to kill him.
+ The film deals with media bias, reality-TV, tabloid news, government conspiracy and Islamic terrorism.