

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”

RECAP – BRITISH SPY FICTION

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?

STYLE – BRITISH SPY FICTION

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 glamourous; 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?

AMERICAN SPY FICTION – CULTURE REVEALED

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
- ✖ Int’l politics – How does US influence? Does it pull strings? Manipulated by native governments?
- ✖ 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

CHARLES McCARRY – SPY METHOD

- ✖ 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



PLOT - “END OF THE STRING”

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”

MCCARRY FAQ – LIFE WRITING



- ✖ “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."

MCCARRY FAQ – RANDOM POLITICS

- ✖ “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."

MCCARRY – BIOGRAPHY

- ✖ 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

MCCARRY FAQ – NOVEL APPROACH

- ✖ 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 entralling 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 SPY FICTION – JOSEPH FINDER

American thriller – corporate, espionage, fear-culture:

- ✖ Streamlined prose – action-based plot
- ✖ “Neighbors” -> Unreliable narrator, identity?
- ✖ Fox news culture - <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?

PLOT – “NEIGHBORS”



- ✖ 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
- ✖ 1994 – 2nd novel, *Extraordinary Powers* - hunt for a mole in CIA – published days before Aldrich Ames arrested
- ✖ 1996 – 3rd novel, *Zero Hour* - FBI hunt for terrorist in New York

FINDER FAQ - WRITING ISSUES

- ✖ 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.

FINDER FAQ - BRITISH VS AMERICAN THRILLERS

- ✖ 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

LAST THOUGHTS – SPY ORGANIZATIONS

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.”

FILM

- ✖ “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=lgF8S7eTjxE>
- ✖ “Wrong is Right” (1982) – film of McCarry novel, *Better Angels* (1979) - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kg33yKyEvjo>
 - + 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.