Literary Covers: Secret Writing in Anglo-American Spy Fiction and Film

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Abstract

Secret writing – perceived both as the *writing of secrets* (act) and as the instrument of subterfuge (object) – lies at the heart of espionage operations both in fact and in fiction. Intelligence reports, secret dossiers, coded documents and dead-letter-drops are all familiar motifs in spy narratives, highlighting the significance of the written word as a vehicle of truth, deception, propaganda and misinformation.

My project explores systems of written communication in Anglo-American spy fiction and film. Sought as objects of desire, written texts raise ongoing questions about authorial identity and provenance, material authenticity, and political value. I investigate how textual and literary forms, materials, and spaces are used as a means of fashioning, concealing, conveying, and exposing secrets. Relatedly, I explore how these cultural expressions influence how the realities of the covert state – by nature unacknowledged and undocumented – are deciphered and understood.

In this project, I show how textual miscellany, systems of bureaucracy, and the conflict of authorship shape issues of class and gender in *The Third Man* (1949); how letter-writing and disrupted communication engender disembodiment and desire in *Smiley's People* (1979 and 1983), and how the spy memoir (promoting the open secret) precipitates the commoditisation and degrading of data value in *Hopscotch* (1980) and *Burn After Reading* (2008). In doing so, I examine writing objects such as the pen, typewriter, and computer as tools of control, confession, and commercialisation.

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List of Accompanying Material

1. Video Essay: *The Writing on the Wall*

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Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References. The supplementary video essay, "The Writing on the Wall", was published in the Summer 2022 edition (Issue 7) of the WRoCAH Journal.

Introduction: Writers and Spies

From invisible ink to exploding pens, hidden typewriters to secret dossiers, systems of written communication lie at the heart of spy narratives, highlighting the significance of the written word as a vehicle of truth, deception, propaganda, and misinformation. The spy genre is a sphere in which purloined letters have implications for state security, and the death of the author is often deployed as a narrative device rather than a theoretical concept. This thesis explores literary iconography and textual motifs in popular Anglo-American spy fiction and film. Focusing on novels, films, and television ranging from Graham Greene and Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949) to the post-Cold War spy comedy *Burn After Reading* (dir. Joel & Ethan Coen, 2008), I analyse how the figures, forms, materials, and spaces of writing help formulate narratives of secrecy, intrigue, and conspiracy. In doing so, this project provides a bridge between two distinct bodies of scholarship: that which tackles the portrayal of writers and writing on screen, and a cluster of work that I term "literary intelligence studies", which adapts and repositions Simon Willmetts' conception of the "cultural turn" in intelligence studies" by acknowledging the centrality of literary modes of communication within cultural representations of espionage.[1]

While Andrew Hammond explores how Cold War espionage and intelligence concerns have penetrated mainstream British literature, concentrating on the proliferation of spy motifs in seemingly unrelated genres, this thesis flips the focus of that study.[2] Instead of analysing the significance of espionage motifs in literary fiction, I concentrate on the underexplored prevalence of literary cultures and conventions in spy fiction. Through three

[1] Simon Willmetts, "The Cultural Turn in Intelligence Studies," *Intelligence and National Security* 34, no. 6 (2019): 800-802.
[2] Andrew Hammond, *British Fiction and the Cold War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 88.

chronologically ordered case studies, I analyse how the spy genre engages with the evolution of writing instruments, broadly tracing the technological progression of the pen, the typewriter, and the computer. I explore how these technologies infuse spy narratives with notions of literary heritage, nostalgia, and, latterly, the digital paradox of permanence and erasure.

The Third Man is the first of the three case studies, followed by John le Carré's novel *Smiley's People* (1979) and its BBC adaptation (dir. Simon Langton, 1983), and a comparative analysis of the films *Hopscotch* (dir. Ronald Neame, 1980) and *Burn After Reading* (2008). These selections were based on several criteria. Firstly, they represent temporal moments in the twentieth and twenty-first century spy genre, following a chronological trajectory from the immediate post-World War Two period to a post-millennial satire on Cold War conspiracies. Secondly, each case study is centrally concerned, in various guises, with the relationship between spying and writing. This takes place on both a technological (charting the evolution from analogue to digital writing) and a material level. As befits its investigative theme, *The Third Man* deals with fragments and traces of text, such as initials, fingerprints, and torn papers. The key emblem in *Smiley's People* is the letter and the formal systems of communication that disrupt and facilitate its delivery. *Hopscotch* and *Burn After Reading* are both concerned with the revelatory impact of the spy memoir. The project therefore traces the development not only of technology, but also of material substance.

Thirdly, the selections all identify, to varying degrees, narratives which are neglected or overlooked. While *The Third Man* has received much critical attention, I tease out the covert narratives of gender and class based around the characters of Anna Schmidt and Sgt Paine. *Smiley's People* is often overshadowed by its predecessor *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*

(1974) but is significant to this project in the way it foregrounds marginalised communities. Both *Hopscotch* and *Burn After Reading* have been relatively neglected in critical scholarship. This project aims to redress the balance and draw attention to popular narratives that exist under the radar, "hiding in plain sight".

Finally, the chronological and geographical span of the thesis mirrors the shifting areas of political crises in the twentieth and twenty-first century global context. Starting with the fragmented city of post-war Europe in *The Third Man*, I move to the bleak landscapes of the UK in the 1970s and early 1980s. *Smiley's People* is set in a country still smarting from the reputational damage of the Suez Crisis of 1956 and mired in a decade of political scandals, mainland bombings, and ongoing recession. It depicts an air of cynical resignation about the complacency of political elites and an open hostility towards Europe. Across the Atlantic, the US in 1980 is also dealing with the painful consequences of political scandals and conspiracies in the preceding decade. *Hopscotch* can be read as a direct response to the narratives of corruption surrounding the CIA's 'Family Jewels' and the Nixon administration's Watergate controversy. Similarly, *Burn After Reading* takes place in the aftermath of the post-9/11 political and moral malaise in the US, which included the invasion of Iraq, abuses of power by the military and intelligence services, and the opening of Guantanamo Bay. By taking this fluid chronological and geographical approach, the project responds to moments of intense crisis and national introspection in the international political sphere during the Cold War and beyond.

At its heart, the project offers a way of "reading" spy narratives through the scenes of writing and textual miscellany that structure and punctuate them. In doing so, I navigate what Rosie White terms the "baggy monster of sources, contexts and media" to show the

pervasiveness of these literary conventions and their shared visual language across genres and time periods.[3] The thesis charts this trajectory from the "classic" spy fiction of the early Cold War to modern espionage narratives, identifying pertinent moments of intervention that illustrate how these technologies of writing substantiate the act of spying and the figure of the spy. In this Introduction, I consider the relationship between writing and spying and how it has played out both in the critical literature and in fictional scenarios on screen, illustrating some of the key synergies through a series of close readings, and drawing out selected implications for the project as a whole. This segues into a discussion on the historical and cultural contexts of fictional espionage narratives before I situate my research within the scholarly literature and give a brief summary of the forthcoming chapters.

The act of writing, as pointed out in separate studies by Paul Arthur, Judith Buchanan and Lucy Fischer, is not automatically cinematically engaging.[4] There is little dramatic satisfaction to what is ostensibly a passive and contemplative activity. The introspection inherent in the process of creativity – the simple task of putting words on the page or screen (whether coded, inscribed, handwritten, typed, word-processed, or dictated) – offers limited scope for visual interest or variety. Imaginative inspiration, creative blockages, or extended periods of monotonous graft are largely inactive and deskbound endeavours. This applies as much (if not more) to spy narratives as it does to, for example, literary biographies where scenes of writing are commonplace, if not obligatory.

[3] Rosie White, *Violent Femmes: Women as Spies in Popular Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge: 2007), 7.
[4] Paul Arthur, "The Written Scene: Writers as Figures of Cinematic Redemption," in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation* ed. Robert Stam & Alessandra Raengo (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2008): 331; Judith Buchanan, "Introduction: Image, story, desire: the writer on film," in *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship* ed. Judith Buchanan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3; Lucy Fischer, *Body Double: The Author Incarnate in Cinema* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2013), 20.

In spy fiction, as Allan Hepburn argues, there is an expectation of thrills and visceral sensation.[5] Dramatic interest is occasioned by the excitement of pursuit or the fear of betrayal. Michael Denning encapsulates the problems surrounding the representation of routine work in spy fiction succinctly: "A man at a desk processing papers is hardly the material of storytelling."[6] The practices of writing, reading, and textual analysis carry little visual interest. Reviewing Tomas Alfredson's adaptation of John le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011), Michael Wood similarly laments the static nature of the subject matter: "Filming a man reading is bit like making a movie of a writer at work: close-up, man or woman sits at a desk, staring at a sheet of paper, the shot is held for three hours."[7] However, these critiques overlook both the prevalence of this image in twentieth and twenty-first century spy narratives, and also the self-reflective, meta-fictional role of the author in placing the figure of the writer (and the act of writing) at centre stage. This intervention creates a mythology around authorial identity cultivated by spy writers such as Graham Greene and John le Carré, whose fictions traverse their work and their literary selves.

The tension between the passive image of a man writing and its repeated deployment in spy fictions is captured by Eva Horn, who theorises that the genre's preoccupation with data-driven knowledge acquisition reflects the epistemological reality of Cold War intelligence-gathering.[8] In her analysis of the film *Three Days of the Condor* (dir. Sydney Pollack, 1975), Horn concludes that "in the mid-1970s intelligence work amounts to textual

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[5] Allan Hepburn, *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 24.
[6] Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 135.
[7] Michael Wood, "At the Movies: *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*." *London Review of Books* 33, no. 9, Oct 6, 2011, accessed May 13, 2022. https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v33/n19/michael-wood/at-the-movies.
[8] Eva Horn, *The Secret War: Treason, Espionage and Modern Fiction* transl. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 232.

processing."[9] Horn's claim provides a point of departure for this project as I seek to show how the relationship between spying, literary iconography, and textual cultures is enacted through fiction and film. Through a close reading of the materials and technologies of writing on screen, I explore how the figure of the writer intersects with and informs the characterisation of the fictional spy. I identify patterns of literary and textual motifs and analyse how they shape understanding of gender and identity in spy narratives, and how this evolves over time. To draw out some of the implications of these questions, I first consider how the connections between writing and spying have been formulated in critical literature before turning to a brief case study investigating the returning figure of the writer/spy on film.

Writing as betrayal

"What is it about writers and spies?" asks intelligence officer-turned-writer Tod Hoffman in his deeply personal exploration of John le Carré's fiction.[10] It is a rhetorical question which he is nonetheless impelled to answer; an act of self-indulgence, perhaps, but one that emerges as a recurring concern in espionage narratives and their associated critical analyses. The spy-turned-writer is a familiar figure in the evolution of espionage fiction. Famous examples include Somerset Maugham, Graham Greene, Ian Fleming, John le Carré, and – more recently – the former Director-General of MI5, Stella Rimington. Their professional experience in the intelligence services confers a level of authority and authenticity to the fictional narratives they produce while providing an oblique insight into the connections between the secret state and the cultural establishment in mid-twentieth century Britain. Historian Hugh Wilford notes

[9] Ibid., 236.
[10] Tod Hoffman, *Le Carré's Landscape* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), ix.

that, in the UK, "where the modern intelligence agency was born, intellectuals moved smoothly back and forth between secret government service and the literary life."[11] This process of professional migration favoured individuals of a certain class, gender and educational status, who could afford to "dabble" in both areas. The notion of the "gentleman spy", alongside his writerly alter-ego, presupposes independent wealth and means, which enables political and societal access while operating on a pre-professional, amateur level. This fluidity of movement and class-based fellowship established the parameters for a generation of British spy fiction. As Geraint D'Arcy succinctly puts it, espionage narratives are dominated by "white, Oxbridge men, overseeing the exchange of secret information, and kept in cardboard folders bound with rubber bands."[12] The battle for information is framed as a gendered conflict of authorship and narrative control, fought with words, pens, papers, and files.

Post-World War II, the growing influence of government institutions such as MI5 and GCHQ in the UK meant that covert operations were beginning to be felt at a domestic, as well as an international, level. Hammond makes a plausible case for this creeping professionalism contributing to the spy genre's increasing focus on administrative procedures, arguing that "political realities and lived experiences" led to increasing moral introspection and self-reflection.[13] What was previously international, exotic, and fantastical became mundane, domestic, and prosaic. Similarly, Horn argues that the Cold War shifted the perceptions of the intelligence agent from field operative to desk-bound administrator.[14] It represents a

[11] Hugh Wilford, "Secret America: the CIA and American culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern American Culture* ed. Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 275.
[12] Geraint D'Arcy, "'Essentially, another man's woman': Information and Gender in the Novel and Adaptations of John le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*," *Adaptation* 7, no. 3 (2014): 279.
[13] Hammond, *British Fiction and the Cold War*, 87.
[14] Horn, *The Secret War*, 235.

temporal progression of espionage from the Machine Age to the Information Age, with a related change in materials, resources, and methods. The "realist" spy thriller (morally ambiguous narratives set against the "romantic" fantasy of heroic action exemplified by Ian Fleming's James Bond series) posited espionage as a bureaucratic endeavour, with paper, files, and archives replacing cloak-and-dagger intrigue, bullets, and gadgets as tools of the trade.[15] Spy fiction became prosaic as information-processing came to the fore. This necessitated the recruitment and deployment of word processors, both in human and technological forms.

It is tempting to speculate how this migration between the twinned spheres of spying and writing had an impact on Cold War fictions, both political and literary. This is certainly how Adam Piette interprets a passage in Nabakov's *Lolita* in which Humbert Humbert joins an unexplained Polar expedition, a cover for a clandestine quest for uranium: "Nabakov is implying, cryptically, that the secret operations of the Second World War trained a whole generation of intellectuals, recruited into the war's scientific projects, in the arts of secrecy and hush-hush camouflage."[16] The idea that the wartime subterfuge provided a training ground for the post-war literary imagination segues into Timothy Melley's argument that the American "Cold War state was in part a fiction-making machine designed to sway enemies and citizens alike."[17] In other words, writers found practical application in the plots and

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[15] Simon Willmetts and Christopher Moran offer a useful summation of the key characteristics of realist and romantic spy thrillers, proposing that realist narratives include "themes of treachery, deceit, amorality, the conflict between the personal and the political, and the moral fallibilities of the individual protagonist." They contrast this with the romantic and fantastical "themes of heroism, imperial adventure, patriotic duty, virile masculinity and Manichean triumph of good over evil." Simon Willmetts and Christopher Moran,"Filming treachery: British Cinema and Television's Fascination with the Cambridge Five," in *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10, no.1 (2013): 53.
[16] Adam Piette, *The Literary Cold War, 1945 to Vietnam: Sacrificial Logic and Paranoid Plotlines* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 83.
[17] Timothy Melley, *The Covert Sphere: Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 30.

conspiracies of post-war international relations, not only through the devising of covert operations, but also, as both Wilford and Melley point out, through cultural patronage.[18] Writers, artists, and performers were supported and funded as part strategic outreach programme designed to promote Western cultural values in what Frances Stonor-Saunders terms the "cultural Cold War."[19] This experimentation with literary "agency" placed writers at the forefront of Cold War policy, a position satirised (as I shall explore in Chapter One) by Graham Greene in *The Third Man* (1949).

For John le Carré, the formal training received as part of his time in the intelligence services comprised not only the art and practice of espionage, but also the craft of writing:

> The most rigorous instruction in prose writing that I ever received came, not from any schoolteacher or university tutor, least of all from a writing school. It came from the classically educated senior officers on the top floor of MI5's headquarters in Curzon Street, Mayfair, who seized upon my reports with gleeful pedantry, heaping contempt on my dangling clauses and gratuitous adverbs, scoring the margins of my deathless prose with such comments as *redundant – omit – justify – sloppy – do you really mean this?* No editor I have since encountered was so exacting, or so right.[20]

Here, the attention to detail and the emphasis on textual accuracy (not to mention the hierarchical condescension and geographical exclusivity) corroborates the portrayal of the intelligence services as the realm of the educated elite, the "men of letters" concerned with the precision and preservation of language. This commitment to literalism could be derided as self-indulgent and inconsequential on the part of bureaucratic middle-managers, but in actuality shows how the written word was prioritized as a purveyor of established norms. In espionage, as in writing, the power of communication is a fundamental skill to master in the safeguarding of national heritage, tradition, and authority.

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[18] Wilford, "Secret America," 277; Melley, *The Covert Sphere*, 30.

[19] Frances Stonor-Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: the CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999), 4.

[20] John le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel: Stories from My Life* (London: Viking, 2016), 21.

The connection between spying and writing is not limited to the sharing and borrowing of professional practices. On a personal level, there is also an element of empathy and recognition. In an interview with *Der Spiegel* in 1989 to promote *The Russia House* (a novel centred around a contested manuscript), le Carré remarks that writers and spies share a sense of alienation.[21] They are both spectators and participants, observing and reporting on a society of which they are both a part and apart. Their perspective is at once peripheral, liminal, and central. This fused sense of proximity and distance confers a paradoxical yet symbiotic relationship. Writing on the culture of espionage in Cold War America, Wilford also recognises these synergies:

> There seemed to be some basic connection between the roles of writer and spy: both were iconic, even heroic figures in modern culture, necessarily detached from ordinary society, yet gifted – cursed, perhaps – with unique insight into the darkest realms of human existence.[22]

The conflation of isolation and acuity gives the writer a sense of emotional affinity with the spy. This kinship feeds the writer's compulsion to understand, interrogate, and represent the world of espionage, using narrative strategies adopted from their shared crafts of storytelling, character development, 'plotting' (in both senses) and performance. However, these similarities mask a fundamental contradiction in the treatment of secrets. For the spy, there is a necessary drive to disguise and conceal; while, for the writer, the impetus is to reveal, celebrate, and surprise. For both figures, the generation of fictions through writing serves to construct and complicate the "truth" of their secret lives. These tensions lie at the heart of this study.

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[21] *Der Spiegel*, "What Would I Be Like If I Were He?" in *Conversations with John le Carré.* Ed. by Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman (Mississippi: University of Mississippi Press, 2004), 113.
[22] Wilford, "Secret America," 275.

As Bruce Merry observes, “both the writer, at the compositional level, and the spy, at operational level, employ subterfuge and cunning.”[23] Deception, or – at least – the ability to weave convincing yarns, is one of the key tools in the respective arsenals of the fiction writer and the spy. Eve Horn argues that the connection transcends mere professional interest, seeing fiction as a fundamental structural component of spying that is inextricable and unassailable: “Both hatch plots and invent worlds that dissolve into alternative possibilities or get bogged down in dialectic assumptions and counter-assumptions.”[24] Marina MacKay suggests that recurring themes of betrayal in the work of Muriel Spark locates the creative imagination as a precursor to – and pre-requisite for – treason.[25] It is a symbiosis that Hammond argues is most aptly represented in Greene’s *Our Man in Havana* (1958), in which domestic appliance salesman Jim Wormold conjures secret agents out of a vacuum before his creations take on a life (and death) of their own.[26] Wormold’s fictional imaginary transforms whimsical fantasy into fatal reality, which (as Hammond observes) maps on to the real-life echoes of Greene’s novel in the Cuban Missile Crisis four years later.[27] Spies become writers and writers beget spies, in turn supplying experience, inspiration, and valuable source material in a relationship of reciprocal benefits and mutual sustainability. Personal stories take on political and national significance as individual fictions play out on the international stage.

This shared commitment to the conspiratorial form has implications for the writer’s moral compass. As MacKay argues, “Creativity means casualties.”[28] Le Carré suggests that

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[23] Bruce Merry, *Anatomy of the Spy Thriller* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977), 6.
[24] Horn, *The Secret War*, 112.
[25] Marina MacKay, “Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason,” *Modern Fiction Studies* 54, no.3 (2008): 507.
[26] Hammond, *British Fiction and the Cold War*, 100.
[27] Ibid., 100.
[28] MacKay, “Muriel Spark and the Meaning of Treason,” 515.

former spies turning to writing is a form of defection in the sharing of trade secrets, albeit less harmful than the political kind.[29] Nonetheless, the inclination to shadow, to observe, and to render characters drawn from personal experience can be viewed as a form of manipulation and duplicity. It requires what Greene terms "a splinter of ice in the heart of the writer", that is, the ability to detach from the warmth of human connection, to identify frailty, and to write dispassionately and sometimes ruthlessly in pursuit of narrative goals.[30] In her study of Alan Bennett, Kara McKechnie observes that as an author:

> [Bennett's] writing technique is akin to a form of spying, based, as it is, on observation and eavesdropping, while preserving his own, secret self… The relationship between authorship and exploitation is another pervasive strand of this ongoing investigation, picturing the author as an outsider, observing rather than participating, and using other people's lives as a means of self-expression.[31]

Other people's lives, or (to use the title of the 2006 film) the lives of others, is a fixation for both writers and spies as they seek to understand, characterise, and exploit the motivations and feelings that comprise the layers of human experience. The writer/spy is therefore an ambiguous, morally oblique figure whose outsider status simultaneously enables and obscures their capacity for insight and, consequently, betrayal.

The writer/spy on film

One of the best ways to illustrate how this project will address its core research themes – the intersections between the writer and the spy, the materials, spaces, and technologies used, and the recurring patterns of literary and textual motifs – is to present a brief case study on a set of pertinent images. In the following series of close readings, I show how the scene of

[29] Le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel*, 18.
[30] Graham Greene, *A Sort of Life* (London: Vintage, 2002), 151.
[31] Kara McKechnie, *Alan Bennett* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 89.

writing perpetuates the notion of spying as a predominantly masculine venture, evokes a sense of the past through depictions of heritage and nostalgia, and destabilises the security of the domestic and private sphere. In doing so, I set up the context for Chapter One, which analyses the impact of male authorial authority on feminine agency, Chapter Two, which explores the repercussions of disrupted communications, and Chapter Three, which punctures the gravitas of the writer/spy by exposing the truth-telling/fabrication paradox of the spy memoir. The following section will establish the methodological parameters of the thesis as I interweave close textual readings, historical and material contexts, and cultural and screen intertexts to offer an illustration of the rich scope of critical potential in the area of literary intelligence studies.

The figure of the writer (Figures 1-4) is a recurrent feature of spy films. These images, strikingly similar in their composition, demonstrate how the moment of writing can be replicated and reproduced to create a recognisable genre trope. Framed in a domestic setting, with assorted accoutrements furnishing the desks and backgrounds, these images endow the scene of writing with an intensity of purpose and masculine endeavour. Penholders, plant pots, and coffee cups imbue the spaces with a comfortable, lived-in feel, while the formal or semi-formal dress of the men indicates that we are in the realm of the professional middle-classes. A half-drunk glass of wine (Figure 1) and a bottle of Pilsner (Figure 4) provide added stimulants, reinforcing the link between alcohol and creativity.[32] These are not young men; their desk-bound pursuits signal a cerebral rather than an action-driven interest. However, the surface similarities between the images mask key differences in purpose, showing that

[32] Figure 1 provides a noteworthy divergence from an earlier scene in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* in which Nan hosts Leamas for a romantic dinner. In a gesture of frugality, she offers him a glass of wine, from a bottle “left over from Christmas.” The contrasting profligacy of Peters (Sam Wanamaker) with his glass of wine for breakfast, either indicates the high value the East Germans are placing on Leamas as a defector, or (as with the cottage) serves to refute their reputation for sober austerity.

writing and textual work can play out in manifestly different ways. The writers are, variously, engaged in the processes of recording information (Figure 1), documenting knowledge (Figure 2), calculating codes (Figure 3), and making art (Figure 4). Writing is shown to be a vehicle of interrogation, archiving, communication, and creation, with these routine, seemingly mirror-image acts fashioning an effective cover for a range of clandestine activities.

In three of the four images, curtain-flanked windows give a hint of the world outside, while also situating espionage as a performative and theatrical endeavour. Business and professional duties have penetrated the home sphere. This spatial incursion links to Denning's observation that spy fiction problematises the boundaries between the public and private.[33] Sam Goodman extends this notion in a chapter devoted to the destabilising influence of the spy in the domestic space.[34] The familiarity of domestic routine masks a reality which is disrupted and disordered. The depictions of home working – a conflation of two oppositional concepts – show the writing desk as a site of conflict and contention. In the examples shown above, the public and private have been fused in a space in which the sense of cosy domesticity is illusory. Neither enjoying the security of home nor the structures of work, it mirrors the implications of the "safe house," a liminal, neutral location that acts as a holding space for spies in transit. As Denning argues, the notion of safety in this context is erroneous.[35] The scene of writing, despite an appearance of quietude, is a space of uncertainty, deception,

[33] Denning, *Cover Stories*, 131.
[34] Sam Goodman, *British Spy Fiction and the End of Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 75.
[35] Denning, *Cover Stories*, 134.

and peril. It is also, I shall argue, a space that evokes a sense of the past through literary and generic inheritance and historical allusions, contributing to the notion of the spy genre as a purveyor of heritage and nostalgia.

Figure 1: Sam Wanamaker in The Spy Who Came in from the Cold (1965).[36]

Figure 2: John Mills in The Thirty-Nine Steps (1978).[37]

Figure 3: Nicol Williamson in The Human Factor (1979).[38]

Figure 4: Sebastian Koch in The Lives of Others (2006).[39]

[36] *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold,* directed by Martin Ritt (Talking Pictures TV, 2021), film: https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/1658B7B4?bcast=135773360.
[37] *The Thirty-Nine Steps,* directed by Don Sharp (More4, 2017), film: https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/000D0079?bcast=123244380.
[38] *The Human Factor*, directed by Otto Preminger (BBC Two, 2017), film: https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/000173E8?bcast=125519496.
[39] *The Lives of Others*, directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck (BBC Four, 2010), film: https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/0144783B?bcast=42613148.

The performative function of writing as a means of creating an illusion of domesticity plays a key part in the ritual of agent recruitment in Martin Ritt's adaptation of John le Carré's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965). Peters (played by Sam Wanamaker) interrogates Alec Leamas (offscreen, played by Richard Burton) after the latter's purported defection (see Figure 1). The interview takes place in a rural cottage by the sea, attended by a housekeeper; a hired space from which to conduct these types of intelligence operations securely. While Goodman (in his analysis of the novel) reads le Carré's description of the house as inescapably functional – "deliberately plain in order to remain inconspicuous" – the film presents a more subtle play on the masquerade.[40] The scene takes place in Holland prior to Leamas' final transfer to East Germany. He is on enemy territory, but on friendly terms. The cottage can therefore be read as a holding space, a liminal zone that acts as a buffer between east and west, incorporating aspects of both. The setting as it is presented creates an ambience of bucolic tranquillity at odds with the stereotypical austerity of Cold War urban architecture, a cinematic aesthetic that Douglas McNaughton terms the "Iron Curtain discursive unconscious."[41] The visual motifs McNaughton identifies, which include "roadblocks, watchtowers, run-down social housing […] pine forests and liminal wastelands", are notably absent from this scene of Leamas' first interrogation.[42] The East German influence, the venue implies, is not the cultural wilderness of western propaganda. The cottage is friendly and enticing, its normality intentionally seductive. It is nonetheless also a façade, a simulation of home comforts designed to facilitate the serious professional enterprise of betrayal. As Goodman notes, the pen and paper are the key signifiers of this latent purpose.[43] Peters

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[40] Goodman, *British Spy Fiction and the End of Empire*, 91.
[41] Douglas McNaughton, "Cold War Spaces: *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* in Television and Cinema," *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 15, no. 3 (2018): 384.
[42] McNaughton, "Cold War Spaces," 387.
[43] Goodman, *British Spy Fiction and the End of Empire*, 91.

makes careful note of the answers Leamas provides; his act of writing is part of a wider performance within a stage set designed to produce particular effects.

The clash between the security of internal, domestic spaces and the threat of external, international actors is a central theme of Don Sharp's 1978 adaptation of John Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1915). The scene of writing, located in a plush, well-appointed urban apartment that is shown to be vulnerable to the nefarious intentions of outside forces, dramatizes the urgency of this conflict and locates it within the British class system (see Figure 2). Colonel Scudder (played by John Mills) writes frantically in his notebook. A man on borrowed time, Scudder is operating in requisitioned space that he has negotiated from protagonist Richard Hannay (played by Robert Powell). The notebook, which contains his research concerning an imminent plot to assassinate the Greek Prime Minister (on a visit to the British Parliament), is near completion. It is an information repository for the intelligence Scudder has gathered, a secret archive that becomes an object of desire for villain, hero, and audience alike. Hannay's apartment offers Scudder – identified as a fellow gentleman traveller – a temporary safe haven to complete his task. The period setting, with its deep, rich colours, elegant upholstery, and stylish furniture, gives the impression of Hannay as an opulent bachelor. The sense of sanctuary is undermined by two henchmen (played by Ronald Pickup and Donald Pickering) gaining false entry into the building – an exclusive central London residence – in search of Scudder and his notebook. This invasion of the domestic space punctures the private domain that Scudder has fashioned around himself, shattering the illusion of security. For all its trappings of wealth and gentlemanly solidarity, an Englishman's home is not his castle. The threat lies within as well as without, a theme that is carried to its logical conclusion at the end of the film with Hannay's discovery that the mastermind of the insurrectional plot is a British peer and government minister. As with Bill

Haydon in John le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1974), the principal risk to Britain's established powers is shown to lie within its own ranks.[44]

The use of the home/castle cliché in the Otto Preminger's 1979 film adaptation of Graham Greene's *The Human Factor* (1978) shifts attention to the British middle classes through the character of Maurice Castle (played by Nicol Williamson). Castle's notion of "home" is tied up in the unassuming life he has crafted for himself and his family in a quiet residential area of London. In Figure 3, he writes from his suburban retreat of Berkhamsted, where he lives with his wife and (ostensible) son.[45] Unusually, the background is bare and unadorned; the desk empty apart from the book (Tolstoy's *War and Peace*) from which he is generating his latest code.[46] This lack of aesthetic embellishment reflects Castle's identity as an anonymous functionary in a profession that has "never been very James Bond minded," preferring a fountain pen to a Luger.[47] Castle's frown and white knuckles indicate the gravity of the message he is composing. Unlike the first two characters in this selection of images, Castle is in his own home, "[l]ess than an hour by train" from the London office.[48] It is a place of refuge and reassuring anonymity. However, as Goodman points out, the suburban ordinariness is itself a cover for Castle's professional duplicity.[49] His identity as a spy destabilises any sense of domestic harmony and security on the home front.

Castle cultivates (and embodies) the image of the boring bureaucrat to prevent any suspicion of his treacherous conduct. He is valued by his superiors for his competence and

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[44] John le Carré, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (London: Sceptre, 2006), 361.
[45] Berkhamsted features prominently in Greene's memoir as a notable family enclave. Greene, *A Sort of Life*, 4.
[46] The camera pans down to reveal a carved wooden serving boat/nibbles tray sitting on the desk. This elegant item is a typical example of 1970s tableware seen in suburban households, characteristic of the aspirational middle-class penchant for hospitality.
[47] Graham Greene, *The Human Factor* (London: Vintage, 2005), 41.
[48] Ibid., 8.
[49] Goodman, *British Spy Fiction and the End of Empire*, 81.

frugality: "You did very good work in Pretoria […] You reduced the expenses of the station considerably."[50] This is, perhaps, a backhanded compliment, but it shows that intelligence work includes not only running agents and sourcing secret material, but also balancing the books. Castle's administrative efficiency and respectable façade provide cover for his double-agency (which itself involves the desk-bound activity of translating codes). His daily commute provides a valid excuse for procuring a series of classic novels from his communist contact in the book trade, a further example of the literary motifs that pervade both film and novel. Writing, reading, encrypting, and deciphering straddle Castle's work and leisure pursuits, rendering it impossible to disentangle the two domains.

Castle buys his books from the benign and unassuming Mr Halliday, who demonstrates his old-school literary credentials by writing "all his business letters in long-hand."[51] He is the proprietor of an "unusually respectable bookshop" in Soho, "with a window full of Penguins and Everyman and second-hand copies of World's Classics."[52] Halliday's bookshop, a bastion of propriety, is shown to be in direct opposition (both geographically and metaphorically) to the adult shop across the road run by his son (whom Castle believes to be his Soviet contact), frequented by shifty, "furtive types."[53] The ironic juxtaposition of these two literary modes existing in the same family business – one sordid and secret, the other upright and reputable – is compounded by the revelation that the elder Halliday is in fact the contact: his bookish cover disguises a subversive element that his son's porn shop can only imitate. This multi-layered metafictional gameplay also contains further literary intertexts. Halliday's second-hand stock and old-fashioned demeanour, "bent and white-haired", resembles the antique

[50] Greene, *The Human Factor*, 47.
[51] Greene, *The Human Factor*, 37.
[52] Ibid., 37.
[53] Ibid., 39.

shop proprietor Mr Charrington in George Orwell's *1984* (1948), "a man of perhaps sixty, frail and bowed […] His hair was almost white, but his eyebrows were bushy and still black."[54] Both offer a literary sanctuary for the beleaguered protagonists (Greene's Castle and Orwell's Winston Smith) through a reassuring glimpse of the past, but both are revealed to be a front that ultimately leads to the downfalls of both Castle and Smith. The echo of Orwell's bleak dystopia hints at Castle's fate: isolated and alone in a basic Moscow flat, forever separated from the family he loves.

It is worth lingering briefly on the historical contexts that feed into Greene's novel. *The Human Factor*'s confluence of middle-class suburbia, literary respectability, and international espionage is not without historical precedent. The bookshop façade makes an appearance in the real-life spy scandal known as the Portland Spy Ring, which resulted in the conviction in March 1961 of five conspirators. Christopher Andrew, in his history of MI5, notes that two of the defendants, Peter and Helen Kroger, were antiquarian booksellers residing in Ruislip.[55] The Krogers were Soviet agents living under assumed identities and passing naval secrets to Moscow, using their modest suburban bungalow as a communications hub. The surface mundanity, reinforced by their status as white-collar professionals, represents a shift from the perception in the earlier twentieth century of spying as the preserve of upper-class privilege. The "gentleman spy", as portrayed in fiction by John Buchan and Ian Fleming, and represented in fact by the ongoing controversy surrounding the Cambridge spies, was rapidly morphing into the middle-class bureaucrat. This was in part due to a shifting sense of scrutiny. The privileged behaviour, eccentricity, and amateur networks of the upper classes were no longer afforded free rein. Anonymity was instead conferred upon the professional middle-

[54] Greene, *The Human Factor*, 37; George Orwell, *1984* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 97.
[55] Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin, 2009), 487.

classes. Intelligence operatives were now salesmen, book traders, publishers, and writers; with the creative industries and text-based careers offering both training and convenient cover for acts of political fiction.

The role of authorship, and the associated interchange between factual reportage and artistic imagination, is a theme that permeates the final film of this selection (Figure 4). *The Lives of Others* (dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006) follows the story of playwright Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch), who makes his living in the German Democratic Republic of East Berlin in the mid-1980s. At first quietly loyal to the authoritarian regime, accepting state patronage to write plays espousing socialist ideology and enjoying relative freedom as a result, Dreyman becomes disillusioned by the persecution of his friends. The image shows him writing a draft of his new play in traditional longhand, a habit that centres the craft of writing and imbues it with his own identity, rejecting the automated depersonalization of the typewriter. As Buchanan observes of a later scene, his workspace is "both visually appealing and unashamedly sentimental", incorporating the cosy intimacy of warm lighting, personalised ornaments, and literary paraphernalia.[56] For Dreyman, writing is a relaxed, intimate, and deeply personal act, taking place in the sanctity of his well-appointed apartment (a privilege afforded by his pro-government stance). His clothing adds to the casual effect: an open-necked white shirt, with no tie, contrasts with the formal professionalism of the other three figures, emphasising Dreyman's artistic sensibility and giving an overall feeling of comfort. The impression, however, is undermined by the viewer's knowledge that his apartment has been bugged by the security services, who have set up an elaborate surveillance operation to monitor his activities. Unbeknownst to Dreyman, his place of

[56] Buchanan, "Documentary li(v)es," 218-219.

sanctuary has been infiltrated by malign forces, which threaten to undermine his carefully constructed defences. His literary reputation turns from an advantage into a source of vulnerability. Once again, the place of writing is shown to be a space of contention, instability, and surveillance. The notion of domesticity is shown to be precariously subject to the pervasion of the professional, to the extent where the spy's domestic existence and identity is over-ridden entirely or shown to exist only as a fabrication.

There are several observations that can be drawn from these examples that resonate with the overall focus of this project. Firstly, the scenes of writing typify the spy genre's preoccupation with notions of nostalgia and heritage, both through an aesthetic evocation of the past and also through the performance of literary inheritance implicit in the replication of images. The visual repetition of the writing desk in films spanning several decades and production contexts indicates a desire within the spy genre to revisit and commemorate the past, with each of the films revealing an individual relationship with their cinematic and generic heritage. The decision by director Martin Ritt and cinematographer Oswald Morris to shoot *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* in black and white harks back to the moral degradation of film noir while evoking the more contemporary aesthetic of the British New Wave in the late 1950s and early 1960s. *Spy* even reunites the stars of Tony Richardson's genre-defining drama *Look Back in Anger* (1959) – Richard Burton and Claire Bloom – as Leamas and Nan Perry, which, through the echoes of their previous roles, recalls the genre of kitchen sink realism. The film's austere palette emphasises the narrative's moral ambiguity in the same year that the vibrancy and opulence of Technicolor was garnering Academy Awards for films such as *Doctor Zhivago* and *The Sound of Music*. Ritt's film purposely eschews these technical enhancements in favour of a stripped back visual style that conjures a dissipated past and a bleak future. Both inheritance and legacy are suffused with contention and loss.

In different ways, Figures 2-4 also reveal their links to the past. The period setting of *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1978) positions the film as a direct adaptation of John Buchan's 1915 novel instead of a remake of the 1936 Alfred Hitchcock film (a loose adaptation of the original which updated the plot to a 1930s setting). The sumptuous period detail of the 1978 production design, which draws attention to its authentic costumes, veteran cars, country mansions, and bucolic landscapes, places it firmly in the genre of the heritage film. The casting of British acting stalwart John Mills alongside a fresh-faced Robert Powell (coming soon after his star-making turn in *Jesus of Nazareth* in 1977) draws on British cinematic history while presenting its (ostensible) future, signifying a passing of the baton in terms of dramatic inheritance and legacy. The notebook – the central object of desire within the plot that contains all Scudder's (Mills') research and knowledge – is a physical representation of this transition.

The contemporary suburban setting of Preminger's *The Human Factor* (1979) is less obviously rooted in the past, although its position as an adaptation of Graham Greene's novel provides a direct link to Greene's associated literary heritage. The film's deliberately drab 1970s locations, shifting between an unexceptional office space, Castle's house in Berkhamsted, and a bookshop interior in Soho, emphasise the film's muted tone. Even a flashback to Castle's time in South Africa does not offer any particularly memorable vistas. It is an aesthetic that provides a template for more recent films set during the Cold War period. Both Tomas Alfredson's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011) and Dominic Cooke's *The Courier* (2020) opt for downbeat, gloomy visuals that draw on the brown hues of 1970s British interior design. Eric J. Morgan suggests that Alfredson's film "evokes that analog world via saturated colors of gray, brown, and burnt orange, all designed to capture the depressed nature of the

1970s. The British Empire is depicted as literally rusting, collapsing on itself."[57] The key word here is analogue, which emphasises how the period aesthetic is closely intertwined with physical technologies that centre on the measuring, storing, recording and transmitting of information. Despite *The Courier* being set in the early 1960s, its analogous colour scheme moves it closer to the drab realism of 1970s' spy dramas rather than, for example, the vibrant consumerism of Sidney J. Furie's *The Ipcress File* (1965). This transaction between past and present – in particular, the adoption (and adaptation) of specific visual tones and colour palettes – forms part of the language of spy films produced during and after the Cold War.

Von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others* (2006) employs an aesthetic that (controversially) communicates an attitude of sentimental nostalgia, or *Ostalgie,* for the German Democratic Republic of the 1980s. While critics such as Mary Beth Stein commend the film's realist recreation of East Berlin's urban "decay", and Owen Evans notes that authenticity is invoked by the "use of subdued, cold lighting throughout," Cheryl Dueck suggests that this "visual association with the GDR past is a key to unlocking a whole storage of historical problems."[58] Thomas Lindenberger argues that the film's celebrated visual realism is undermined by the narrative drive for reconciliation.[59] Paul Cooke offers a useful summary of critical debates around the film's engagement with *Ostalgie*, concluding that the visual effects, material culture, and period detail instead draws attention to the film's

[57] Eric J. Morgan, "Whores and Angels of our Striving Selves: The Cold War Films of John le Carré, Then and Now," *Historical Journal of Radio, Film and Television* 36, no.1 (2016): 95.
[58] Mary Beth Stein, "Stasi with a Human Face? Ambiguity in *Das Leben der Anderen*," *German Studies Review* 31, no.3 (2008): 568; Owen Evans, "Redeeming the demon? The legacy of the Stasi in *Das Leben der Anderen*," *Memory Studies* 3, no.2 (2010): 166; Cheryl Dueck, "The Humanization of the Stasi in *Das Leben der Anderen,*" *German Studies Review* 31, no.3 (2008): 601.
[59] Thomas Lindenberger, "Stasiploitation: Why Not? The Scriptwriter's Historical Creativity in *The Lives of Others*," *German Studies Review* 31, no.3 (2008): 560.

artificiality and *in*authenticity, placing it within the heritage genre.[60] These examples show how cinematic espionage is rooted in the preservation and propagation of values, cultures, and ideals, with screen representations of the literary spy providing a lens through which to analyse that relationship.

The second insight to be drawn from these examples is the relationship between spying, writing, and gender. Fairly obviously, the writers are all men, of middle age, writing seriously and studiously about matters of national security. It is a not unrepresentative depiction of the spy genre, which, as Rosie White argues, is a product of the masculine bureaucratic environment.[61] However, there is a tension between writing as a passive, deskbound activity and spying as an active expression of masculinity. As Richard Burton's resentful Alec Leamas growls to Control in *Spy Who Came in From the Cold*: "I'm a field man, I don't want a desk job." "You don't know what's on the desk," replies Control calmly. "Paper," retorts Leamas.[62] Writing, papers and paperwork, Leamas implies, are demeaning and emasculating, not suitable work for a trained professional. This disdain for bureaucratic process is characteristic of a genre which prioritises masculine action over systematic intelligence-gathering. The contradiction lies in the latter's prevalence as a visual trope. Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell draw a distinction between as writing as creation and writing as transcription, which represents the difference "between inspired minds and automatic hands."[63] Matthew Kirschenbaum makes a similar division between writing "as the act of composition [and] the work of typing and retyping, to say nothing of the work of

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[60] Paul Cooke, "Watching the Stasi: Authenticity, *Ostalgie*, and History in Florien Henckel von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others* (2006)" in *New Directions in German Cinema* ed. Paul Cooke (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 120.
[61] White, *Violent Femmes*, 6.
[62] *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold.*
[63] Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell, "Introduction," in *Literary Secretaries/ Secretarial Culture*, ed. Leah Price and Pamela Thurschwell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 1.

correspondence and copying, of filing and bookkeeping and so forth."[64] The clerical roles of writing, recording, and typing are separated from authorial autonomy by means of gender. Intelligence is designated as a backroom activity, executed behind the scenes by anonymous operatives. Leamas articulates a fear around the disintegration of these gendered boundaries and the associated challenge to his masculine identity. The regimentation and automation of word processing undermines questions of authorial agency and thereby destabilizes the hetero-normative hegemony of male-dominated spy narratives. It is no accident that George Smiley, Leamas' superior in the novel and the archetypal proponent of the anonymous academic intellectualisation of espionage, is characterised as a perpetual cuckold.

The figure of the writer on screen has received considerable scholarly attention in the last ten years, linked, in no small part, to the proliferation of literary biographies on film. Judith Buchanan's edited volume *Screening Literary Authorship* has been a foundational text in forming my interest in the connections between authorship, creativity, and agency. Her focus on writing as an act, identity, and process goes to the heart of my investigation into the role of literary endeavours and textual motifs in spy fiction. In particular, Buchanan notes the aestheticization of the spaces and materials of writing, arguing that "the cumulative effect of these recurring shots *across films*…generates a sense of consoling familiarity and of a visual terrain reassuringly easy to navigate for the generically-attuned spectator."[65] It is this cumulative effect – the repetition, explication, and subversion of generic markers in spy films spanning sixty years of production – that has animated this project. The spectres, shadows, patterns, and echoes of literary culture and iconography tell the story of twentieth-century

[64] Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2016), 140.
[65] Judith Buchanan, "Introduction: Image, story, desire: the writer on film," in *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship*, ed. Judith Buchanan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 6.

espionage in ways that are recognisable yet satisfyingly surprising in each iteration. When East German Hauptmann Gerd Wiedler (Ulrich Mühe) interrogates a suspected dissident in von Donnersmarck's *The Lives of Others*, for example, he writes down the name "Werner Glaske," while repeating it verbally. The physical act of note-taking, together with the accent, tone, and iteration of the name echo a similar scene in Martin Ritt's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965), in which defector Alec Leamas (Richard Burton) is interrogated by East German officer Philips (Sam Wanamaker), eliciting the name of "Werner Seebold." The scene creates an intertextual connection between these two films, made fifty years apart and set at opposite ends of the life of the Berlin Wall. The repetition creates a haunting effect that reverberates across time, productions, and national film industries, foregrounding a spy culture that relies on mechanisms of transcription, recording, and filing to implement and perpetuate power and control.

While Buchanan, Fischer, and Shachar concentrate primarily on the figure of the writer on film, Edward Gallafent takes a slightly different approach by focusing on writing and text as they appear on screen. Playing on the double meaning of the letter as a constituent part of written language and as the form of correspondence, Gallafent confines his analysis to four close readings of films which foreground the act of writing as meaningful interventions in the lives of the characters.[66] In doing so, he takes a broad view of the spaces, materials, and properties that define representations of the written word. My principal debt to Gallafent's work comes in the form of the material attributes of textual production. Gallafent emphasises the transience and precariousness of the written word, reliant on the instruments and materials which affect resilience, longevity, and impact. Words can be absent, smudged, or

[66] Edward Gallafent, *Letters and Literacy in Hollywood Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.

misread; pages can be ripped up and destroyed. Letters can be mislaid, purloined, and/or repurposed.[67] As a substitute for physical presence, writing presents a mediated form of expression and identity that can be misleading, illusionary, or downright deceptive. It embodies the dynamics and fragilities of textual exchange that is central to this thesis.

Writing can also convey the physical trauma of war. The embodied, enforced inscription of Elsa Fennan's concentration camp tattoo in le Carré's *Call for the Dead* symbolizes, as Phyllis Lassner argues, "an indelible memory trace of the Holocaust […] deciphered as a realistic story of physical and emotional decimation."[68] The trauma of war is inscribed and ingrained in the bodies of its victims. The crude and dehumanising identifier makes a permanent mark on the survivor's identity and essence. This traumatic embodiment is also noted by Peter Schwenger in his analysis of Peter Townsend's *The Postman of Nagasaki*, in which the scarred back of the postal boy, maimed by the nuclear explosion: "became a more significant message than any of his letters; like a human post card, he had been written on the back by the bomb."[69] The human body – fragile, broken, but resilient – is the most graphic and expressive form of all. These two examples, which represent the lasting effects of the Holocaust and the nuclear bomb, provide a timely context for the starting point of this project, located in the rubble of Vienna of *The Third Man* (1949) in the immediate post-war period. In the following section, I offer a brief summary of the historical and cultural contexts that feed into and anchor my thesis.

[67] Ibid., 6.
[68] Phyllis Lassner, *Espionage and Exile: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Spy Fiction and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 182.
[69] Peter Schwenger, "Postnuclear Post Card," *Papers on Language and Literature* 26, no.1 (1990): 169.

Historical and cultural contexts

The evolution of twentieth century intelligence institutions in Britain is closely interwoven with fictional representations of spycraft in popular culture. In the early 1900s, the "invasion scare" novels of Erskine Childers, William Le Queux, and Edward Phillips Oppenheim formed part of a literary trend that contributed to an overarching narrative of foreign menace in the years leading up to World War I. Childers' *Riddle of the Sands* (1903) in particular is widely acknowledged as one of the foundational texts of the literary spy genre.[70] Eric Sandberg argues that *Sands* sits at the threshold between the nineteenth century invasion novel and the twentieth century spy novel.[71] He argues that the novel's strength and longevity lies in its sophisticated character development, the willingness to address the ethical fog of espionage, the instability and fluidity of national identity, and the use of physical landscapes as metaphorical representations.[72] Alongside its cultural legacy, the impact of Childers' novel was also felt in real-world naval intelligence circles. Its painstaking mapping of Britain's pre-World War I coastal defences exposed the nation's naval vulnerabilities, piquing the interest of the military authorities and prompting an official re-evaluation of operational capabilities.[73] These emergent themes, distinct from the adventurism of the contemporaneous 'Great Game' genre, can be identified as recurring features of realist espionage narratives of Somerset Maugham, Eric Ambler, and Graham Greene in the 1920s and 1930s.

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[70] See Wesley K. Wark, "Introduction: Fictions of History," in *Spy Fiction, Spy Films, and Real Intelligence*, ed. Wesley K. Wark (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991), 1; and John Atkins, *The British Spy Novel: Styles in Treachery* (London: John Calder Ltd, 1984), 23.
[71] Eric Sandberg, ""A Terrible Beauty is Born": Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands*, the Spy Thriller and Modern Identity," *English Studies* 99, no. 5 (2018): 539-541.
[72] Sandberg, "A Terrible Beauty is Born," 547-549.
[73] See, for example: Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust: The Story of Western Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 13-14; Brett F. Woods, *Neutral Ground: A Political History of Espionage Fiction* (New York: Algora, 2008), 29; and Anthony Masters, *Literary Agents: The Novelist as Spy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 10.

Childers' legacy was not, however, limited to his authorial status. Having produced a work that instituted some of the generic conventions of the modern spy novel and which tangentially contributed to the increasing professionalisation of Britain's pre-war intelligence services, he later became engaged in political activism of a different kind. His dual British-Irish heritage led to a split in political affiliation during World War One. A private operation smuggling German arms to Ireland in 1914 (guns which were later used in the Easter Rising of 1916) was counteracted by his voluntary service in the British military, which culminated in the award of a Distinguished Service Cross for the Gallipoli Campaign.[74] His split identities and divided loyalties ultimately had fatal consequences. Aligned with the post-war Irish Republican movement, in 1922 he was arrested and court-martialled for possession of an illegal firearm. He was executed in Dublin in November 1922. It was some distance from the patriotic acclaim that greeted his novel nearly twenty years beforehand. With *The Riddle of the Sands*, Childers is uniquely influential in the literary, historical, and political landscape. He is lauded for his impact on the spy thriller genre, credited for real-world interventions in military and naval planning, and vilified for treachery when his political affiliations (and actions) turned against the British state. Successively an advocate, facilitator, and opponent of state security, Childers' journey from pioneering spy writer to traitor encapsulates in its extremity the complex and ambiguous nature of the relationship between writers, writing, and espionage that forms the basis of this study.

These blurred boundaries between historical fact and literary fiction in the origins of the spy genre place a special emphasis on the impact of historical events on fictional espionage narratives (and sometimes vice versa). The confluence of history and culture,

[74] Sandberg, "A Terrible Beauty is Born," 538.

combined with the innate secrecy of the intelligence field, has produced a tendency for spying and spycraft to be perceived and interpreted through the prism of fiction. While this project will not address the fictional representations of specific historical events in its individual case studies, in the following section I consider the ramifications of the Cambridge spies as a significant historical and cultural marker that underpin the portrayal and understanding of British espionage narratives in the twentieth century.

The defections of Donald Mclean and Guy Burgess to Moscow in May 1951 and, later, of Kim Philby in 1963 sent shockwaves through the British intelligence establishment. The three defections were compounded by the subsequent unmasking of Anthony Blunt and John Cairncross in 1964 (although these were not publicly revealed until 1979 and 1982, respectively). All five men had been educated – and recruited by Soviet intelligence – at Cambridge University in the mid-1930s before assuming a variety of senior roles in British public institutions (including the Foreign Office, the BBC, MI5 and MI6) while conducting acts of espionage on behalf of Moscow. During their time as double agents, MI5 historian Christopher Andrew reports that Philby, Burgess, and Maclean were responsible for supplying over 20,000 pages of classified material to the Soviet Union.[75] The scale of their treason being measured by page count shows an interesting focus on the status of physical documentation in narratives of espionage. Their shared education background created a conveniently memorable moniker that was to haunt and, in many ways, contribute to the perception of, the British intelligence services in the latter part of the Cold War. The scandal of the "Cambridge Five", as they became popularly known, represented the incompetence of

[75] Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorized History of MI5* (London: Penguin, 2009), 426.

bureaucracy, the corruption of the nepotistic establishment, and the decline of British international influence.

The profusion of spy narratives in British fiction, screen and stage in the 1970s and 1980s can be attributed directly to the ongoing legacy of the Cambridge spies and the revelatory books, investigative journalism, and publishing controversies that the subject spawned. These multi-layered accounts from competing fictional, biographical, official, and unauthorised sources created a complex system of connected narratives in which secrets were unveiled, contested, fictionalised, re-written, and mythologised. Through these recurring cultural representations, the Cambridge spies provided a focal point to interrogate ideas around class, gender, and national identity. Their high-profile treachery provoked nearly twenty years of national introspection until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 diverted attention away from Cold War concerns in the 1990s. Nevertheless, there has been a resurgence of cultural interest in the Cambridge spies and their fictional counterparts in the post-9/11 period, notably through the BBC's *Cambridge Spies* (2003) and the cinematic adaptation of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (2011). This continued revisiting and retelling of this story of national betrayal by a select group of Cambridge intellectuals indicate a fascination with the mechanics and materiality of treachery, which can be traced through narrative patterns encapsulated, as I shall argue, by the textual items that populate spy fictions. This thesis builds on the cultural legacy of the Cambridge spies, with their interconnecting layers of history and fiction, in considering how espionage narratives display a distinctly literary and textual quality. To set this up, I offer a brief overview of related cultural productions.

On television, the moral and psychological consequences of the ideological treachery at the heart of the British establishment was loosely fictionalised in two Dennis Potter TV plays: *Traitor* (1971), starring John Le Mesurier, and *Blade on a Feather* (1980), starring Donald Pleasance. On film, Marek Kanievska directed *Another Country* (1984), starring Rupert Everett and Colin Firth in an early "origin film" inspired by the real-life figure of Guy Burgess (1911-1963) that considered the societal conditions and class hierarchies that could shape the future path for betrayal. Set in the 1930s, the film reflects on the rigidly institutional education system that contribute to the alienation and disaffection of those who reject the political and sexual hegemony.

More directly biographical (though still highly conjectural) reconstructions of the Cambridge spies came in the form of the TV plays *Philby, Burgess and Maclean* (1977, directed by Gordon Flemyng), *Blunt* (1987, directed by John Glenister), together with the two John Schlesinger (director)/ Alan Bennett (writer) TV collaborations: *An Englishman Abroad* (1983, starring Alan Bates and Coral Browne) and *A Question of Attribution* (1991, starring James Fox and Prunella Scales). Each of these productions adopted a period setting, evoking a sense of nostalgia and placing the British spy genre firmly in the category of heritage TV. This approach had the effect of softening the characters and their stories, focusing on the personal costs of political betrayal (loss of status and reputation, exile) rather than the off-screen impact on geo-political relations, intelligence operations, and their unidentified victims. These standalone TV plays were joined by three serialised BBC adaptations of John le Carré novels: *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979, directed by Jon Irvin), *Smiley's People* (1982, directed by Simon Langton) and *A Perfect Spy* (1987, directed by Peter Smith). The first two adaptations introduced the character of George Smiley (played by Alec Guinness), whose scholarly

approach and unassuming demeanour came to symbolise the British spy in the age of bureaucracy.

On stage, Alan Bennett's *The Old Country* (1977) evoked a wistful nostalgia for a Britain that never existed, with Alec Guinness foreshadowing his casting as George Smiley in his portrayal of an exiled traitor. These roles followed an (unrelated) series of on-screen secret agent guises that Guinness had portrayed over several decades, including the entrepreneurial Jim Wormold in Carol Reed's *Our Man in Havana* (1959), sinister KGB agent in David Lean's *Dr Zhivago* (1965), and inscrutable spymaster Pol in Michael Anderson's *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966). Guinness's affinity with shadowy roles that conveyed diffidence and impenetrability was, Neil Sinyard suggests, in part due to his (anti) star persona that communicated "something furtive and elusive."[76] His reclusive acting style, which also characterised his public image, was uniquely suited to the anonymity and unknowability of his characters. Guinness, Sinyard observes, "often brought an air of deep secrecy to the roles he played."[77] The "gift of quiet", as Michael Billington terms it in a *New York Times* feature on *Smiley's People*, hinted at the grief and often sinister resolve that lay beneath his character's impassive mask.[78] The coalescence of the actor's off-screen celebrity persona and on-screen performance history in spy films, combined with his cinematic and theatrical pedigree, confers a sense of depth, heritage, and prestige to a genre often dismissed as lacking cultural merit. This cumulative effect creates a layer of intertextuality that evokes the secret identities characteristic of the genre, drawing attention to spying itself as an act of doubling and

[76] Neil Sinyard, "Sir Alec Guinness: The Self-Effacing Star," in *British Stars and Stardom*, ed. Bruce Babington (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 144.
[77] Ibid., 147.
[78] Michael Billington, "Alec Guinness Does a Second Tour of Duty as Le Carré's Spy," *New York Times*, Dec 20, 1981, accessed June 03, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/20/movies/alec-guinness-does-a-second-tour-of-duty-as-lecarre-s-spy.html.

performance. John le Carré observes that Guinness "studies and stores away the mannerisms of the adult enemy, moulds his own face, voice and body into countless versions of us, while he simultaneously explores the possibilities of his own nature."[79] He concludes: "Watching him put on an identity is like watching a man set out on a mission into enemy territory.[80] The synergy between acting and spying as processes of artistic creation is characterised here as a uniquely hostile endeavour. Guinness's calculated performance in a multitude of spying roles is an exercise in observation, empathy, and physical embodiment. The art of concealment necessitates a complex and adversarial relationship with not only other characters, but also with the audience and the wider environment, creating an ongoing feeling of displacement and unease.

This sense of distance and alienation is dramatized in Bennett's *The Old Country.* Loosely inspired by the story of Kim Philby, the play imagines a recreation of a pastoral English landscape in a rural Russian dacha. The geographical dislocation mirrors the inauthenticity of Guinness's character identity as he surveys the facsimile of his previous life. It was the first of Bennett's so-called 'traitor trilogy,' which concluded with the 1988 double bill *Single Spies* (itself partly a stage adaptation of Bennett's 1983 TV play: *An Englishman Abroad*).[81] The second part of the bill, *A Question of Attribution*, offered a meditation on the parallels between art and espionage through a speculative meeting between Anthony Blunt and Elizabeth II in the lead-up to Blunt's public exposure in 1979. *Single Spies* premiered at the National Theatre in December 1988, just six months after Kim Philby's death in Moscow. The

[79] John le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel: Stories from My Life* (London: Viking, 2016), 229.
[80]Ibid., 229.
[81] Other stage productions during the 1980s included Hugh Whitemore's *Pack of Lies* (1983), which drew inspiration from the Portland Spy Ring of the late 1950s, and Tom Stoppard's *Hapgood* (1988), which starred Felicity Kendal as a spy chief and working mother negotiating the competing demands of state security and school sports days. Each of these plays use the popular spy genre as a lens through which to examine the roles and social expectations of women in the domestic and public spheres.

production therefore performed a kind of epitaph for the story of the Cambridge spies, with the profile of the national stage serving to institutionalise, historicise, and even legitimise their narrative of treachery as a peculiarly British eccentricity. By the time *Single Spies* was re-launched for a national tour in early 1990, the saturation of spy dramas was compounded by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, an event which immediately altered the geo-political framework. While press reviews on tour remained generally positive ("highly absorbing and amusing," and "two splendid plays"), several commentators observed that the topic had lost its relevance in the new political climate.[82] Allen Sadler wrote in *The Guardian* that "Recent events have left the espionage business high and dry."[83] By the turn of the decade, spies had (temporarily) lost their lustre, only to re-emerge in the 2000s steeped in nostalgia and homage, as I shall demonstrate through a brief analysis of the relationship between *Cambridge Spies* (2003) and *The Third Man* (1949).

This is a small snapshot of spy-related output on British stage and screen during this period. I have not included radio productions, which lean towards genre parody.[84] For readers interested in learning more about this temporally-specific cluster of cultural output, Jonathan Bolton's *The Blunt Affair* addresses its collective impact on British culture and politics in the 1980s.[85] It is beyond the scope of this project to delve into this material in detail, but the overview provides a useful context for the case studies in Chapters One and Two, which emerge from the ongoing legacy of the Cambridge spies.

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[82] Anon, "Review: *Single Spies*, Plymouth," *The Stage*, 9 March 1990. National Theatre Archives; Richard Edmonds, "*Single Spies*," *Birmingham Post*, 28 February 1990. National Theatre Archives.
[83] Allen Saddler, "*Single Spies*," *The Guardian*, 12 February 1990. National Theatre Archives.
[84] Tom Stoppard's BBC Radio 4 play *The Dog It Was That Died* (1982) directly lampooned the le Carré-style search for a double agent, with the title offering an additional intertextual link to Graham Greene's *Our Man in Havana*. The spying game was further mined in a series of Radio 4 sketch shows, including the music hall farce *Iron Curtain Call* (1986) and Radio Active's *Probe Round the Back* (1987).
[85] Jonathan Bolton, *The Blunt Affair: Official Secrecy and Treason in Literature, Television and Film 1980-89* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).

In the following section, I explore how deeply this legacy is embedded within *The Third Man* to illustrate not only the centrality of this text to my argument, but also the methodological ways in which visual analysis can illuminate suggestive juxtapositions, parallels, and echoes between texts and their historical and cultural contexts. This interweaving of history and fiction and the resultant textual echoes that reverberate through these original productions, adaptations, fictional reimaginations, and narrative reworkings, are key tenets of my approach to this project. I trace how historical signs and generic conventions are reproduced, modified, and reapplied through textual artefacts in different media, periods, and contexts. How do the acts, tools, spaces, and products of writing in spy narratives evolve over time and changing production contexts? What meanings and suggestive juxtapositions can be extrapolated from these literary patterns, facsimiles, and residues? To introduce this approach, and as a precursor to my examination of textual objects in *The Third Man* in Chapter One, I offer a brief analysis of how visual parallels are deployed in two contrasting screen productions, made forty years apart, that derive from (and contribute to) the Cambridge spies narrative continuum.

The BBC television series *Cambridge Spies* is a particularly significant example of the way a system of visual references pertaining to light and shade are employed to recall earlier narratives. Erica Sheen discusses the crucial moment when Kim Philby (Toby Stephens) evades pursuit and hides in a darkened doorway in 1930s Vienna (Figs 5-10), and notes that the combination of angled shadows, crumbling Baroque architecture, artificial light glistening on rain-soaked cobblestones, and the sounds of echoing footsteps create a visual and aural homage to Carol Reed's *The Third Man*.[86] Philby steps into the shoes of Harry Lime (Orson

[86] Erica Sheen, "Secrecy and Exposure: The Cambridge Spies," in *Rule, Britannia! Biopics and British National Identity*, ed. Homer B. Pettey and R. Barton Palmer (Albany: Suny Press, 2018), 279.

Welles), creating a doubling effect that invites the audience to draw parallels between the two men. Kim Philby, of course, is the "third man" in the Cambridge spy ring, a moniker first applied to him in a speech to Parliament given by Labour MP Marcus Lipton in 1955.[87] Lipton's accusation (that Philby was the third conspirator following the defection of Guy Burgess and Donald Maclean in 1951) undoubtedly exploited the title of the 1949 film as a form of cultural shorthand for themes of double-dealing, corruption, and betrayal. By invoking the ghost of Philby's cinematic forebear, *Cambridge Spies* acknowledges and explicates the link between the two characters. In this scene, Harry Lime becomes Philby's alter-ego, a fictional counterpart whose cinematic identity provides a fitting emblem of Philby's status as a double-agent, ironically foreshadowing his future path to notoriety. Thus, as well as paying tribute to Reed's film as a foundational influence in British espionage cinema, the scene offers an implicit commentary on Philby's multifaceted identity, his impending treachery, and the cultural inheritance that contributed to his public persona.

In a further layer, it has often been suggested that Philby was himself part of the inspiration behind the character of Harry Lime.[88] Charles Drazin devotes a chapter to the connections between Graham Greene, Philby and Lime (both literal and conjectured) and goes so far as to suggest that the 1949 film is "the ultimate coded message" implicating Philby as the Third Man.[89] While it is unlikely that Greene knew specifically of Philby's double identity at the time of writing the film, there is critical consensus that Philby's combination of charm,

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[87] *Times* Parliamentary Report, 26 Oct. 1955, quoted in Phillip Knightley, *Philby: KGB Masterspy* (London: Pan Books, 1989), 194.

[88] See Sheen, *Secrecy and Exposure*, 279; Charles Drazin, *In Search of The Third Man* (London: Methuen, 2000), 144-154; Tony Shaw, *British Cinema and the Cold War: The State, Propaganda, and Consensus* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2006), 28-29; Brian Diemert, "The anti-American: Graham Greene and the Cold War in the 1950s," in Cold War Literature: Writing the Global Conflict, ed. Andrew Hammond (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 215; Julia Prewitt Brown, "An Eye for an I: Identity and Nation in the Films of John Schlesinger," in *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 44, no.1 (2016): 19; and Willmetts & Moran, "Filming treachery", 50.

[89] Drazin, *In Search of The Third Man*, 151.

ingenuity, and unscrupulousness was a key influence on the creation of Greene's character. In one example, the real-life Philby (in his time as a socialist activist) did indeed use the Vienna sewers as a channel for smuggling members of his underground group in 1934, perhaps anticipating Harry Lime's trafficking route beneath the streets of the post-war city in 1949.[90]

Figure 5: The Third Man (1949) pursuit.[91]

Figure 6: Cambridge Spies (2003) pursuit.[92]

Figure 7: The Third Man advertising kiosk.[93]

Figure 8: Cambridge Spies advertising kiosk.[94]

[90] Knightley, *Philby: KGB Masterspy*, 42; Drazin, *The Search for The Third Man,* 145-146.
[91] *The Third Man*, directed by Carol Reed (BBC Four, 2017).
Film: https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/001D37C3?bcast=28235492.
[92] *Cambridge Spies*, directed by Tim Fywell (London: BBC, 2003), DVD.
[93] *The Third Man.*
[94] *Cambridge Spies*

Figure 9: The Third Man doorway.[95]

Figure 10: Cambridge Spies doorway.[96]

A third shadow therefore emerges to join Toby Stephens' Kim Philby in the doorway, representing both Harry Lime as his cinematic double, and the historical legacy of the real-life Philby himself. The combination of the visual aesthetic of *The Third Man* with an imagined re-enactment of historical events means that the fictional Philby is haunted not only by Lime's ghost, but by association, the impression of his own real-world past self. The double agent becomes a triple agent, a metaphorical "third man" in what Sarah Cardwell terms a "complex layering process" of character development through echoes of past events and real-life figures.[97] These layers have a notably material and textual dimension, which relates to Ruben Weiss's suggestion that "spies are perceived as documents", subject to reading, analysis, and constant redrafting.[98] In this project, I adopt Weiss's formulation of the spy-as-document to explore how these textual layers unfold. Like Alec Guinness's multifaceted performance of the embodied spy, channelling past roles and his own covert persona, the scene in *Cambridge*

[95] *The Third Man.*
[96] *Cambridge Spies.*
[97] Sarah Cardwell, *Adaptation Revisited: Television and the Classic Novel* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2002), 91.
[98] Ruben Weiss, ""We Read You": Spies, Documents, and Identity in John le Carré and Joseph Conrad," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 62, no. 5 (2021): 529.

Spies offers a useful visual expression of doubled textualities, concealed identities, and embedded meanings that lie beneath the surface of fictional espionage narratives.

Situating the research

This project falls within the field of research that addresses the myriad cultural representations of spying and secret intelligence in fiction, film, and television. As noted earlier, historian Simon Willmetts identifies this scholarship as constituting a "cultural turn" in intelligence studies in recent years.[99] The field emerged as a discernible grouping in the years post-9/11 as a theoretical and conceptual response to narratives surrounding the "War on Terror" and its Cold War antecedents. Focusing on the intersections of fiction and espionage, the field analyses how the fictional spy genre provides a lens through which to theorise concepts such as treason and betrayal, mystery and intrigue, secrecy, and deception.

No study of contemporary espionage fiction would be complete without due acknowledgment of Michael Denning's germinal work on the British spy genre.[100] First published in 1987 during the first wave of literary criticism dedicated to British spy fiction, *Cover Stories* was reissued in 2014 to coincide with the current cluster of scholarship on espionage fiction.[101] Drawing on methodologies including Marxist theories of ideology, structuralist models of myth and narrative, and debates on realism, Denning offers an insight

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[99] Willmetts, "The Cultural Turn in Intelligence Studies," 800.

[100] Michael Denning, *Cover Stories: Narrative and Ideology in the British Spy Thriller* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

[101] Denning's work sits alongside several studies of espionage fiction published during the 1970s and 1980s, including: Bruce Merry, *Anatomy of the Spy Thriller* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1977); Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, *The Lady Investigates: Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction* (London: Gollancz, 1981); John Atkins, *The British Spy Novel: Styles in Treachery* (London: John Calder Ltd, 1984); John G. Cawelti and Bruce A. Rosenberg, *The Spy Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987); Anthony Masters, *Literary Agents: The Novelist as a Spy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

into how spy stories reflect and comment upon (and are a product of) contemporary political, social, and ideological concerns, applying models of production and consumption typified by the Cultural Studies movement of the 1970s and 1980s. He considers the texts chronologically in terms of genre, literary history, and realism, arguing that they offer "cover stories" for narratives surrounding Britain's place in the world, the decline of imperialism and associated rise of nationalism, the emergence of consumer society, and the institutionalization of bureaucracy.

The generic positioning of spy fiction, hovering somewhere between the "literary" and the "popular", lends itself, Denning suggests, to a propensity for self-reflexivity and metafictionality.[102] Literary allegories and intertextual references are scattered through the genre like clues or codes, challenging the reader to follow the trail and decipher hidden meanings. Dennings gives the example of the "bizarre battle of books" in Ian Fleming's *From Russia With Love*, in which Bond and his opponent Red Grant trade blows using their respective copies of *The Mask of Dimitrios* (by Eric Ambler) and *War and Peace* (by Leo Tolstoy) as shield and weapon.[103] Denning reads this clash of literary artifacts as a playful representation of the national stereotypes that characterised the cultural Cold War: the "low", popular culture of the western powers versus the "high" literary culture of the Soviet Union.[104] Furthermore, he links the bookish reference to a marketing gambit surrounding the novel's first publication, which saw *From Russia With Love* produced in hardcover to masquerade as literary fiction.[105] This exercise in generic subterfuge befits the duplicitous narratives that typify the spy genre, while echoing and emphasising the novel's implicit sense

[102] Denning, *Cover Stories*, 115.
[103] Ibid., 114.
[104] Ibid., 114.
[105] Ibid.,115.

of literary self-consciousness. To build on Denning's observation, I contend that the value of Fleming's Bond series was again shown under a different guise, this time as a piece of literary history, in January 2022 when a collection of fourteen first editions was sold at auction for just under £170,000.[106] The transition from simulated literary status to mass market commodity to high-end collectors' item tells the story of the genre's changing identity and shifting value. The book: the humble spy thriller – once the fictional makeshift weapon in Fleming's Cold War clash of cultures – becomes the ultimate capitalist symbol of wealth and status.

The recognition of – and focus on – literary objects as intra-textual and intertextual devices is a key feature of Denning's work that I apply to my own project. His chapter on Greene and le Carré analyses *The Human Factor* (1978) and *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1974), explicating the bureaucratic foundation of these narratives and emphasising the prosaic mundanity of spycraft in 1970s British fiction. Power, Denning suggests, lies in the accumulation of information and the dissemination of knowledge.[107] In other words, authority is derived from manipulating and mastering the systems of communication (secret or otherwise) that facilitate the production, protection, pursuit, and disclosure of information. While Eva Horn suggests that "the history of conspiracies is a history of media", I contend, rather, that it is a history of communication.[108] These systems provide the architecture for narratives of intrigue, where information can be recorded, filed, archived, suppressed, bartered, exchanged, exhorted, corrupted, or destroyed. The materials and

[106] Jack Blackburn, "Special Bonds of Ian Fleming's Old Friend," *Times*, Jan 29, 2022, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/c914368a-806b-11ec-bbb7-54d5cd4b43b0?shareToken=d6704df45e5d6f1c065a0115824c9aed.
[107] Denning, *Cover Stories*, 136.
[108] Eva Horn, "Media of Conspiracy: Love and Surveillance in Fritz Lang and Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck," *New German Critique* no. 103 (2008): 127.

mechanisms of these covert textual processes, and their related impact on identity, autonomy, and agency, lie at the heart of this project.

The next cluster of scholarship that I discuss forms the critical spine from which my research has evolved. Allan Hepburn focuses his attention on liminal spaces and figures in spy fiction (the wall, the sewer, the body). Similarly attuned to the historical events that inform the discourse of literary espionage, Hepburn's analysis untangles the codes and encryptions embedded within these narratives. His section probing the hermeneutical structure of spy fictions has informed my understanding of how to read and decipher meaning as part of the investigative process.[109] The cognate relationship between narratives of detection and espionage is theorised by Luc Boltanski as undermining "the stability and coherence of reality" through the genre's focus on mystery and intrigue.[110] According to Boltanski, "reality finds itself split between a *surface reality*, apparent but partly or completely illusory, and an *underlying reality*, hidden but authentic."[111] In other words, the duality and disguise inherent in spy fictions provide a structure through which to discover hidden truths. This argument is taken up by Eva Horn in her masterful monograph on the role of fiction in uncovering and narrativizing the political secret:

> Fiction alone can *narrate something* and at the same time *hint at something else to be deciphered* underneath the obvious plot. Even more so, literature is able to make the narrative's unstable basis itself a part of the narrative. While secret intelligence by definition involves the withdrawal of truth and the opacity of positions and affiliation […] Fiction helps us to catch a glimpse of the underlying rules that determine what can be seen and known and what remains invisible and unknowable.[112]

Horn's fluid and expansive study uses fiction in all its guises to conduct a wide-ranging analysis of how fiction engages with selected moments and movements of espionage history. Horn's

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[109] Allan Hepburn, *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2005), 58.
[110] Luc Boltanski, *Mysteries & Conspiracies: Detective Stories, Spy Novels and the Making of Modern Societies* transl. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014), 26.
[111] Boltanski, *Mysteries & Conspiracies*, 123.
[112] Horn, *The Secret War*, 39.

predominantly Anglo-American focus, and her discussion of the Cold War (drawing out the influence of Graham Greene and John le Carré), resonates with my approach in this thesis. More specifically, Horn's close analysis of Sydney Pollack's *Three Days of the Condor* (1975) as a treatise on reading and a reflection of the "quasi-academic" turn of American intelligence-gathering serves to contextualise my case study of *Hopscotch* (1980) and *Burn After Reading* (2008) in Chapter Three.[113]

One of the criticisms often levelled at the spy genre and its associated analyses is its homogeneity and lack of diversity, in terms of both subject matter and authors. From the fantastical action realm of Ian Fleming's James Bond and Robert Ludlum's Jason Bourne to the men in suits of Len Deighton's *The Ipcress File* and le Carré's *Circus*, spying has, historically, been a male-dominated field, centred on the Anglo-American experience. Recent scholarship has begun to address this bias by identifying and bringing to the fore the more marginalised voices within the genre. A forthcoming monograph by Sian MacArthur on gender roles in Cold War spy fiction demonstrates the timeliness and relevance of this focus.[114] Rosie White places women at centre stage to analyse how spy narratives articulate the complex relationship between femininity and agency.[115] Focusing primarily on female protagonists (rather than minor or peripheral characters), White uses flexible selection criteria for her materials, taking a chronological approach that encompasses mythologies around real-life figures, fictional representations in printed media, and case studies in film and television. This wide-ranging intermedial approach is something I embrace in my own project, which moves fluidly between fiction, film, and television as texts of equal significance and value. Its generous scope allows

[113] Ibid., 235.
[114] Sian MacArthur, *Gender Roles and Political Contexts in Cold War Spy Fiction* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).
[115] Rosie White, *Violent Femmes: Women as Spies in Popular Culture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 10.

for a flexible route to tracing literary echoes, legacies, and dialogic interconnectedness. I expand upon the critical justification for the inclusion of both film and literature when I discuss the selection criteria towards the end of the chapter.

Two other major studies seek to illuminate minority narratives in the spy genre. Phyllis Lassner analyses how spy fiction offers a platform for exploring representations of political exile through a study of six British writers from the 1930s to the 1960s. Like White, Lassner extends her critical framework to include fiction and film, selecting examples from her own experiential observations.[116] Lassner applies her considerable expertise on Holocaust literature and cultural representations of antisemitism to examine le Carré's treatment of exile and Jewishness in his Cold War spy fiction.[117] She argues that selected characters in his novels represent both the traumatised survivor and the sacrificial victim, trapped in ideological liminality as witnesses to the bipartite conflict, and complicating easy resolution.[118] This detailed exploration of displacement and alienation informs my analysis of disrupted communication as a symbol of marginalised voices in *Smiley's People* in Chapter Two of this thesis. Liminality in the form of Jewishness, homosexuality, and communism is the core theme of Erin Carlston's study of spy fiction, which takes a different methodological approach by framing the literature against three historical espionage scandals (The Dreyfus Affair, The Cambridge Spies, and the Rosenberg trial).[119] Continuing the neat line of threes,

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[116] Phyllis Lassner, *Espionage and Exile: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Spy Fiction and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 2.
[117] See, for example: Phyllis Lassner, *Anglo-Jewish Women Writing the Holocaust: Displaced Witnesses* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Phyllis Lassner & Lara Trubowitz (ed.) *Antisemitism and Philosemitism in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries: Representing Jews, Jewishness, and Modern Culture* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008); Phyllis Lassner, "Testing the Limits of the Middlebrow: The Holocaust for the Masses," *Modernist Cultures* 6, no.1 (2011): 178-195.
[118] Lassner, *Espionage and Exile*, 201.
[119] Erin G. Carlston, *Double Agents: Espionage, Literature, and Liminal Citizens* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 1-2.

Carlston views these events through the lens of the literary and dramatic works of Marcel Proust, W.H. Auden and Tony Kushner, arguing that the invisibility and instability of the outsider makes him (and it is usually him) analogous to a spy.[120] Carlston also takes a fluid approach to the materials she selects, drawing on historical and archival documents as well as fictional texts.[121] This inclusive methodology is characteristic of recent scholarship in this field and sets a precedent for my own study.

My interest in the Cambridge spies and their influence on the spy genre has been strongly influenced by the work of Joseph Oldham. His clear-sighted and accessible studies on the production histories of spy narratives on British television – with a hefty focus on the BBC adaptations of John le Carré – have made a significant contribution to the field. In his 2017 monograph, Oldham charts the parallel evolution (and analogous relationship) between intelligence bodies and television broadcasting services as examples of British institutions concerned with the accumulation and dissemination of information.[122] Both, in the broadest sense, have a remit of public service and are characterised (and hampered) by a bureaucratic reputation that gives rise to accusations of incompetence and/or conspiracy. Oldham's attention to production contexts and, in particular, his consideration of contested heritage and legacies in British spy television (while neglecting the key text of *Smiley's People*) have given me a strong foundation from which to launch my own enquiries on generic and literary inheritance.[123] In terms of material objects, his archive research unearthed the planning that went into the production design of the BBC's adaptation of *Tinker Tailor*, which deliberately

[120] Ibid., 5.
[121] Ibid., 10.
[122] Oldham, *Paranoid Visions*, 2.
[123] Ibid., 93-97; Joseph Oldham, "'Disappointed Romantics': Troubled Heritage in the BBC's John le Carré Adaptations," *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 10, no. 4 (2013): 740; Joseph Oldham, "From Reverential to 'Radical' Adaptation: Reframing John le Carré as 'Quality' Television Brand from *A Perfect Spy* (BBC 2, 1987) to *The Night Manager* (BBC 1, 2016)," *Adaptation* 10, no. 3 (2017): 3.

foregrounded the visual minutiae of "secret files, code-books, encryption pads and other paraphernalia of espionage."[124] Oldham identifies this preoccupation with detail as a recognisably masculine endeavour, which is perhaps a surprising conjecture given these visuals represent the bureaucratic processes of recording and filing – clerical tasks typically attributed to a feminine role.[125] The contestation between authorial creativity and subjectivity, the mundanity of textual production, and the fragility/resilience of material objects (with associated questions of agency and gender) is a dynamic threaded through this thesis.

Taking a broader methodological approach from an historical and intelligence studies standpoint (as opposed to Oldham's focus on television studies), Simon Willmetts and Christopher Moran analyse some of the key cinematic and televisual representations of the Cambridge spies. Employing a multi-disciplinary approach, weaving between the relevant histories of the British intelligence service and selected portrayals on films and TV, Willmetts and Moran argue that the story of the Cambridge Five had a revolutionary effect on the spy fiction genre in its transition from the romance of Ian Fleming's Bond to the realism of Graham Greene and John le Carré.[126] They propose that screen representations of the spies (whether fictionalised or directly biographical) interrogate and destabilise notions of British identity in terms of class, sexuality, and imperial decline.[127] While the observation that portrayals of the Cambridge Five in popular culture have received limited scholarly attention has now been emphatically tackled by the body of research that has emerged in the intervening years, there is still scope to explore synergies with literary and textual cultures. I draw on the later work

[124] Oldham, *Paranoid Visions*, 87.
[125] Ibid., 88.
[126] Willmetts and Moran, "Filming treachery," 53.
[127] Ibid., 54-55.

of Willmetts and Moran in their (respective) analyses of CIA representations in Hollywood cinema and in biographical memoirs.[128] These studies inform my analysis of fictional intelligence memoirs in the films *Hopscotch* (1980) and *Burn After Reading* (2008) in Chapter Three.

The challenge and paradox of spy biopics, "films that tell the truth about liars", is the core focus of Erica Sheen's chapter on TV films portraying the lives of the Cambridge spies.[129] Sheen lays bare the patterns of repetition and recurrence that are embedded within the multitude of screen representations inspired by this narrative. The positioning of *The Third Man* as the *ur-text* for what Sheen terms the "extraordinarily intense process of textual proliferation" surrounding the Cambridge spies contributed to my selection of the film as the first case study.[130] As a foundational text of the early Cold War, *The Third Man* is also the subject of close analysis in Adam Piette's intricate study of Cold War cultural interfaces. Piette combines literary criticism with historical and political contexts to make a convincing argument about the film's representation of the Cold War's "sacrificial logic," foregrounding the character of Anna Schmidt, a focus and methodology from which I take my cue in Chapter One.[131]

My interest in, and engagement with, ideas related to technologies of writing and the material properties of literary objects has been shaped and informed by the work of Matthew Kirschenbaum and Friedrich Kittler. In his fascinating and accessible history of the word

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[128] Simon Willmetts, *In Secrecy's Shadow: The OSS and CIA in Hollywood Cinema 1941-1979* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016); Christopher Moran, *Company Confessions: Revealing CIA Secrets* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2016).
[129] Erica Sheen, "Secrecy and Exposure: The Cambridge Spies," in *Rule, Britannia! Biopics and British National Identity*, ed. Homer B. Pettey and R. Barton Palmer (Albany: Suny Press, 2018), 267.
[130] Ibid., 273.
[131] Piette, *The Literary Cold War*, 44.

processor, Kirschenbaum highlights how the iconography of writing instruments relates to issues of identity and individual expression. In his view, the choice of implement – whether cheap biro, executive fountain pen, or erasable chalk – determine and augment the quality and meaning of what is written, evoking a deeply personal and emotive response in the writer.[132] These signatures – identifiable symbols of literary authorship – are at odds with the secrecy and anonymity of the spy genre and its preoccupations with masking, duplicity, and false impressions. Recognising the espionage metaphor, Kirschenbaum likens the scholarly sleuthing that Lawrence Rainey applied to T.S. Eliot's use of three different typewriters on *The Waste Land* to a domestic intelligence operation.[133] This echoes a scene in *The Lives of Others* in which a forensic graphologist gives a lecture on the different models of typewriter used by suspected GDR dissidents, belabouring the detailed measurements, typefaces, and ink colours.[134] The materiality of these instruments may, as Kirschenbaum argues, demystify the act of composition, but it also reveals compromising information around the writer's character and identity. Conversely, this exposure can also be deliberate. Keith Jeffery notes how Mansfield Cumming, the first Director of the Secret Intelligence Service, wrote his memos in green ink, an ostentatious practice that communicated his naval background and signalled his authority while stamping his own identity on the newly established service branch.[135] This fusion of personal flamboyance and the professionalisation of covert operations sets an early precedent for the complex and fluctuating relationship between character, text, and technology as contradictory symbols of secrecy and status..

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[132] Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes*, 23.
[133] Ibid., 26.
[134] Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, *The Lives of Others: A Screenplay* (London: Pushkin Press, 2014), 101-102.
[135] Keith Jeffery, *MI6: The History of the Secret Intelligence Service 1909-1949* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 726-727.

The mediating function of media technologies on the production, transmission, and storage of information is the principal focus of Kittler's work, which situates the typewriter as an item of central importance. Conceived and produced by the weapons manufacturers Remington & Son from surplus parts at the end of the American Civil War, typewriters began mass production in 1874 becoming, as Kittler argues, "a discursive machine gun."[136] The mechanical and metaphorical conflation of typing and warfare confers a masculine quality on the typewriter at odds with their female-coded operators (early references to the "typewriter" make no distinction between machine and typist).[137] Indeed, Kittler suggests that the automated properties of "typescript amounts to the desexualization of writing," countering "the phallocentrism of classical pens."[138] By removing the intimacy of writing – the discharge of ink on to the page – the typewriter becomes a device of attrition: industrial and impersonal. Its transformation of writing into a mechanised process with military associations has the effect of weaponizing language as a form of communication, destabilising gendered norms, and imposing a division between mind and text. These qualities and considerations feed into my analysis of the typewritten spy memoir in Chapter Three.

Through the interweaving of literature, texts, and Cold War espionage, this project brings together two bodies of research, namely critical analysis of the writer and material writing on screen, and what I have termed Literary Intelligence Studies. There is a cluster of scholarship that addresses this overlap, specifically focusing on the manifestations of bureaucratic processing, textual analysis, and information retention in Cold War spy fiction, which demonstrates the relevance and salience of this project. For example, Shawn James

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[136] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* transl. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 191.
[137] Maebh Long, "Is It About a Typewriter? Brian O'Nolan and Technologies of Inscription," *The Parish Review: Journal of Flann O'Brien Studies* 4, no. 2 (2020): 5.
[138] Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 187 & 206.

Rosenheim's work investigates the literary origins of twentieth century intelligence institutions, tracing the intersections between literary analysis and wartime code-breaking.[139] He offers two main rationales for these connections: firstly that popular literature (especially writing for children) relies strongly on codes, riddles, and word play, which mirrors the patterns of cryptographic analysis; and secondly, that the impetus to decode meaning, unlock mysteries, and uncover secrets can be distilled into the desire to understand the thoughts, intentions, and motivations of others – essential ingredients for the spy.[140] Both Rosenheim's *The Cryptographic Imagination* and Timothy Melley's *The Covert Sphere* explore how the cultural imagination influences, and is influenced by, the workings of the secret state.[141] Like Horn, both writers position fiction as a way of revealing knowledge that is classified, cryptic, or suppressed. In his chapter on "False Documents", Melley explicates the synergies between writing and spying, emphasising the "literary nature of intelligence work" and the double-meaning of plotting "as both a fictional form and a secret scheme."[142] This feeds directly into my central argument while leaving space to analyse the explicit functions of texts and textuality in this relationship. While Melley focuses on the cultural representations of state intelligence organisations, I dedicate my attention to the effects on the individual. Melley's framing of the ways in which secret information is disclosed to the public forms the foundation for my discussion of the spy memoir in Chapter Three.

Several articles address the crossover between texts, writing, and spycraft. Peter Schwenger applies the textual preoccupations of Derrida's *Post Card* to two post-nuclear

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[139] Shawn James Rosenheim, *The Cryptographic Imagination: Secret Writing from Edgar Poe to the Internet* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 144.
[140] Ibid., 162-163.
[141] Timothy Melley, *The Covert Sphere: Secrecy, Fiction, and the National Security State* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), 5.
[142] Ibid., 117-121.

narratives. In his analysis, he considers the paradox of the post card: open, legible, yet fragmentary and double-sided, together with the institutional security but practical fragility of the postal system.[143] Jacqueline Foertsch also draws on Derrida's theory of the nuclear archive to frame her analysis of the material treachery of paper in Don DeLillo's *Libra* and John le Carré's *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*.[144] Building on Foertsch's work, also using Derrida's conception of the archive and again focusing on *Libra* as a case study, Theo Finigan views the archive as a self-perpetuating and violent entity, in which the proliferation of texts engenders a constant re-writing of reality, eventually fusing archive with archivist in an inescapable and diabolical dance.[145] This hint of the uncanny recurs in Yael Levin's analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, which recognises the haunting effect of writing and its consequent capacity to terrorize.[146] While I do not engage with Derrida's theory explicitly in this thesis, his influence can be traced indirectly through these studies to help formulate: i) my thoughts on the paradoxical fragility and durability of paper, and the disembodiment (and dismemberment) of the archive in Chapter One, and ii) my investigation of postal systems, disrupted communications, and ghostly returns in Chapter Two. Finally, I draw on Geraint D'Arcy, who uses the lens of adaptation to examine John Le Carré's novel *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* in the context of its representation of material information and gender, which feeds directly into my analysis of *Smiley's People*.[147]

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[143] Peter Schwenger, "Postnuclear Post Card," 166.
[144] Jacqueline Foertsch, ""Ordinary Pocket Litter": Paper(s) as Dangerous Supplement(s) in Cold War Novels of Intrigue," *Contemporary Literature* 48, no. 2 (2007): 279.
[145] Theo Finigan, "There's Something Else That's Generating This Event": The Violence of the Archive in Don DeLillo's *Libra*, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 55, no. 2 (2014): 192.
[146] Yael Levin, "The Interruption of Writing: Uncanny Intertextuality in *Under Western Eyes*," *The Conradian* 36, no. 2 (2011): 34.
[147] Geraint D'Arcy, "'Essentially, another man's woman': Information and Gender in the Novel and Adaptations of John le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*," *Adaptation* 7, no. 3 (2014): 275.

There are several critical frames that my project touches upon but does not explicitly employ. The first is postmodernism, specifically the ways in which authors such as Graham Greene and John le Carré engage in self-reflexive representations of writing and authorship in their fiction (and, indeed, how they construct versions of themselves in their biographical writings). There are also suggestive metafictional and intertextual links between works that I identify and analyse in the context of the individual chapters. I also draw on elements of nostalgia and heritage drama in my analysis of how spy narratives express a reactionary desire to return to the past. All three case studies address screen productions in the context of their literary sources, but I do not specifically engage with theories of adaptation beyond placing the texts within their historical and cultural contexts. My analysis of letter-writing and the postal system in Chapter Two is limited to the geographical space of the UK and continental Europe but a further international focus opens avenues for a postcolonial approach. These frameworks offer fruitful potential for future research in the context of the spy genre.

Methodology and Chapter outlines

The thesis follows a chronological structure and engages with selected examples of espionage fiction (encompassing literature, film, and television) that explicitly address the relationship between spies, writers, and writing. In adopting an inter-medial approach, I embrace the critical lead of Horn and White. Specifically, Horn's grouping together of literature and film as "fictions" allows her to interrogate the structure of the political secret at certain historical junctures represented by a popular culture which "cannot be subsumed under one specific genre label".[148] Similarly, White's selection of primary texts ranges from the novels of Ian

[148] Horn, *The Secret War*, 43.

Fleming and William Le Queux to the American television series *Alias* via the French cinematic version of *Nikita*.[149] This nimble traversing of media and national production contexts enables White to focus on a comparative analysis of the changing roles of women in a genre that gained prominence through interconnected developments in literature, film and television during the twentieth century. Alfred Hitchcock's trio of films in the 1930s (*The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935), *Secret Agent* (1936), and *Sabotage* (1936)) contributed to the popularity of the pre-war spy genre through adapting, re-writing, and re-inventing literary source materials. His auteur status, Thomas Leitch argues, gave the films a "higher prestige value" than the literary originals, or at least placed cinema on equal footing in the critical conversation.[150] My focus on texts, contexts, and intertexts encourages an interconnected perspective on the intermedial characteristics of the spy genre. I view these examples as part of a textual continuum and analyse the visual and imaginative ways in which the spaces, materials and instruments of writing function on the page and on screen.

The Third Man is replete with references to books, authorship, and literary exchange, conveying a cynical view of how textual production contributes to abuses of power. In Chapter One, I draw on scholarship that frames the film as a conflict of authorship to analyse how those tensions unfold in relation to class and gender. Focusing on the characters of Sgt Paine and Anna Schmidt, I explore how the film's extensive literary and textual concerns affect the lives of those with limited authorial authority and agency. In Chapter Two, I analyse how letters in the novel (1979) and television adaptation (1983) of *Smiley's People* are used as vehicles for confession, atonement, and vengeance. I argue that the fluctuating materiality of

[149] White, *Violent Femmes*, 7.
[150] Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 2009), 6.

these epistles, encompassing variously absence, transience, and permanence, signals the weaponization of communication alongside (and sometimes influencing) the stability of identity. If, as Joseph Oldham argues, le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* is a drama of conversation, with its slow pace and dialogue-heavy scenes harnessing the literary prestige of the classic serial, then *Smiley's People* is a drama of correspondence.[151] Letters, postcards, signs, and inscriptions – modes of exchange traditionally found in period romance – are deployed as symbols of interrupted communication and thwarted desire, representing the fractured lives that the world of espionage leaves in its wake. Continuing the focus on confessional writing, I cross the Atlantic in Chapter Three to analyse the fictional spy memoir in two popular American films: *Hopscotch* (1980) and *Burn After Reading* (2008). This geographical shift represents the changing sites of crises and national self-reflection during this period. I consider how the films' engagement with systems of information and communicative technology – specifically the typewriter and the word processor – influences (and symbolizes) the relationship between spying and the domestic sphere.

By tracing the representation of writing instruments, spaces, and materials in these three case studies, the project builds on existing scholarship that addresses the figure of the writer, and the act of writing, and applies this approach to literary and screen spy narratives. This will be achieved by analysing how literary and textual artefacts shape the characterisation of the writer/spy, examining how the materiality and tangibility of written material affects the stability, sincerity, and value of the meaning it inscribes, and exploring how systems of written communication influence concepts of class, gender, and national identity. In a genre where anonymity, secrecy, and isolation are key drivers of success and

[151] Joseph Oldham, *Paranoid Visions*, 88.

survival, this project proposes that written communication is a fundamental means of desire, self-expression, and human connection.

Chapter One

The Lady Vanishes: Class, Gender, and Precarious Texts in *The Third Man* (1949)

This chapter will address the literary and textual miscellany that infuses the film *The Third Man* (1949), analysing how the forms and materials of writing influence the representation of agency, gender, and class, with particular attention drawn to the relatively peripheral characters of Sgt Paine (Bernard Lee) and Anna Schmidt (Alida Valli). From Paine's custom of reading on the job to pass the time to Anna's forged identity papers, they are recipients, benefactors, consumers, and targets of the proliferation of writing that pervades the film. Their stories exist on the margins of the main three-way conflict between Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten), Major Calloway (Trevor Howard) and Harry Lime (Orson Welles), yet their fates are inextricably entwined and poignantly suggestive of how these conflicts affect the subordinate, the compromised, and the powerless. I explore how their characters are delineated through the production of literary and textual objects that serve to confer identity, loyalty, and romantic connection, as well as providing a source of (contested) entertainment and culture. In doing so, I draw on author Graham Greene's own literary status and the film's production contexts to analyse how *The Third Man* expresses an ambivalence towards writing as a font of destabilising power, disputed truth, and precarious autonomy.

The Third Man is infused with references to writing, authorship, and literary heritage. From the lecture on the "Crisis of Faith in the Contemporary Novel" (hosted by the British "Cultural Re-education Section" to an audience of Viennese intellectuals) to the subtext-laden discussion of Martins' new book (itself titled *The Third Man*), Greene draws constant attention to the production and reception of literary narratives – both fictional and factual.

Holly Martins is a writer of cheap Westerns, drawn to Vienna on his friend's invitation to write propaganda material for a supposed medical charity. Martins' first name was changed from "Rollo" in the novella in deference to actor Joseph Cotten's concerns about his character's perceived masculinity.[152] The new moniker is taken from the American poet Thomas Holley Chivers, a "figure of fun" known for his association with the more successful Edgar Allan Poe.[153] This literary in-joke signals Martins' disadvantaged position from the outset in the shadow of his popular and charismatic friend. Dismissed as a "scribbler with too much drink" by the goading Major Calloway and mocked by Lime's friend Baron Kurtz as "a master of suspense – such a good cover!", Martins' status as a serious author is undermined from both within and beyond the text.[154] His popular entertainments are set against Calloway's factual dossiers in a conflict of writing genres and ideologies. The romantic fantasy of Martins' morally simplistic Western fictions contrasts with the dry facts of Calloway's documentary realism, each using their own stylistic approach as a lens through which to decipher the true story behind Harry Lime's artful conspiracies.

Previous studies on authorship, literary heritage, and cultural exchange in *The Third Man* usually centre on the treatment of Martins as a writer of popular entertainments and Greene's playfully knowing skewering of modernism and "serious" literature as examples of cultural elitism. Focusing on the cinematic collaboration between Greene and Director Carol Reed, Peter Evans observes how this clash of high and low culture is a self-reflexive commentary – an authorial in-joke – on the critical categorisation of Greene's own literary oeuvre into two distinct camps (the "entertainments" vs the "serious works").[155] The conflict

[152] Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (London: Vintage, 2019), 4.
[153] Ibid., 4.
[154] Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 37.
[155] Peter William Evans, *Carol Reed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 96.

of authorship, represented in production terms by the creative heavyweights of Reed, Greene, and actor Orson Welles (and, more remotely, American producer David Selznick), is mirrored on-screen by the competing approaches of Holly Martins, Major Calloway, and Harry Lime as creators of narratives. Evans views this battle for authorship in the film as an exploration of male identity and subjectivity, particularly centred around the homosocial dynamic between Martins and Lime.[156] On a similar note, Michael Sinowitz agrees that "this struggle for authorship and control has permeated the entire film," with each character seeking to understand and manipulate the plot through the lens of their own generic biases.[157] Sinowitz identifies a few elements of chaos that undermine their attempts to gain narrative supremacy, calling into question the extent of control each character is able to wield. Sinowitz includes the character of Anna Schmidt as an example of this anarchic influence, arguing that her actions at the film's close reject the imposition of narrative order, a claim which I shall address later in the chapter.[158]

The Third Man's self-reflexive commentary on authorship and genre is rooted in the time and political context of its production. Focusing solely on the novella, Sam Goodman comments that, superficially, the plot of *The Third Man* resembles one of Martins' pulp fiction Westerns (the lone avenger, the damsel in distress, the shoot-out), but that this conceals a more nuanced critique of the conventions of the spy genre as a "Boy's Own"-type fantasy espoused by writers such as John Buchan and William Le Queux, which Goodman argues is unsustainable in the post-war context of the early Cold War.[159] Noting the differences from the novella (in which both Martins and Lime were English), Adam Piette reads Holly Martins

[156] Evans, *Carol Reed*, 101.
[157] Michael Sinowitz, "Graham Greene's and Carol Reed's *The Third Man*: When a Cowboy Comes to Vienna," *Modern Fiction Studies* 53, no.3 (2007): 425.
[158] Sinowitz, "When a Cowboy Comes to Vienna," 431.
[159] Goodman, *British Spy Fiction and the End of Empire*, 24.

and Harry Lime in the film as archetypes of American culture: Martins is the innocent abroad, "the boyishly idealistic writer of Westerns", while Lime is the amoral gangster, both operating in Vienna as the double-faceted centre of high culture and site of post-war intrigue.[160] Anne-Marie Scholz also views this battle for authorship in the context of early Cold War conflicts, identifying a shift in focus from the novella's more straightforward ideological oppositions of East vs West to a more subtle conflict in the film between the "high" culture of Western Europe and the "low", popular culture of the USA.[161] The characterisation of Martins' blundering (yet proactive) American versus Calloway's cool-headed (yet ineffective) representation of British authority forced into an uneasy (and unequal) alliance is, Scholz suggests, reflective of not only the shifts in post-war geo-political power dynamics, but also the respective states of the British and American film industries.[162]

These wide-ranging critiques on *The Third Man*'s preoccupation with authorship and literary self-consciousness have nonetheless given little attention to the forms and modes of writing depicted in the film. Significantly, Martins – the "famous" and prolific author – is never shown to pick up a pen, an absence which indicates a certain incongruity about his identity as a writer. To address this gap, this chapter will instead ask: what are the visual examples of textual production in the film and how do these material representations signal issues of power, status, and identity? What is the role of the archive in determining and recording the truth of one's character? What are the human consequences of this (predominantly masculine) battle for authorship and cultural supremacy? In considering these questions, I will offer a close analysis of Sgt Paine as a working-class symbol of Greene's readership ideal

[160] Piette, *The Literary Cold War*, 28.
[161] Anne-Marie Scholz, *From Fidelity to History: Film Adaptations as Cultural Events in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2013), 28.
[162] Ibid., 37.

and Anna Schmidt as the primary recipient, reluctant subject, and dispossessed object of written texts across a range of materials.

In considering the film, I will also be drawing on the novella and screenplay as complementary texts. In his preface to the novella, Greene argues that “it is almost impossible to write a film play without first writing a story…One must have the sense of more material than one needs to draw on.”[163] In other words, the world of the film is necessarily more complex than can be seen on screen, with layers of intrigue mirroring the labyrinthine plot. Greene creates hidden avenues that the reader and critic is invited to explore. In considering the novella and screenplay of *The Third Man* as integral parts of the analysis (that is, as connected texts, rather than independent of and supplementary to the film), I follow the lead of scholars including Sinowitz, Hepburn, and Brian Lindsay Thomson, who are explicit in broadening their analytic parameters to measure the texts (including the film) as part of a wider continuum. Thomson characterises *The Third Man* as a “set of texts” incorporating the novella and screenplay as well as the film, Hepburn considers them as a series of “cultural documents”, while Sinowitz views the film “almost as an excerpt of a more extensive narrative”.[164] This perspective moves away from the compare-and-contrast medium-specific approach championed by Seymour Chatman as he weighs up the narratorial strengths of film and novella, towards a more fluid engagement with the texts as complementary and inextricably intertwined.[165]

[163] Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (London: Vintage, 2019), 3.
[164] Brian Lindsay Thomson, *Graham Greene and the Politics of Popular Fiction and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 85; Hepburn, *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture,* 120; Sinowitz, “Graham Greene's and Carol Reed's *The Third Man*,” 406.
[165] Seymour Chatman, “Who is the best narrator? The case of *The Third Man,*” *Style* 23, no. 2 (1989): 184.

Papers, please

Paper and papers, as Jacqueline Foertsch observes, are central motifs in Cold War narratives of conspiracy.[166] Making a distinction between the singular and plural, the material (paper) and the functional (papers), Foertsch draws on Derrida's *The Post Card* to theorize paper(s) unique societal role: as archive, communicative media, proofs of identity, legal contracts, and financial currency, while acknowledging its elemental fragility.[167] Paper determines the individual's relationship with the state and how a person's subjectivity is understood and authenticated. It is at once highly durable and innately unstable, a two-sided contradiction that Foertsch argues crystalizes its use as a metaphor for the double life of the spy.[168] Paper confers legitimacy, while also being vulnerable to falsification, appropriation, and destruction. Theo Finigan builds on Foertsch's discussion of the symbolic, communicative, and hermeneutical functions of paper in Cold War cultural discourse with a special focus on the archive. Following Derrida, and, like Foertsch, offering a reading of Don DeLillo's *Libra*, Finigan argues that the act of gathering and storing physical documents not only preserves records, but the very process of archiving actively perpetuates events in a cycle of production and reproduction.[169] In drawing on this work, I embrace Foertsch's conceptualisation of the innate contradictions that paper represents: durability vs fragility, authenticity vs fabrication, institutional authority vs individual agency, all key issues in the study of Cold War conspiracy narratives. These binary oppositions reflect the Manichean dichotomy of the Cold War in general, but I argue that *The Third Man* moves beyond this (reductive) duality through its

[166] Jacqueline Foertsch, “"Ordinary Pocket Litter": Paper(s) as Dangerous Supplement(s) in Cold War Novels of Intrigue,” *Contemporary Literature* 48, no. 2 (2007): 279-280.
[167] Ibid., 283.
[168] Ibid., 304.
[169] Theo Finigan, “There's Something Else That's Generating This Event”: The Violence of the Archive in Don DeLillo's *Libra*, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 55, no. 2 (2014): 189.

enduring focus on the power of trinity and the (relatedly) uneasy depiction of friendship, love, and enmity.

I propose to extend Foertsch's and Finigan's highly fruitful approach on the properties and functions of paper to also include the textual impressions and figurative possibilities of what is written on the page and (significantly) on other surfaces. Here, I turn to Edward Gallafent's conception of writing as a spectrum between permanence and absence.[170] Gaps and spaces are as important, communicatively, as tangible text. Missing words and torn up letters signify meaning beyond what can be physically read. Fonts, styles, and writing implements can reveal or obscure the purpose behind the content they render. Materials and properties are also key to understanding what is being communicated. Words that are inscribed or carved in stone (such as a name on a headstone) are, outwardly, more durable than those written on, for example, a steamed-up window. But material resilience does not necessarily equate to solid truth. I take as an example the writing (never shown on screen) on Harry Lime's gravestone at the beginning of *The Third Man*. The invisible (but implied) engraving looms over the "plot" – a three-way meaning encompassing the patch of consecrated land, the criminal conspiracy, and the film's narrative trajectory – which is embedded in deception and falsehood. The gravestone is a commemorative marker that signals the depths Lime is prepared to descend as part of his underground schemes. Calloway's investigation becomes a literal exhumation as the grave is excavated and the layers of plot revealed. The writing for Lime is, figuratively, on the wall.

As a triumvirate, Martins, Calloway, and Lime represent Greene's central concern with the processes of narrative construction. Calloway, the bureaucratic investigator, compiles his

[170] Gallafent, *Letters and Literary in Hollywood Film*, 6.

evidence-based reconstruction of events with determination and pragmatism. Martins, the writer of generic pulp fictions, fills this gap with a romanticised and empathetic sensibility that propels his independent enquiries, but his perspective is distorted by the simplistic binary morality of his Westerns. Lime, the maverick genius, litters the narrative with fragments of text that form a paper trail of his carefully fabricated conspiracies. Each character plots their own path and decodes scenarios through the prism of the texts that they generate. For Martins, this can be characterised as the mass-produced book: popular, morally idealistic, yet limited in scope and nuance (Figure 11). For Calloway, it is the bureaucratic file: factual, methodical, yet unfeeling and incomplete (Figure 12). For Lime, as I shall explore further, it is the scribbled envelope: virtuosic, dishonest, and (in the film) tantalizingly absent. Taken together, these versions of artistic creativity form a satisfyingly complementary approach to narrative construction that is characteristic of the three-way fixation of the film itself.

Figure 11: Fictional entertainment - Martins' Western

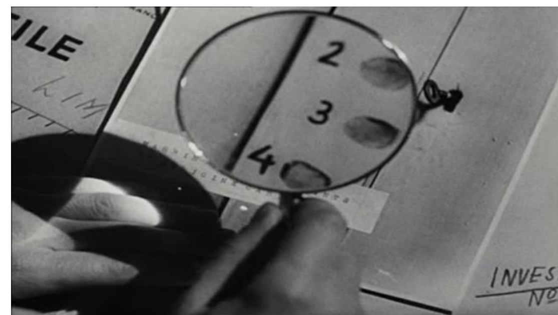

Figure 12: Factual detail - Calloway's file on Lime

Calloway’s files provide an illuminating example of how textual artefacts are used to both delineate and subjugate identity. In the novella, his mind turns “to the thick pile of agents’ reports”, stating that “I believe in my agents; I’ve sifted them all very thoroughly.”[171] His language here is instructive, referring to physical filtration instead of personal selection. Individuals are reduced to their written representations: recorded, verified, and stored away

[171] Greene, *The Third Man* (2019), 15.

for future reference. They are subject to inspection and scrutiny rather than understanding and empathy. Calloway (lacking Martins' creative imagination) admits that, in his striving for neutrality, "the drive of destiny can never find a place in my files."[172] Identities are recreated via documented facts, in which human sources are abbreviated to edited summaries. This creates a division between intelligence as *information* and as *cognitive capacity*, effectively depersonalising and even dehumanising the act of storing knowledge. The files subjugate their subjects' personhood, giving rise to an uncanny juxtaposition between the living and the inanimate, a theme that pervades *The Third Man* through the absence, apparition, and resurrection of Harry Lime.

The spectre of Harry Lime is a shadow that haunts the film. As Hepburn notes, Lime is simultaneously "a corpse, a ghost, a living person", an unholy trinity of spectral and physical manifestation.[173] For much of the film, he is also represented by a file, embodied in paper and ink, and subjected to constant revision as further information is revealed. This tallies with Ruben Weiss's proposal that spies should be read as documents, meaning that "each cover identity is a rewriting of the text, while the original is buried deeper and becomes fader; in other words, the spy becomes a palimpsest of identities."[174] This is true of Lime's multiple faces: on the surface, in person, he is a lover, friend, and benefactor, while in the layers of Calloway's paperwork – a smorgasbord of photographs, fingerprints, letters, and diagrams – he is a crook, smuggler, and murderer. He exists at opposite extremes: at once dead and alive, cherubic and satanic, the best friend Martins ever had, and the worst racketeer in Vienna. These contradictions are summed up in Lime's journey in the final scenes of the film as he

[172] Greene, *The Third Man* (2019), 42.
[173] Hepburn, *Intrigue*, 118.
[174] Weiss, ""We Read You," 529.

gravitates from the roof of the ruined cathedral, flanked by angels, to the depths of the hellish sewers. Evans reads Harry's return as "a regeneration of evil, the return in monstrous form not just of perverse desires but of a culture's imperfectly interred collective wickedness."[175] Lime's trajectory from ascendance to descent is represented not only by the famous Ferris Wheel scene, but also by the frequent staircase motif that appears throughout the film. "He is now in hell," says the elderly porter earlier in the film, gesturing upwards. "Or in heaven," he adds, pointing downwards.[176] In the ruins of the post-war city, it is difficult to tell the difference. Nevertheless, Evans' diabolical characterisation feels exaggerated until the physical and metaphysical evidence of the file is considered.

Calloway's file on Lime documents his crimes in black and white. A montage sequence in the film (Figure 12) shows Martins the proof of his friend's villainy in forensic detail. It elucidates what was previously hearsay and rumour using dry, unassailable facts. What is missing from Calloway's file, however, is the human experience (and trauma) that lies embedded within the words and images. It is an unnatural containment that suppresses the reality of human suffering. Martins is persuaded and saddened by the facts the file reveals, but not moved to active revenge. This is only prompted by Calloway's devious ruse to show him the physical consequences of Lime's black-market dealings in diluted penicillin, cynically appealing to the exploitative impetus of the creative imagination: "You're a writer: it should interest you."[177] In a harrowing sequence only heightened by what remains unseen, Martins visits the disfigured and dying victims of childhood meningitis: the direct, personified results

[175] Peter William Evans, *Carol Reed* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 98.
[176] *The Third Man*. Film.
[177] Graham Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 109.

of Lime's drug trafficking operation. The file suddenly comes alive in a grotesque embodiment of Lime's moral corruption.

As an example of uncanny reanimation, the image foreshadows a similar description of files in John le Carré's *Call for the Dead* (1961) in what Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (adapting Eva Horn's concept) would term a recursion in time and genre: the fluid repetition and exchange of images and ideas.[178] In le Carré's novel, Holocaust survivor Elsa Fennan challenges the bureaucratic outlook of civil service administrators who reduce the lives of their operatives to inanimate files:

> The mind becomes separated from the body; it thinks without reality, rules a paper kingdom and devises without emotion the ruin of its paper victims. But sometimes the division between your world and ours in incomplete; the files grow heads and arms and legs, and that's a terrible moment, isn't it? The names have families as well as records, and human motives to explain the sad little dossiers and their make-believe sins."[179]

Documented facts are complicated and problematised by lived experience. The archive, far from creating order, represents the organic, corporeal chaos of human life: at once complex, fallible, and violent. The bureaucratic instinct to codify motivations and feelings is, the passage suggests, unnatural and aberrant, creating a monstrous hybrid that imbues the figure of the spy with a dislocated, disembodied identity. This creates a paradox at the heart of intelligence-gathering linked to the Derridean trace: building a file creates an alternative reality of a person far removed from their physical, human form.[180]

These patterns of diabolic forms, haunted figures, and ghostly tormentors link espionage narratives with the literary tradition of the Gothic uncanny, a connection that Yael

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[178] Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, "Translating Betrayal: Signpost for *The Secret War*," in Eva Horn, *The Secret War: Treason, Espionage and Modern Fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 22.
[179] John le Carré, *Call for the Dead* (London, Coronet: 1995), 28.
[180] Jacques Derrida, "Différance", in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed.Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 403.

Levin identifies in Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*.[181] *The Third Man* is similarly infused with shadows, doubles, reanimation, and returns. This feeling of unease is captured at the outset in Greene's account of the film's moment of conception, which has entered cinematic lore.

> I had paid my last farewell to Harry a week ago, when his coffin was lowered into the frozen February ground, so it was with some incredulity that I saw him pass by, without a sign of recognition, among the host of strangers in the Strand.[182]

Greene's description of this initial idea, hastily scribbled on the back of an envelope in 1947, forms part of the film's documented history as the concept can be traced from a single – pithily ironic – scenario into the subsequent novella, screenplay, and feature-length movie. The note contains a central mystery that forms the essence of the film's plot: an unexplained resurrection; a dead man walking; a hint of the uncanny, wrapped in a wry sense of humour. The reference to the Strand not only places the story in a British context but also evokes the generic and literary heritage of the detective mystery through Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and other detective serials in the *Strand Magazine*. This self-conscious literary allusion is a feature that can be identified throughout the film, with its generic fusion of film noir, Hitchcockian mystery thriller, and (as Peter Wollen argues) the cycle of post-war British spiv films.[183] Evans suggests that these influences, combined with the film's metafictional preoccupation with issues of writing and authorship "point towards processes related to the construction of realities," implicating the audience in the production of meaning through an awareness of generic conventions and the actors' previous starring roles, while taking a satirical swipe at the champions of modernism.[184] This sense of audience complicity – a

[181] Levin, "The Interruption of Writing," 24.
[182] Graham Greene, *The Third Man and The Fallen Idol* (London: Vintage, 2019), 3.
[183] Peter Wollen, "The Vienna Project," *Sight & Sound* 9, no. 7 (1999): 16-19.
[184] Peter W. Evans, "*The Third Man*: Constructions of the Self," *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 31, no. 1 (1995): 42.

sharing of secrets through detectable intertexts – heightens the film's conspiratorial credentials.

The mystery is not confined to the plot. For scholars keen to uncover the intentions or inspiration behind the synopsis, Greene's own writing provides a source of both curiosity and hindrance. Neil Sinyard notes how it typifies the author's propensity for equivocation: "Even his handwriting implies a secretive nature: it is barely decipherable."[185] This is a throwaway and perhaps frivolous observation, but one which reveals an instinctive interest in (and frustration about) the form of writing as a contributory factor in the construction of meaning. Greene himself, along with his novels, screenplays, literary criticism, film criticism, and journalism, was a prolific letter writer. It is worth pausing here to explore in detail the missive he wrote to his lover Catherine Walston in September 1947, which documented the moment of inspiration for *The Third Man*:

> So I walked to the Café Royal & sat & read *The Aran Islands* & drank beer till about 10 & then I still felt restless, so I walked all up Piccadilly & back, went back in a gent's in Brick Street, & suddenly in the gent's, I saw the three characters, the beginning, the middle & the end, & in some ways all the ideas I had – the first sentence of the thriller about the dead Harry who wasn't dead, the risen-from-the-dead story, & the one the other day in the train – all seem to come together.[186]

For a writer of precision and purpose, this stream of consciousness – full of repetition, physical movement, agitated pacing, abrupt turns, and lengthy digressions – is impulsive and frenetic where his plot note is studied and contained. He describes the feeling as "restless" but "not sexually" so, even though there is a sense of electric anticipation and climactic satisfaction in the resolution, the "coming together" of the story.[187] The editor, Richard Greene, notes that this passage is particularly difficult to decipher, having been "written in

[185] Neil Sinyard, *Graham Greene: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 12.
[186] Graham Greene, "To Catherine Walston," in *Graham Greene: A Life in Letters*, ed. Richard Greene (London: Little, Brown, 2007), 146.
[187] Ibid., 146.

pencil" with "several points of uncertainty."[188] This reveals not only the unreliability of the writing instrument in conveying accurate meaning, but also the instability of the archive and the fragility of the materials contained therein. It is also part of the mythology that Greene cultivated around himself as an author; his persona is crafted around this type of paratextual material that is designed to mislead, obfuscate, and mystify. The emotional energy of the creative idea – as communicated through the pencilled note – is compromised by the manner of its rendering: tenuous, precarious, and ill-defined. Greene's choice of implement, pencil over pen or even typewriter, represents the spontaneity of the moment as well as its transience, its faint lines offering feinted meaning. As I shall explore later in the chapter, the contradictions and uncertainties that arise from these material considerations are embedded within the fabric of the film itself, conveying not only the precarity of meaning, but also of identity and personal security.

Returning to the plot note scribbled on the back of the envelope, this is added to the bulging file of paratextual material (including the realms of memos from American producer David Selznick) that surrounds the film's inception, development, and production.[189] Writing, argues Hepburn, is like spying in its generation of paper.[190] "Intelligence work" suggests Eva Horn in a similar vein, "amounts to textual processing."[191] In both arenas, the source (an idea, a secret document, an individual) is an item of material interest, produced by "agents" of creativity with an inventiveness developed through their real-life spying experiences. While *The Third Man* is not ostensibly an espionage film, Hepburn argues that it nonetheless expresses the fragmentation and corruption of post-war Vienna, a space in which spies,

[188] Richard Greene, *Graham Greene: A Life In Letters* (London: Little, Brown, 2007), 146.
[189] Judith Adamson, *Graham Greene and Cinema* ((Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1984), 50.
[190] Hepburn, *Intrigue*, 113.
[191] Horn, *The Secret War*, 236.

subterfuge, and political conspiracies were able to flourish.[192] As both Scholz and Thomas Riegler point out, the senior production team of *The Third Man* (along with key script advisors) comprised of people closely connected with British intelligence in World War II, infusing the film with a sense of authenticity and realism.[193] For producer David Selznick, the employment of professional conspirators proved a double-edged sword as he suspected director Carol Reed and writer Graham Greene of plotting against him in their script clashes.[194] Greene (with his background in intelligence as an SIS officer from 1941-44) himself noted the parallels between the writer and the spy: "he watches, he overhears, he seeks motives and analyses character, and in his attempt to serve literature, he is unscrupulous."[195] As shown in his letters, Greene uses the writing tools at his disposal to generate uncertainty around his identity and intentions. He emphasises the skills of diligent surveillance together with a propensity for deviousness and dishonesty as hallmarks of both professions. Like spies, writers distort and dissemble in pursuit of a higher calling. Don't trust us, Greene seems to be saying. The written word is not as reliable as it seems.

This sentiment is echoed when the image of a scribbled note on the back of an envelope re-emerges in Greene's novella of *The Third Man* (1950), which (although published later) was written prior to the film's production as a supplement to the developing storyline, rather than (as is usual for book-to-film adaptation) providing the original source material. Colonel Calloway, the head of the British Military Police in Vienna (redesignated Major for the film), narrates his first encounter with the visiting writer Rollo Martins (as we have seen,

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[192] Hepburn, *Intrigue*, 111-112.
[193] Scholz, *From Fidelity to History*, 36; Thomas Riegler, "The Spy Story Behind *The Third Man*," *Journal of Austrian-American History* 4 (2020): 2.
[194] Charles Drazin, *In Search of The Third Man* (London: Methuen, 2000), 52.
[195] Greene, *A Sort of Life*, 114.

renamed Holly for the film) as he interrogates him about his relationship with Harry Lime following the latter's funeral:

> He [Martins] whistled a tune – it was oddly familiar to me. 'I always remember that. I saw Harry write it. Just in a couple of minutes on the back of an envelope. That's what he always whistled when he had something on his mind. It was his signature tune.' He whistled the tune a second time, and I knew then who had written it – of course it wasn't Harry.[196]

Calloway's dispassionate correction to Martins' sentimental reminiscence reveals the latter's gullibility in the face of Lime's propensity for myth-making. Martins, the dry narration implies, is easily persuaded by Lime's self-defined and performative genius. He (Martins) reads Lime's brief scribbles as a sign of brilliance instead of deceit. The brevity of the note, for Martins, is a mark of Harry's easy creativity, a moment of invention rather than cynical duplicity. Calloway – of course – knows better, casting doubt on authenticity and authorship in a way that signals to the reader a playfully self-reflexive question around Greene's own claims to inspiration.

It is tempting to compare these two envelopes – both integral components in the development of the film *The Third Man* – and consider one as an implicit commentary on the other. The fiction holds up a mirror to the fact, inviting scrutiny. If one is judged to be a falsehood, why not the other? Murray Roston takes this discrepancy, which he sees as part of Greene's self-avowed predilection for planting falsehoods, as an opportunity to disregard the author's personal, critical, and biographical writings as background context, choosing instead to focus on the textual strategies and reader reception of his key works.[197] For Roston, Greene "seemed to revel in prevarication", echoing the self-aggrandisement of his fictional creations.[198] From this perspective, Greene's persona as a writer, which incorporates a

[196] Graham Greene, *The Third Man*, 16.
[197] Murray Roston, *Graham Greene's Narrative Strategies: A Study of the Major Novels* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 5.
[198] Ibid., 3.

reputation for professional deception, contradicts the sincerity of his public declarations. Charles Drazin shares this scepticism about Greene's reliability, noting his playful tendency to blur the boundaries of veracity in his biographical works as well as his fiction.[199] Drazin extends this observation to the other key players in the film's development: director Carol Reed and actor Orson Welles, each of whom had a propensity for bending the truth to suit his own convenience.[200] Reed's account of the creative interference from American producer David Selznick and Welles' exaggerated portrayal of his own role in the script are cited by Drazin as examples of how the myths surrounding the film were formed and embellished.[201]

The most obvious example of writing on screen in *The Third Man* is conspicuous by its absence. The use of subtitles for the German-language sections of the film was vetoed by director Reed, which not only gives the film a sense of place, authenticity, and gravitas, but also offers the non-German speaking audience a shared sense of Martins' confusion. His attempts to interrogate witnesses and follow lines of enquiry are stymied by his consistent inability to communicate or comprehend what they are saying. The language barrier means that he (along with the audience) is reliant on the translations of others (Calloway and Anna) to gather information, a mediated position that is open to misinterpretation and false impressions. It is not a state with which he is unfamiliar. Misreading and misconceptions are one of the primary narrative drivers of the film. Martins mispronounces Anna's German theatre script, Crabbin (Wilfred Hyde-White), the representative of the Cultural Re-education Section (itself a distortion of the British post-war diplomatic outreach initiative, the Cultural Relations Department), mistakes him for an author of note, and Martins misinterprets his

[199] Charles Drazin, *In Search of The Third Man* (London: Methuen, 2000), 1.
[200] Ibid., 24.
[201] Ibid., 78.

friendship with Lime as genuine fellowship rather than the relationship of convenience it is revealed to be. [202] As both Thomson and Sinowitz observe, Martins uses the simplistic plots of his Westerns as a structure through which to view and understand the situation in which he finds himself, casting the characters in recognisably generic roles: the lone avenger, the corrupt sheriff, the winsome love interest.[203] He summarises his approach to Sgt Paine: "This lone rider has his best friend shot unlawfully by a sheriff. The story is how this lone rider hunted that sheriff down."[204] Of course, the main assumption – the death of Lime – is found to be demonstrably false, which leads Martins to fundamentally reassess his own worldview.

The problem of authorship, then, is not just what Evans identifies as a question of originality, but an issue of verisimilitude.[205] According to Evans, "the fim's metafictionality, its proliferation of references to authorship and writing" reveal "the provisionality and contingency of all artistic representation."[206] That is, the film's preoccupation with matters of writing, literary heritage, and creative imagination reveals the instability of the written word as a purveyor of certainties. This sense of mutability is conveyed through the numerous styles, materials, and uses of written texts in the film, from cheap paperbacks to police files, from newspapers to passports, and from personalised embroidery to public graffiti, all combining to create a rich textual aesthetic. In the following sections, I turn to a detailed case study of how on-screen writing is deployed in *The Third Man* to problematise issues of class, gender, identity, and autonomy.

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[202] Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 64.
[203] Brian Lindsay Thomson, *Graham Greene and the Politics of Popular Fiction and Film* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 106; Sinowitz, "When a Cowboy Comes to Vienna," 416.
[204] Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 32.
[205] Peter William Evans, "*The Third Man* (1949): Constructions of the Self," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 31, no. 1 (1995): 40.
[206] Ibid., 41.

The soldier as reader

In this section, I show how Sgt Paine's cultural engagement and straightforward pragmatism reflect an ease with his social and professional life at odds with the political machinations taking place around him. He is an archetypal figure representing the educated working class, whose subordinate role is belied by his dry humour, powers of observation, and enthusiasm for popular culture. In a film punctuated by texts, Paine is the only significant reader which, I argue, highlights the wartime policy of military literacy development and its potential to challenge class structures and social hierarchies through education and learning. His cultural interests and professional expertise demonstrate a rounded, seasoned character with a strong interior life, a combination that ultimately threatens the corrupt established order and results in his violent death.

Paine plays a significant role on the film. A relatively minor character, subordinate to Major Calloway, he is nonetheless a constant presence. He first appears after Lime's "funeral", waiting in the car reading a magazine (Figure 13). When Calloway and Martins repair to the bar (incidentally called Schmolka, which Riegler identifies as a hidden credit to Peter Smollett-Smolka, a Vienna contact of Greene's rumoured to be the source of the penicillin smuggling storyline), Paine sits at a respectful distance, reading the paper (Figure 14).[207] Patient, reliable, and vigilant, Paine is characterised in these early scenes as the archetypal British soldier. The revelation that Paine is a keen reader of Westerns, and as such the only character to be familiar with Martins' work, provides the first (and only) validation of Martins' authorial credentials. Scholz reads this recognition as representing "that element of European society that identifies with the values of American popular culture," a connection

[207] Riegler, "The Spy Story Behind *The Third Man,*" 11.

that I shall explore in the following section.[208] Paine's stoical and prosaic approach gives his opinion a sense of weight and authenticity, although his admiration of Martins as a writer does not prevent him from carrying out his official duties. He punches Martins in the face while in the same breath congratulating him on his books, a humorously discordant juxtaposition. The violence is sudden and unexpected, but immediately softened by the accompanying praise. For Paine, work and leisure exist harmoniously side-by-side and he exudes a certain boyish enjoyment of both. He unwittingly (or perhaps mischievously) punctures the high culture pretensions of Crabbin's literary society, misidentifying the previous week's "Hindu dancers" as a "striptease", but in doing so nailing the reason for its popularity.[209] Through his blunt, grounded perspective, Paine cuts to the heart of the matter, revealing unspoken truths that others are too "cultured" to voice or even realise.

The characterisation of Paine is a continuation of the wartime image of the reading soldier. This figure was conjured as a form of British propaganda by James Milne in 1919, whose essay in praise of the soldier as reader borders on the hagiographic:

> The British soldier is a simple personality, good-natured, good-hearted, a gentleman of sentiment. Therefore he likes a story to be simple, to have a worthy hero and a virtuous, beautiful heroine.[210]

Milne's description could be applied directly to Paine and his enjoyment of the binary morality of Martin's westerns. It is an idealised, reductive portrayal that is both simplistic and patronising, but designed to cultivate a persona that is sympathetic and morally worthy. The enjoyment of reading is presented as a healthy distraction to alleviate boredom and boost morale. In this rendering, the soldier's act of reading represents a symbol of individual virtue,

[208] Scholz, *From Fidelity to History*, 46.
[209] Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 30-31.
[210] James Milne, "The Soldier as a Reader," *Fortnightly Review* 105, no. 629 (1919): 755.

psychological balance, and national fortitude. It is, perhaps, an attempt to wrest the image of the literate soldier away from the self-penned trauma of the wartime poets, who skilfully skewered the government's patriotic propaganda with their raw and uncompromising writings from the trenches. The obligations of duty to a common national cause triumph over the individual voices of protest and suffering.

Figure 13: Sgt Paine waiting after the funeral

Figure 14: Waiting in the bar

Figure 15: The artisan at work

Figure 16: Making an inventory

Wartime readership, notes Edmund G. C. King, formed a significant part of a soldier's life, with abundant letters, newspapers, magazines, and books received from home:

> Cheap, small-format editions were particularly appreciated, as these were easily accommodated in a soldier's kit and could be exchanged with other soldiers, or discarded when worn or damaged by wartime conditions.[211]

Books were not only a source of entertainment and escapism, but also of camaraderie and fellowship. The sharing of stories offered a coping mechanism for life on the front line, while

[211] Edmund G.C. King, ""A Priceless Book to Have out Here": Soldiers Reading Shakespeare in the First World War," *Shakespeare* 10, no. 3 (2014): 232.

providing an emotional connection with families back home. The value of the gift was not tied up in the status of the author or quality of the print, but in the practical properties of the book's size, weight, and portability. Books were disposable and, as John Jamieson explains, "expressly designed to be carried in men's pockets and to be passed from reader to reader until worn out."[212] Cultural engagement goes hand in hand with everyday pragmatism, a combination that can be seen in the characterisation of Sgt Paine in *The Third Man*: practical, effective, in tune with popular culture, yet unencumbered by psychological complexity.

If the First World War established (or at least reinforced) the iconography of the literate soldier, the Second World War built on the foundations of books as a cultural battleground. Matthew Fishburn analyses how the Nazi book-burning in 1933 (and the repeated destruction of the Louvain library during the German invasions of Belgium in 1914 and 1940) inspired an Allied propaganda campaign promoting books and culture as bastions of civilized society.[213] Fishburn shows how the anti-book-burning sentiment in the US coalesced into the official slogan "Books Are Weapons", which was taken from a letter by President Roosevelt in 1942 to mobilize public opinion against the totalitarian suppression of ideas.[214] Liberty, freedom, and independence of thought were all bound to the idea of a free press. Literacy became a political as well as an educational strategy.

The American soldier in Jamieson's survey of frontline readership in World War Two does not fare much better than his British equivalent in World War One: "Lowbrows in the Army may prefer to read comics, movie magazines and western stories, but they do read."[215]

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[212] John Jamieson, "Books and the Soldier," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1945): 323.
[213] Matthew Fishburn, "Books Are Weapons: Wartime Responses to the Nazi Bookfires of 1933," *Book History* 10 (2007): 228.
[214] Ibid., 236.
[215] Jamieson, "Books and the Soldier," 320.

This classist appraisal expresses surprise at the education levels of the rank-and-file soldier, despite military policy prioritising education as a means of improving efficiency, mental health, and morale. Christopher Loss explains how the US Army Information and Education Division was formed in February 1944 in response to research showing that increased education led to better outcomes for individuals adjusting to life in the armed forces.[216] The image of the reading soldier, then, did not necessarily emerge as the result simply of personal choice and happenstance, but of broader government strategy to improve literacy. A link to *The Third Man* can be identified through the mention of Zane Grey, who Martins names in the public lecture as his chief authorly influence. Crabbin dismisses the reference with a joke about Grey's lack of literary stature: "Of course, we all know, Grey wrote what we call *Westerns*: cowboys and bandits."[217] Grey may not meet Crabbin's definition of a serious author, but Jamieson draws on contemporary library reports to show that his books were the second highest in demand for US soldiers overseas in the first half of 1944.[218] Sgt Paine, based overseas as part of the British occupying forces of a city split between British, American, French and Russian rule, is shown to be the prime readership for this kind of popular literature.

Paine, then, embodies the persona of the working-class soldier/reader in the Anglo-American context: infantilized by his superiors (Calloway chides him like a child when he makes a mistake on a slide-show presentation), but relied upon to carry out the drudge work: as driver, bodyguard, minder, and administrator. He possesses an interest in, and knowledge of, cultural affairs, which – combined with an ability to apply skills in a practical setting –

[216] Christopher P. Loss, ""The Most Wonderful Thing Has Happened to Me in the Army": Psychology, Citizenship, and American Higher Education in World War II," *The Journal of American History* 92, no.3 (2005): 867.
[217] *The Third Man*.
[218] Jamieson, "Books and the Soldier," 329.

transcends the stereotype of his social position. He reads magazines and papers during his long periods of waiting (Figures 13 and 14), keeps abreast of Crabbin's social programme, and applies his learning to the detection of falsified papers (Figure 15). He is then tasked with processing the paperwork: recording the seizure of the Anna's letters and papers and issuing receipts for both (Figure 16). Significantly, it is to Paine to whom Calloway turns for an expert assessment of Anna's passport. He reads the document with the skill of a craftsman, pointing out the discrepancies in the print that prove the forgery. It is a broad, nimble skillset and one which elevates Paine to a character of significant interest in a narrative concerned with texts and how they are deployed. Amidst a host of characters whose identities are misrepresented (whether by accident in the case of Martins, or by design in the case of Anna and Lime), Paine's forthright approach and expert analysis penetrates the deception.

If, as Evans argues, "there is an element of autobiography in Greene's creation of Holly Martins", and, as I argue, in the mischievous dissembling of Harry Lime, then Paine (representing the proletariat masses) is his ideal audience.[219] Greene himself extolls the virtues of this type of reader:

> The artist needs an audience to whom it isn't enough to preach, in which he can assume a few common ideas, born of a common environment. I don't mean a small avant-garde public, but a national public, the kind of trench kinship which isn't a matter of class or education, but of living and dying together in the same hole.[220]

Greene instils this "trench kinship" in the character of Paine, an example of a cultural consumer drawn to the pleasure of books and not constrained by ideas of fashion or elitism. He embodies the comradeship of the reading soldier: sharing stories, alleviating boredom, appreciating entertainment. Books are more than an escape; they are a means of education

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[219] Evans, *Carol Reed*, 96.
[220] Graham Greene, "Ideas in the Cinema," in *The Spectator* (19 November 1937), in *The Graham Greene Film Reader: Reviews, Essays, Interviews & Film Stories* ed. David Parkinson (London: Carcanet Press, 1993), 422.

and social elevation. It is presumably no accident that Paine is killed at the end of the film dying in the hole of the sewers, his moral clarity fatally confronted by murky realities. His ability to read texts, see through pretensions, and counter misapprehensions represents a threat to the authorial supremacy and narrative double-dealings of the Martins/Lime/Calloway trio, and he is ultimately extinguished in a cynical preservation of the social order.

The Lady Vanishes

The character of Anna in *The Third Man* is defined by letters and papers. More specifically, her national identity, professional status, individual autonomy, and personal liberty are determined by what other people have written for her, to her, and about her. The falsified identity papers that Harry Lime has procured on her behalf conceal her Czech identity behind an Austrian passport. They give her the freedom to live and work in Vienna but leave her vulnerable to exploitation and deportation. Her legitimacy is destabilised, and her liberty threatened, by the fraudulence of this documentary proof of identity. Her job in the theatre is characterised by the scripts she reads and the roles she performs. As an actress performing within the vast tradition of the Austrian stage, her success is founded on how she interprets the words on the page. The love letters from Harry that she treasures as a keepsake are summarily confiscated by the police looking for evidence of Lime's whereabouts. Their relationship becomes itemised in a case file. Feelings and emotions are recorded, catalogued, and stored for future reference. In the hands of the British military police, the letters become functional instead of imbued with personal meaning. They are judged to serve a political

purpose and their private messages are reclassified and reconstituted to benefit the public interest.

For Hepburn, Anna's collection of papers and paper-based "cheesy theatre" roles signal her multiple identities.[221] For Piette, Anna represents the romanticised marginalisation of Eastern Europeans: dispossessed, bartered, and exploited by the Allied powers in the post-war battle for territorial, ideological and cultural supremacy.[222] In this section, I analyse four examples in which Anna is depicted through writing in *The Third Man* to show how her identity, autonomy, and liberty are determined and manipulated in the documents produced on her behalf: falsified, repossessed, borrowed and unstable. As the film progresses, the writings that mark her presence and desires shift from solid print through personal handwriting and decorative design to, finally, a nebulous outline. Her name – written symbol of self and agency – is left on the condensation of a gondola window, the fluid text half obscured against the urban backdrop. Her identity is rendered as a piece of careless public graffiti liable to be wiped out. Through these writings, I trace Anna's journey as she makes an active attempt to reclaim authorship of her own fate, to the ultimate detriment of her freedom (and, potentially, life).

Anna's forged identity papers (Figure 17) have both a practical and a sentimental resonance. They are at once a lifeline and, from her perspective, a demonstration of Lime's love for her. The passport enables her to live and work in Vienna, avoiding the prospect of deportation to an uncertain fate. "She can't live in this city without papers" protests Martins as Major Calloway orders their confiscation during a police raid of her apartment.[223] As a

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[221] Hepburn, *Intrigue*, 116.
[222] Piette, *The Literary Cold War*, 44.
[223] Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 45.

willing and complicit beneficiary of one of Lime's underworld "rackets", she chooses to overlook reports of his other – more serious – crimes. The official document, printed, signed and stamped, is for Schmidt an emblem of gratitude and love, representing the risk that Lime has supposedly assumed on her behalf. It is a source of personal loyalty. For Lime, one must assume the passport had a more basic and transactional function, keeping Schmidt in situ for his regular evening visits: "He used to look in round six."[224] The forged documents not only conceal the truth of her identity, but blind her to the contractual nature of their relationship. Double meanings, then: falsified legitimacy and cynical romanticism. Love and sentiment are traded for a convenient business arrangement. Lime's words to Martins on the Great Wheel in the official screenplay support this reading: "If she gets out of this hole, be kind to her. She's worth it."[225] In the final film, the dialogue is tweaked slightly to "You'll find she's worth it." The evolution hammers home the point: Lime is speaking man to man, sharing intimacies, allocating perks. Anna's papers, while offering ostensible protection, merely assign power elsewhere, reducing her to an object of barter.

Following Lime's lead, Martins takes up the mantle when he uses Anna's papers to negotiate the terms of his cooperation with Calloway. The only way that Anna can break this pattern of dependence and obligation is to destroy her own identity papers, substituting her liberty (and potentially her life) for agency. This analysis counters Sinowitz's argument that the film's ending (Anna walking silently and resolutely past Martins into the distance after Lime's second funeral) is a sign that she is "triumphant in her free will."[226] Yes, it is a gesture of defiance, but rather than (as Sinowitz argues) throwing an element of chaos into Martins'

[224] Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 64.
[225] Ibid., 98.
[226] Sinowitz, "When a Cowboy Comes to Vienna," 431

naïve attempts to impose narrative order, she rejects the continued protection represented by her forged Austrian documents, deliberately succumbing to the horrors of Russian post-war repatriation.

Figure 17: Anna’s false passport

Figure 18: Harry's letters

Figure 19: Monogrammed pyjamas

Figure 20: Great Wheel window

Anna’s nationality is a source of discussion and contention in the film. Drawing on her archival study of *The Third Man*, Judith Adamson points out that, while Anna’s nationality changes through successive screenplay drafts (variously Hungarian, Estonian and Czechoslovakian), her falsified papers remain a consistent plotline.[227] This consistency indicates that the question of her (female) identity and subjectivity is a significant detail amidst the film’s more prominent issues of homosocial loyalty and betrayal, post-war political divisions, and moral disintegration. Convincing as the passport initially appears, the forgery is easily identified by Sgt Paine when the British Military Police (BMP) search Anna’s apartment.

[227] Judith Adamson, *Graham Greene and Cinema* (Norman: Pilgrim Books, 1984), 56.

Her Austrian nationality is called into question, raising the stakes to an implicit threat of deportation. Her status has changed in an instant from citizen to alien. As such, she becomes the subject of negotiation between the shared powers in occupied Vienna, her Eastern European roots making her a person of interest to the Russians. The rights that the documents confer are abruptly removed, rendering her helpless in the face of political manoeuvrings. The printed words shift from a defensive shield to a tool of oppression.

Anna's passport is seized by the British authorities as further evidence of Lime's criminal activities, the "proof" of her identity (granting her freedom of movement and right to work) now forming part of an incriminating file. The document has been repossessed and repurposed, switching from personal identifier to political weapon. The forgery becomes a visible, legible indicator of Lime's guilt. It is to be stored and archived as part of the official record, the bureaucracy of this transaction confirmed by the writing out of a receipt.[228] Anna's proof of personhood is reduced to a piece of administrative miscellany. This represents what Steven Neuse describes as "the stultifying effect that bureaucratic organizations have on human freedom, creativity and moral sensitivity," which ties in with the argument around the depersonalising effects of the file discussed earlier in the chapter.[229] The scene also asserts the power dynamics of class and gender. Anna's personal space and property are invaded and seized by a sizeable group of men led by a military officer. The unbalanced optics support Geraint D'Arcy's observation (writing about the male-dominated administration in *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*) that "Spying is about class", with Anna's personal information used as a commodity to leverage power and influence.[230] The authority of Calloway – white British,

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[228] Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 45.
[229] Steven M. Neuse, "Bureaucratic Malaise in the Modern Spy Novel: Deighton, Greene, and Le Carré," *Public Administration* 60, no. 3 (1982): 296.
[230] D'Arcy, "'Essentially, Another Man's Woman,'" 279.

male, middle-class and supported by numerous subordinates – is set against Anna's vulnerability: female, Eastern European, dispossessed, and (save for the inadequate Martins) totally alone.

The letters confiscated by the BMP in the search compound the situation. Sgt Paine casually tucks them under his arm as he goes to the desk to write out the receipts. Anna's attention is drawn to them, her frozen expression communicating the emotion contained within the sheets (Figure 18). "They are private letters," she protests, almost redundantly.[231] The love letters from Lime detail their intimacies. Sheets of paper represent the sheets of the bedroom. For Anna, they are a genuine testimony to the couple's love. For Lime, one could charitably infer a level of sincerity, but this is neutralized by the practical benefits conferred by his (cynical, performative) act of writing. Like the passport, the letters are another method of securing Anna's affection and, consequently, her acquiescence to a continued sexual arrangement. Paine reassures her that the letters will be dealt with sensitively: "Don't worry, miss. We are used to it. Like doctors."[232] His words again convey the altered functionality of the written material: from secret confidences shared between lovers (or, more cynically, a tool of emotional manipulation) to a clinical dataset destined for a bureaucratic file. Her feelings are subject to an invasive, almost gynaecological study. All writing becomes a matter of record, archived and stored for reference. Personal and private correspondence is converted into public ownership for political gain. It is a measure of how, in the Cold War, secret information was no longer limited to material obtained by clandestine means. Intelligence, argues Horn, is conceived as a commodity (not necessarily secret) to be acquired,

[231] Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 46.
[232] Ibid., 46.

accumulated, and bartered.[233] The overt demonstration of military authority in this scene might be tempered by the seemingly reasonable process of administrative filing, but the act of bureaucracy serves to normalise and ratify the violence of the invasion. For Anna, nothing is safe or sacred; details of her love, loyalties, and sexual activities are exposed, recorded, and filed for others to access and examine.

The intimacy of the love letters and the associated implication of a sexual relationship are echoed by a third instance of textual materiality in the film. As Martins rings the bell to her apartment, Anna is shown briefly lying in bed, wearing a pair of silk pyjamas with the letters "HL" embroidered on the lapel (Figure 19). The lighting in the scene rests equally on her face and on the letters in an elegant portrait of repose. It is an affecting, poignant composition. These are Harry's pyjamas, a detail that combines with her melancholy expression to show her continued devotion to her dead lover. For Evans, it is a gesture of intimacy that signals the "hypnotic effect of Lime on Anna", suggestive of a symbiotic and sexual relationship in a neat evasion of the Hollywood Production Code.[234] For Drazin, the pyjamas are a symbol of luxury in a world of austerity, conveying "both Anna's love and Harry's vanity."[235] The lettering detail is flamboyant and finished with flourishes, indicating extravagance and an enhanced sense of self-worth. It is typical, Drazin observes, that Lime bought the silk pyjamas for himself and not for Anna. It demonstrates his propensity for self-indulgence, placing value on his own comfort over that of others. The items she wears are borrowed, not gifted. Her own name is erased, subsumed by another's. As with the forged papers, she is living under an assumed identity, adopting a flimsy protection that is

[233] Horn, *The Secret War*, 232.
[234] Evans, *Carol Reed*, 103.
[235] Drazin, *In Search of the Third Man*, 49.

superficially generous but essentially weak. Harry’s gesture of love is, materially and metaphorically, a fabrication: further evidence of Anna’s insecure status in post-war Vienna.

The final example of Anna’s “life writing” occurs on screen in real time. Following Lime’s resurrection, and towards the end of his conversation with Holly Martins in the Great Wheel, he idly traces Anna’s name in the condensation of the cab window, illustrated by a heart punctured with a Cupid’s arrow (Figure 20). It is a schoolboy gesture that befits Lime’s pretensions to adolescent mischief. It is almost as if he is returning to the nostalgic and carefree basis of his youthful friendship with Martins, inviting a resumption on its original terms of jocular, low-stakes rivalry. It is an incongruous action given the bleak nature of their conversation, especially when viewed in conjunction with the cynical lines Lime is speaking: “the dead are happier dead.”[236] While he is ostensibly talking about the “suckers and the mugs” whom he so disdainfully exploits and discards, his absent-minded sketching of Anna’s name draws her (consciously or subconsciously) into that categorisation.[237] The girlfriend he supplied with papers (to keep her close) and letters (to keep her sweet), is now lumped with “one of those dots” on the ground, as an unexceptional and incidental victim of his schemes.[238] His drawing on the window is a sentimental but ultimately vacuous expression of his love, cast against – and almost obscured by – the bleak Vienna cityscape in the background. While Rob White sees Lime’s tracing of Anna’s name as a “little token of their relationship” akin to the monogrammed pyjamas, the manner of its composition in fact sends an altogether darker message.[239] Lime’s love for Anna, transposed into these letters casually

[236] Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 99.
[237] Ibid., 98.
[238] *Ibid:* 97.
[239] Rob White, *The Third Man* (London: BFI, 2003), 62.

written on water residue on an ever-rotating wheel, is transparent, fluid, and liable to summary erasure.

The arrow through the heart that accompanies Anna's name can be read not so much as a declaration of affection, but as an implicit threat. Anna's identity and existence are dependent on Lime's words, schemes, and material support. This precarious reliance on a fickle master is represented by the fragile trace of the word on the glass. The sense of peril in this image of the name on the window is reminiscent of an earlier spy film, directed by Alfred Hitchcock. For Neil Sinyard, the key Hitchcock allusion in *The Third Man* is the similarity between Martins' literary lecture for the Cultural Re-education Section on the 'Crisis of Faith' and Robert Hannay's political address to the Liberal Party in *The Thirty-Nine Steps* (1935).[240] However, I argue that a more fruitful connection can be found between *The Third Man* and Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1939). Like Greene's earlier novel *Stamboul Train* (1932), which was adapted to film as *Orient Express* in 1934, and the Carol Reed-directed *Night Train to Munich* (1940), *The Lady Vanishes* belongs to what James Chapman describes as a "vogue for train-related fiction" in the lead up to WWII.[241] The connection between the two films, both set in central Europe, was hinted at in early script drafts by splitting what became the GHQ representative Crabbin into two characters (identified in the official screenplay as Carter and Tombs), with the intention of casting Naunton Wayne and Basil Radford.[242] Wayne and Radford had appeared in both Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* and Reed's *Night Train to Munich* (both scripted by screenwriters Sidney Gilliat and Frank Launder) as recurring characters Charters and Caldicott, the public school-educated relics of British colonial rule

240 Sinyard, *Graham Greene: A Literary Life*, 102.
241 James Chapman, *Hitchcock and the Spy Film* (London: IB Tauris, 2018), 107.
242 Phillips, Gene D., *Graham Greene: The Films of his Fiction* (London: Teachers College Press, 2003), 63.

whose obsession with cricket and blinkered disdain for their foreign surroundings (followed by a redemptive display of bravery and rectitude) provide a focal point for much of the film's humour. There are echoes still in *The Third Man*'s character of Crabbin of their resolute sense of British cultural superiority, fractious preoccupation with status, and overarching tendency to misread situations based on their own bias. Crabbin is an advocate of high art and cultural diplomacy with limited appreciation of either, which leads him to mistake Martins for a writer of high intellectual standing. This sense of indirect cinematic inheritance, augmented by the professional links between directors Hitchcock and Reed and screenwriters Gilliat and Launder, lends weight to Sinyard's observation that *"The Third Man* is a very Hitchcockian film", centring on the Great Wheel as a symbol of historical cycles.[243] As I shall argue, the Great Wheel is also the site of an act of re-writing of a specific Hitchcockian scene, revealing distinct changes in the political atmosphere and gender autonomy between 1930s and late 1940s Europe.

In Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), the name "Froy" is drawn on the train window (Figure 21) by the eponymous lady (played by Dame May Whitty) as a means of introduction when the clatter from the train prevents her speech from being understood. Following Miss Froy's disappearance, the name is later revealed again by a temporary burst of steam; its transitory appearance the first tangible proof for Iris (played by Margaret Lockwood) that her elderly companion is not a figment of her imagination. The spectral trace of the name on the window indicates Miss Froy's physical presence while at the same time conveying the precarity of her continued existence. As Rebecca Harrison observes, this occurs in a liminal space that not only positions Froy "on the threshold between public and private

[243] Sinyard, *Graham Greene*, 102.

realms", but also in a perilous state between life and death.[244] The writing is only fleetingly visible, the word disappearing against the background. It is both seen and unseen, her identity and being tantalizingly present while frustratingly remote; a mystery to be deciphered. Harrison argues that this exemplifies a process in which "women must undergo transformation from active labourers into docile consumers receptive to patriarchal influence."[245] In this reading, Froy is an "immobilised" woman, trapped in a transitional state, whose agency is now dependent on her would-be rescuers.[246] While Froy's physical stasis and precarity is undeniable, the analysis does overlook the role of authorial authority, which transforms the message into a cry for help. The lady may have vanished, but her words –

however fragile – remain as proof of her identity and autonomy.

Figure 21: The Lady Vanishes (1938)[247]

Figure 22: The Third Man (1949)

Seen side by side, these two images provide a striking juxtaposition of pre- and post-war Europe, as well as an insight into the changing gendered roles within that socio-political context. The lettering on the left (Figure 21) is spindly and faint, characteristic of the writer's age and vulnerability. It suggests a fading existence that is nonetheless self-determined. The word acts as a form of personal SOS, its brief appearance followed by the shriek of the train's

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[244] Rebecca Harrison, *From Steam to Screen: Cinema, the Railways and Modernity* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 135.
[245] Ibid., 135.
[246] Ibid., 145.
[247] *The Lady Vanishes,* directed by Alfred Hitchcock. (BBC Two, 2021), film: https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/001C339D?bcast=133917186.

whistle communicating a sense of urgency and threat. The view out of the window depicts a picturesque rural scene in the fictional European country of Bandrika, a peaceful world soon to come to an end. In contrast, the right-hand image from *The Third Man* (Figure 22) shows the name "Anna" traced boldly in the condensation, the solid lines of the letters conveying strength and vitality, even as the letters themselves are half obscured against the background. Written by a male hand, it is dedicatory rather than introductory. A valediction, then, and not just to an individual but to a way of life. The bucolic idyll of the 1930s (Figure 21) gives way to the urban devastation of bombed out Vienna in the late 1940s (Figure 22). The horizontal symmetry of the train window frame in the first still is harmonised by the elaborate lampshade illustrating the refined trappings of the dining car. This sense of balance and elegance is replaced by the vertical slant of the Great Wheel in the second still: off-centre and crooked. The old, established order, represented by the formalities of polite address (Miss Froy's first name is never revealed) gives way to a bold statement of youth and the intimacy of first-person address in a tableau that is nevertheless distorted, obfuscated, and deeply unstable.

It is instructive also to consider the contrasting modes of transport in these two scenes. The kinetic possibilities of train travel in the earlier film (with its connotations of wealth, freedom, and romanticism) transforms into to the slow, continuous rotation of the Great Wheel. Liberty and independence are replaced with unremitting cycles of repetition and confinement. The opulent carriage of the monied (primarily British) middle classes makes way for a creaking, battered fairground ride with the "*tiny faces pressed like flies against the glass*" exemplifying the proletariat "mugs" of Harry's Soviet-occupied Vienna.[248] The

[248] Greene, *The Third Man* (1988), 95.

possibilities of tourism in *The Lady Vanishes*, the "increasing popularity of Continental travel…and the democratisation of foreign holidays" represented by rail travel (as noted by James Chapman in his historical study of Hitchcock's spy films) is halted by the devastation of war.[249] Wealth and privilege yields to poverty and privation as the focus shifts from the British middle classes to the citizens and refugees of Central European, political victims of a decade of upheaval and conflict. The pursuit of leisure in this context has shrunk materially. What was in pre-war rail travel a symbol of movement, progress, and technological advancement becomes in the Great Wheel a creaking, slow-moving relic that is dilapidated but nonetheless enduring. The substitution of the train for the Great Wheel means that, ironically, the image has in fact come full circle, with *The Lady Vanishes* having been adapted from a novel by Ethel Lina White called *The Wheel Spins* (1936). This connection ties in with Robert Stam's concept of "an ongoing whirl of intertextual reference and transformation" that he applies to adaptation specifically, but which is also relevant to the dialogic relationship between genre films as they adopt, modify, and subvert specific literary ideas and motifs.[250]

The writing on the window in Reed's *The Third Man* therefore offers an implicit intertextual tribute to, and commentary on, the earlier Hitchcock film, tracing the generic lineage of mystery and intrigue through the respective delineations of its female characters and victims, subject to the plotting of those who claim an authorial role. I subscribe to Harrison's appraisal of the significance of the window as a screen proxy: a self-reflexive commentary on cinema's role in preserving and perpetuating these narratives of female suppression.[251] Unlike Miss Froy, whose writing communicates her ability to determine her

[249] James Chapman, *Hitchcock and the Spy Film* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2018), 107-108.
[250] Robert Stam, "Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation," in *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, ed. Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (Malden: Blackwell, 2005), 5.
[251] Harrison, *From Steam to Screen*, 144.

own fate, Anna is controlled by the writings of those who purport to love and protect her. This comes to a head towards the end of *The Third Man* when Martins uses her passport as a bargaining chip for his own cooperation in Calloway's scheme against Lime. Realising that Anna is about to be claimed by the Russians due to her illegal status, Martins makes an implicit request for Calloway to return her passport and secure her freedom by way of a train ticket heading westwards. In return, Martins will help Calloway to entrap Lime. In this cynical transaction, Anna has again been reduced to a commodity, an item of barter; her passport conferring freedom without agency. This contradiction is given visual form when, unaware of the reasons for Calloway's sudden beneficence, she is escorted on to the train by Sgt Paine (Figures 23 & 24), the framing of the scene for once regular and uniform. Her world, it seems, has been re-ordered and re-arranged. She has been neatly filed in the confined box of the train carriage, a world away from the skewed lines of the Great Wheel (Figure 22). There is a sense of return to the calm stability of the trans-European railway (Figure 21) of *The Lady Vanishes* (an apposite description of Anna's intended journey), but the liberty this implies is tempered by the prescribed manner of her departure and the visual constraints (an enclosed space, a military escort) that surround her (Figure 24).

Spying Martins loitering in the station café and hoping for some answers, Anna breaks free from her engineered confinement to confront him. Initially pleased to see him, she slowly uncovers the bargain he has struck with Calloway and realises her compromised position. In an emphatic rejection of her unwitting collaboration in the plot against Lime, she tears up the passport as the train departs without her, destroying her chance of freedom while at the same time releasing the shackles of obligation (Figure 25). This bittersweet act of defiance simultaneously asserts her personal autonomy while surrendering her political liberty. She reclaims her own agency by rejecting the identity documents procured (by Lime), deployed

(by Calloway), and exploited (by Martins) on her behalf. “Not in my name,” is the implicit message she sends to both Martins and Calloway (Figure 26), metaphorically wiping away the writing on the window. She tears up the script of her own complicity and collusion, fully aware that in doing so she is rejecting the protection of the British authorities and laying herself open to arrest and probable repatriation by the Russians.

Figure 23: Anna's confusion at her reprieve

Figure 24: An official send-off

Figure 25: Realising the price of her "freedom"

Figure 26: Tearing up the script

The site of her repudiation – the station café – is also significant. It carries echoes of David Lean’s *Brief Encounter* (1945), the quintessentially British romantic drama in which Laura Jesson’s (Celia Johnson) affair with Alec Harvey (Trevor Howard) starts and finishes in the prosaic surroundings of a provincial railway café, coming full circle as the train is heard departing from the station. Anna’s rejection of Holly can be read as a visual and aural rejoinder to the earlier film – itself a study of domestic subterfuge and espionage – that conjures Howard’s ghostly presence as Calloway, the “third man” in this scene. He is the

architect of the plot against Lime and the spectral focus of Anna's consternation. In tearing up the passport, Anna is rejecting Calloway's authorial and authoritative role, simultaneously undermining the strength and integrity of British military influence in Vienna and striking out for a future that is unknown and unscripted. It makes her snub of Martins at the graveyard in the film's final scene – a subject of substantial authorial dispute between screenwriter Greene and director Reed – inevitable.

Conclusion

Anna Schmidt and Sgt Paine are both inextricably bound to the bureaucratic systems that govern military and civilian life in post-war Vienna in *The Third Man*. Despite their subsidiary status (subject to the power struggle taking place between the main trio of Holly Martins, Major Calloway, and Harry Lime), these two characters are key to understanding how minorities (of class and gender) are categorised and processed through textual means. Paine performs an administrative role by processing papers, collating files, and assisting with Crabbin's cultural exchange. He is an effective functionary of the bureaucratic regime; on hand to deliver plane tickets, spending money, and receipts for apprehended personal effects. In his spare time, he reads books, magazines, and papers, performing the archetype of the literate and literary soldier. Essentially, Paine is an expert accumulator of knowledge in both the personal and professional sphere. This gives him powers of recognition and understanding, which, coupled with a dry sense of humour, undercuts the cultural pretensions of his superiors. His cultural ease and sanguine approach are out of place in the fractured and fragmented city. His violent death at the end of the film reinforces the moral corruption engendered by the bureaucratic system that he helped to sustain.

As an immigrant with false papers, Anna's position in the city is as tenuous as her identity. She is reliant on the favours bestowed and the licence given her by the men in authority. She treads a precarious path, which is determined for her by bureaucratic permissions. Ripping up her own passport is a defiant gesture of autonomy, but the unspoken result is repatriation to Russia to an uncertain fate. The long walk from the cemetery at the end of the film represents her uneasy traversal of the living and the dead, a pervasive theme. Lime's body is now in the ground, but his legacy of moral ambiguity remains. Returning to the image of the post-war survivor, Phyllis Lassner identifies Elsa Fennan as a victim of the uncanny contradiction between survival and death. She "is a discarded shell of a woman, one of the living dead […] Elsa is an example of a dispossessed victim of twentieth century wars that leave these women haunting the very ideas of home and homeland and their traditional promises of protection."[252] Anna is similarly dispossessed and displaced, an undocumented victim of the European conflict. In the following chapter, I turn to another haunted woman in exile, in John le Carré's *Smiley's People*, who attempts to placate the ghosts of her past through other textual means.

[252] Phyllis Lassner, *Espionage and Exile: Fascism and Anti-Fascism in British Spy Fiction and Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 189.

Chapter Two

From Delivery to Deliverance: Letters and Disrupted Communication in John le Carré's *Smiley's People* (1979)

In hs 2016 autobiography, John le Carré tells a story that has haunted him since he was a teenager. He describes a flock of pigeons bred on a casino roof in Monte Carlo, where he was staying with his father (a conman and heavy gambler).[253] Next to the casino was a shooting club, which provided additional sport for its wealthy members. The pigeons were collected in rooftop traps and driven into a tunnel that led directly on to the target range. They flew out into the clear blue sky and were summarily shot. However, because the club patrons had enjoyed a leisurely and often liquid lunch, their aim was not always accurate. Many of the birds escaped, only to return – as homing pigeons do – to the same casino roof, where they were again trapped and placed back into the tunnel for another round. And so the cycle continued.

Le Carré invites the reader to speculate on why this image holds such an abiding fascination. He was clearly preoccupied with its symbolism; his biographer, Adam Sisman, points out that *The Pigeon Tunnel* was the working title for several of the author's novels before it was finally chosen as the heading for his autobiography.[254] It certainly captures what Adam Piette identifies as the "sacrificial logic" of Cold War narratives, in which (mostly) innocent citizens are exploited and killed by the toying of state superpowers.[255] Piette expresses this condition, represented in his argument by the death of Liz Gold in *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold*, as characteristic of "a fascist masculinity that identifies women and

[253] John le Carré, *The Pigeon Tunnel: Stories from My Life* (London: Viking, 2016), vii.
[254] Adam Sisman, *John le Carré: The Biography* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 110.
[255] Piette, *The Literary Cold War*, 13.

Jews as victims."[256] In other words, gender and religious identity, alongside class and political ideology, mark out those citizens who are marginalised, disadvantaged, and ultimately expendable. Phyllis Lassner makes a similar observation in her discussion of Elsa Fennan in le Carré's *Call for the Dead*: "she is also, like women civilians in all wars, the unacknowledged victim of men's continual battle for supremacy".[257] For le Carré, the pigeons exemplify the callous disregard of the privileged elite towards the victims of their "great game": anonymous and disposable casualties in a world that conflates violence and sport. The journey of return, repetition, and death represents a lack of agency and a sense of fatalism over events beyond control or understanding, a recurring theme in le Carré's novels. It is a story of innocence, manipulation, and betrayal. But, perhaps most importantly for this chapter, the birds themselves represent a rudimentary system of secret communication. The homing instinct that drives their return is the same behaviour that determines their suitability for carrying messages during times of both conflict and peace. The opening vignette demonstrates the fragility of this method of communication and the expendability of its participants. They are cannon fodder in a world where replacements are easily found. In essence, the scene dramatizes the idea of shooting the messenger.

Intercepted letters, murdered couriers, and failed deliveries are central components of le Carré's 1979 novel *Smiley's People* (itself titled *The Pigeon Tunnel* in early drafts), and the subsequent BBC television adaptation, directed by Simon Langton in 1982.[258] Bookended by two letters, both concerning a parent's loss of a child, *Smiley's People* is populated with acts, spaces, and materials of writing in various stages of formation, produced in the main by

[256] Ibid., 13.
[257] Lassner, *Espionage and Exile*, 188.
[258] Sisman, *John le Carré*, 393.

characters who are immigrants, exiles, and outcasts. If, as Joseph Oldham argues, the contemporaneous television adaptation of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979) is "a drama of conversation," in which knowledge is accrued through a series of one-to-one dialogues between members of the ruling establishment, then *Smiley's People* is a drama of written communication between the socially and politically underprivileged, whose voices are only heard through fragmentary clues such as chalk marks, torn postcards, and missing letters.[259]

In this chapter, I will analyse examples of written communication that are disrupted, purloined, half-formed, or absent to consider how the written word is weaponised, memorialised, and performed in the context of espionage fiction. In doing so, I draw on three main theoretical frames. First, Esther Milne's study of letters and postcards illuminates how the use of these technologies affects varying levels of presence, intimacy and privacy.[260] Secondly, Karin Koehler's historicist study of letters in the fiction of Thomas Hardy offers a model for examining the impact of disrupted communication on individual agency. Her chapter on letters from socially excluded and impoverished characters provides a cautionary insight into the limits of communication technologies as being able to effect a democratising and socially liberating change.[261] Thirdly, Edward Gallafent's study of *Letters and Literacy in Hollywood Film* presents a useful approach to interpreting the mechanisms of words on screen using close analysis. More specifically, I adopt his taxonomy of textual substance (transience and absence) to investigate the narrative effects of chalk and notetaking.[262]

[259] Oldham, "'Disappointed Romantics,'" 737.
[260] Esther Milne, *Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).
[261] Karin Koehler, *Thomas Hardy and Victorian Communication: Letters, Telegrams and Postal Systems* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 184.
[262] Gallafent, *Letters and Literacy in Hollywood Film*, 6-7.

Gallafent draws a distinction between writing that is permanent, transient or absent, arguing that the implements, forms, and methods of writing can be as important as the words themselves: "Words can be as innately fragile as the material they are written on or as temporary as the medium used for writing…Or they can be deliberately or accidentally enduring, promising to outlast the writer."[263] He augments his reading of *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (Max Ophüls, 1948) with an examination of a lesser-known scene from the film which contextualises the significance of the written word and offers a frame through which the letters can be interpreted.[264] Through this lens, he is able to place his primary analysis within a broader literary context that foregrounds themes of societal norms and obligations. I propose to apply this model to an equivalent study of inscriptions, chalk marks and notebooks in *Smiley's People*, which recalls Gallafent's shifting questions of "absence, fragility and endurance" in its differing representations of words, letters, and symbols.[265] I will show how these examples of writing which are transient (chalk), or absent (notes), offer a reminder that meanings and intentions are unstable, changeable, and open to distortion. I argue that this emphasis on text that does not quite formulate into tangible words (and when it does, offers a meaning which is superficial, opaque, or contradictory) signals the prevailing peril represented by the written word in this novel, its pliability, and its potential for manipulation or misuse. I punctuate my analysis with an examination of how these images are visualised on screen.

I will firstly offer a brief summary of the evolution of letters as a plot-driven device in the early novels of le Carré. Secondly, I provide a succinct plot overview of *Smiley's People*

[263] Ibid., 6.
[264] Ibid., 17.
[265] Ibid., 12.

and analyse the opening letter and its screen visualisation to introduce some of the key issues it raises. Thirdly, I examine writing as a fragile form through a detailed analysis of chalk as both a mark of respectability and symbol of transience. Finally, I explore the contrasting use of notes in two scenes to illustrate how the absence of writing can be used as a tool for manipulation and power.

Letters in le Carré

Letters function as introductory plot devices, vehicles for exposition, and articles of mystery designed to launch narratives of intrigue and propel the story into action. Whether imparting knowledge, misinformation, or deception through successful delivery, misappropriation, or accidental loss, the letter performs a formal, plot-driven role. In le Carré's first novel, *Call for the Dead* (1961), the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS, or MI6) receives an anonymous letter denouncing civil servant Samuel Fennan as a communist, prompting an investigation which leads to his apparent suicide and the eventual uncovering of an East German spy network in Britain.[266] The letter functions both as an "inciting incident" and a clue into Fennan's death. When compared with his typed suicide note, the first letter is found to be written on the same machine, but with a different strength of impression (and by implication, a different hand), thus confounding the initial conclusions of the investigation. In *A Murder of Quality* (1962), a letter is sent to a Christian magazine by subscriber Stella Rode, who writes of her fears of being murdered by her husband. Retired spy George Smiley undertakes the role of detective to investigate the letter at its source (a boys' public school). Arriving to find that Rode has

[266] John le Carré, *Call for the Dead* (London: Coronet, 1995).

indeed been murdered, he stays to solve the case in a plot that derives more from the traditional murder mystery than the spy thriller.

While the letters in these examples have a practical role in establishing and furthering the plot, they lack a wider significance in the consideration of the written word as representing and amplifying certain thematic elements of the work as a whole. In her analysis of letters in heritage film, Belén Vidal characterises this distinction as that of: "(narrative) object and (rhetorical) figure."[267] That is, the presence of letters is as much symbolic and aesthetic as it is authentic and functional. This distinction corresponds with the critical appraisal of le Carré's first two novels, *Call for the Dead* (1961) and *A Murder of Quality* (1961). While they are commended for their plotting and entertainment value, it was not until *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (1964) that le Carré received widespread critical acclaim.[268] The latter novel was adapted as a film in 1965, directed by Martin Ritt and starring Richard Burton, receiving two Academy Award nominations (for Best Actor in a Leading Role and Best Art Direction (Black and White). *Call for the Dead* and *A Murder of Quality* can be seen, then, as generic investigative thrillers that have their roots in the detective genre. The rudimentary treatment of letters in both novels – as literal objects rather than figurative modes – supports this conclusion.

The third example, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1974), offers a variation on the plot-centred function of the letter but adds a metaphorical resonance that is central to the focus of this chapter. Towards the beginning of the novel, Russian agent Irina reveals the existence (but not identity) of a senior British double-agent in a diary/letter addressed to her lover

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[267] Belén Vidal, "Labyrinths of Loss: The Letter as Figure of Desire and Deferral in the Literary Film," *Journal of European Studies* 36, no. 4 (2006): 424.
[268] Eric Homberger, *John le Carré* (London: Methuen, 1986), 41, 46.

"Thomas" (British agent Ricki Tarr). The letter in question forms a major subject of Smiley's interrogation of Tarr's interrogation by Smiley, in which their love affair and Irina's proposed defection are reported in full. As a final gesture, Irina had left the missive in a prophetic "dead-letter-drop" for him to find in the event of her disappearance (and, by implication, death). Her written testimony is the trigger for the investigation that will lead to the unmasking of a traitor at the heart of British intelligence. Irina's letter, which contains her fatalistic awareness of the likely consequences, recalls Rowland's 2013 analysis of *A Letter to Three Wives* (1949), in which she considers the effects of the letter's disembodied voice in invoking the notion of death.[269] The ironic terminology of the "dead-letter-drop" in *Tinker Tailor*, combined with Irina's physical absence, presages her probable fate. Her "gift" of testimony is, in effect, her last will and testament, and she writes knowingly as if from beyond the grave.[270] Irina's is a ghostly presence in the novel, embodying through her absence what Rowland defines as "the spatial and temporal interval opened up by letters," in which "a phantasmatic dimension is inevitably conjured."[271] In *Smiley's People*, this spectral plane invoked through letters is refined, widened, and deepened.

Smiley's People was conceived as the third part of a trilogy comprising *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1974) and *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977). The novel concludes the connecting storyline of the pursuit and eventual capture of the Russian spymaster "Karla". The plot, briefly, is as follows: Madame Ostrakova, a Russian émigré living in exile in Paris, is approached by the Soviet agent Kirov, who offers a deal for her estranged daughter Alexandra (whom she had left in Russia as an infant) to join her in France. Not fully trusting this

[269] Rowland, "Deliveries of absence: epistolary structures in classical cinema," in *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship*, ed. Judith Buchanan (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 197.
[270] John le Carré, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (London: Sceptre, 2006), 66.
[271] Rowland, "Deliveries of absence," 194.

uncharacteristically generous gesture, Ostrakova writes a letter detailing her suspicions to "The General," a fellow émigré and former Russian double-agent now living in retirement in England. The letter triggers a memory in the General, who sets in motion a train of events that will lead to his murder but also entice the former head of the British intelligence service, George Smiley, out of retirement to solve the mystery. In her communication, Ostrakova has unwittingly revealed a secret Soviet search for the cover identity of a young woman, "a legend for a girl."[272] Smiley ultimately discovers that this scheme was designed by Karla as a private enterprise to protect the identity of his daughter, who suffers from schizophrenia. Under the false name, she has been committed to an institution in Switzerland, where her safety and health can be protected. Compromised by his ideological hypocrisy and corrupt use of state funds, Karla is blackmailed by Smiley into defecting to the West.

Writing as atonement

The first instance of letter-writing that frames the narrative of *Smiley's People* (the novel) is located in the interior, enclosed space of a Parisian apartment:

> that night while the whole neighbourhood slept, Ostrakova sat at her dead husband's desk and wrote to the General with a frankness which lonely people reserve for strangers, using French rather than Russian as an aid to greater detachment.[273]

It is a distinctly private and personal setting, characterised by temporal and spatial dislocation and isolation. The layers of time, space, and language punctuate the character's experience. Flanked by the spectres of her late husband and absent child, and under the cover of darkness, Ostrakova confronts the demons of her past. It is a moment of introspection and interiority,

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[272] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 187.
[273] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 24.

with the nocturnal backdrop offering the comfort of concealment combined with a sense of conspiratorial intimacy. The time of writing has been chosen deliberately to ensure silence and solitude. Ostrakova's wakefulness is juxtaposed with the neighbours' sleep, signifying her separation from the social norm and her growing consciousness of the wider stakes at play.

This sense of distance and alienation is reinforced by Ostrakova's choice of language. In using the language of her adopted country instead of her mother tongue, Ostrakova creates an emotional buffer between herself as the writer and the content of her letter. Belén Vidal opens her study of letters in heritage film by quoting from David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country*, itself a reference to L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* (1953).[274] As well as introducing the letter as an intermediary device between the past and present, the allusion presents a notion of "the past" as having a spatial as well as a temporal dimension, which emphasises the sense of physical distance conveyed by the passage quoted above. The past is unfamiliar, incomprehensible, and unreachable. For Ostrakova, living in exile in Paris, her Soviet past is indeed a foreign country: remote and inaccessible. The letter as an object is a means of mediating between the two states, past and present, while the process of writing offers a subjective opportunity for re-writing the past from the perspective of the present. The estrangement from her daughter – a memory previously buried – is therefore expressed obliquely through the deliberate filter of a second language, which offers an additional layer of emotional protection.

The invocation of the past in the present and the resurrection of absent bodies in this scene evokes the concepts of ghosts and haunting. In writing her letter, Ostrakova is forced to confront the double phantoms of her husband and daughter. Allan Hepburn ruminates on

[274] Vidal, *Labyrinths of loss*, 418-419.

the role of ghosts in spy narratives: "For the bereft, ghosts stand as figures of obstructed mourning. More specifically, in espionage fiction, specters express the uncanny return to consciousness of false commitments, betrayals, or collaborations tainted by error."[275] For Ostrakova, the personal guilt surrounding the abandonment of her daughter – in her words, "a great sin, the greatest a mother can commit"[276] – is first resurrected by the appearance of Kirov. It is complicated by the signed pledge she made to the Soviet authorities to gather information on the émigré groups in France, an act which draws her into the official realm of espionage. As Hepburn again argues: "A ghost recalls not just a personal act of betrayal…but also a forcible integration into a conspiracy."[277] The private trauma she endures with the loss of her daughter – what she sees as a betrayal of the maternal role – is augmented by the coerced act of disloyalty to her adopted community: a double sin in the eyes of society. This ties in with what Rosie White describes as an increasing focus on the portrayal of female spies in the latter part of the twentieth century as moving into the space in both the public and private spheres of betrayal previously occupied primarily by their male counterparts.[278] Ostrakova's double transgression encompasses both family and society, decisions by which she continues to be haunted, and through which she can be exploited.

Her act of letter-writing, then, is one of confession, supplication, and atonement; an attempt to assuage the ghosts of the past. To Hepburn's ostensible double sin, however, can be added a third: marital betrayal. Despite having been dead for nearly twenty years, Ostrakova's late husband retains a proprietorial presence in this scene. Writing at "her dead husband's desk," Ostrakova implicitly positions herself as an interloper in what she perceives

[275] Hepburn, *Intrigue*, 81.
[276] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 18.
[277] Hepburn, *Intrigue*, 82.
[278] White, *Violent Femmes*, 33.

as a masculine space.[279] His memory – embedded in, and embodied by, the furniture – provides a material reminder of his past existence. She writes to another man in the company of her husband's pervading presence, a feeling of betrayal that she harnesses to deflect suspicion from her true purpose when she requests the address of her confidante:

> The old Russian smirked and asked whether it was business.
> It was not, said Ostrakova craftily, remembering the General's reputation for philandering and contrived a shy woman's smile.[280]

Disguising her missive as a love letter, she assumes the role of a lover as a shield against the truth. The pretence, however, soon begins to fuse with reality. Esther Milne explains how letters evoke a feeling of intimacy through the mechanism of confidentiality.[281] Alone in the apartment she shared with her late husband, at the dead of night, Ostrakova pours out her heart to the General in a letter of confession and appeal. The letter creates a bond of intimacy between them as the act of writing unlocks in her a sense of desire. When finished, "she stuck too many stamps on it deliberately, much as she might have lit a candle to a lover."[282] The letter becomes a receptacle and conduit for her unspoken desire, ostensibly for knowledge of her daughter, but also for her dead husband and lover, and for what she has lost. The performance of love – initially a fabricated ruse – transforms into lived reality as the letter acts as a form of release for her dormant feelings. The unburdening of secrets becomes an act of eroticism, deeply personal and vulnerable to abuse.

The opening letter, then, is characterised by the domestic setting in which it is written, the temporal and spatial dislocation of the writer, and the material reminder of the past. It serves to emphasise the prominence of interior and private space, the impact of historical

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[279] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 24.
[280] Ibid., 24.
[281] Esther Milne, "Email and Epistolary Technologies: Presence, Intimacy, Disembodiment." *Fibreculture* 2 (2003): 335.
[282] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 25.

decisions and sacrifices on the present, the continuing trauma of state surveillance, and the psychology of female desire. As well as initiating the plot of intrigue, the letter introduces notions of exile and displacement. The letter's onward trajectory follows a familiar template. The letter that goes astray is a recognisable device in fictional melodrama, alongside its narrative cousin, the "*letter that arrives too late,*" which Vidal explores in her analysis of letters on screen.[283] In *Smiley's People*, the hints concerning the less than smooth journey of Ostrakova's letter are signalled early by a French postal strike[284] and a blank refusal by the Soviet Embassy to assist: "We are not a postal service, they told her."[285] The institutions and mechanisms of communication available to Ostrakova are characterised by obstruction, disruption, and denial.

The 1982 television adaptation of *Smiley's People* centres on Ostrakova's letter as a connecting narrative thread. The focus here, however, shifts from the writer to the reader as the camera follows the manner of the letter's conveyance and receipt instead of the physical and emotional act of writing. The novel's detailed description of Ostrakova's psychological state in the Paris apartment is replaced by a direct cut to the letter's arrival in London. This is perhaps partly to do with the difficulties of portraying the interiority of thought and the ostensible passivity of writing on screen. In her introduction to the edited volume on *The Writer on Film*, Judith Buchanan encapsulates the challenges faced by film-makers in dramatizing unmediated scenes of writing: "acts of literary composition viewed purely from the perspective of an observing and non-intrusive camera would be hard pressed to yield

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[283] Belén Vidal, *Figuring the Past: Period Film and the Mannerist Aesthetic* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 164.
[284] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 25.
[285] Ibid., 21.

momentum, trajectory and visual drama."[286] In other words, writing is not an activity that invites spectatorship. But Buchanan makes the point that the camera is rarely (if ever) a neutral observer. Instead, it generates a space for nuance, ambiguity, and subjective interpretation.

The popularity of fictional works depicting writers on screen, together with an increasing body of scholarly studies addressing this experience, indicate that there is popular and critical interest in examining the processes of literary and textual creation.[287] Letters in particular are objects of fascination as material expressions of (for example) love, anguish, truth, or denunciation. The cinematic and (in this case) televisual media offer ways of illuminating and interrogating the figures, spaces, practices, and instruments of writing. The explanation for ignoring Ostrakova's night-time letter as a passive, introspective, and essentially *uninteresting* action does not then stand up to scrutiny, especially since (as I shall later explore) Smiley's equivalent letter in the final episode is given detailed, extended, and even reverent screentime. The television adaptation, far from retreating from scenes of writing and reading, instead foregrounds these acts as objects of observation, spectatorship, and surveillance. In doing so, the production implicitly emphasises and venerates the role of authorship and the author's intimate connection to the words and materials as expressions of identity, love, and revenge.

Given this focus, I argue that the decision in the television adaptation to dwell on Ostrakova's letter as an object, rather than an act, of desire is a functional one to emphasise the genre of the investigative thriller. It offers a way for the audience to make connections

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[286] Judith Buchanan, "Introduction: Image, story, desire: the writer on film," in *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship*, ed. Judith Buchanan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 3.
[287] See also Shachar, *Screening the Author*.

between unfamiliar, geographically distant, and ultimately peripheral characters. The framing of the scenes denoting the letter's arrival creates a sense of pervasive surveillance and paranoia, which establishes the tone for the opening murder. In the selected stills below, I shall demonstrate how these visual codes are played out. The sequence introduces General Vladimir (hereafter Vladimir) via a long shot on location in central London (indicated by a sign for the British Museum) with two red pillar boxes positioned prominently in frame (Figure 27). Through this simple visual motif, an implicit connection is made between Ostrakova's letter and Vladimir as its intended recipient. In an interview with theatre critic Michael Billington towards the end of the production shoot in December 1981, producer Jonathan Powell explains how le Carré's contribution to the screenplay influenced the structure of the opening episode:

> Where le Carré helped was in building up a logical sequence of events so that you follow the progress of the letter the Russian woman in Paris sends to Vladimir in London. The audience now sees Vladimir before Smiley does and that letter becomes the peg for the first episode.[288]

The letter, then, acts as a hook for the audience, facilitating the transfer of attention from one unknown character to another. There is an element of gendered erasure in the decision to replace Ostrakova's writing of the letter with Vladimir's receipt of it (which is only described in flashback later in the novel), an issue unconsciously articulated in Powell's interview anonymising her as "the Russian woman" while referring to "Vladimir" on first name terms. It is clear from this exchange that the filmmakers are interested primarily in the onward trajectory of the letter and its plot function rather than in terms of its personal and psychological resonance. The shift away from the female writer to the male reader, reduces (although doesn't fully erase) the representation of the older woman as a sexual being. Eileen

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[288] Michael Billington, "Alec Guinness Does a Second Tour of Duty as Le Carré's Spy," *The New York Times*, Dec 20, 1981: 2, 29. https://www.nytimes.com/1981/12/20/movies/alec-guinness-does-a-second-tour-of-duty-as-lecarre-s-spy.html.

Atkins' Ostrakova has an intelligent, watchful presence that is not without humour, but her concerns in Langton's BBC adaptation are mostly maternal. The screen suppresses the desire that was a fundamental part of her characterisation in the novel.

Figure 27: Pillar box[289]

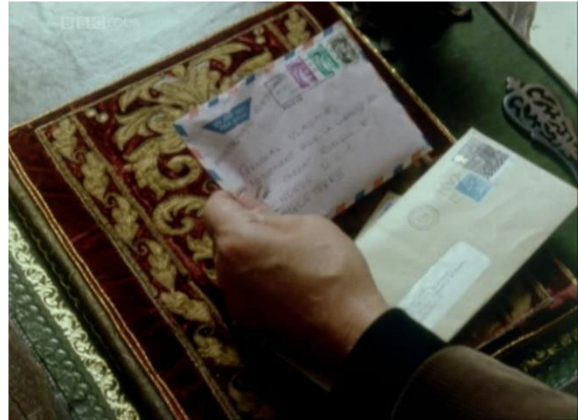

Figure 28: Post delivery[290]

Figure 29: A love letter?[291]

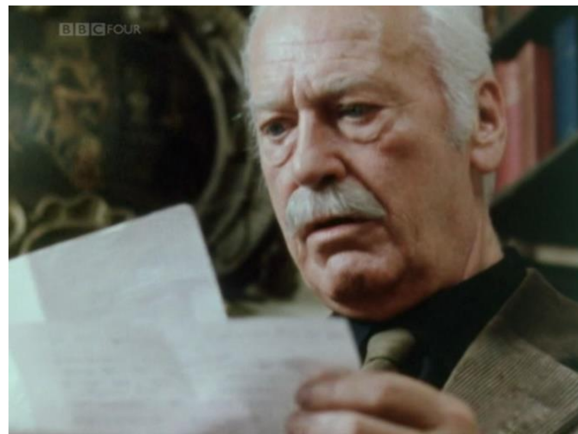

Figure 30: Realisation[292]

Moreover, from a commercial standpoint, the casting of Curt Jürgens as Vladimir offered audiences a recognisable figure from the 1977 Bond film *The Spy Who Loved Me,* in which he had played the villainous Stromberg. One of the more successful Bond films

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[289] *Smiley's People*, directed by Simon Langton (BBC, 1983), TV: https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/0063F055?bcast=27677673.
[290] Ibid.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Ibid.

(according to James Chapman grossing an estimated $186 million worldwide), *The Spy Who Loved Me* was something of a resurgence for the series.[293] Chapman argues that, in many ways, it is the quintessential Bond film, "a compendium of the narrative formulae and conventions of the entire series."[294] Along with its immediate successor *Moonraker* (1979), it re-set the blueprint to one of ever-expanding spectacle and audacity. It is this genre of spy film, then, that the casting of Jürgens in *Smiley's People* both recalls and recoils from. The echoes of the Bond supervillain set up the story's overarching cat-and-mouse game between Smiley and his Soviet counterpart, Karla.[295] Vladimir's promenade through a recognisable London landscape evokes the genre convention of using the city as a representation of the nation, and, more specifically, as shorthand for the British secret service. Sam Goodman encapsulates this trend in his examination of the post-war city: "the city acts as a metonymic signifier of sovereign authority, embodying the governmental and ideological values of the nation in a seemingly singular yet imagined form."[296] The letter's arrival in London, then, is not just a means of furthering the plot and introducing a new character, it is also a way of placing the production in the context of its genre heritage. The red pillar-box is an item of street furniture that Charlotte Brunsdon groups together with traditional red phone booth and the red Routemaster bus as a stylish aesthetic designed to evoke a specific sense of place[297] Audiences familiar with this convention would anticipate a mission brief, a scene which does indeed appear towards the end of the first episode. Through judicious casting and

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[293] James Chapman, *Licence to Kill: A Cultural History of the James Bond Films* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2000), 178.
[294] Ibid., 183.
[295] The appearance of Michael Lonsdale - fellow Bond supervillain Hugo Drax from *Moonraker* (1979) - as Counsellor Grigoriev in Episode 6 of *Smiley's People* reinforces the genre intertexts.
[296] Goodman, *British Spy Fiction and the End of Empire*, 47.
[297] Charlotte Brunsdon, *London in Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 2007), 39.

location filming, the scene draws on the use of London as a code for the British intelligence services, a tried and tested trope for the spy film genre.

It is also evident, of course, that *Smiley's People* follows the more realist tradition of the spy genre as opposed to the Bondian trend for romance and extravagance. Vladimir's base of operations is no grand lair, but "a little library next door to the British museum."[298] This unobtrusive building is an example of Brunsdon's concept of a "lived, material, everyday city […] an inhabited London between the landmarks."[299] These characters exist in the peripheral, liminal spaces of the city, unobtrusive and unnoticed. Vladimir is shown in Figure 27 walking his small dog in the grey, autumnal streets, dressed for warmth. The camera is positioned behind a tree and possibly across the street, giving the shot an impression of voyeurism and surveillance. He is next seen climbing the stairs to his small shared office, exchanging a look of intimacy with his colleague's wife, before sitting down to read the post (Figure 28). Ignoring the official-looking business letter, his attention is immediately drawn to the handwritten envelope *par avion*, with its "too many stamps" as if from a lover.[300] In an intimate and unusual gesture, he holds the envelope to his nose and inhales, as if to detect the scent of the sender (Figure 29). This medium shot has a threefold purpose. First, in the absence of Ostrakova's scene of writing in Paris, it offers a hint of her effort to disguise the message as a love letter, perhaps through the traditional spraying of perfume. It carries an impression of her embodied self and creates an immediate bond of intimacy with the recipient through generating a physical reaction. Secondly, it enables Vladimir to participate in this small deception for the benefit of the watching audience within the office, who are

[298] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 260.
[299] Brunsdon, *London in Cinema*, 41.
[300] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 28.

attending closely to his movements. By treating the letter as a piece of romantic correspondence, he deflects their focus away from its potential significance. Thirdly, the television audience can surmise that he is metaphorically picking up the scent of the chase. Figure 30 shows Vladimir's reaction in close-up – intense concentration, mouth half-open – as he realises the significance of what he is reading.

The desire for the author, Buchanan reminds us, pushes back against Roland Barthes' treatise that meaning should be sought through the reader's interpretation of the work. She argues that, "[i]n making sense of the work, readers crave, and seek, origins."[301] This desire inspires a fascination with uncovering the author's identity and motivations. This is especially true in matters of intelligence, where provenance and authenticity are major considerations when analysing written material. The status of the author assumes primary importance in determining the legitimacy of the product. By placing the emphasis on Ostrakova's letter, both the novel and television adaptation of *Smiley's People* position the theoretical search for the author within the diegetic narrative. Ostrakova's stubborn defence of her life enables her eventual discovery and rescue by Smiley in a scene that actively eschews the death of the author and reasserts the authority of the authorial voice.

The space in which the letter is read is also significant. Appropriately for a group of former spies, the building is inconspicuous and overlooked: "The Free Baltic Library was on the third floor over a dusty antiquarian bookshop that specialised in the Spirit. Its little windows squinted into a forecourt of the British Museum."[302] The library is a place of anonymity and reclusion, occupied by elderly exiles whose political efficacy has waned to the

[301] Buchanan, "Introduction: Image, Story, Desire, 18.
[302] Le Carré, *Smiley's People,* 127.

point of obsolescence. Like the library's inhabitants, the equipment (restricted to a "liquid copier") is functional, but antique, "like an old steam engine".[303] However, the space remains an institution of learning and a repository for knowledge, letters, and text. It is flanked by the bookshop and the British Museum, which are also hubs of knowledge, literary archives, and cultural exhibition. Vladimir receives and reads the letter in this interpretive space, gleaning the information presented by Ostrakova with a backdrop of books, papers, and typewriters. Writer and reader combine via letter to co-produce meaning in this interpretative, literary space. In a later visit to their offices within the library, Smiley notes that Vladimir's colleague Mikhel has "several discarded copies of *Sporting Life*", a publication which hints at his issue with gambling and the resultant potential for blackmail or bribery.[304] The publication indicates a tawdry, morally dubious pursuit which raises (valid) questions around Mikhel's character and disrupts the literary integrity of the office. The letter's arrival disguised as a missive of love reinvigorates the office as an active bureau of spycraft, initiating the painstaking copying process as the ancient machine cranks into gear, while the scattered copies of *Sporting Life* indicate a lowlier motive for betrayal.

Transient writing

Chalk is a recurring material in both the novel and television adaptation of *Smiley's People.* Used by Vladimir and his group as their chosen method of communication, a single line drawn in a designated (often public) place signals safe passage. The physical properties of the chalk suit a rapid, makeshift contact or exchange. The mark it leaves offers a clear and recognisable

[303] Le Carré, *Smiley's People,* 260, 133.
[304] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 129.

message to its intended recipient but is in itself unobtrusive and impermanent. It is easily ignored, smudged, or erased. The simplicity and transience of the material are qualities that create a valuable tool with which to transmit basic codes. It is also an instrument of instruction and guidance, with connotations of childhood and, specifically, childhood authority. In Gallafent's example from *Letter From an Unknown Woman*, chalk is first seen on a blackboard in a hospital ward to signal childbirth and parental identity.[305] Its use in marking the start of life is authoritative and institutional, presenting information which is factual and unembellished, but with a subtext of emotional pain and loss (the blank space next to "Father" speaking volumes). Contrast this with another famous literary chalk mark, this time marking the end of life in Thomas Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Fanny Robin has died in childbirth, and her pauper's coffin is labelled with a simple chalk inscription: "*Fanny Robin and child*."[306] Desirous to prevent the existence of the child (and reason for her death) becoming public knowledge, Gabriel Oak rubs away the final two words of the hastily written dedication. The infant's life has effectively been wiped out for a second time. The chalk, used in these examples as a marker of birth, parentage, and death, hints at the fragility and ephemerality of life, together with the emotional consequences of absence and denial.

In *Smiley's People,* the first instance of the chalk motif occurs when lorry driver and Estonian émigré Villem is inveigled by Vladimir into acting as courier for a vital document in Hamburg. Setting up the scene for the transaction and after waiting for a designated time, he returns as commanded for his prize: "On the bench, next to the basket, he saw the yellow chalk mark he was looking for, running over two slats, bright as a canary, telling him that the

[305] Gallafent, *Letters and Literacy in Hollywood Film*, 13-14.
[306] Thomas Hardy, *Far From the Madding Crowd* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 1993), 303.

handover had taken place successfully."[307] Inexperienced in clandestine operations, Villem is reassured by the clear message he receives: the exchange has been straightforward and effectual. The precautions put in place appear to have worked and he retreats from the scene satisfied with his achievement and with the document in hand.

This image of the yellow chalk mark, and the successful resolution of its deployment, is recalled and reversed in the following chapter, in which a piece of yellow chalk is discovered in the pocket of a man (Vladimir) found murdered on Hampstead Heath: "The next bag contained a stick of school chalk, yellow and miraculously unbroken. The narrow end was smeared brown as if by a single stroke, but the thick end was unused."[308] Chalk powder is also found on the dead man's hand. On the one hand, it conveys an aura of respectability: "We did wonder whether he might be in the teaching line."[309] For the reader (as for Smiley), the clear implication is that he used the chalk to communicate the safety signal (as introduced in the previous chapter), but the message it contained: "*I see no danger and am proceeding as instructed to the agreed rendezvous*" (original italics) was premature and his confidence fatally misplaced.[310] His dead body on the Heath reveals the code's necessity at the same time as it demonstrates its fallibility. The stakes are suddenly raised by this unexplained and lethal breakdown in communication. The man's final message, we later learn, was "a wavering yellow worm…scrawled all down the post. Perhaps the old man was worried about rain, thought Smiley. Perhaps he was afraid it could wash his mark away. Or perhaps in his emotional state he leaned too heavily on the chalk."[311] The man, in essence, has imprinted himself on the post, leaving a forceful impression that endures beyond his death. The chalk

[307] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 36.
[308] Ibid., 43.
[309] Ibid., 44.
[310] Ibid., 97.
[311] Ibid., 97.

powder, itself an elemental substance drawn from the ground, marks the last remains of his corporeal presence. It is the final expression of his spirit and purpose, now exposed to the elements to weather away. In this way, the mark can be read as representing the force and vitality of life, as well as its transience and insubstantiality). The residual powder evokes the words of the traditional Christian funeral service – dust to dust – as it commemorates Vladimir's final gesture and points towards his continuing legacy: the hidden message he has left Smiley to discover.

The opening credits sequence which introduces all six episodes of the BBC television series of *Smiley's People* uses chalk marks as its core visual motif. The creative decision to place this writing implement at the forefront of the series emphasises the centrality of the symbol to the theme of the story. In *Smiley's People*, the chalk acts as a visual metaphor both in tracing the (seemingly disconnected) lines of enquiry and through emphasising the central import of the written motif in the series. Mixing a haunting soundtrack of minor piano chords with esoteric chalk trails across nondescript and dilapidated locations, the sequence is cryptic and indistinct. The visuals offer close-ups of structures which are barely recognisable but decidedly down-at-heel. The chalk is graffitied surreptitiously and randomly on apparently public spaces: a faded bench (Figure 31), under the peeling paint of a wooden shed (Figure 32) and is seen finally lying broken in front of what may be a rusted boat (Figure 33), before exploding into dust (Figure 34). Not only does this sequence foreground the chalk as a writing motif and hint at a certain indecipherability of plot, but it also offers a marked contrast from its screen predecessor *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979) in its focus on disused spaces, reflecting its concern with the lower social strata.

Unlike *Tinker Tailor*'s preoccupation with the privileged environs of the British establishment (signalled most clearly with the image of the Radcliffe Camera in Oxford over the closing credits), *Smiley's People* is concerned with the foot-soldiers: lorry drivers, motor-cycle couriers, factory-workers and travellers.[312] These are the forgotten proponents and

Figure 31: Faded bench.[313]

Figure 32: Peeling paint.[314]

Figure 33: Broken chalk.[315]

Figure 34: Explosion.[316]

[312] Joseph Oldham makes a similar observation in identifying the settings of *Tinker Tailor* as "overwhelmingly composed of elite spaces including a prep school, a gentleman's club, an Ascot country house, the lanes of Oxford, and the institutions of Whitehall." Joseph Oldham, "'Don't let the side down, old boy': interrogating the traitor in the 'radical' television dramas of John le Carré and Dennis Potter," *Cold War History* (2019): 11. DOI: 10.1080/14682745.2019.1638366.

[313] *Smiley's People,* TV.

[314] Ibid.

[315] Ibid.

[316] Ibid.

victims of international espionage, unremarked upon and hidden in plain sight like chalk graffiti on a rotten park bench, destined to fade into obscurity.

Absent writing

There are two main instances of notetaking in *Smiley's People.* As with the letters, they are positioned respectively towards the beginning and end of the novel, which offers a mirroring effect and thus invites comparison. The first occurs when Ostrakova is accosted by the Russian agent Kirov in Paris. He takes her to a local café and proceeds to state his purpose in an encounter that mixes interrogation with exposition: "He had produced a notebook. In Moscow it would have been her file but here in a Paris café it was a sleek black leatherbound notebook, something that in Moscow even an official would count himself lucky to possess."[317] For Ostrakova, who is sorely familiar with this process, and through whose eyes we are surveying the scene, the notebook is incongruous. It does not fit with who she perceives this man to be, and what he represents. It points to a status and, more importantly, to an individualism that is alien to her experience of Soviet officialdom. In a café populated by "the usual trio of prostitutes" and staffed by "a sullen young waiter in a soiled shirt who led them to a table in a corner that was reserved with a grimy Campari sign," an aesthetically ostentatious – and presumably expensive – notebook is perhaps not the best choice for a secret agent wishing to remain incognito.[318] The examination continues: "The stranger pushed aside his empty plate and once more took the sleek French notebook in both hands. He turned a page, as if approaching a new chapter."[319] Both the style and the size of the

[317] le Carré, *Smiley's People,* 13.
[318] Ibid., 11.
[319] Ibid., 17.

notebook are inappropriate to the setting, with Kirov relying on the written word to aid his interrogation instead of recalling the facts from memory. These niggles contribute to Ostrakova's sense of unease (notwithstanding the trauma of remembering similar interrogations in the past) that leads her to question the veracity of the story she has been told. Desperate to share and allay her fears, she composes her letter to The General.

Contrast this scene with Smiley's later interrogation of the Soviet diplomat Grigoriev. Counsellor Grigoriev of the Soviet Embassy in Bern has been caught in a sting operation conducted by Smiley's people. He has been photographed drawing money under a false name from a Swiss bank account, an action likely to result in his expulsion from the country in disgrace. More importantly, it has been established that he has used this money to pay the fees of a young woman incarcerated in a private health institution. The reader now understands this young woman to be Karla's daughter, suffering from a serious mental illness, and secreted away under the cover name of Alexandra Ostrakova. Karla's operation to "find a legend for a girl," which included the siphoning of large amounts of Soviet funds, has been conducted entirely for personal motives. In an act of hypocrisy counter to his fundamental ideology, he has taken advantage of the superior health facilities of the West after a lifetime of service to the Soviet cause. Acting in this way has forced him to choose personnel outside of the usual sphere of competence, at considerable risk to himself. Grigoriev, like Kirov before him, was recruited precisely because of his amateurism and artlessness: "Karla couldn't trust his own chaps, that's your point. He had to go out in the sticks and recruit an irregular…A clod."[320] The equivalence between the two envoys is underlined by Smiley's observation of Grigoriev when they meet in Switzerland: "Smiley remembered Kirov…He looked at Grigoriev

[320] le Carré, *Smiley's People,* 283.

and read the same incurable mediocrity in everything he saw."[321] This innate lack of professionalism is exemplified through the contrasting portrayals of note-taking in these respective scenes of interrogation.

Seized with relative ease by the group of British agents in Switzerland, Grigoriev faces his inquisitor: "Smiley, with an air of official regret, opened a notebook on his lap, much as Kirov might have done."[322] Superficially, his actions echo those in the earlier scene, although conducting the interview in private quarters rather than in the public space of the Parisian café gives a hint as to the disparity. As the interview continues, "Smiley sighed once more and primly turned to another page of his notebook."[323] His persona, which consists of a "glum tone of official necessity," is one of considered and practised performance.[324] He is the essence of the diligent bureaucrat, meticulously taking notes throughout the interrogation. His manner is persuasive and compelling, guiding and cajoling his unwilling interviewee towards the desired objective. Indeed, the guise he adopts is carefully chosen to provoke a reaction: "he held his pen ready, and in such a way…that a man like Grigoriev would feel positively obliged to give him something to write down."[325] The approach is designed to encourage cooperation and extract information. However, the text makes it clear that his act of writing is just that: a performance: "His eyes as he wrote were almost closed, but he wrote all the time – though God knows *what* he wrote…for George would never have dreamed of consigning anything of even passing confidentiality to a notepad."[326] Of the notebook itself, "the pages were ruled but otherwise blank."[327] Smiley's note-taking then, is characterised by

[321] Ibid., 345.
[322] Ibid., 346.
[323] le Carré, *Smiley's People,* 348.
[324] Ibid., 347.
[325] Ibid., 350.
[326] Ibid., 362.
[327] Ibid., 348.

its absence. Unlike Kirov, his notebook is empty, and all records are committed to memory. The illusion of writing is revealed by the non-existence of the words on the page, a contradiction that both emphasises the dangers contained therein, and also points to the function of writing as an instrument of deception.

The focus on Smiley's notetaking is dramatized effectively in a scene in the final episode of the BBC television adaptation produced in 1982, directed by Simon Langton (Figures 35-38). Seated at an executive desk on an elaborately decorated chair, the unsmiling Smiley (Alec Guinness) exudes officialdom.[328] He takes great pains to achieve accuracy and precision by consulting his notes (Figure 35), recording the facts and dates (Figure 36), and ensuring that the proceedings are documented in full. As is shown in the following images, his attention is focused wholly on his notes, rather than on the subject of his interrogation. He even pauses the interview briefly with a curt "Wait, please," to give himself time to turn the page of his notepad (Figure 37), ostensibly so as not to miss a word of Grigoriev's testimony. It is not until the end of the interview that his notebook is revealed to be blank (Figure 38), cleverly illuminating his manipulation of the written word as a means of subterfuge throughout the course of the scene. The pretence has both contributed to – and offered a distraction from – Smiley's true intentions: to create an atmosphere that will facilitate confession. In a final subtle reference to the Kirov interview with his plush leather notebook, the television production shows Smiley's modest choice of material as a basic spiral notepad; much more fitting for a spy exercising discretion both in his words and actions. Even in the private and controlled space of the interrogation room, nothing is left to chance.

[328] In a further still, he is shown flanked by a harp and a stack of music stands, an appropriate metaphor for his position as conductor and orchestrator of Grigoriev's confession.

It is worth pausing here to note the difference in perspective offered by the novel and television adaptation. The novel foregrounds Smiley's deception early on, and indeed the scene plays out with the benefits and accretions of hindsight. The narration recalls the events from a retrospective and analytical standpoint, reporting on the techniques of interrogation

Figure 35: Consulting his notes[329]

Figure 36: Recording facts[330]

Figure 37: Turning the page[331]

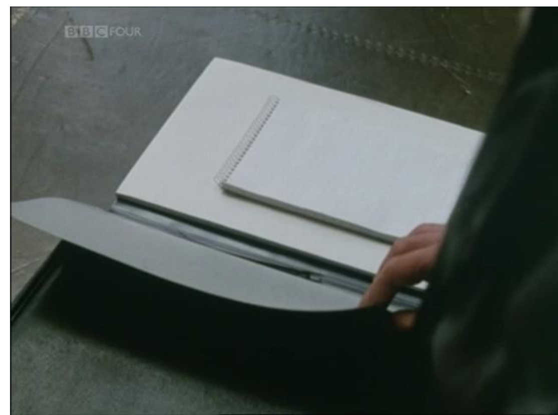

Figure 38: The empty notepad[332]

with a tone of admiration. The operation "became known in Circus mythology" as a particularly successful example of achieving their objective with minimal fallout.[333] Through

[329] *Smiley's People*, TV.
[330] Ibid.
[331] Ibid.
[332] Ibid.
[333] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 337.

tape recordings and transcripts, the scene is embedded within the institutional memory of MI6. In contrast, the adaptation, set very much in the present, delays the moment of revelation until the end of the scene. This aligns the audience's perspective with Grigoriev and changes their experience of the scene to that of participant rather than observer. Smiley's notetaking is wholly convincing, which makes the moment of discovery even more satisfying for its sophisticated deception.

Conclusion

If, as I have argued, Ostrakova's letter-writing is a gesture of atonement designed to make peace with the ghosts of her past, the letter that closes the novel conjures ghosts of a different kind. Written by Smiley in the neutral "safe house" of a Swiss hotel room, the letter is addressed to his nemesis Karla, nicknamed "The Sandman". The reference to Freud's uncanny is unmistakeable.[334] The disembodied Karla has haunted Smiley throughout his career: a ghostly double whose identity is ethereal, unreachable, yet strangely familiar. Connie Sachs, the retired Head of Research at the Circus, explains the reference to Smiley:

> 'It was his joke. A German fairy tale Vladi picked up in Estonia from one of his Kraut forebears. "Karla is our Sandman. Anyone who comes too close to him has a habit of falling asleep." […] Twin cities, we used to say you were, you and Karla, two halves of the same apple.'[335]

The childhood nightmare is a corruption of innocence and a reminder of mortality, recalling the European setting, childhood friendship, and doppelganger trope of *The Third Man*. For Smiley, it is also a recognition that the foe is uncomfortably close to home. His obsession with Karla represents a way of simultaneously confronting and denying issues of his own morality:

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[334] Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *Literary Theory: An Anthology* ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 163.
[335] Le Carré, *Smiley's People*, 220.

> The label on the handle read 'Memorabilia'. Lifting the lid, Smiley saw a heap of old buff files bound together with green string. Gently, he untied and lifted the cover of the first volume to reveal Karla's misted photograph staring up at him like a corpse from the darkness of its own coffin. He read all night, he hardly stirred. He read as far into his own past as into Karla's, and sometimes it seemed to him that the one life was merely the complement to the other; that they were causes of the same incurable malady.[336]

Karla's face is a mirror image of his own, a symbol of the undead. The file is incorporeal but animated: haunting, all-seeing, and damning of Smiley's past. It is no accident that the Sandman story is recalled by Connie Sachs, characterised by D'Arcy as the gendered "personification of the archive", from her mind's unwritten repository.[337] The systems of information retention are actualised in physical form. The files do indeed grow arms and legs and develop minds of their own, but they have to be recaptured and subsumed or, in Connie's case, fired and exiled.

Smiley's final letter to Karla is an act of resurrection and revenge, but also of self-condemnation. By conjuring the phantom into being, Smiley must face the physical proof of his own culpability, ironically through the vehicle of a Berlin mail van.[338] The deal is signed, sealed, and delivered by a facsimile of the national postal system. It is an apposite and satisfying conclusion to a novel (and adaptation) concerned centrally with the mechanisms of letter-writing and postal deliveries. Stolen letters, torn postcards, and fragmentary chalk marks populate a narrative of disrupted communication that represents the disconnection and displacement of marginalised society in the UK in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Within this context, the letter is a means of confession and penance, disguised as a missive of love. It is simultaneously heartfelt and misleading, written by an author marked by distrust, but desirous of human connection, with valuable information to share. In the next chapter, I

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[336] Le Carré, *Smiley's People,* 299.
[337] Geraint D'Arcy, "'Essentially, Another Man's Woman," 285.
[338] Ibid., 392.

extend my analysis of the confessional mode to the spy memoir, in which the data is commodified, digitised, and ultimately, devalued.

Chapter Three

Tools of Confession: Heritage, Legacy, and Memoir in *Hopscotch* (1980) and *Burn After Reading* (2008)

The spy memoir, Timothy Melley argues, is one of three ways in which ostensibly secret information is disclosed to the public. Revelatory memoirs of retired and/or disenchanted agents are a means of exposing, justifying, contesting, or critiquing the workings of the secret state. Historian Christopher Moran concurs that spy memoirs perform a "latent function" in shaping perceptions of the otherwise clandestine world of state intelligence. Public fascination with real-life spies and their covert exploits ensures that the genre enjoys a healthy and steady readership. However, these publications are frequently interlaced with personal and political agendas, official censorship and redactions, temporal delays, and devalued insights. When information becomes a commodity, public interest is often conditional and time limited. Moreover, if we embrace Susanna Egan's assertion that "autobiography is pre-eminently a truth-telling genre", this creates a disjuncture when the subject is defined by simulated identity and a professional capacity for disinformation. When the "truth" is promoted by writers trained in the art of deception, the result is heavily mediated and deeply suspect. Finally, an aptitude for gathering, keeping, and trading information does not necessarily provide sufficient training for effective and entertaining dissemination. The compulsion to divulge secrets may lead to exaggeration and embellishment on the one hand, or a painstaking breakdown of technical routines and coding rules on the other. Spies are not necessarily talented, or reliable, writers. These complexities produce the conditions for comedy and parody.

The autobiography is embedded within the historical context (and restrictions) of its creation and dissemination. Leigh Gilmore argues autobiography and its surrounding discourses "profoundly concerns representations of citizenship and the nation."[339] In other words, the genre creates a personal narrative amidst a national context, conferring voice, agency, and significance to individuals hitherto anonymous and silent. For the writer/spy, there is also the allure of personal gain and public acknowledgment after undertaking covert work in the service of the state, a role which is not known for providing monetary or celebratory rewards. There is a temptation, then, for personal glorification, which creates an impetus for manipulating and even fictionalising the truth. Writing about 19th century diarists, Rebecca Steinitz considers diaries as "cultural and discursive practice", which enables her to analyse how "authors of fictional diaries worked or reworked the conventions of actual diaries."[340] I adopt this framing to explore how the relationship between the fictional spy memoir and its Cold War counterpart sets the historical, political, and cultural context for this chapter.

The spy memoir falls under the category of "hostile" individual actions, such as investigative journalism, academic inquiry, and whistle-blower exposés that Melley identifies as one of three ways that secret state information reaches the public arena. [341] Revelatory memoirs of retired and/or disenchanted agents are a means of disclosing, justifying,

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[339] Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), 12.

[340] Rebecca Steinitz, *Time, Space and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 4-5.

[341] Melley's second means of revealing information is through strategic misdirection by state institutions: the judicious release of selected (and operationally inconsequential) information designed to assuage curiosity or divert attention away from weightier matter. This is a transactional and tacit relationship driven by public relations methodologies, which sees intelligence agencies offering official cooperation with the press, media, and film industries in exchange for circumspection in other - potentially more delicate - areas. The third way in which Melley argues the public gains knowledge of the covert sphere is through fiction and popular culture, which reflects and shapes understanding of intelligence, espionage, and state secrecy.
Melley, *The Covert Sphere*, 8.

contesting, or critiquing the workings of the secret state. Christopher Moran argues that for much of its institutional life, the CIA has returned this hostility with interest.[342] Revealing professional secrets was judged to be a seditious, treacherous act. Moran charts how perpetrators were subject to legal restrictions, subject censorship and, in extreme cases, targeted personal vendettas in what he terms a "blood sport".[343] This approach, Moran argues, evolves over time into an institutional recognition of the potential value of strategic revelations.[344] Reflecting this change, former CIA agent John Hollister Hedley is unusually positive about the impact that this type of endeavour can have on public perceptions of the espionage world: "Memoirs can help clear the air. They can illuminate and inform. They can correct misconceptions. They can contribute expert opinions on current issues."[345] Memoirs can be sanctioned - even begrudgingly - by the authorities (see, for example, the memoirs of former MI5 Director General Stella Rimington),[346] unauthorised and thereby subject to extended legal challenges (such as those faced by the former MI5 Assistant Director Peter Wright),[347] or openly hostile (like the entertaining but ultimately self-serving autobiography of Soviet double agent Kim Philby).[348]

Philip Lejeune defines autobiography as "the retrospective story of a life […] the purpose [of which] is to transmit a memory, a worldview, an experience," or, in essence, "the

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[342] Christopher Moran, *Company Confessions: Revealing CIA Secrets* (London: Biteback, 2015), 12-13.
[343] Ibid., 15.
[344] Ibid., 19.
[345] John Hollister Hedley, "Three Memoirs from Former CIA Officers: Intelligence in Recent Public Literature," *Studies in Intelligence* 49, no.3 (2007). https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol49no3/html_files/Three_Memoirs_10.htm. Accessed Feb 15, 2020.
[346] Stella Rimington, *Open Secret: The Autobiography of the Former Director-General of MI5* (London: Arrow Books, 2002).
[347] Peter Wright, *Spycatcher: The Candid Autobiography of a Senior Intelligence Officer* (London: Viking, 1987).
[348] Kim Philby, *My Silent War: The Autobiography of a Spy* (New York: Modern Library, 2002).

written expression of the self."[349] Applying this frame to lives which are defined by simulated identities and trained deceptions offers an intriguing puzzle to be untangled. If, as Susanna Egan asserts, "autobiography is pre-eminently a truth-telling genre", then this creates a fundamental disjuncture when the subject is defined by their capacity for disinformation.[350] Christopher Moran puts it succinctly:

> concerns about factual contamination and mendacity are increased in the case of spy memoirs. Why, after all, should anyone believe a word of what a spy has to say? They are trained to lie, deceive, and dissemble; that is their business.[351]

From an historian's perspective, spies cannot be trusted to tell the truth of their own lives. As Gordon Corera puts it, "All memories are faulty and spies, in particular, are trained to deceive."[352] They are the ultimate unreliable narrators, necessitating corroborating documentary evidence to verify their subjective accounts. The autobiographical contract, the promise of the "authentic self," is undermined by the professional practice of duplicity, imposture, and betrayal. Fundamentally, the spy-turned-writer inhabits a paradoxical state. The pursuit of truth is in direct conflict with the spy's propensity for deception, the urge to confess counters the professional need for concealment, while the desire for recognition goes against the spy's central tenet of anonymity. To illuminate the life of a spy therefore requires a rejection of its basic principles. This contradictory dilemma establishes the conditions for parody as these films about the spy memoir draw attention to the farcical nature of the truth-telling liar. *Hopscotch* tells the story of what happens when the individual pursuit of truth clashes with the institutional need for secrecy, while *Burn After Reading* asks the question of

[349] Philip Lejeune, "Autobiography and New Communication Tools," transl. by Katherine Durnin in *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online* ed. Anna Poletti and Julie Rak (London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), 247.
[350] Susanna Egan, *Burdens of Proof: Faith, Doubt, and Identity in Autobiography* (Ontario: Wilfrid Lauvier University Press, 2011), 3.
[351] Moran, *Company Confessions*, 11.
[352] Gordon Corera, *MI6: Life and Death in the British Secret Service* (London: Phoenix, 2012), 2.

what happens when that truth is fundamentally inconsequential and yet still (inconceivably) desirable.

This chapter will analyse two cinematic case studies that present fictional portrayals of the spy memoir from within and beyond the Cold War. *Hopscotch* (directed by Ronald Neame, 1980) adopts and parodies the generic codes of 1970s conspiracy films, while *Burn After Reading* (directed by Joel & Ethan Coen, 2008) treads similar generic territory updated to the post-9/11 political context, continuing the Coen brothers' interest in the reimagining of classic Hollywood cinema. I chart how each film draws on its respective cultural and historical intertexts to re-write the recent past through comedy. Focusing on the contrasting iconography of the typewriter and the CD as the tools of textual production and dissemination, I show how the films invoke what Eva Horn identifies as a link between intelligence gathering and textual processing in 1970s conspiracy thrillers.[353] In doing so, I draw on Matthew Kirschenbaum's view that "our instruments of composition, be they a Remington or a Macintosh, all serve to focalize and amplify our imagination of what writing is."[354] The typewriter and the word processor – two contrasting material objects – reveal both the writer's relationship with their subject, and also the increasingly tenuous mechanisms through which information is stored and retrieved. I show how these connections play with the proliferation of surveillance, the infiltration of information systems into social affairs, and the shifting relationship between the individual and the state.

Produced in, respectively, 1980 and 2008, the films span a period of nearly thirty years, providing an opportunity to explore the changing nature of conspiracy and surveillance in the

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[353] Horn, *The Secret War*, 236.
[354] Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016), 23.

comedy spy film from both within and beyond the Cold War. Narratively, both films focus on the varying fortunes of disenchanted CIA officers/analysts who resign from the agency and decide to write their memoirs. Feeling slighted by the incumbent regime, both protagonists seek revenge for their treatment by exposing the corruption endemic in the system. The films share a concern with the preoccupations, spaces, and instruments of writing, drawing upon and ultimately parodying the trope of the spy-turned-writer in espionage fiction. The memoirs, and the scenes of writing, become a convenient focal point, raising questions about the role of plotting and the narrative urge to rewrite (and retrospectively re-right) the sins of the past.

Generically, both films are comedies. They offer a parody of contemporary spy thrillers, turning conspiracies to capers in response to their respective film cycles of the 1970s and 2000s. Harries argues that "Parody has long been viewed as part of the evolutionary cycle of genre – typically occupying the 'late stages' of a genre's development."[355] In the 1970s, films such as Coppola's *The Conversation*, Pakula's *The Parallax View*, and Pollack's *Three Days of the Condor* dramatized the growing unease with the workings and misuses of the secret state. Creeping fears of surveillance technologies, institutional corruption, and diminishing individual autonomy were given creative expression in a cinematic trend that centred on processes of investigation and revelation. Melley offers a useful distinction between heroic conspiracy films which offer the reassurance of a positive resolution (e.g. *Three Days of the Condor*), and the bleaker narratives (*The Conversation* and *The Parallax View*) in which individuals are ultimately rendered powerless against an overwhelming state juggernaut.[356]

[355] Dan Harries, "Film Parody and the Resuscitation of Genre," in *Genre and Contemporary Hollywood* ed. Steve Neale (London: British Film Institute, 2002), 286.
[356] Melley, *The Covert Sphere*, 28.

The 2000s saw a rejuvenation of the conspiracy thriller, with films such as the Bourne trilogy (2002-2007) and *Syriana* (2005) emblematic of reignited disquiet surrounding US covert operations in the post-9/11 context.

Both *Hopscotch* and *Burn After Reading* appear at the apex of these cinematic trends, corresponding to what both Harries (theorising film parody) and Alan Burton (in his study of spy films in the 1960s) identify as the parodic turn in film genre cycles.[357] The temporal location of both films conforms to this notion of parody as genetic inheritance: adopting, regenerating, and inverting generic conventions. *Hopscotch* enjoys a familial relationship with not only the historical events and cinematic predecessors that supplied the conspiratorial context for the decade, but also its parodic progeny in the form of *Burn After Reading*. *Hopscotch* director Ronald Neame was a prolific British filmmaker who worked extensively with David Lean in the 1940s before moving to Hollywood to pursue further directing opportunities. His extensive credits included the spy film *The Man Who Never Was* (1956) and the conspiracy thriller *The Odessa File* (1974). In his biography of the Coen brothers, Ronald Bergan notes how Joel and Ethan Coen (then twelve and nine, respectively), watched and enjoyed Neame's comedy heist film *Gambit* (1966).[358] The film left such an impression on the young cinephiles that, almost thirty years later in 2003, they agreed to an offer by producer Mike Lobell to revise the original screenplay for a remake.[359] While *Gambit* was not ultimately released until 2012 (to negative reviews), the intervening production of *Burn After Reading* in

[357] Alan Burton, "'Jumping on the Bondwagon': The Spy Cycle in British Cinema in the 1960s," *Journal of British Cinema and Television* 15, no. 3: 329.
[358] Ronald Bergan, *The Coen Brothers*, 2nd edn. (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2016), 280.
[359] Ibid., 280.

2008 demonstrates the extent of the Coens' interest in – and indebtedness to – Neame as a formative influence.[360]

A further reason for selecting these materials is that, despite their prime positions at the end of their respective spy cycles, both films have been relatively neglected critically. They are not what Harries would term the "exaggerated" spy parodies such as *Spy Hard* (1996) or *Austin Powers* (1997-2002), and therefore sit uneasily between genres, falling under the critical radar.[361] Reviewer Roger Ebert captures the ambivalence towards *Hopscotch* in his description of the film as: "pleasant […] so familiar, it's almost neutral."[362] This implies a certain mediocrity and safety of tone that does not lend itself to serious critical attention. *Hopscotch* is given passing mention by Melley as a basic example of what he terms the "heroic public sphere" narrative (which champions the value of the revelatory impulse that leads to greater transparency) and does not appear at all in Tricia Jenkins' examination of the relationship between the CIA and Hollywood film.[363] Oliver Boyd Barrett et al offer a more detailed consideration of the film as part of their forensic survey of how the CIA has been represented in Hollywood, but their methodological approach relegates the film to secondary status.[364] Their study does, however, address two points that are relevant to this chapter. Firstly, it places *Hopscotch* in the immediate historical context of a series of state legal actions

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[360] Several reviews have made the connection between the two films. See, for example: Alex Williams, "Criterion Review: Walter Matthau Plays Spy Games in *Hopscotch*." *Cinapse*, 2017, accessed Jun 27, 2022. https://cinapse.co/criterion-review-walter-matthau-plays-spy-games-in-hopscotch-71a163c70ed4; Chuck Bowen, "Blu-ray Review: Ronald Neame's *Hopscotch* on the Criterion Collection." Slant Magazine, 2017, accessed Jun 27, 2022.
[361] Harries, *Film Parody*, 87.
[362] Roger Ebert, "Hopscotch." *RogerEbert.com*, 1980, accessed Jan 21, 2020, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/hopscotch-1980.
[363] Melley, *The Covert Sphere*, 28; Tricia Jenkins, *The CIA in Hollywood: How the Agency Shapes Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016).
[364] Oliver Boyd Barrett, David Herrera, James A. Baumann, *Hollywood and the CIA: Cinema, Defense and Subversion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 75.

in the late 1970s aimed at preventing former CIA agents from publishing their memoirs.[365] Second, Boyd Barrett et al note that the film's depiction of the CIA is more nuanced than might be expected: crediting the positive characterisation of Kendig's agency protégé (Sam Waterson) as set against the buffoonish managerial antagonist (Ned Beatty).[366] These subtleties are also noted by Bruce Eder as he praises the film's dual identity as "the only "feel-good" realistic spy film ever made."[367] The film's inclusion in the Criterion Collection in 2002 provides a rare example of critical endorsement that I seek to amplify through this study.

Similarly, *Burn After Reading* has received scant critical attention. Written and directed by Ethan and Joel Coen, the film emerged in the immediate aftermath of the directors' Oscar-winning crime western *No Country for Old Men* (2007). In comparison to the latter's critical acclaim (which included Academy Awards for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Adapted Screenplay), *Burn After Reading* received mixed reviews. *Guardian* critic Peter Bradshaw was uncompromising in his assessment, describing it as the directors' "most mediocre film in a long time: a desperately strained black comic farce."[368] For commentators such as Jeffrey Adams, it marks a regression to the superficial comedy that characterized the Coens' flirtation with the Hollywood mainstream between 2003 and 2010.[369] This period included films such as *Intolerable Cruelty* (2003) and *The Ladykillers* (2004), neither of which – as Adams points out – were projects initiated by the directing team, and both of which represented critical and commercial disappointments.[370] *Burn After Reading* shares with

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[365] Ibid., 85.
[366] Ibid., 95, 97.
[367] Bruce Eder, "Hopscotch." The Criterion Collection, 2002, accessed Jun 27, 2022.
[368] Peter Bradshaw, "Burn After Reading." *The Guardian*, 2008, accessed Jan 17, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2008/oct/17/burn-after-reading.
[369] Jeffrey Adams, *The Cinema of the Coen Brothers: Hard-Boiled Entertainments* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 12.
[370] Ibid., 12-13.

these films not only a focus on triviality and pastiche, but also a contemporary setting, which Adams argues presents something of a challenge for filmmakers who are seemingly more comfortable in the fictionalised imaginary of the past.[371] The Coens' biographer Ronald Bergan summarily dismissed *Burn After Reading* as a "blip" in an otherwise commendable return to form in the late 2000s.[372]

For others, such as film critic Ian Nathan, *Burn After Reading* represented an exhilarating return to the chaotic sensibilities and dark humour of the Coens' early works. Nathan praises the way the filmmakers threw "a pile of wacky ideas and multiple movie references into the juicer to see what flavour emerges."[373] Maria Poulaki goes even further and ascribes the film with the complexity of contemporaneous "network narratives" such as *21 Grams* (2003), *Syriana* (2005), and *Babel* (2006), which are characterised by their overlapping and intersecting storylines.[374] *Burn After Reading* was unexpectedly well-received on the international market, grossing $35 million and prompting a *Variety* headline of "*Burn* sizzles in overseas run".[375] If the directors' previous films offered a reinvention of classic Hollywood genres such as film noir (*Blood Simple,* 1984), the gangster film (*Miller's Crossing*, 1990), and screwball comedy (*The Hudsucker Proxy*, 1994) in what R. Barton Palmer defines as a "*retro* engagement with classic genericity," *Burn After Reading* is a creative excursion into the generic territory of the spy thriller.[376] This chapter shows that *Burn After Reading* engages extensively with the genre of the spy thriller, playing with – and subverting – ideas of inscription, record-keeping and narrative import.

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[371] Ibid., 2.
[372] Ronald Bergan, *The Coen Brothers*, 2nd ed. (New York: Arcade Publishing, 2016), xiv.
[373] Ian Nathan, "Burn After Reading Review," *Empire* 233, Nov 2008: 56.
[374] Maria Poulaki, "Network Films and Complex Causality," *Screen* 55, no.3 (2014): 382.
[375] Dave McNary, "Coen brothers' 'Burn' has long legs o'seas," *Variety* 412, no.11 (2008): 20-22.
[376] R. Barton Palmer, *Joel and Ethan Coen* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 113.

In *Hopscotch*, former spy Miles Kendig (Walter Matthau) – forced out of service by his conniving superior – declares his intention to write a memoir revealing his extensive knowledge of the secret (and by implication corrupt) work of the CIA: "I'm going to tell the truth!" His sometime partner and reluctant co-conspirator Isobel von Schmidt (Glenda Jackson) counters with a caustic riposte: "Oh, it's a work of fiction!"[377] The exchange neatly encapsulates several points that this chapter will seek to address. Firstly, at a basic level, it foregrounds the written text as an object of import and desire, while immediately drawing attention to the instability of the truth/fiction dichotomy in the sphere of espionage. It expresses the allure of revelation while cautioning against the validity of subjective representation. The idea of a memoir being the source of a definable and unmediated "truth" is laid open to doubt, challenge, and even ridicule. While the exposure of state secrets (and the competing desire to protect or procure them) provides the central narrative thrust of the film, the comedic tone playfully muddies the easy delineation between positive "truth" and deceptive "fiction", while acknowledging the fictive influence that Melley identifies as a central component to US post-war political (and cultural) strategies.[378] Truth, it implies, is a consistently fluid concept in the sphere of espionage, open to manipulation, misapplication, and wilful (mis)interpretation.

Secondly, the exchange draws upon implicit knowledge of recent events in US intelligence history in the 1970s, which comprises of a succession of high-profile transgressions, controversies, and cover-ups. From Watergate to 'The Family Jewels', the CIA was buffeted by damaging exposures of – and investigations into – a series of historical

[377] *Hopscotch*, directed by Ronald Neame (Studio Canal, 1980), DVD.
[378] Melley, *The Covert Sphere*, 6.

misdeeds and illegalities.[379] The cumulative effect of these conspiratorial misadventures and the corresponding negative portrayals of state intelligence in Hollywood cinema in the 1970s was one of cynicism, paranoia, and increasing public distrust. The interplay between historical events and cultural productions created a culture of conspiracy that extended into and impacted upon both arenas. The genre of the paranoid conspiracy thriller is a tangible outcome of this aggregated political moment. Thirdly, and relatedly, the scene expresses a desire to revise and rewrite the past, an urge to confess, set the record straight, and discover the "truth". In this way, Kendig shares the moral imperative of Holly Martins in *The Third Man* and George Smiley in *Smiley's People*. Their investigative impulses at different temporal and geographical points of the Cold War show an obsession with the past that is characterised by their simple and uncomplicated literary signatures: Martins' paperback Western, Smiley's plain biro, and Kendig's portable typewriter. In contrast, Cox's use of the digital voice recorder in *Burn After Reading* marks him out as a charlatan, too willing to embrace new technologies and lacking a connection with the material past. Finally, the dialogue extract presents the dichotomy between truth and fiction as a source of comedy, signalling the film's parodic approach to the conspiracy thriller template of the previous decade (in films such as *Scorpio* (1973)*, The Parallax View* (1974)*,* and *Three Days of the Condor* (1975)). The use of parodic elements connects the film with its immediate progenitors and foreshadows its link with *Burn After Reading*, while creating enough distance to offer an ironic commentary on the political and cultural contexts in which it was produced.

[379] See Rodhri Jeffreys-Jones, *In Spies We Trust: The Story of Western Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 160; Willmetts, *In Secrecy's Shadow*, 223-224.

Figure 39: Diligent typing in *Hopscotch*[380]

Figure 40: Lazy dictation in *Burn After Reading*[381]

Placing these screen productions within the cultural and political contexts of their respective releases and considering how they can be viewed as reflecting and contributing to the pervading narratives of state intelligence services, I adopt Hila Shachar's concept of the writer on screen as barometer of the times.[382] I argue that a retrospective analysis of these two films reveals changing approaches towards portraying the relationship between the individual and the state over the course of thirty years. The films represent (and respond to) the historical moment in which they were produced in ways that have not been fully explored.

The similarities of plot and theme create a dialogic relationship between the two films, which both take place in a post-war period (following Vietnam and the War on Terror, respectively). Taken as a pair, they offer contrasting insights into how cinematic authorship is affected by the technologies of writing. Focusing on the figure of the writer/spy and their respective scenes and modes of writing (see Figures 39 and 40), I investigate how the spy memoir in *Hopscotch* evokes a desire to return to the era of post-war trust in the moral certitude of the intelligence services. The iconography of the typewriter in this scenario represents a tool of reliability and authenticity. Kendig's casually unkempt appearance (Figure

[380] *Hopscotch*, directed by Ronald Neame (BBC One, 2007), film: https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/00569339?bcast=35419865.
[381] *Burn After Reading,* directed by Joel and Ethan Coen (ITV, 2004), film: https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/0115D073?bcast=105971469.
[382] Shachar, *Screening the Author*, 170.

39), reveals copious chest hair while dressed in a silk paisley dressing gown that is borrowed and too small.[383] Looking faintly ridiculous, he nonetheless represents the epitome of retrospective, easygoing masculinity. His reading glasses add a respectable hint of intellectualism as he diligently punches the keys of the typewriter with a solid (if basic) two-finger technique. Through framing the spaces, instruments, and acts of writing as comforting, comical, and nostalgic, the film parodies and ultimately rejects the influx of political corruption, bureaucratic incompetence, and illegal operations in favour of a traditional (and reactionary) reliance on human intelligence, masculine brawn, and organisational unity.

By contrast, *Burn After Reading* presents a bleak picture of personal mendacity and domestic fragmentation in post-9/11 America. Centring on disgruntled former spy Osborne Cox (John Malkovich), the film knowingly draws on the trope of the spy memoirist popularised in *Hopscotch* to chart his professional, marital, and mental disintegration as he confronts the loss of his job, the realisation of his wife's affair, and their imminent divorce proceedings. The equivalent scene of writing in *Burn After Reading* shows Cox (Figure 40) similarly attired in a silk paisley dressing gown. In this case, however, it is undoubtedly part of his own wardrobe, which subconsciously places him in the same sartorial and social category as Kendig's boss. Cox lounges louchely on the chaise, exuding an air of effete disdain. It is an affected performance, which is consolidated by his use of a digital voice recorder instead of a physical writing instrument. This choice represents a lack of effort and, by implication, moral substance. His preoccupation with producing an "explosive" written exposé of the modern intelligence world triggers a series of plots, conspiracies, and blunders through a network of interrelated characters. In place of the typewriter are two digital means of textual production

[383] The gown belongs to the unknowing homeowner: Kendig's boss and nemesis.

and storage: the voice recorder and compact disc. These devices symbolize how the film's relationships – both personal and political – are mediated through (and driven by) the information systems that pervade all areas of life. In this world, assignations on park benches are more likely to be the result of online dating, and mystery men in the shadows turn out to be lawyers serving divorce papers. The CD, containing an inadvertent amalgam of Cox's memoirs and his household finances, is an object of desire for characters with little understanding of its contents or worth. The CD represents an impression or a projection of value instead of containing substantive meaning in and of itself. In contrast to the typewriter, which produces solid, material content, the digital coding of the CD reflects the transience and vacuity of the memory it stores. By characterizing the spaces and mechanisms of writing as pretentious, fragmented, and immaterial, *Burn After Reading* illustrates how the early 21st century proliferation of information networks and online connections masks the offline collapse of his family relations and, by implication, the moral disintegration of the state. The gathering and storage of data on individual citizens, once the tool of international espionage, has infiltrated all sectors of the domestic sphere. The film parodies the resulting emphasis on personal ambition and vanity amidst an aura of social distrust, conspiracy, and paranoia.

Hopscotch **(1980)**

Hopscotch is an adaptation of Brian Garfield's award-winning 1975 novel of the same name, which charts the adventures of a disgruntled and demobbed CIA agent cast out of the service for rejecting a desk job. Deciding to write a tell-all memoir, the ex-agent, Miles Kendig – played in the film by Walter Matthau – devises a cat-and-mouse game with his former superiors. His aim is to expose institutional wrongdoings while at the same time proving his

continuing superiority in matters of operational subterfuge. Kendig represents the traditional archetype of the field agent: skilled in his trade but unsullied by the bureaucratic mismanagement and dubious political decision-making that characterised the CIA's reputation in the 1970s. He seeks a return to the uncomplicated, mythologised past of intelligence in the service of state, in which the CIA was a trusted organ of national defence rather than an object of suspicion and paranoia. Kendig also embraces the spirit of détente, in which back-channel diplomacy and informal cooperation led to a thawing of Cold War hostilities. Figure 41 shows a moment of kinship between Kendig and his Soviet counterpart (played by Herbert Lom) as they share a drink on a public bench. The scene characterises the relationship between the ageing rivals as one of mutual respect and understanding, set against the brash incompetence and insidious scheming of their successors.

Figure 41: The art of diplomacy.

The spy memoir is the vehicle through which Kendig can fulfil this act of restoration. As well as mailing his book, one chapter at a time, to his publisher, Kendig also sends the fragments to the heads of the major state intelligence agencies across the world, inviting both former friends (the CIA) and foes (the KGB) to pursue him in the hope of stopping his damaging revelations. The memoir therefore acts as a self-conceived Hitchcockian MacGuffin which fuels the plot and creates narrative incentives for the central characters. The processes, spaces, and instruments of writing take centre stage as intelligence material and inside knowledge become valued commodities. The film pokes fun at the cinematic conspiracy narratives of the 1970s which pitched lone professionals against corrupt and amoral state

interests. Bruce Eder commends the film's ability to navigate "a fine line between serious drama and satirical comedy, and between topicality and escapism."[384] *Hopscotch*, then, has a reputation for a geniality of tone that parodies (and subverts) the conspiracy film from which it takes its generic (and genetic) codes.

The film's familial heritage can be traced through two levels: the cultural and the historical. Its cinematic progenitors can be traced directly to the paranoid conspiracy thrillers of the 1970s. Plot-wise, *Hopscotch* can claim close lineage with Michael Winner's *Scorpio* (1973), which centres on a CIA agent accused by his superiors of divulging state secrets to his Soviet counterpart. His protégé in the Agency is summarily assigned to eliminate him, resulting in the eventual death of both. Simon Willmetts notes that *Scorpio* marked the first official collaboration between the CIA and Hollywood film, which, given the film's negative rendering of the agency and the timing of its release amidst the Watergate scandal, turned into a PR disaster.[385] The portrayal of the CIA as unprincipled assassins intent on self-preservation corresponds with Oliver Boyd Barrett et al's observation that the Agency was "fair game" for film producers during the 1970s.[386] That is, it was a convenient target for anxieties around the perpetuation of state corruption both domestically and internationally. *Scorpio* also fits into Tricia Jenkins' categorisation of the representation of the CIA in Hollywood as morally compromised and trigger-happy.[387] These are the generic conventions that *Hopscotch* seeks to reproduce, parody, and – I argue – subvert.

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[384] Bruce Eder, "Hopscotch." *The Criterion Collection*, 2002, accessed Jan 21, 2020, https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/215-hopscotch.
[385] Willmetts, *In Secrecy's Shadow*, 234.
[386] Oliver Boyd Barrett, David Herrera, James A. Baumann, *Hollywood and the CIA: Cinema, Defense and Subversion* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 62.
[387] Tricia Jenkins, *The CIA in Hollywood: How the Agency Shapes Film and Television* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016), 11.

While its tone diverges from *Scorpio*'s bleak treatment of the subject matter, *Hopscotch* comprises broadly the same narrative structure and central relationships. The film also shares a thematic focus on textual concerns with Sydney Pollack's *Three Days of the Condor*, which follows a CIA research analyst (Robert Redford) pursued by a rogue CIA element after he unwittingly uncovers a plot concerning oil in the Middle East. This returns to Eva Horn's point (central to this thesis) that *Condor* is an example of how "in the mid-1970s intelligence work amounts to textual processing."[388] Intelligence in the cinematic conspiracy thriller during this period is characterised by the accumulation and analysis of information as opposed to "gun-toting field agents".[389] The protagonists, while skilled professionals, are defined in the main for their intellectual acuity rather than their physical prowess. *Hopscotch* continues this theme by emphasising Kendig's disinclination to carry a gun, trusting instead in planning, paperwork, and improvisation.[390] His reliance on an old-fashioned skillset lies at the heart of the film's message. It eschews the technological developments that characterise an increasingly surveillance-led state in favour of traditional tools, methods, and – by implication – moral standing.

Just as Kendig writes his memoirs to reveal and redress the wrongs the Agency has inflicted, the film similarly seeks to rewrite the recent history of the CIA. By presenting Kendig and his pursuing protégé Joe Cutter (Sam Waterman) as sympathetic, capable, and fundamentally honourable operatives battling against a malign and corrupt management, the

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[388] Horn, *The Secret War,* 236.
[389] Ibid., 235.
[390] As an experienced CIA operative, Kendig's aversion to firearms perhaps evokes Paul Newman's incongruous admission of innocence as Butch Cassidy in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969): "I never shot anyone before." The reworking of a notorious(ly violent) outlaw as a peaceable rogue is a piece of revisionist history that mythologises these characters as fundamentally decent. Kendig's antipathy towards guns is recycled in *Burn After Reading*, with George Clooney's State Department agent claiming a lack of experience in discharging the gun he carries. Unlike Kendig, however, this innocence does not last the course of the film.

film deflects criticism of the CIA as a structural entity, choosing instead to define the run of unethical activities as an aberration to the norm. In doing so, it invites the audience to place their trust in the past (Kendig) and the future (Cutter) of the intelligence services. The parody therefore serves to reinforce, rather than undermine, the narrative of official competence, idealism, and longevity.

The scene of writing

The processes and practices of writing on screen are often channelled through a series of visual identifiers such as pens, quills, typewriters, and, latterly, computers. Hila Shachar characterises these motifs as part of a "screen language" of literary representation.[391] The writing process is aestheticized and even fetishized through these implements. The typewriter is situated at the forefront of this trend. Technologically and temporally located between the pen and the word processor, it is an instrument that is simultaneously haptic and mechanised. It offers both visual and aural stimuli for the viewer, with the rhythmic tapping of the keys signalling artistic productivity and narrative momentum. The fusion of sound, image, and kinetic energy satisfies the demands of the cinematic experience.

The typewriter also signifies authenticity, diligence, and accuracy. Its physical appearance and properties denote solidity, reliability, and durability. For Laura Marcus, in her study of Joe Wright's film adaptation *Atonement* (2007), the typewriter is a symbol of authorial status and identity.[392] For former CIA officer David Atlee Phillips, the typewriter represents an idealised and reassuringly prosaic vision of how the US intelligence service

[391] Shachar, *Screening the Author*, 17.
[392] Laura Marcus, "The writer in film: authorship and imagination," in *The Writer on Film: Screening Literary Authorship* ed. Judith Buchanan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 45.

should be perceived. Writing in the *Dallas Texas Herald* in 1976, Atlee Phillips was evidently aware of the challenges the Agency faced in changing its public image: “The truth would be better served if the CIA symbol were not the cloak and dagger, but a stack of 3 by 5 cards and a typewriter.”[393] There are echoes of this sentiment in *Hopscotch*, in a scene where Kendig issues instructions for his equipment: “Find me a copying machine and a stack of nine by twelve manila mailing envelopes.”[394] It is a far cry from the “robotic fish and […] “dragonfly insecthopper”” that Melley finds amongst the declassified exhibits on the website of the CIA museum.[395] The attention to mundane details supports Eva Horn’s observation that the office-bound routine of archival research, literary analysis, and textual processing shown in *Three Days of the Condor* offers a prosaic (and nostalgic) alternative view of the workings of state intelligence.[396] Intelligence work is characterised by paperwork and routine administration.

In *Condor*, the normality of the office environment is violently disrupted by the sudden murder of the typists and office workers during their lunch-hour by an Agency-funded assassin (disguised, ironically, as a mailman). The internal corruption of the modern intelligence agency is revealed by setting one purveyor of textual processing against another, contrasting violent immorality with diligent productivity. *Condor*’s plot expands upon the conflict between this double-faced nature of the agency by concluding, as Horn observes, with the print medium of the *New York Times*.[397] By focusing on literary and textual modes of communication, the central conflict of the film is positioned as a battle for narrative

[393] David Atlee Phillips, quoted in Christopher Moran, “The Last Assignment: David Atlee Phillips and the Birth of CIA Public Relations,” *The International History Review* 35, no. 2 (2013): 339.
[394] *Hopscotch*, DVD.
[395] Melley, *The Covert Sphere*, 21.
[396] Horn, *The Secret War*, 235.
[397] Ibid., 237.

ownership within the CIA. The return to the literary slant of the film's opening suggests a victory of sorts for the bookish researchers while cautioning that the employment of state-sanctioned assassination using a post office cover has effectively torn up the rulebook for judicial and institutional norms, destabilizing the concept of domestic security.

Hopscotch continues this exploration of the internal conflict between the two cultures within the CIA. The film casts a wry glance at the clash of methodologies vying for supremacy: represented by Agee (see above) as the cloak and dagger on the one hand or the typewriter on the other. This is skulduggery and violence versus literary heritage and the industrious production of information. The film comes down firmly on the side of the latter, ultimately rejecting the corrupting influence of officious bureaucracy in favour of individual autonomy and ingenuity. Far from embracing the fatalist conclusions of earlier paranoid conspiracy films such as *The Parallax View*, where the protagonists are subsumed and destroyed by the machinations of the state, *Hopscotch* re-asserts the power of the individual. Institutional corruption is marked as an aberration, open to the restoration of public trust given the right intervention. If, as R. Barton Palmer argues, the paranoid thriller embodies the "struggle to maintain an untrammeled individuality and independence of action", *Hopscotch* claims victory for experience, individualism, and integrity in the battle for the soul of the US security state.[398] In this sense, the film ultimately posits a return to the idealised conservative values that defined the post-war culture of consensus of the 1950s.[399] This preoccupation with the past, combining nostalgia and conservatism in a mask of rebellion and reform, infuses the film's thematic and stylistic composition.

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[398] R. Barton Palmer, "The Hitchcock Romance and the '70s Paranoid Thriller" in *After Hitchcock: Influence, Imitation, and Intertextuality*, ed. David Boyd and R. Barton Palmer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 86.
[399] Willmetts, *In Secrecy's Shadow*, 5.

The film's emphasis on age as a marker of quality is clearly flagged in the opening exchange between Matthau's protagonist Kendig and the apparent stranger, Isobel von Schmidt (Glenda Jackson), who approaches him in an Austrian open-air café. The mannered – and heavily allusive – conversation centres on the vintage of wine:

> Isobel: Do you prefer young wine or one slightly older?
>
> Kendig: Oh, slightly – slightly older.
>
> Isobel: As a general rule, the older wines are better. You see it takes time for the elements in wine to resolve themselves into an harmonious whole. It takes time, oxygen […] It is the product of skill, knowledge, and in many cases, love.[400]

The dialogue plays on the classic convention of the spy genre in which coded language is used in assignations between strangers in public places to communicate identity, signal recognition, and establish common purpose. Here, though, the meeting is not between two strangers. The purpose is romantic instead of purely professional. As Cawelti and Rosenberg point out, the techniques of spies and lovers often overlap in the performance of clandestine encounters.[401] In this scene, Kendig and Isobel are reigniting their relationship through acknowledging and embracing the passage of time. The arch use of metaphor heightens the sense of their separation while bringing them closer together as they play the game in unison. The ruminations on the importance of quality and vintage illustrate the value placed on age and experience in both the personal and professional spheres. Just as Kendig seeks to prove his continued operational efficacy in the face of his recent demotion, Isobel probes to see whether he is prepared to follow the same values in his personal relationships. Her maturity as well as his is under discussion. Their playful flirtation acknowledges the departure from the archetypal 'Bond-girl' figure in contemporary spy narratives in favour of a more mature and (relatively) age-appropriate relationship.

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[400] *Hopscotch,* DVD.

[401] John Cawelti and Bruce Rosenberg, *The Spy Story* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 12-13.

The casting of Matthau and Jackson reinforces the message surrounding the accretions of age and experience. Matthau transforms the clinical character of Garfield's novel (a role initially offered to Warren Beatty) into a paternal figure imbued with warmth and dry humour. Matthau's star persona – craggy, lumbering, and reassuring – is an antidote to the traditional action-driven spy. His Kendig is a field agent renowned for his experience and ingenuity rather than a capacity for physical heroics. As Richard Dyer observes, actors bring to their roles echoes of past performances.[402] Matthau's history as a character actor who is by turns slovenly (*The Odd Couple*, 1968) and "gruff, shaggy and sardonic" as a diligent law enforcer (*The Taking of Pelham One Two Three*, 1974) informs the construction of his character in Hopscotch.[403] His performance, imbued with the traces of his past roles, gives an everyman quality to the role. Brian Garfield, who adapted the screenplay from his own novel, praises Matthau's performance:

> He's "baggy pants." He's not slick. And one of the reasons that the "Yalies" who run the CIA disapprove of him is that he's sort of rumpled, and not the polished sort that we want at high levels of diplomacy. In spite of that, the character is brighter and wiser than any of the guys in the polished suits.[404]

Like his precursor in *Pelham*, Kendig is proficient, but also likeably shambling, dishevelled, and occasionally prone to disarming errors (his accents are a source of ongoing bemusement). He is more akin to John le Carré's George Smiley than Ian Fleming's James Bond: using his nondescript appearance as a professional asset and a tool of anonymity. Matthau's performance also recalls Peter Falk's portrayal of *Columbo* in the eponymous television series

[402] Richard Dyer, *Stars* (London: British Film Institute, 1998), 126.
[403] Roger Ebert, "The Taking of Pelham One Two Three" *RogerEbert.com*, 1974. Accessed May 5, 2020, https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-taking-of-pelham-one-two-three-1974.
[404] "Introduction by Ronald Neame and Brian Garfield," *Hopscotch.* DVD.

which ran from 1971 until 1978 on NBC, imbuing Kendig with an endearing quality familiar to audiences.

The film brings Kendig's paternal element to the fore. As well as tapping into notions of heritage and nostalgia, the film is concerned with the prospect of legacy and succession. This is evident both within the narrative structure and also at the level of production and casting. Kendig has a fatherly relationship with his protégé, Joe Cutter (Sam Waterston), the young, talented agent who is assigned to his pursuit. They share the same wry outlook on the job and employ similar operational values, preferring to assess the situation and exercise judgment before rushing into unnecessary action. Despite Cutter's adversarial role, his humour and pragmatism defuse any sense of threat that might otherwise be apparent. This creates one of the most interesting – and unusual – dynamics of the film: the lack of definable risk to the protagonist. Despite the stakes raised by Kendig's memoir gambit and the potential Oedipal clash between father figure and his heir apparent, any conflict between the two never materialises. This creates a tonal shift from a spy thriller to a something gentler and more contemplative. Kendig's paternal regard for Cutter is clear throughout. He writes about him in positive terms in his memoir and ruffles his hair affectionately even as he gags him and ties him to a chair. On meeting the two CIA men in London, Kendig's publisher shakes Cutter's hand, commenting: "I'm very glad to meet you," which suggests that the younger agent will not be unduly affected by the book's revelations.[405] His reputation for principled behaviour, combined with his position as an agency insider, means that he is well placed to restore public trust after the ensuing institutional overhaul. The baton is effectively passed between the generations, correcting the misstep represented by Myerson's disposition for dirty tricks.

[405] *Hopscotch*, DVD.

Kendig's paternal qualities in the film are reiterated through his relationship with the seaplane pilot, Carla. There is a marked distinction here between the original novel and the film adaptation. In Garfield's novel, there is a sexual attraction between the two characters which results in a one-night stand. She later tells him: "You're a lovely man, you know that? That night I took you home – I don't do that with just anybody."[406] Eschewing the novel's fleeting romantic liaison in favour of an emphatically platonic encounter, the film completes the turnaround through the dialogue. As they part, Carla (played by Lucy Saroyan) remarks: "You seem like a nice fella. You remind me of my father." To which Kendig responds: "That's always been my problem."[407] The exchange underlines the narrative around his age, marking a distinction from the trope of the bed-hopping spy, and confirming his curmudgeonly – but dependable – credentials. It also contains a knowing nod to their real-life relationship. Kendig's switch to a fatherly role has a pragmatic as well as a narrative purpose: Lucy Saroyan, the actor cast as Carla, is Matthau's stepdaughter, which would have raised fundamental challenges had the romantic subplot been retained. Completing the family set-up in the film is Matthau's son David, cast as a minor CIA agent. On the one hand, these are interesting but ultimately insignificant pieces of film trivia. However, on the other, these connections offer a parallel storyline of hereditary unity and patriarchal patronage. Like Kendig, Matthau is playing the system to provide opportunities for his successors in a form of cultural inheritance. The themes of heritage and benevolent paternalism permeate the fictional sphere into the production's casting, feeding into the film's overarching narrative of preserving and securing legacies and promoting family values.

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[406] Brian Garfield, *Hopscotch* (London: Head of Zeus, 2011), 104.
[407] *Hopscotch.* DVD.

The character of Isobel is invented for the film to replace Carla as Kendig's romantic interest. Playing opposite Matthau, Glenda Jackson's star persona is one of intelligence, spiky elegance, and authority. The film marks their screen reunion following a successful partnership in Howard Zieff's *House Calls* (1978), which gives added resonance to their fictional rekindling of affection. Theatrically trained as part of Peter Brooks' RSC ensemble in the 1960s and winner of two Academy Awards for Best Actress (1970 and 1973), Jackson imbues Isobel with sophistication and pragmatism. Known also for her BBC television portrayal of *Elizabeth R* (1971), Jackson's screen presence in *Hopscotch* trades on this regal background as the aristocratic Austrian love interest. Both actor and character are unconventional and unsentimental in appearance and performance. In her study of female stardom in British cinema, Melanie Williams argues that Jackson represents a particular moment of "seventies crisis and nostalgia," which is a claim worth unpicking in the context of her role in *Hopscotch.*[408] According to Williams, Jackson's combination of unconventional femininity and sexual progressiveness led to comparisons with European screen contemporaries such as Simone Signoret and Jeanne Moreau.[409] The subtle androgyny of her looks and the eroticism of her performances tallied with the radical developments in gender and sexual politics during the 1970s. Jackson's candour and self-assurance – both on and off screen – offered a direct challenge to the prevailing norms of screen femininity.

In pursuing this argument, Williams notes the similarities between Jackson and Katharine Hepburn in appearance and disposition.[410] The echoes of Hepburn's screen persona are evident in Jackson's performance in *Hopscotch* as she embodies the role of the incisive,

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[408] Melanie Williams, *Female Stars of British Cinema: The Women in Question* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 20.
[409] Ibid., 118.
[410] Ibid., 123.

poised, and independent love interest. The opening dialogue certainly recalls elements of the classical Hollywood screwball comedy, using, as Williams describes it, "the genre's verbal badinage, albeit updated for a more permissive age."[411] By adopting the dynamics of the screwball comedy in its romantic pairing, *Hopscotch* implicitly signals a return to the genre's heyday in the late 1930s and early 1940s, a period that saw the birth of the incipient Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the wartime precursor to the CIA. This link to Hollywood's screen heritage is a further example of how *Hopscotch* delves into – and even weaponizes – the past as a source of allure, virtue, and value.

The combination of progressiveness and nostalgia that Jackson brings to the film is central to its contradictory ideology. Chuck Bowen captures the film's intrinsic conflict in a 2017 review:

> The film parodies political hypocrisy while embracing the conservative myth of a man as a singular fount of his own destiny. In differing circumstances, Kendig's lone-wolf ways would render him an ideal Republican avatar.[412]

On the one hand, the film champions rebellion and individualism against the corruptive influence of state actors, while on the other positing a return to the benevolent paternalism that is a central component of the myth of the US security state. Willmetts codifies this myth through the public image of Allen Dulles, CIA Director 1953-1961:

> His placid smile and neatly trimmed grey moustache and hair were reassuringly avuncular – giving a sense of a man at ease with the world, and his profession. His slightly skewed bowtie, along with his dated rimless oval spectacles, lent him a professorial air. It evoked […] openness, contemplation, intelligence, trustworthiness, and somebody who was unflappably reasonable.[413]

While Matthau's performance of Kendig evokes a more working-class everyman, the character embodies the qualities that Willmetts notes above (intelligence, trustworthiness,

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[411] Ibid., 124.
[412] Chuck Bowen, "Blu-ray Review: *Hopscotch.*" Slant Magazine, 2017, accessed May 29, 2020. https://www.slantmagazine.com/dvd/hopscotch/
[413] Wilmetts, *In Secrecy's Shadow*, 122.

reason), representing a romanticised restoration of the fabled 'Golden Age' of state security.

Jackson's character also represents the historical connection between US intelligence and its British and European progenitors. As a British actor playing an Austrian character, she embodies the older variants of state espionage established in Europe in the early twentieth century. By reviving his former partnership with Isobel, Kendig is returning to the origins of the CIA and OSS, which were influenced by, and ultimately borne out of, American collaboration with the British SIS in World War II. His association with Isobel marks a return to an idealised relationship based on shared history, mutual advantage, and durability. The European sensibility is threaded throughout the film. From the opening scene set in the Munich Oktoberfest to the afore-mentioned rendezvous in the open-air Austrian café and Isobel's alpine-style apartment, scored throughout with a rousing Mozart soundtrack, the Western European locations are a celebration of pageantry, ritual tradition, and cultural opulence. For an espionage film, *Hopscotch* offers a stark contrast to what Douglas McNaughton terms the "Iron Curtain discursive unconscious", the bleak visual style that defined the cinematic depictions of Cold War Eastern Europe.[414] Kendig is patently not operating in the gritty realism of Berlin in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965) or even the gothic imaginary of post-war Vienna in *The Third Man* (1949). Decades later, his European playground is the prosperous result of the US Marshall Plan (1948-51): a space of affluence and consumerism. The chosen locations of Munich and Salzburg do not share the historical baggage of their divided capitals. They are more closely aligned to what Michael Denning identifies as a preoccupation with travel and tourism in Ian Fleming's Bond novels (and, later, films).[415] The international settings, with their visual and sensual attractions, frame the travel

[414] McNaughton, "Cold War Spaces," 384.
[415] Denning, *Cover Stories*, 102.

experience as an exercise in consumption. Denning goes on to argue that "the line between tourism and spying is a fine one," drawing a comparison between the two as acts of spectatorship.[416] The onscreen pleasures are shared between character and audience, implicating the viewer in an act of surveillance that doubles as cultural indulgence.

Figure 42: Taking the shot

This affinity can be seen in *Hopscotch* in the way Kendig is presented against the backdrop of the annual Munich Oktoberfest. In the film's opening scene, which moves from an outdoor parade to the crowded beer hall, Kendig's beige mackintosh and camera combination is suitable garb for both sightseer and spy. In fact, he embodies both identities at the same time, using the tourist-friendly environment to disguise his surveillance operation: hiding in plain sight. The setting facilitates the fusion of business and pleasure. His appearance contrasts with the background mural, which depicts a procession of archetypal Bavarian huntsmen in traditional rural dress (Figure 42). Again, the old is juxtaposed against the new as European heritage provides the backdrop to contemporary American exploits. Kendig's camera is positioned in front of the rifles as he takes on the hunter's mantle of pursuit. He observes his target from above before taking the shot. The visual proximity between modern surveillance equipment and rustic tradition represents an evolutionary trajectory, or a symbolic passing of the baton. The camera replaces the gun as the hunter's weapon of choice, emphasising Kendig's non-violent tendencies. The scene bolsters the film's construction of the USA (represented here

[416] Ibid., 104.

by Kendig) as an effective but ultimately peaceful force operating in tandem with the historically militaristic but quaint rituals of Western Europe. The subtle colourings of American flag in the red, white, and blue bunting complete the impression of unity. Europe, previously a site of conflict and violence (as seen in *The Third Man* and, to an extent, in *Smiley's People*), is now a space for cooperation.

Figure 43: Meeting Nixon

Figure 44: At the firing range

Figure 45: Hitting the target

Figure 46: Meeting Kissinger

The hunting theme is continued on Kendig's return to the USA, which has replaced Europe as the primary space of contention, as befits the internal institutional tensions of the CIA. Called into his superior's office, Kendig is reprimanded for his decision not to apprehend his Soviet counterpart in Germany. While waiting for the meeting to commence, he casts his eye over the pictures on the wall which depict his boss, Myerson, in a series of encounters with political figures interspersed with images of target practise and fishing (Figures 43-46). The choice of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger as distinguished personages whose association Myerson is keen to publicise gives an indication of his political affiliations and

proclivities. As, respectively, President and Secretary of State during the early 1970s, Nixon and Kissinger were inextricably linked to the controversies, dirty tricks campaigns, and questionable foreign interventions that characterised the decade. By displaying their photos, Myerson is implicitly aligning himself with the same unscrupulous approach to political intrigue. At the same time, the remaining photos on display show Myerson's preoccupation with guns, hunting, and shooting. Specifically, they are arranged to emphasise his prowess in the sport. It is a faintly ridiculous collection of shooting range targets and oversized fish. Overall, the pictures adorning the office paint a picture of vanity and self-aggrandizement. There is a subtle class commentary being invoked here too. Set against the partnership of Isobel and Kendig, which Williams argues places "Jackson's supercilious Englishwoman against an all-American rough diamond", Myerson represents pure bourgeois pretension.[417] Adrift of the notional values represented by hereditary wealth (the early OSS according to Willmetts had a reputation for recruiting the elite of American society) and the graft of Kendig's working class everyman, Myerson is a parody of unequivocal and vulgar ambition.[418] Neither cultured nor diligent, he represents a generational misstep; an inheritance gone awry. The internal corruption seen in the paranoid conspiracy thrillers of the 1970s is condensed here in a single individual, who provides an easy target for Kendig to redress the balance.

Faced with demotion to a desk job, Kendig absconds to Austria to re-connect with Isobel in the café scene described earlier. They retreat to her alpine apartment and make lunch in a scene of unassuming domesticity. Later, playing cards, Kendig's easy assimilation into this new environment is signalled clearly by the matching colour scheme. His light blue jumper complements both Isobel's robe and the tiled fireplace in the background (Figure 47).

[417] Williams, *Female Stars of British Cinema*, 123.
[418] Willmetts, *In Secrecy's Shadow*, 45.

The tableau is warm and harmonious, an impression strengthened by the gentle strains of Mozart's "Eine kleine Nachtmusik" emanating from the record player, to which Kendig is humming along. The music establishes an upbeat, positive tone. This is evidently a place of comfort and safety; a refuge from the complexities and politics which define his profession. On the face of it, the scene is curiously sedate and structurally redundant. The film could easily skip from their lunchtime flirtation in the kitchen to the bedroom scene the following morning. However, the scene has a broader purpose in playing with the generic conventions of the spy film and, more importantly, performs a pivotal role in conveying the domestic, family values that Kendig ultimately seeks to defend. It demonstrates that his venture as a writer and memoirist is based on a rich, lived experience, reinforced by shared knowledge and history.

Having already noted how the film subverts the typical romantic encounter of the globe-trotting agent, I argue here that the card-playing scene presents an alternative to the upmarket casino scene that is frequently punctuates spy films. Pauliina Raento summarizes how the scenes of gambling in James Bond movies serve to illustrate the character's identity and masculinity in the context of high-stakes game-playing.[419] Raento notes how Sean Connery's sartorial elegance and self-assured skill within the elite surroundings in *Dr No* establish the tone for

Figure 47: Playing cards

[419] Pauliina Raento, "All in - and More! Gambling in the James Bond Films," *UNLV Gaming Research & Review Journal* 21, no.1 (2017): 53.

the series.[420] In contrast, in *Hopscotch*, Matthau wears a casual and decidedly cosy jumper in the well-heeled but homely setting of Isobel's apartment. The professional suit and tie – often visual markers of the CIA "Company" – have been cast off in favour of informal domesticity. Moreover, his control of the card game is distinctly lacking; he absent-mindedly capitulates to Isobel's superior tactics, losing money in their wager. In age, dress, setting, intensity, and aptitude, Kendig is presented as the antithesis of the conscious style and overt virility of Bond. The scene subverts the plot-driven gameplay structure noted by Michael Denning as a hallmark of the spy thriller into something more akin to a character study.[421] In place of a prelude to a fleeting and superficial sexual encounter, it shows a relationship of substance and history. Isobel's passing mention of "antiques" again reinforces the importance of their mutual vintage. The couple are flanked by decorative pewter plates and bookshelves populated by hard-bound volumes that constitute an extensive literary collection, accrued over several years. It gives the apartment a lived-in feel, a sense of shared history and accumulated knowledge. The scene introduces a deliberate slowness to the pace of the film that draws attention to the values of home, leisure, and friendship, but also intellectual richness and depth. The latter is reinforced by the couple's verbal sparring that evokes the heavily literary and literate genre of the screwball comedy. Implicitly, these are the ideals that are under threat by Myerson's wilful distortion of the professional sphere. While the scene follows generic conventions in foreshadowing the game-like pursuit that Kendig initiates with his memoirs, it does so by establishing the playful tone of the gambit and identifying the personal values – the protection and preservation of the private sphere – that underpin his actions.

[420] Ibid., 54.
[421] Denning, *Cover Stories*, 97.

Changing the record

The following morning, prompted by a cordial meeting with his Soviet rival Yaskov (Herbert Lom), Kendig returns to the apartment determined to write his memoirs. It is a venture designed to give a first-hand authenticated account of the professional misdemeanours that have been perpetrated by the US intelligence community – represented here by Myerson – in the preceding decades. Kendig's motivation is to expose the institutional culture of corruption that has become endemic in the system, pointing the finger at those responsible while positioning himself as the paradigm of operational nous. Having shredded his personal file prior to his departure, the memoir will become the sole documentary record of Kendig's experiences; the main repository and output of the intelligence he has gathered over his years of service. Cast aside by the new regime, Kendig is inspired to take back control of the narrative. In essence, he is setting the record straight. However, the secrets he proposes to reveal have no direct bearing on his own self-reflection. The memoir is not a confessional exercise, but one of accusation and implication. If, as Elke D'Hoker argues, a memoir "draws on the confessional impulse to question problems of selfhood, truth, and deception", then Kendig's mode of revelation eschews the challenges of personal introspection.[422] Instead, his memoir writing is an outward-facing act of revenge and restoration with limited damage to (and even elevation of) his own professional identity. He is, as Cutter accurately summarises, "putting himself back in the game" after an enforced spell "on the bench".[423] In spy parlance, Kendig is going back out into the cold. He is orchestrating a plot that casts himself as the principal player, creating an assignment that exists in both written and practical forms.

[422] Elke D'hoker, "Confession and Atonement in Contemporary Fiction: J.M Coetzee, John Banville, and Ian McEwan," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 48, no.1 (2006): 33.
[423] *Hopscotch*, DVD.

In a near-repeat of the card-playing scene from the previous evening, the camera rests on the record player before cutting to Kendig seated at the typewriter at Isobel's desk. The light blue shade is carried over from the previous scene in the form of the curtains. This time, Kendig's neutral, argyle-pattern jumper blends in with the colour scheme of the typewriter, the background sofa, and Isobel's beige blouse. Visually and aurally, he remains in tune with his surroundings. He types in rhythm with the music as the camera pans gently across the wood-panelled room, taking in a fruit bowl, lampshades, flowers, and other accoutrements of domestic comfort. The combination of the musical beat and the tapping of the keys gives the act of writing a light and natural momentum. There is purpose and vigour to Kendig's typing, which contrasts with his lackadaisical attempts at cards the previous evening. He has rediscovered his motivation.

Figure 48: Mozart on the record player

Figure 49: Kendig typing

Figure 50: The scene of reading

Figure 51: Writer and reader in alignment

The musical serenade of "Eine kleine Nachtmusik" is replaced by the buoyant "Rondo for Piano and Orchestra in D Major", which is a brisk and sprightly tune deliberately selected

to accompany the sound of typing and imbuing the action with a sense of righteous fervour akin to Kittler's "discursive machine gun."[424] Having alighted on Mozart as the principal score for the film after a heavy prompt from Matthau's agent, the director approached Matthau to suggest some "Mozart typing music" for this scene.[425] He duly selected this piece to synchronise with his performance, heightening the sense of harmony which is complemented by the visual mirroring of writer and reader (Figures 48-51).

Despite occupying this demonstrably feminine space, Kendig is not imposing upon it. Positioned in the foreground to the right of the screen (Figure 49), his presence is prominent but not dominant. He integrates easily into the room, re-emphasising the visual and emotional unity between these two characters. It is a relaxing, idyllic vignette, warmly lit with muted colours. The sepia tinge evokes a sense of nostalgia. Typing laboriously on the borrowed typewriter, Kendig's single-fingered efforts makes it evident that this is an instrument of convenience rather than custom. However, this does not detract from the flow of the words. As he writes, the camera pans across to Isobel (Figure 50) reading the first chapter. The domestic harmony is marred only by the discordance of her horrified reaction to the book's content. However, her dire warnings about the perils these revelations will provoke does not disrupt the righteous momentum of his endeavour. The combination of record and recording device provides technological and acoustic balance to Kendig's need to set the record straight.

Released in 1980, *Hopscotch* marks an unofficial end point to the cycle of paranoid conspiracy thrillers in the 1970s. The start of the new decade also represented a transition in

[424] Kittler, *Gramphone, Film, Typewriter*, 191.
[425] "Introduction by Ronald Neame and Brian Garfield" *Hopscotch*, directed by Ronald Neame, DVD, 1980.

the domestic use of communication technologies. Matthew Kirschenbaum identifies 1981 as the year in which word processors began to emerge in the public consciousness, prompted by improvements in hardware, financial accessibility, and greater commercial availability.[426] The lovingly rendered scenes of typing in Neame's film suddenly belonged to another era as the revolution in home computing gathered pace. Typewriters were boxed up and replaced by a new generation of word processors. Writing on screen turned to writing on screens as analogue transformed into digital. This transition was reflected on film in a series of cinematic treatments of the evolving human-computer interface. Cold War nuclear diplomacy is inadvertently put to the test in John Badham's *WarGames* (1983), in which a bored teenager (played by Matthew Broderick) unknowingly hacks into a government computer system and sets off a chain of potentially world-changing events from the domestic comfort of his bedroom. Coded messages and blinking screen typefaces permeate Penny Marshall's *Jumpin' Jack Flash* (1986), a comedy spy thriller starring Whoopi Goldberg, while the ubiquity, desirability, and vulnerability of digital information systems is the subject of Phil Alden Robinson's all-star *Sneakers* (1992). In all these examples, computers take centre stage as conduits to a wider – perilous – world. As products of the digital transformation of the late-twentieth century, these films are now period curios, suspended in time and portraying communicative technologies that, in the internet age, are as much a relic as the typewriter and fountain pen. It is in the context of these technological developments and their screen representations that I turn to my final case study.

[426] Kirschenbaum, *Track Changes*, 52.

Burn After Reading

Burn After Reading wears its cinematic and literary heritage on its sleeve. The film poster pays deliberate homage to the classic designs produced by Saul Bass for 1950s Hollywood movies such as *The Man with the Golden Arm* (1955), *Vertigo* (1958), and *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959). The font, colour scheme, and use of silhouette draw inspiration from the promotional designs for these 1950s psychological thrillers and film noirs by directors Alfred Hitchcock and Otto Preminger (Figures 52-55). The visual tribute establishes a level of expectation for *Burn After Reading* which is typical of the Coens' reputation for generic appropriation. The poster positions the film within a cinematic grouping known for their visual style, narrative complexity, and dubious morality. It promises a revisionist approach to the archetypal

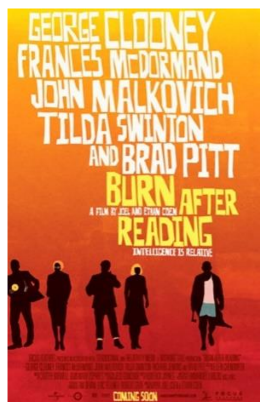

Figure 52: Burn After Reading poster

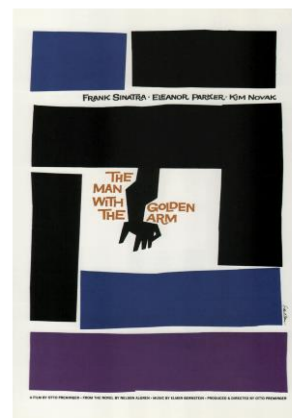

Figure 53: The Man with the Golden Arm poster

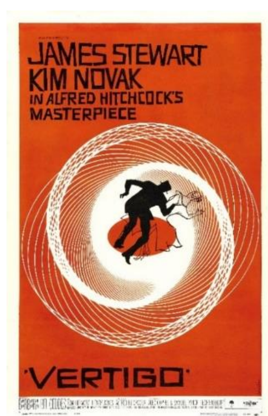

Figure 54: Vertigo poster

Figure 55: Anatomy of a Murder poster

suspense narrative, while highlighting the all-star ensemble cast of George Clooney, Frances McDormand, John Malkovich, Tilda Swinton, and Brad Pitt. These combined effects serve as a conscious signal that this is a film of quality, distinction, and pedigree, rooted in the film noir tradition.[427]

The poster's emphasis on "reading", however, draws attention to the small print. The word is framed by the credit "A film by Joel and Ethan Coen" and the tagline "Intelligence is relative". The directors' reputation for subversive parody is combined with a play on the meaning and value of intelligence.[428] The placement of both lines serves to undermine the poster's thriller vibes, hinting that, as Pitt's character Chad observes in the film: "appearances may be deceptive", itself a line that is bathetic in context, suggesting a superficial understanding of spy tropes with no sense of how to apply them to real-world interactions.[429] The act of reading is presented not only as a central theme in this knowingly literate film, but also as an active invitation for the audience to "read" beyond the superficial messaging. As such, the poster conforms to Adams' idea that the films of the Coen brothers "encourage hermeneutic treasure hunting, challenging audiences to engage actively with the film text, often tempting viewers to decipher what appears to be a hidden code."[430] Despite Adams' deliberate omission of *Burn After Reading* from his study (citing a superficiality unconducive to inclusion in a collection of the directors' best work), the language of decoding he uses to delineate this analytic process is particularly apt for a film about spying.[431] The acts of reading, unearthing hidden meaning, and decrypting data are embedded within the plot of the film

[427] The poster also shares similarities with Peter Glenville's *The Comedians* (1967), which was adapted from his own novel by Graham Greene and starred spy film stalwarts Richard Burton and Alec Guinness.
[428] A further connection to Hopscotch could here be inferred by recalling Myerson's satirical re-naming of the FBI as "Fucking Ball-busting Imbeciles."
[429] *Burn After Reading*, DVD.
[430] Adams, *The Cinema of the Coen Brothers*, 3.
[431] Ibid., 14.

and also exist as a knowing commentary on the role of cinematic spectatorship. Just as Katie's divorce lawyer exhorts her to "Be a spy, madam", appropriating her (soon to be ex) husband's professional tools to gather evidence of his personal finances, the audience is encouraged to apply their cultural literacy skills to interpret the data presented.[432] The poster therefore performs a quadruple function: firstly, by establishing the film's generic inheritance; secondly through emphasising the literary basis of the plot; thirdly, by implicating the audience in the act of chasing information and assigning meaning to material (both the diegetic memoirs and the film itself) whose value is consistently open to debate; and fourthly, by adopting the language of digital media to destabilise the association between burning and destruction.

Corrupted Memory

The imperative contained within the title also hints at film's central concern with writing, memory, and digital media. "Burn after reading" is a familiar refrain in spy narratives, instructing the recipient to commit secret information to memory and destroy the original – incriminating – material. The reader becomes a repository for data that is no longer available in physical form. In the film, however, the information is not conveyed in hard copy. In place of papers, letters, and manuscripts are voice recorders, hard drives, and compact discs. Digital media transforms the ways in which information is inscribed, stored, and transmitted. "Burning" changes from an act of destruction to an act of dissemination, upsetting convention by sharing what should be hidden, and storing to digital memory what should be erased. Digitisation therefore undermines the usual assumptions around textual processing, namely the intimacy of writing and the material connection to the art of composition. Furthermore,

[432] *Burn After Reading*, DVD.

the ease by which data can be embedded, shared, downloaded, and erased has a devaluing effect. In essence, the technology degrades the content. As Kirschenbaum argues, “storage today is both an accessory […] but it is also increasingly disembodied and dematerialized.”[433] The disembodied hard drive echoes through the film through Hardbodies gym, the dead body of Chad, and the idealised body of Linda’s (Frances McDormand) plastic surgery aspirations. Through its portrayal of information systems – whether state intelligence, private insurance, or online dating – *Burn After Reading* shows how memory becomes remote, dismembered, and corrupted.

Echoing *Hopscotch*, an early scene in *Burn After Reading* sees CIA analyst Osborne Cox called to a company meeting in which he is demoted. Unlike *Hopscotch*, this time the reason is more personal than professional: he drinks too much. This is an interesting point of divergence from the earlier film. The CIA management is represented as a professional body, following protocol, and requiring staff to conform to certain standards of behaviour. The alcoholic spy has been consigned to the past and Cox is summarily removed from his post. Seething at the injustice, Cox resigns his post entirely and determines to write his memoirs as an exercise in revenge. The sudden transition from a professional, international focus (he ran the ‘Balkan desk’) to a private, domestic crisis is emblematic of the film as a whole. Spying has turned inwards, no longer coterminous with the global sphere.

This shift is encapsulated in the opening credits, which take the form of a satellite visualisation of the USA. The sequence begins with a satellite view of the earth from space (Figures 56-57) and gradually zooms into ground level, gathering detail as it closes in. This

[433] Matthew Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms: New media and the Forensic Imagination* (London: The MIT Press, 2008), 5.

digital rendering is not only reminiscent of images gathered by modern intelligence and surveillance technologies, but also commercial computer programmes (such as Google Earth and Street View) and video games (such as *Call of Duty*), which use military-style reconnaissance imagery to present geographic voyeurism as entertainment. In the year of the film's release, Street View was incorporated into Google Earth in a move that transformed the ways in which members of the public could navigate (and intimately engage with) the geographic landscape. This commodification of surveillance – in film, computing, and gaming – illustrates the increased acceptance and normalisation of spying tools and techniques in everyday interactions. The opening visuals therefore illustrate the shift in emphasis from the professional to the private sphere, indicating that the change is inexorable, pervasive, and inescapable. Global surveillance technologies have turned inwards, indicating an introspective obsession with a state in crisis.

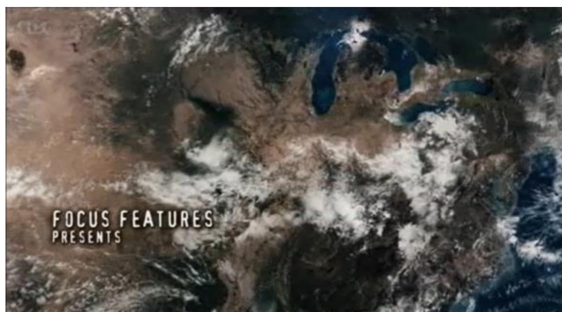

Figure 56: Opening credits (beginning)

Figure 57: Opening credits (end)

Cox's new and self-appointed identity as a memoirist comes about by accident. He appears to pluck the idea from out of the air while trying to explain to his wife Katie (Tilda Swinton) his recent state of unemployment. Justifying his decision to resign from the CIA in the face of her hostile scrutiny, Cox scrambles for an answer to her challenge of what he plans to do now: "I've been thinking about writing a, um, book, or, you know, a sort of…memoir."[434]

[434] *Burn After Reading*, DVD.

The intention behind his declaration appears to be placatory, though it is also delusional and narcissistic. The hesitation in his speech patterns betrays the underlying uncertainty that is fuelling his extemporisation. He is grasping for an explanation that will correspond with his self-perception and self-projection as the erudite gentleman spy of the old school, placing himself within the same lineage as the mythologised Ivy League intellectuals who populated the early days of the intelligence agency in the 1950s. Cox's motivation for writing his memoirs is therefore twofold. Firstly, and most obviously, it is an exercise in revenge against those in the Agency whom he perceives to have slighted him. He believes that he has the tools and knowledge to cause significant reputational damage to individuals in a system that has – by his account – descended into a bureaucratic quagmire. But secondly, he is motivated by the preservation (and even extension) of his self-image. He believes that his expertise and intelligence has been overlooked by men with superior rank but inferior intellect. His demotion (and elective dismissal) from the Agency threatens to undermine his position amongst the privileged elite of Georgetown society, a status generated through his work, marriage, and selective membership of the Princeton Old Boys alumni association. A swift rebrand as a writer would constitute an acceptable shift in focus. By championing the cause of intellectual heritage over modernising management, he is aiming to retain his social standing within these networks, including his status-driven marriage.

Cox receives two significant reactions to his memoir proposal. The first, from his wife, can be accurately described as contemptuous hilarity. She responds with a derisive, high-pitched laugh, which she later compounds when he reveals that the memoir has been stolen: "Why in god's name would anyone think that's worth anything?"[435] As a comparison with

[435] *Burn After Reading*, DVD.

Isobel's howl of anguished concern in the equivalent scene in *Hopscotch*, Katie's response is one of callous boredom and disdain. It illustrates a fundamental lack of affection and respect in their fractured relationship. Despite the conversation taking place in the intimate setting of their bedroom, they are depicted as physically and emotionally distant. He perches on the edge of the bed, choosing his words carefully, while she sits at the elaborate dressing table in a cosmetic face mask conducting the conversation through a mirror. It is an apt compression of their marriage: remote, screened, and groomed for outward appearance. This façade, and the cultural capital it confers, is threatened by Osborne's impetuous decision.

At the same time, Katie's reaction reveals an understanding of the extent of change in the commercial value and cultural impact of spy memoirs since 1980. While, as Moran argues, insights from high profile and controversial individuals continue to attract interest from publishers and readers alike (he gives the example of former CIA Director George Tenet, whose memoir reached No. 2 in the Amazon bestseller list in 2007), the sheer volume of accounts published by low- and middle-ranking intelligence officers in the post-Cold War era serves to dilute the reputational impact.[436] Richard Aldrich and Jules Gaspard describe this contrast in strident nautical terms, comparing the heavyweight "dreadnought" memoirs of former Directors with a dismissive "flotilla of autobiographies by CIA lawyers, middle managers, analysts and field operators."[437] Osborne Cox falls into the latter category. His memoirs are a fictional representation of this (extensive and indistinguishable) written output that marks a notable change in culture and policy towards inside stories of state intelligence operations. By the early 2000s, these revelatory memoirs are scrutinized and tolerated as an

[436] Moran, *Company Confessions*, 9.

[437] Richard Aldrich and Jules Gaspard, "Secrecy, Spooks and Ghosts: Memoirs and Contested Memory at the CIA," *Journal of American Studies* 55, 3 (2020): 555. doi:10.1017/S0021875819001798.

unavoidable (and, Moran argues, sometimes useful) part of the CIA's public relations strategy.[438] This literary trend also represents a growing self-reflection and introspection of a state concerned with justifying and rationalizing its own operations. The institutional response is telling. When discussing the potential publication later in the film, the CIA Superior (J.K. Simmons) responds with a shrug and a "No biggie" when he hears confirmation of Cox's low clearance level.[439] Despite his intentions and belief in his own mythology, Cox possesses an over-inflated view of his own significance, unaware that the book (when written) is destined for obscurity. Katie's reaction, then, is characteristic of the film's treatment of the hypocritical veneer which conceals the fragmented family, the degraded value of information, and the recent evolution in how the American organ of state intelligence manages its own narrative.

Figure 58: Katie (Tilda Swinton) reacts with derision

Figure 59: Cox's father (unknown) shows no reaction

Serendipitously continuing the nautical metaphor, the second response Cox receives is from his father while they are out sailing, a typical setting for masculine bonding. Staring out to sea on the cusp of sunset, it is an image tailored to a romanticised (and cinematically

[438] Moran, *Company Confessions*, 19.
[439] *Burn After Reading*, DVD.

resonant) vision of himself embarking – alone – on a noble quest. Unlike the halting exchange with Katie, he has had time to formulate the reasoning behind his endeavour:

> Government service is not the same as when you were in State. Things are different now. [No response.] I don't know, maybe it's the Cold War ending. Now it seems like it's all bureaucracy and no mission. I'm writing a memoir. I think it can be pretty explosive and I don't think you would *dis*approve. I don't *think* you would disapprove. Katie's having difficulty accepting it, but sometimes there's a higher patriotism, dad.[440]

There are several points of interest here. For all his protestations about how things have changed, the sentiments are remarkably similar to those expressed by Kendig in *Hopscotch*. Like the earlier film, the simmering resentment against state bureaucracy and his innate belief in the incendiary potential of the information he possesses are key motivating factors. The return to the Cold War as a point of reference further illustrates his sense of nostalgia and yearning for the past. He misses the elevated position that his breeding and schooling would have conferred at that time. It is also revealing that Cox has followed his father into State service (albeit not at the State department). He carries the weight of familial tradition by inheriting his father's patriotic notion of duty and career trajectory. The severance of his CIA employment threatens to undermine that legacy, so his characterisation of the proposed memoir as a form of higher calling is offered as a justification to this act of betrayal. It is unclear, however, whether his words are reaching their intended audience; his father remains silent throughout the scene, showing obvious signs of dementia. As such, his reaction is impassive to the point of non-existent, raising the question as to whether he has the mental capacity to understand. He represents the severed link between the Cox as the individual and the paternalist state he is trying to rediscover. Cox's repeated line, "I don't think you would *dis*approve; I don't *think* you would disapprove" foregrounds the desire for his father's acceptance, but the shifting emphasis, the recurring double negative, and the one-way

[440] Italics denote emphasis in performance.

dialogue underlines his fundamental doubt that the goal has been achieved.[441] He is essentially talking to himself in the physical presence – but mental and emotional absence – of his father, whose memory has been corrupted in the worst sense. The act of persuasion that Cox is undertaking is therefore primarily aimed at himself, set against the background of his prior loyalties to family and state, both of whom are – variously – contemptuous, indifferent, and deaf to his cause.

The two reactions to Cox's proposed memoir establish the context for the scene where he commences the writing of it (Figures 60-63). The muted reception hints at the folly and vacuity of his plans, an impression borne out by his writerly behaviour. Cox is first shot from above lying prone on a leather recliner, his eyes wide open (Figure 60). For a few seconds, his body lies still, which leads to a moment of uncertainty as to whether he is in fact alive or dead. The fleeting impression of lifelessness is broken when he raises the voice recorder to his mouth and starts dictating the first words of the chapter: "We were young and committed, and there was nothing we could not do."[442] The grandiose opening statement is characteristic of the pomposity with which Cox conducts himself professionally. Espionage, for him, is a membership of an elite club, the trappings of which are evident in the privileged surroundings of his Georgetown property. The furniture – plush leather recliner, collectible trinkets, authentic Persian rug, and polished oak floor – is emblematic of his social status and taste for tradition. They are the symbols of a mindset that is stuck in the past and trading on a time (not wholly expired) when affairs of state were irreducible from issues of class, nepotism, and material display. Clothing-wise, he has swapped the ostentatious bow tie of his office attire in the opening scene for a louchely expensive pyjama and paisley dressing

[441] *Burn After Reading*, DVD.
[442] Ibid.

gown combination. He is revelling in the decadence of his new writerly identity, constructing an image of a maverick genius in daytime nightwear with rather more care and attention than he ascribes to his actual words. The scene illustrates this affected display: framing him as the stereotypical tortured writer deep in contemplation (Figures 62-63). It is a deeply comedic and bathetic image, showing the extent of his self-delusion as an unrecognised genius.

The composition of his writing is less elaborately staged. The confidence with which he dictates the opening line is not succeeded by a logical progression of thought. Instead, the words hang in the air unaccompanied and uncontextualized. Unable to provide an example or anecdote that may have strengthened his opening claim, he tries again on a different tack:

> We thought of the Agency less…less, um… The principles of George Kennan – a personal hero of mine – like the fabled Murrow's Boys, at a time of… [*interrupted by a ringing phone*][443]

The prose is riddled with hesitation, repetition, deviation, and interruption; Cox is incapable of completing a single train of thought. It is not a construction worthy of a self-professed intelligence analyst tasked with everyday briefings, reports, and other examples of written communication requiring the formulation of clear points of argument. His verbal floundering does not give the impression of professional competence. Cox's in-text references to George Kennan (a fellow Princeton alumni and a key figure in advancing the US containment policy towards the Soviet Union in the 1940s) and Edward Murrow (a campaigning broadcast journalist known for his cultivation of a group of talented journalists in WWII) places himself firmly (if erroneously) within the mythology of liberal intellectual influencers of 20th-Century America, while failing to emulate their coherence, erudition, and incisiveness of thought. As such, the scene invites the audience to mock the audacity of Cox's self-delusion. For the knowing viewer, the mention of Murrow also takes a humorous swipe at the George Clooney-

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[443] *Burn After Reading*, DVD.

directed *Good Night, and Good Luck* (2005), a political drama which offered a sober account of Murrow's principled battle against McCarthyism. The film was a recent continuation of the investigative conspiracy genre that emerged in the 1970s in the aftermath of Watergate, dramatizing the role of heroic individuals – journalists, writers, whistle-blowers – holding the government to account. By placing *Burn After Reading* within that generic lineage, the scene draws attention to Cox's blatant hubris. His intellectual and social vanity are brought into focus – and roundly satirized – by these generic intertexts. Clooney's casting as a sex-obsessed philanderer punctures the image of sobriety engendered by his coolly diligent producer in *Good Night, and Good Luck* and adds to the film's metacinematic playfulness. The multiple allusions to this cinematic lineage give *Burn After Reading* the illusion of gravitas while ridiculing the trope of the sanctimonious (and ideologically driven) writer-spy.

Figure 60: Prone figure

Figure 61: Opening words

Figure 62: Contemplation

Figure 63: The artist framed

The scene is also cleverly misleading. Cox cups his face in his hand as he stares into the middle distance with a melancholy expression, with the artfully curated bookshelves in

the background marking his intellectual status (Figure 62). He stares out of the window, resting his chin on the window frame while tapping the pane with his fingers (Figure 63). It is designed to give the impression of a writer's imagination at work. Cox is giving a performance which foregrounds the *process* of creative endeavour. All relevant features are in place: the costume, the set dressing, the facial expressions, and the languid movements combine to form a carefully constructed writer's persona. It is a self-consciously contrived image, but there are elements within the scene which undermine his solemnity. In the foreground, the television is playing a daytime gameshow. A gleeful chorus of "She's married!" and "Has boyfriend!" is recited loudly by the audience as the written answers appear on screen, providing a meta-commentary on his wife's affair and Cox's cuckolded status.[444] The words on screen – carrying a clear, unadulterated message – encroach upon his abject attempts at convoluted political commentary, while also reiterating the film's concern with the entertainment value of domestic and personal conspiracies over state-level intrigue. Triviality triumphs in the battle with substance. To emphasise the creative and intellectual void at the heart of Cox's venture, the scene's pay-off reveals the true motivation for his meditative posing. Rather than waiting for inspiration to strike, he is counting down the minutes until the clock turns 5pm to have his first alcoholic drink of the day. The revelation effectively punctures the illusion of Cox as creative genius while also subtly reinforcing the decision of his employers to demote him on the grounds of unprofessional behaviour. In

Figure 64: At Princeton

[444] *Burn After Reading*, DVD.

seeking to reactivate and reconnect with the past, Cox inadvertently does so by reigniting the cliché of the hard-drinking writer/spy, embodying the mocking "Oh So Social" tag of the OSS that Willmetts describes in his history of US Intelligence in Hollywood cinema.[445] Cox is indeed a relic, but not in the way that he intends, or even realises. Significantly, his attendance at the dinner is heralded by the only example of physical writing that Cox produces in the film – a short handwritten note surrounded by gin-soaked lime wedges (Figure 64).

The lack of substance to Cox's memoirs (the word itself subject to his pretentiously Gallic pronunciation) is encapsulated by the means through which he chooses to record his thoughts. Instead of the archetypal pen and paper, or the solidly traditional typewriter, the content is, respectively, created and stored on two digital devices: the voice recorder and the CD. In the first instance, the recorder's stop-start mechanism captures (and mimics) his unfinished sentences and meandering thoughts. The process of transcribing the (presumably) completed work onto the computer is never shown on screen. Instead, the only evidence of its existence is the CD itself, a medium that Kirschenbaum characterises as inherently fragile (liable to damage and misplacement) and one-sided (in data recording terms).[446] It is also easy to read, duplicate, and re-write; the data it conveys is vulnerable and unprotected. This is demonstrated in the film by the ease in which the CD is lost and replicated on the one hand and found and opened on the other. However, there is a further complication: burned into the CD are not only chapters from Cox's memoir, but also details of his household finances. The international sphere has once again been fused with domestic concerns. Gym employee Chad reverently characterises this information as, "Numbers and dates and numbers and

[445] Willmetts, *In Secrecy's Shadow*, 45.
[446] Kirschenbaum, *Mechanisms*, 32, 91.

numbers and dates. And numbers…I think that's the shit, man. The raw intelligence."[447] Cox's memoirs are confused with the mundane, routine "shit" that constitutes everyday life admin, all misread by Chad as information of value. The metaphor continues with the Coens' naming of the Russian Embassy contact "Crapkin." It is a far cry from the end-of-life poignancy of Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*, but the implicit reference lends weight to the sense of memories being over-written and corrupted. At the end of the film, Cox is in a vegetative state, shot in the head by an unknown CIA agent. The agent has reverted to a blank page.

Conclusion

In the summer of 1948, director Carol Reed recruited writer Jerome Chodorov to undertake revisions to the screenplay of *The Third Man*, with the aim of turning the British character of Holly Martins into an American.[448] This transpired to be a relatively straightforward adjustment and even gave greater legitimacy to Martins' identity as a writer of cheap Westerns. One script session, taking place at the offices of producer Alexander Korda in Piccadilly, was interrupted by a visit by director David Lean and his producer on *Oliver Twist* (1948), the cinematographer and emerging director Ronald Neame.[449] While the conversation in the room was dominated by the negative reaction in the US to Alec Guinness's portrayal of Fagin, Neame's timely appearance provides an opportune way to link the case studies that are threaded through this project. From casual observer of *The Third Man's* pre-production preparations, champion of rising screen star Guinness, and director of the spy film *Hopscotch* to a creative inspiration to the Coen brothers, Neame's career provides a fitting way in which

[447] *Burn After Reading*, DVD.
[448] Drazin, *In Search of The Third Man*, 44.
[449] Ibid., 45.

to frame the intertextual nuances and recurring themes of inheritance and legacy that have infused and driven this chapter.

In a directing career spanning forty-three years, Neame developed a semi-regular collaboration with Alec Guinness, from the actor's first casting in the Neame-produced *Great Expectations* (1946), through to Neame's notable films as director: *The Card* (1952), *The Horse's Mouth* (1958) and *Tunes of Glory* (1960). Guinness' famed restraint and chameleon abilities were among the qualities that drove this creatively satisfying professional association. Quoted in an article by Matthew Sweet, Neame says of Guinness: "He was like one of those dolls which I remember from when I was a kid, on which you would hang different things to make them a soldier, or a pilot."[450] Or, indeed, a spy performing a series of roles, artfully concealed underneath layers of disguise. Behind the camera, Neame shared a tendency to disappear into his material. Andrew Spicer puts this down to the context of his cinematic apprenticeship, belonging to: "a generation of filmmakers who believed that a director should be as unobtrusive as possible."[451] Given that his early mentors and collaborators in British film included Alfred Hitchcock, David Lean, and Noel Coward – directors not known for their artistic reticence – I am not sure how far this generalisation stands up to scrutiny. It is hard to see how the influence of this generational cohort contributed to what Peter Kemp argues is a lack of "personal signature" in Neame's work.[452] Nonetheless, his ability to traverse a variety of cinematic genres and styles, encompassing

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[450] Matthew Sweet, "Alec Guinness: The stranger in our midst," *The Independent* Oct 04, 2002. Accessed June 25, 2022, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/alec-guinness-the-stranger-in-our-midst-138786.html.
[451] Andrew Spicer, "Neame, Ronald (1911-2010)" *Reference Guide to British and Irish Film Directors, BFI Screenonline*, accessed Jun 25, 2022, http://www.screenonline.org.uk/people/id/509309/.
[452] Peter Kemp, "Straight from the Horse's Mouth: Ronald Neame, an Autobiography," *Sight and Sound* 13, no.9 (2003): 3. https://www.proquest.com/magazines/straight-horses-mouth-ronald-neame-autobiography/docview/1828980/se-2?accountid=15181.

both the British and American film industry while retaining a degree of anonymity, stamp him as a director of versatility, range, and unpretentiousness, whose influence can be traced into the twenty-first century through the films of the Coen brothers in characteristic, and affectionately zany, tribute.

Neame's legacy in the spy genre – and, in particular, the subgenre of the fictional confessional – is not limited to *Burn After Reading.* Television historian Joseph Oldham delves into the production history of the British television conspiracy drama *The Whistleblowers* (2007), which was commissioned for ITV as an attempt to match the success of the BBC's spy serial *Spooks* (2002-2011).[453] The pivotal figure that bridged these two series, first as the Head of BBC Drama Commissioning responsible for green-lighting *Spooks* and then as managing director of independent TV production company Carnival Films (which developed *The Whistleblowers*), was producer Gareth Neame.[454] According to Oldham, Neame developed an interest in the whistleblowing charity Public Concern at Work (PCAW), which fed into his vision of a conspiratorial drama addressing timely concerns around the veracity of state, intelligence, and military cover-ups in the lead-up to, and aftermath of, the Iraq War in 2003.[455] Oldham notes screenwriter Tony Marchant's debt to the "heightened, dramatic world" of 1970s conspiracy thrillers such as *The Parallax View* and *Three Days of the Condor*, while incorporating the more realist influence of the PCAW.[456] Another influence, closer to home, can be traced through Gareth Neame's hereditary connection with his grandfather, Ronald. It adds a new dimension to what Oldham terms the "postmodern allusive turn" that implicates British television drama in the continuing and self-conscious process of returning,

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[453] Joseph Oldham, "'Seeing a conspiracy around every corner': Paranoia as procedural in Tony Marchant's *The Whistleblowers* (2007)": 364.
[454] Ibid.,
[455] Ibid., 365-366.
[456] Ibid., 366.

reworking, and repurposing fictional espionage narratives.[457] From *The Third Man* to ITV's *The Whistleblowers,* the spy DNA – generic, literary, familial – infiltrates literature, film, and television across the Anglo-American sphere, foregrounding issues of inheritance and legacy, and leaving its coded traces for generations of readers and viewers to decrypt.

[457] Ibid., 369.

Conclusion: A Paper Kingdom

> Juliet rolled the last sheet of paper and the carbons out of the Imperial. Her fingers, as usual, were smudged with purple from the carbon. She put the dustcover on the typewriter and placed the top copy of the transcription on Perry's desk for him to read later. One carbon was filed and another was placed in an out-tray for a messenger boy to pick up eventually and take somewhere else. Juliet imagined that it lingered unread in yet another filing cabinet, in a Ministry somewhere, or back at the Scrubs. There was going to be an awful lot of paper left at the end of the war.[458]

This passage, from Kate Atkinson's spy novel *Transcription* (2018), encapsulates and brings up to date this project's concern with the physical manifestations, material objects, gendered roles, and bureaucratic processes of writing and textuality in fictional spy narratives. Juliet is an 18-year-old MI5 recruit in the early years of the Second World War. She is assigned to a small surveillance team in Pimlico and tasked with transcribing secretly recorded conversations with suspected Nazi sympathisers. The work is a source of simultaneous intrigue and frustration as the excitement of being involved in a covert operation is tempered by the mundane reality of her role: "Was she to be an agent then? (A spy!) No, it seemed she was to remain shackled to a typewriter."[459] The romantic fantasy of espionage is undercut by prosaic materiality as she realises that her capacity for analytical thinking is valued less than her typing speed. Her weapon is noisy, cumbersome, and tied to a desk. The letters and words she produces constitute a "sentence" in more ways than one. The carbon stain on Juliet's fingers signals not only the tangible effects of technological intervention on the human body, but also, metaphorically, the stain on her character engendered by her involvement in the death of one of the Nazi sympathisers towards the end of the novel, and her ultimate exposure as a Soviet double-agent. Her treachery is made manifest in the form of a

[458] Kate Atkinson, *Transcription* (London: Doubleday, 2018), 60.
[459] Ibid., 28.

carcinogenic residue, a toxic stamp imparted by the typewriter foreshadowing her guilt. Textual processing, like spying, is a messy business.

Transcription shows how writing spaces, instruments, and materials infuse the plot with authentic period detail. Atkinson's focus on writing captures the physical and moral grubbiness entailed in the process of spying, the tedium and repetitiveness of the administrative procedures that underpin the bulk of espionage work, the standardised duplication of data for multiple readers, the personnel structures that facilitate the transfer of information, and the institutional authority (an anonymous government department, a prison location) that looms over the production and storage of paper-based records. This is spying as industry rather than artistry or craftmanship, a job instead of a vocation. The typist/transcriber is a cog in a wider bureaucratic machine, with the Imperial model of typewriter suggesting the echoes of an Empire built and sustained on paper and information.[460] The familiarity of routine is juxtaposed with the unknowability of the destination: information disappears into a cavernous vacuum of corridors, antechambers, and cabinets; holding spaces and hiding places that characterise the architectural and ideological impenetrability of the British secret state.

Juliet's wry humour suffuses the third-person limited narration with an understanding of how class dynamics and gender politics determine the hierarchical structure of intelligence operations as representative of British organisational culture. This symbiotic relationship is embedded within the structure of the novel. In an example of the easy migration between intelligence and cultural institutions that I noted in the Introduction to this thesis, Atkinson

[460] See, for example: Miles Ogborne, *Indian Ink: Script and Print in the Making of the English East India Company* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

switches the narrative between Juliet's wartime role in 1940 and her post-war job in 1950 as a producer of educational children's television programmes for the BBC. The move from one "great national monolith" to another represents not so much a career progression as a redeployment.[461] The "mazy bowels" of Broadcasting House mirror the labyrinthine corridors of Ministry buildings: convoluted, meandering spaces in which information can be dispatched, concealed, and mislaid.[462] The production and deployment of written communication is inextricably connected with the commissioning bodies – whether intelligence, ministerial, diplomatic, or cultural – that determine the national narrative.

This project has investigated how texts and textuality play a fundamental role in fictional espionage narratives, following a paper trail to unpeel the layers of written communication that typify and sustain the spy genre. Eschewing the exploding pens of the James Bond films *Never Say Never Again* (1983) and *Goldeneye* (1995), and the weaponised stationery of *The Bourne Trilogy* (2002-2007), the project has focused on the more prosaic exemplars of writing motifs, forms, and recurrences in Anglo-American spy fictions (novels and films) in the Cold War and beyond.[463] I have argued how the technologies and materials of written communication have helped formulate expressions of individual identity and autonomy in a genre where anonymity and invisibility are key markers of success and survival. I have shown how the prevalence of bureaucracy, in particular the pervasion of files, records, and archives, has created a system of subjugation and violence that rivals traditional state weaponry in its scope and reach. I have demonstrated how the intimacy of letter-writing

[461] Atkinson, *Transcription*, 11.
[462] Ibid., 8.
[463] Jason Bourne wins a series of one-to-one fistfights using a biro (*The Bourne Identity*, 2002), a magazine (*The Bourne Supremacy,* 2004), and a book (*The Bourne Ultimatum*, 2007), leading film critic Ben Browne to ponder "What is Bourne's fascination with office supplies?". Ben Browne, "The 15 Best Fight Scenes from the Bourne Franchise" *Screen Rant*, 2016, accessed May 30, 2022, https://screenrant.com/jason-bourne-best-fights/.

places the act of spying within the emotional context of clandestine romance, following the same narrative and affective trajectories of seduction, betrayal, and revenge. Finally, I have shown how the urge to confess – to tell the truth – in a genre defined by falsification and pretence creates a paradoxical state that gives rise to parody and ridicule.

This thesis intervenes in the field of literary intelligence studies by bringing together two areas of scholarship that have emerged over the last ten years. The project draws on and contributes to research on the writer and writing on screen by: i) interrogating the concept of authorial (secret) agency in the context of fictional espionage narratives; ii) examining how the materials, instruments, and spaces of writing help formulate notions of class and gender identity; iii) exploring how the relative solidity of the written word affects and/or undermines the stability, longevity, and value of the meaning it inscribes. The thesis builds on existing work on screen representations of the figure of the writer and of writing itself by Hila Shachar, Judith Buchanan, Lucy Fischer, and Edward Gallafent and links these studies with the cultural espionage scholarship of Eva Horn, Allan Hepburn, and Luc Boltanski to demonstrate the role of secret and overt writing in fictional espionage narratives. While Jacqueline Foertsch, Yael Levin, Theo Finigan and Ruben Weiss touch on these connections in isolated case studies (of John le Carré, Joseph Conrad, and Don DeLillo), this thesis is the first project to take a cohesive approach spanning the period 1949-2008 and tracing the evolution of literary and textual motifs through generations of spy fiction and film. In doing so, it reveals the genre's fascination with – and inextricable reliance on – the written word, providing prolific opportunities for further study.

The chronological and geographical structure of the thesis has enabled me to focus on certain moments of crisis across the twentieth and early twenty-first century, encompassing

Europe, the UK, and the US. Starting with *The Third Man's* devastated and divided Vienna in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, the project has considered how bureaucratic systems (both overt in terms of the military, and covert in the form of Lime's smuggling organisation) regulate life, identity, and personal autonomy. The Cold War is still very much in operation in *Smiley's People*, which follows an elderly Russian dissident exiled to France. Europe is still represented as a hostile space populated by spies, informers, and persecutors. The narrative focus, however, shifts to the UK, which is struggling politically and socially after a decade of domestic political strife. In contrast, the Europe of *Hopscotch* is celebratory and welcoming, seemingly unencumbered by the ghosts of the past. The tension here lies in the domestic US space, responding (like the UK) to an extended period of internal corruption and controversies. This introspection and civil infighting are magnified in the final film, *Burn After Reading*, which is wholly concerned with how systems of global surveillance and military information technology have infiltrated and corrupted the domestic, internal sphere. These geographical axes provided a nimble way of framing the analysis.

This thesis has offered an interdisciplinary approach to a topic rich with literary motifs and visual imagery. The ambitious chronological and geographic scope enabled a selection of texts that demonstrate the significance of material textuality to the spy genre. The critical focus on this area of popular culture, building on a developing field of scholarship, has added visibility and legitimacy to a genre frequently neglected as a serious source of study. In doing so, I have demonstrated the value of the study of entertainment as an academic pursuit.

One of the components of this project is a 12-minute video essay, *The Writing on the Wall*. This takes the form of a supercut: a video montage of edited writing scenes from popular spy films spliced together, with no explanatory voiceover, to create a thematically-

linked narrative. I adapted the title of the video essay from Sam Smith's title track to the 2015 James Bond film *Spectre* (directed by Sam Mendes), a nod that offers an implicit acknowledgement of the way any discussion around spy narratives is necessarily haunted by Ian Fleming's famous creation. The video essay depicts instruments (chalk, pens, typewriters), objects (files, papers, books), acts (letter-writing, typing, note-taking, reading) and discussions of writing in twenty-three films and television programmes ranging from Alfred Hitchcock's *The Lady Vanishes* (1938) to Steven Spielberg's *Bridge of Spies* (2015). The aim of the exercise was to create a dialogic, fluid, and even playful narrative that would tease out the surprising connections, recursions, and accretions that occur across different periods and production contexts. The video platform enabled a time-defying connection between Alec Guinness's rookie agent Jim Wormold in Carol Reed's *Our Man in Havana* (1959) and the actor's older spymaster guise twenty years later as George Smiley in the BBC adaptation *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979), tracing what Mark Fisher observes as a "lifetime of regret" in the actor's face.[464] It allowed a satisfying transition from the magnifying glass of Mark Rylance in *Bridge of Spies* to that of Joseph Cotten in Carol Reed's *The Third Man* (1949), with both examples giving visual expression to the overarching themes of generic inheritance and legacy that this project has identified and discussed.

The video essay form facilitated my thinking not only around the prevalence and impact of literary imagery in spy films, but also around the varied ways of – and opportunities for – disseminating research to a range of academic and non-academic audiences. Taking inspiration from films such as Christian Marclay's *The Clock* (a 24-hour montage of scenes featuring clocks, watches and timepieces covering all times of the day that premiered at the

[464] Mark Fisher, "The Smiley Factor," *Film Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (2011): 37.

White Cube gallery in 2010), Kogonada's *Eyes of Hitchcock* in 2014 (a two-minute montage made for The Criterion Collection of close-up facial expressions taken from Hitchcock films conveying suspense and fear), and Nick Jones' *Mapping Impossible* in 2021 (a six-minute montage navigating geographical imagery in the *Mission: Impossible* films), *The Writing on the Wall* contributes to the growing body of work that uses the form and language of film to foster interest in research.[465] For a project which has focused to a large extent on the representation of literature and acts of writing on screen, this model has provided a pertinent intervention and catalyst.

Alphabet Soup

Producing the video essay resulted in the emergence of a series of tantalizing options for further study. I touched briefly upon Alfred Hitchcock's influence on the spy genre in *The Lady Vanishes* in Chapter One, but the director's wider oeuvre provides additional avenues for exploration in the context of literary and textual artefacts. For example, *North by Northwest* (1959) continues the trend of imagined characters seen in *The Third Man* (1949) and *Our Man in Havana* (1959), with each film dramatizing the playfully haunting premise of William Hughes Mearns' 1899 poem "Antigonish":

> Yesterday upon the stair
> I met a man who wasn't there.
> He wasn't there again today
> I wish, I wish he'd go away.

[465] Christian Marclay, *The Clock* (Tate, 2010): https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/marclay-the-clock-t14038; Kogonada, *Eyes of Hitchcock* (Criterion, 2014): https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/3306-eyes-of-hitchcock; Nick Jones, *Mapping Impossible: The Maps of the Mission Impossible Films* (YouTube, 2021): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQhsns4ejYc.

The coexistence of presence and absence creates a state of confusion and unease that taps into the shifting paranoia inherent in spy narratives where shadows and spooks threaten to destabilise the social order. Advertising executive Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant) is plagued by – and assumes the identity of – a mysteriously elusive man by the name of George Kaplan, only to find him a creation of the US intelligence services. It is an inversion of Jim Wormold's imaginary agents in *Our Man in Havana*, whose fictional intelligence reports are suddenly made real through the deaths of their innocent namesakes. Wormold is suddenly confronted by his instigator role in both conjuring the men's existence and provoking their deaths. These cinematic scenarios are connected by shared patterns of false identities, ghostly doubles, and the unintended consequences of artistic licence.

Scenes of writing in *North by Northwest* centre on corporate identity. Like Harry Lime and his embroidered pyjamas in *The Third Man*, Roger Thornhill in *North by Northwest* exhibits his vanity through a series of personalised effects (an embroidered handkerchief, a branded match holder). The match holder – a graphic prop embossed with the initials R.O.T – is a conversation-starter, advertising tool, and seduction device as much as it is a smoking aid. He explains it as his "trademark": a self-deprecating symbol of his superficial and caddish nature. The initials prefigure the film's later conflation of the various branches of American intelligence via the mysteriously named CIA representative The Professor: "FBI, CIA, ONI. We're all in the same alphabet soup." It is a world of interchangeable acronyms and shorthand, imbuing the American secret state with a decidedly corporate identity. By his own reckoning, Thornhill is a "rotter" who peddles "expedient exaggeration" for clients and lovers alike (which is not inadequate training for a potential spy). Characteristically, the middle initial stands for nothing, a hollow centre that glorifies his lack of substance and moral fibre. It is an

indictment of American post-war consumer culture that elevates veneer, wealth, and sales targets over family, principles, and loyalty.

Significantly, the match holder is redeployed towards the end of the film as a convenient receptacle for Thornhill's warning note to Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint): "They're on to you – I'm in your room."[467] The difference is stark: Thornhill's polished appearance and manicured hands have morphed into the chapped fingernails and blooded palms of a field agent, scarred by the practical demands of righteous action. Like Juliet in *Transcription*, his hands have been dirtied, but here the stain is organic (blood) rather than synthetic (ink), marked by physical graft and honest endeavour instead of technological incursion. The message he conveys has transformed from the meaningless rot of a sales pitch – printed, stylised, corporate – to the life-saving urgency of a personalised, shakily hand-written plea. The transposable acronyms turn into legible longhand sentences as this commercial object is repurposed to create genuine human connection. The change symbolises Thornhill's evolution from moral vacuity to concerned, valued citizen, motivated by love and embracing the resulting domestic security of marriage.

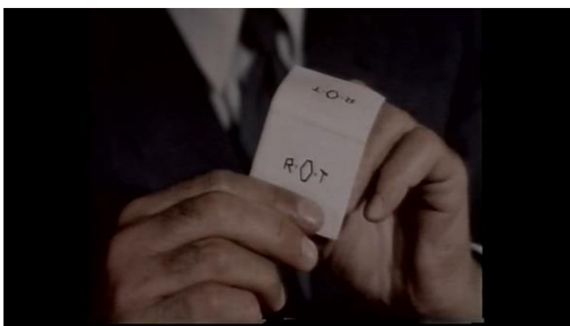

Figure 65: Corporate branding[466]

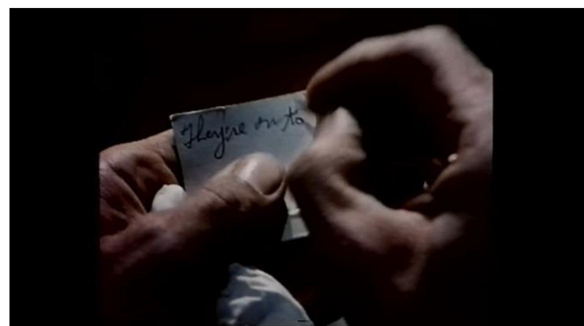

Figure 66: They're on to you

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[466] *North by Northwest*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (BBC Two, 1998): https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/RT473E44?bcast=120383423.

[467] *North by Northwest*, DVD.

Thornhill's initialled match holder joins George Smiley's engraved cigarette lighter in the category of personal effects that illuminate not only identity and social status, but also notions of period detail, social rituals, and individual fallibility. Thornhill's vanity as a raffish bachelor is counterbalanced by Smiley's long term marital unhappiness, each expressed through their smoking accessories and the respective modes of inscription: a malleable paper imprint versus a hard metal incision. One is cheaply made and disposable, the other an expensive gift, a legacy of a failing marriage. The items are also products of their time, symbols of change and impermanence. Whereas smoking was a prevalent habit in the mid-twentieth century, a natural accompaniment to conversations, transactions, and seductions, growing awareness of the health implications resulted in legal restrictions and a rapid decline in social acceptability. By 2008 (the end point of this project), smoking bans had been enacted in the UK and sixteen US states.[468] Smoking fell out of the social language. Match holders, cigarette lighters, and other smoking paraphernalia became items of nostalgia located within the historical context of a twentieth century period setting. The tradition of spies offering each other a light and uttering a pre-rehearsed code of recognition became as antiquated as letters, typewriters, and homing pigeons as tools of the espionage trade. These rituals, objects, and images form part of a rich aesthetic that is firmly located in the period setting and contributes to the continuing fascination with Cold War spycraft.

The cigarette lighter makes a further appearance in Hitchcock's *Torn Curtain* (1966) as a comically non-functioning device belonging to the East German henchman Gromek. Produced at the apex of the 1960s realist spy cycle that included *The Spy Who Came in from*

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[468] "State Smoke-Free Indoor Air Fact Sheet," *Department of Health and Human Services, USA.* May 7, 2009, accessed Jun 24, 2022: https://web.archive.org/web/20090507055519/http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/statesystem/publications/STATESystemFactSheetSmokefree.pdf

the Cold (1965), *The Ipcress File* (1965), *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966) and *The Deadly Affair* (1966), *Torn Curtain* is a critically overlooked and under-appreciated film known primarily for the killing of Gromek; a deliberately torturous scene designed to demonstrate the difficulty of taking someone's life in hand-to-hand combat. The film nonetheless utilizes many of the textual themes that this thesis has explored and provides a fruitful basis for further study. Hitchcock lingers lovingly on handwritten radiograms, messages passed under doors, codes hidden in books, signs written in sand, and a climactic battle of equations chalked furiously on a blackboard. It is a consummate study of clandestine communication, demonstrating the value and versatility of literary objects as narrative devices.

Tracing the uses and representations of writing instruments and materials has been the central purpose of this project. As a means of communication in a genre concerned with secrecy and subterfuge, these items offer a way to navigate this paradox. Bureaucratic motifs such as the "Top Secret" file, the clandestine exchange of briefcases, and the diligent typist are so ubiquitous in the spy genre that, ironically, they are easy to overlook as items of analytical interest. However, when examined in the context of the material world, objects of writing form part of the bureaucratic systems that confer power and authority over individuals and liberties, as well as being tools of dissent. The varying forms of pens, notepads, typewriters and computers can provide a stamp of identity and reveal aspects of character when professional discretion is required. Letters and postcards are vehicles of expression, emotion, and desire, amplified by the seductive conditions of secrecy. The disembodied nature of these messages creates a haunting effect in a genre already permeated with shadows, spooks, and doubles. Ultimately, these items, however remote, are the tangible, physical materials that facilitate and drive human relationships in a sphere characterised by betrayal, treachery, and deceit.

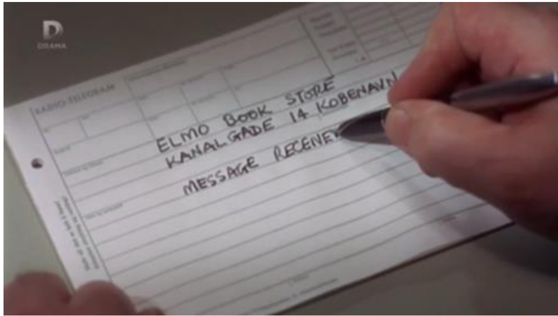

Figure 67: Message received[469]

Figure 68: First edition[470]

Figure 69: A line in the sand[471]

Figure 70: Chalkboard battle[472]

Spy fiction, argues Friedrich Kittler, is a way of concealing the fact that the information revolution of the twentieth century has fatally undermined the relevance of human intelligence-gathering.[473] Typewriters, word processors, and cryptographic machines have superseded the hands-on methods of traditional espionage: treachery, agent recruitment, clandestine meetings, document handovers, and textual analysis. In Kittler's reading, spy novels are a means of bolstering an obsolete profession and perpetuating a pretence of individual agency in the face of automation. In other words, spy fiction is fundamentally an

[469] *Torn Curtain*, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (Drama, 2016): https://learningonscreen.ac.uk/ondemand/index.php/prog/0056F2AE?bcast=121108212.
[470] Ibid.
[471] Ibid.
[472] Ibid.
[473] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, transl. by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 261.

exercise in disguise: “Under the conditions of high technology, literature has nothing more to say.”[474] What this thesis has demonstrated is that spy fiction (including novels, films, and plays) engages with these technologies of communication extensively, obsessively, and even necessarily. The production and exchange of information – in all its variants, materials, and processes – is, I have argued, at the forefront of spy narratives in the twentieth century and beyond. Secret writing, textuality, and literariness are embedded within the language and fabric of spy fictions, revealing how the processes of written communication inform – and illuminate – the structures of espionage. Rather than promoting human intrigue as a mode of denying the operations of paperwork, the films and texts I have analysed in this thesis are explicit about the communication technologies of spying, and their larger implications. These technologies are sometimes opposed to the human, more often revealed to be intimately connected with their human operators, and sometimes even imagined as taking on human form themselves. Literature, it transpires, still has a great deal to say.

[474] Ibid., 263.

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