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Between the secret state and the public sphere: the writer as intermediary

Alan Burton , Huw Dylan  and Jago Morrison 

ABSTRACT

This essay explores the unique roles played by writers as intermediaries between the secret state and the public sphere, providing an introduction to the special issue *Writers in Intelligence*. Though frequently remarked upon, the history, nature, and politics of this relationship remains under-studied. Some spies-turned-writers write in the hope of legitimizing a problematic role, others to own their own identities in a police state. For some, writing is an avenue for critique of a toxic security culture, while others have lent their skills to intelligence agencies as a form of patriotic duty. We examine how fictional representations of intelligence work have been both a boon and a hindrance to various secret services; and how exposing elements of intelligence work can occasionally lead to conspiracy rather than clarity.

ARTICLE HISTORY

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This special issue of *Intelligence and National Security* examines the unique and significant roles played by writers as intermediaries between the secret state and the public sphere. Intelligence agencies operate in the shadows and are often assumed to be exempt from public oversight. Popular espionage fiction repeatedly reinforces the idea of the spy's exceptionality, as perfectly exemplified in 007's 'license to kill'. Bond, most famous of all spies, is not only authorized to carry out extrajudicial killings but seems to enjoy a blanket immunity from accountability, whether legal or political. As many intelligence chiefs have complained, Fleming's work projects a fantasy bearing little connection with the day-to-day work of intelligence agencies. As the essays published here show, intelligence work often merges dramatically with the sphere of politics and public debate, and writers have regularly found themselves acting as intermediaries between the secret state and the people. In this issue, leading scholars from across Literary and Intelligence Studies explore this interaction across a range of periods and national contexts. In the past, the two disciplines have occasionally been brought together, notably in Wesley Wark's *Spy Fiction, Spy Film and Real Intelligence* (1991). But rarely has the resultant scholarship been as truly interdisciplinary or international as the essays presented here.

One of the reasons why fiction has had an important role in shaping public perceptions of intelligence is the cloak of official secrecy surrounding most intelligence agencies for most of their history. Such a culture of disavowal, obfuscation and denial inevitably leads to a representational void – one that writers have often stepped in to fill. Some have done so at the behest of their government's services and in pursuit of their government's objectives. The Soviets missed few opportunities to troll the West by revealing intelligence operations in Cold War Germany. The prolific author Julius Mader was a noteworthy conduit for showcasing what the East German Ministry of State Security learned of various services' operations – selling some five million copies of his books in the process¹. And, as is explored in the following pages, many in the francophone world viewed the

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sphere of foreign espionage and covert action through the lens of pulp fiction, crafted by the prolific Gérard de Villiers, and packaged with an unreasonable dose of sexualisation and sensationalism.

Across the channel in the United Kingdom, for the first half-century of their existence, the British intelligence agencies were protected from media scrutiny by the D-Notice system, a gentlemanly agreement in which newspapers refrained from reporting all sensitive information relating to matters of security, restricting themselves to matters of policy only². Only in the wake of the scandals and defections of the 1960s did governmental control of the press begin to break down, and it was not until the 1990s that a relationship resembling anything like 'openness' began to develop. For decades, memoirs and histories by serving and retired intelligence personnel were energetically suppressed or (as in the case of MI5 Director General Percy Sillitoe) exhaustively censored.³ In this context, as Burton and Morrison have shown elsewhere, for much of the twentieth-century in Britain, fiction seems to have emerged above other forms as a tolerated form of leakage.⁴

There is no doubt that Duff Cooper's 1950 novel *Operation Heartbreak* divulged significant details of a classified wartime deception, Operation Mincemeat, for example. Presented as a work of fiction, nevertheless, he encountered only 'faint resistance' to publishing it according to his diaries.⁵ Similarly, while Dennis Wheatley was successfully deterred from publishing his eye-witness account of wartime deception *The Deception Planners* after World War Two (and in fact did not do so in his lifetime), significant disclosures on the same subject in his novel *Traitor's Gate* (1958) appear to have ruffled no official feathers at all. As Alan Burton shows in his essay below, the status of fiction as a licensed form of disclosure was something that writers were aware of from an early stage. Indeed some, such as Bernard Newman, played on the ambiguity between fictionalisation and authentic disclosure to great effect, incorporating accurate historical details, authentic personalities, factual footnotes and other devices to make readers wonder whether the material they were reading could really be just fiction.

Many early writers of espionage fiction styled themselves, like Newman, as authentic spies working for the safety of the realm. However, there is no doubt that many of them also wrote from a highly positioned, selective and ideological viewpoint. As Allan Hepburn says in his essay here, Erskine Childers certainly published *The Riddle of the Sands* with a political aim in mind: exerting pressure on the British state to enhance its preparedness for invasion. William Le Queux's early works of spy fiction, similarly, make explicit that their primary purpose is to urge a general mobilisation against threats posed by Britain's rivals. In this, the two writers joined a growing number of European contemporaries presaging war in their fiction, including Capitaine Danrit and Camille Debans in France and August Niemann in Germany. Other works, from opposing political perspectives, sought to satirise and critique the imperialistic jingoism of such writing. Notable among these is P. G. Wodehouse's *The Swoop! or, How Clarence Saved England* (1910), a direct contemporary of Le Queux's infamous *The Invasion of 1910*. Such was the popularity of 'invasion scare' writing in the pre-World War One period, however, that while Le Queux's readership extended into the millions, Wodehouse's *The Swoop!* made almost no mark at all.⁶

More successful in challenging the crude nationalism and xenophobia of much early spy fiction was Eric Ambler in the 1930s. Spies in Ambler's work, as Brett Wood writes, 'were not only principally un-heroic but very often of minor significance and unpleasant men ... not splendid patriots but hired killers'.⁷ Ambler's work notwithstanding, nevertheless, nationalism and militarism remained dominant drivers of espionage fiction from the beginnings of the genre in the later nineteenth-century until the emergence of the much more questioning and critical New Realism of the 1960s.

Throughout this period, the authenticity of spy writing to the world of real intelligence remained a perennial concern. Shortly after the Armistice in November 1918 there appeared a short story entitled 'The Enthusiast' in the popular *Lloyd's Magazine*. The scene is set in the comfortable surroundings of the smoking-room of a Gentleman's club in London, where some members are sounding off on the subject of spies and the country's sorry state in handling the wartime menace of German infiltration. The conversation comprises of the usual prattle about hidden wireless sets, pigeons and unfettered signalling to Zeppelins which,

shockingly it seems, went unpunished. Suddenly, the flow is interrupted by an authoritative voice from an armchair outside the circle. 'I really cannot stand this unintelligent, uniformed chatter' declared the lean stranger with the cold blue eyes. 'I should like to feel that at least one club smoking-room had the picture of a real spy'. The interloper then went on to enlighten the attentive group about real espionage as he had experienced it in the Mediterranean.⁸

The author of the story was Compton Mackenzie who had served in Intelligence in the Eastern Mediterranean; written while awaiting demobilisation in Capri. The stranger in the tale was clearly Mackenzie himself, and in 'The Enthusiast' the writer obviously wished to mark a distinction between espionage as it was paraded by the uninitiated and in romantic fiction, and espionage as it was practised by professionals, a select group which had expanded enormously in number during the recent conflict. This now long-forgotten story would later be considerably expanded by Mackenzie in two novels and in four volumes of war memoirs.

'The Enthusiast' is something of a 'missing link', a prototype for a soon to emerge new trend in spy fiction in which former wartime intelligence officers drew on their experience for the writing of fictional tales. The most celebrated case of this type was Somerset Maugham who published the short story collection *Ashenden* in 1928, in which the eponymous *alter ego* relived some of the wartime exploits of Secret Service agent Maugham. For some, writing from experience could counter the patently false impression given in romantic spy fiction and begin to set the record straight; additionally, it could stamp a wartime contribution which would, in all likelihood, otherwise go unheralded. Clearly, the First World War marked a watershed for public awareness of espionage, the place of writing and the writer in intelligence, and how the experience of spying could be configured in spy fiction.

This special issue is part of a broader project that explores this dynamic, the interplay between spies and spy fiction, the AHRC-funded *Writers in Intelligence: The Secret State and the Public Sphere*. The project is concerned with many aspects of this relationship. One concerns how writers who themselves were spies mediate the secret world for the reading public in their books. This relates to a noted curiosity of intelligence work: that it manages to be both secretive in essence, but very frequently rather public in practice. This curiosity has been observed by many, of course; the barrier between the classified and the unclassified world has historically been rather permeable. There is a developing body of academic work on spy writers and how they depict the world of intelligence in their work. The interest in the recently departed John le Carré, including a recent special issue in this journal, speaks to the resonance of this topic. This project expands the parameters of the field. It illustrates that for much of the Twentieth and into the Twenty-First Centuries official secrecy nurtured a fascination in popular discourse and in the public's imagination with 'real' intelligence work. What we have called this 'representational void' was frequently filled by writers, and the public's understanding of espionage and intelligence was therefore often conditioned by fiction. Many of these writers were versed in intelligence work one way or another; many of them traded on their experience to lend their fiction the hallmark of authenticity. Carefully scrutinised, their work often offered rather detailed, occasionally indiscreet, representations of intelligence in eras where archives were closed, and Parliamentary debate rather limited. And, on occasion, their product had considerable political and cultural impact.

A second aspect of the project concerns how intelligence agencies perceive spy writing, and how they occasionally leverage fiction. Given the imperative for creativity in many aspects of intelligence work it should perhaps not be surprising that intelligence agencies have engaged extensively with the creative arts and the creative industries. Aspects of this relationship have been examined in the context of propaganda, of misdirection and cover, and movies. From *Churchill's Wizards* to *Zero Dark Thirty*, the intelligence world has often seen something to be gained by drawing creatives close. This project broadens our perspective on this issue, particularly in the context of how states used writers to design, facilitate and implement deception operations, including in the second world war, and how intelligence agencies have engaged spy writers as contacts and correspondents.

Linked to both aspects, as one might expect perhaps, is the politics of openness concerning the secret state. This manifests in different forms: occasionally as a desire on the part of the intelligence world to control what external parties write, and in so doing controlling the public representation and perception of intelligence work. Occasionally they have tried to shape their external image by controlling the record available to historians. Occasionally, by using the media and publishing industry directly, they have attempted to dispel what is considered to be unhelpful and inaccurate myth and misconception. As the articles in this collection illustrate, the relationship between the worlds of spies and writers is endlessly varied and fascinating.

Its starting point is the spy mania, spy scares, and emergent spy literature of the years immediately preceding the Great War. Many examples of early spy fiction articulated a sense of urgent reality regarding a future European war, a key precedent being Erskine Childers' *The Riddle of the Sands* of 1903. *Sands* has long been appreciated for its gripping and accurate portrayal of sailing in dangerous waters, its timely warning about possible invasion, and its ultimate impact on defence thinking and policy. As a patently serious narrative of spy fiction, *Sands* cast a long and influential shadow over those writers disposed to more realistic treatments of espionage, a debt acknowledged by such luminaries as Eric Ambler and John le Carré. Allan Hepburn brings some fresh thinking to this classic of the genre, situating the novel in the changing culture of information and reconnaissance as captured in such factual writing as Robert Baden-Powell's *Reconnaissance and Scouting* (1891), and various military manuals that gave advice on collecting information about enemy positions and armaments. As Hepburn discerns, *Sands* is particularly effective in putting over the sense of risk and risk-taking, qualities inherent to espionage and reconnaissance, and equally essential to the adventure narrative of a spy thriller. With a view towards future realistic spy stories, Hepburn concludes that, 'Childers' novel provides a template for other espionage novels in that it establishes the necessity of reconnaissance as a preparation for military policy or government intervention'.

As previously acknowledged, the inter-war period witnessed an outpouring of spy stories informed by a more widespread experience of intelligence in wartime, and enjoyed by a reading public more informed than ever before through histories and surveys of espionage which came onto the market in increasing numbers. Of considerable impact on the public's appreciation of secret agency were the numerous memoirs in which former spies and spymasters bared all for an eager readership. Spy stories of the 1920s and 1930s are the subject of Alan Burton's article, and he unearths a number of former agents who lent themselves to the writing of spy fiction. The main focus though is on the neglected Bernard Newman, a prolific author of popular spy thrillers. In a singular deceit, Newman expertly furrowed the no-man's land that lay between the spy memoir and spy fiction, bewildering critics and readers in the process until they could no longer discern where history distinguished itself from romance. Newman expertly created a legend for himself as a former wartime intelligence officer who then went on to serve the secret world in a series of stories which continued to blur the distinction between fact and fiction. The extent of factual writing about espionage between the wars has not been fully appreciated; while the influence of this literature on spy fiction has been barely considered. Burton elucidates these neglected aspects of the subject, and in turn serves to draw attention to issues of authenticity and believability when treating 'writers in intelligence'.

The Second World War similarly extended the experience of intelligence and security more widely, in a conflict marked by unprecedented secrecy pertaining to deception, cryptography and nuclear power. Once more, former agents and officers showed an interest in putting their experiences into print, and once again having to navigate the counter-force of official suppression. The most famous writer of spy fiction to emerge from the war was Ian Fleming, a former senior officer of naval intelligence. Typically relegated to the romantic school of spy fiction, the secret agent James Bond is usually understood as a fantasy figure for readers coming to grips with the bounties of the affluent society. Overturning received views, Oliver Buckton focuses on an overlooked authenticity to the stories, seeing the origin of the Bond novels in real wartime intelligence, and tracing numerous parallels between the secret agent's adventures and wartime intelligence operations, agents, and

institutions. By disguising classified intelligence material as 'romanticized caricatures', Buckton reveals how Fleming artfully evaded the constraints of Official Secrecy.

As Buckton shows, while Fleming drew extensively on his experience in naval intelligence during World War Two, his presentation in fiction was often the opposite of 'authentic'. In this respect his work provides an interesting contrast to that of Newman, where depictions of espionage which were, in fact, entirely imaginary are dressed up to achieve an effect of maximal realism. Looking at Barbara Pym and Muriel Spark, Claire Smith's essay engages with a similar set of questions around the relationship between real intelligence and representation. Snooping and spying of various kinds certainly appears repeatedly in Pym's fiction, but as Smith shows, there is strikingly little in her entire oeuvre to suggest any breach of official secrecy. Even in her portrayal of wartime censor Mildred Lathbury in *Excellent Women* (1952), Smith suggests, Pym practiced a rigorous self-censorship that precluded any improper disclosure concerning her own experience in this role during World War Two. The same cannot be said of Muriel Spark, however, who extensively mined her wartime experience in the Political Warfare Executive in her later writing. Described by the author as MI6's 'political intelligence department', the PWE was heavily involved in deception against German intelligence.⁹ As Smith shows, Spark seems to have had few qualms about official secrecy when writing texts such as *The Hothouse by the East River* (1973), which depicts the derangement of wartime intelligence workers, drawing directly on aspects of the PWE's practices including the exploitation of dead prisoners of war and the manipulation of their families.

In a novel approach to the history of intelligence in World War Two, Morrison's essay investigates how British wartime security drew on writerly practices to effect one of the war's most celebrated deceptions. During this conflict, a wide variety of measures were used by the Allies to influence enemy action and strategy, including visual and wireless deception. As D-Day approached, however, by far the major burden fell onto a vast, many-stranded correspondence between writers working within the Double-Cross (XX) system and officers in German intelligence. Most of the agents whose traffic they simulated were entirely fictional, and even those based on real people (such as the celebrated double agent Juan Pujol Garcia) were in reality, major team efforts that took years to build for maximum effectiveness. Carefully reviewing the voluminous material of the original communications, Morrison reveals the extraordinary shrewdness and creativity of the Double-Cross system, excavating a remarkable practice 'in which writers worked to manipulate and ventriloquise their readers in the German intelligence'. Such was the success of the XX writers that, months after the Normandy landings, the German High Command retained such faith in Juan Pujol Garcia that he was awarded the Iron Cross by the Führer for his contributions to the German war effort. While it has been known for years that the XX system played an important part in Allied strategy during the latter part of the war, the techniques used by writers in British intelligence to pull off one of the most important coups in the history of strategic deception have never previously been examined in this way.

In contrast, the work of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) has received ample historical attention. Less tightly held than the treasures of Bletchley Park, the exploits of the men and women who operated behind the lines was deemed an appropriate topic for public consumption, years before the wartime sigint and its beneficiaries in the XX machinery. But, as Christopher Murphy examines in his piece, 'The Painful Aftermath', this early openness came with a cost. It examines how in the wake of M. R. D. Foot's 1966 official history *SOE in France* came controversy, legal threats, and bureaucratic skulduggery. In writing his ground-breaking volume Foot was barred from conducting interviews with surviving SOE veterans, some of whom then disputed the historian's description and interpretation of their wartime work. Many of them instructed solicitors, claiming to have been defamed, and demanding apologies and compensation. Murphy traces how Whitehall responded to this negative fallout, how they closed ranks, and how they sought to deflect any criticism or responsibility for their initial decision not to provide Foot with access to agents and their testimony. He illustrates how the wrangling undermined the development of further editions of the official history, as Whitehall became increasingly prioritised around avoiding further legal action rather than

exposing more history. Writing history, they learned, could be a messy business, and the tumult following Foot's efforts conditioned their approach to future work. As Murphy suggests, the subsequent volumes on British Intelligence in the Second World War largely steer clear of naming individuals. Disputes over what was fact and fiction, the British exchequer learned, could be costly.

Three contributors in this special issue examine 'writers in intelligence' in other national contexts, directing attention away from the entrenched Anglo-centric dominance of spy fiction studies. The subject of Filip Kovacevic's contribution is Rudolf Abel, one of the most famous spies of the twentieth century. Fêted as a national hero when returned to the Soviet Union following a conspicuous spy swap in 1962, the reluctant Abel was used as a figurehead by the KGB in its propaganda, which aimed to construct a mythic identity for its most famous agent. As Kovacevic shows, spy fiction was a central element in this work, and, in return, spy fiction was the only means at the disposal of Abel to counter the insidious practices of the state security organisation. Using classified Soviet documents, Kovacevic teases out the extraordinary story of the state's deployment of spy thrillers to bolster the security and intelligence apparatus and considers Abel's brave attempt to preserve his personal identity and integrity in his now forgotten novel *Demise of the 'Black Knights'*.

The interaction between the author's identity and the secret world is also a core theme of Pauline Blistène's essay, which delves into the life and work of the French author Gérard de Villiers, and his far-from-forgotten novels. A larger-than-life character – prolific, frequently thoroughly objectionable, and the dominant voice in French espionage literature since 1965 – de Villiers's work was as popular in France as it was obscure to the English literary scene. Total sales of his SAS series exceed some 100 million copies; his readers spanned the spectrum of French society, including its intelligence chiefs and senior politicians. Blistène explores how and why this series, which, for all its success lacks significant literary merit, managed to attain and maintain such a grip on the French imagination. She illustrates that, for all his flaws, this pulp author was immersed in the reality of the subject that he wrote about, so quickly and at such volume. His work was informed by his travels and his networking, and also by his proximity to the secret world. His contacts included spies of all stripes, and various underworld figures who shared their insights with him and who, in turn, frequently featured in some form or another in his novels. They turned to the pages to see themselves. But de Villiers was no mere observer, he was also a player. As Blistène explores, the spy writer was also a writer who spied, being a long-time *honorable correspondant* for French intelligence. That he immortalised his engagement in the profession in text, as well as his belief in the value and necessity of it all, spoke to the authenticity of his work. For all the sex and violence, the public turned to his pages for a glimpse into the real world of spies and saboteurs.

De Villiers' first published SAS novel appeared in 1965, following in the wake of another bestseller, the first bestselling history of the CIA, *The Invisible Government* by the journalists David Wise and Thomas Ross. Both concern the hidden hand of government. De Villiers claimed never to have betrayed a confidence, avoided writing too directly about his home nation's services in his work, and put his prescience down to intuition, research, instinct and the right connections. *The Invisible Government*, for many by contrast, lifted the veil on the CIA, presenting for its readers a detailed account of its covert operations. Unlike de Villiers' enthusiastic readers in the DGSE and upper echelons of the French government, the CIA reacted to Wise and Ross's publication with a distinct lack of enthusiasm, even hostility. Simon Willmetts explores this dynamic in his piece on 'Forbidden History'. He illustrates how the book disrupted what was the then notable absence of covert action from the US media discourse, the odd impossible-to-ignore calamity notwithstanding. The essay goes on to explore how the CIA attempted to control the narrative surrounding its work by disrupting its publication. Despite having to conclude, having purloined a pre-publication copy, that the book contained nothing that constituted an actual security breach, the Agency claimed that it would be priceless propaganda ammunition for the Soviets. As Willmetts argues, they were right. But the impact of *The Hidden Government* was broader, and had a far longer legacy, than perhaps anyone anticipated. The argument of the book, its critique of the CIA's operations and the lack of accountability over its actions, were adopted and repurposed by conspiracists, who saw it as

evidence for their pre-existing world-view concerning secret ruling cabals that governed US foreign policy. Its impact and the conspiratorial misreading of its arguments can be found today in many deep state conspiracy theories. In this case, an attempt to cast light on the secret state paradoxically fed a movement that trades in blurring the boundaries between reality and a make-believe world.

Intelligence agencies, as many of the essays in this special issue attest, have often been tempted to leverage the propaganda value of spy fiction to bolster their public image. However, this dynamic has also sometimes run in reverse. When John le Carré began publishing his scathing portraits of the intelligence 'circus' in the early 1960s, they were widely accepted as 'authentic' partly because of his status as a serving intelligence officer. Similarly, Stella Rimington's depiction of arrogance, corruption and misogyny at the heart of Britain's intelligence machine was clearly rendered more impactful by the fact that she was a recent Director General of MI5 and, as such, a highly respected commentator on matters of security. As Huw Dylan says in his essay here, among Britain's intelligence chiefs Rimington remains notably under-studied, and this fact is rendered more curious by the fact that she successfully steered the agency through a period of considerable tumult and risk for her agency: the end of the Cold War. MI5 emerged more powerful, and with a more prominent public profile. Rimington was central to this. As Dylan argues, she was a late convert to the idea of intelligence 'openness', but was to become one of its most powerful advocates. Moving decisively beyond the gentlemanly arrangements of the past, with its system of backroom briefings and 'trusted' correspondents, she developed deep and fruitful relationships with the media and spoke publicly at major set-piece events. At the core of her mission, Dylan suggests, was the desire to conjure for the public an image of 'real' intelligence to set against the entertaining but unhelpful representations created by spy writers. After her retirement, ironically, she herself turned to spy fiction, perhaps as a way of continuing that same campaign by other means.

In gender terms, Rimington was an important trailblazer, as the first woman to be trained as an agent-handler by MI5, the first to head a Service Branch and the first to head a British intelligence agency. As such her depiction of arrogance, occasional incompetence and misogyny at the heart of Britain's intelligence machine was lent credibility in the minds of readers and reviewers by knowledge that she was writing from long experience. Alongside the gendered critique she offers of UK intelligence culture, nevertheless, Rimington's fiction is also concerned to offer a positive model of effective espionage in the Twenty-First Century, through her highly professional protagonist, officer Liz Carlyle. As Erin Carlston shows, this is a combination of elements we also find in the writings of female former CIA officers such as Susan Hasler, Karen Cleveland and Alma Katsu. Such writers bear witness to the engrained masculinism and (often) militarism that remain endemic across the American secret state. However, they also point to an alternative approach to intelligence, utilising qualities traditionally associated with the feminine, such as empathy, delicacy and a conscientious attention to the moral obligations involved in intelligence gathering and agent running.

In her essay 'Skip the Corsets, We'd Rather have Childcare', Carlston looks at female former officers working in both memoir and fiction and the uncompromising gaze they bring to the culture of the CIA post-9/11. Since the inauguration of the 'War on Terror' in 2001, the CIA has regularly come under pressure for its forays into what Vice-President Dick Cheney called the 'dark side'.¹⁰ In this era, practices including extraordinary rendition (the use of third countries to facilitate treatment of detainees not permitted under US law) and waterboarding (a torture technique designed to simulate the experience of drowning) provoked widespread and sustained condemnation across the media, significantly tarnishing the agency's reputation worldwide. The writers Carlston examines provide unique inside perspectives on such problematic developments in CIA culture and practices, but also offer an alternative vision in which ethical responsibility and empathy in intelligence work return to the fore. From a gender perspective, like Rimington these writers provide a corrective to the highly sexualised images of women in intelligence from the Bond girls to Twenty-First Century television series such as *Alias*, foregrounding the engrained culture of sex discrimination within the CIA and the extraordinary difficulties faces by women officers over such matters as balancing work and childcare. In

fiction by these writers, day-to-day experiences of gender inequality are placed centre stage. As Carlston argues, however, their work goes beyond critique. In different ways, they also attempt to provide a vision of intelligence work in which qualities such as a commitment to an ethic of care are acknowledged as indispensable to effective intelligence work, and in which the secondary contribution of support networks between women officers is recognised. In this way, for Carlston, they provide a view beyond dominant tendencies favouring militarisation and 'enhanced' interrogation techniques, suggesting the possibility of a future CIA that has learned from its mistakes in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In a newspaper piece published in the wake of the unprecedented success of *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963), novelist John le Carré puzzled over the complex issues involved in writing an espionage story, especially given the recent turmoil in British history around treachery, class and sexuality. Revealingly titled 'The Writer and the Spy', he was drawn to the epistemological problem at the heart of (writing about) espionage: Did all those 'shabby little figures' wonder, as they hustled across the public stage, 'what on earth it was all about'?¹¹

It is a heartfelt question, no doubt, to the writer-spy. And it is present in various forms and with varying intensities in the contributions making up this special issue. For the spy-turned-writer, the answer might lie in the desire to legitimise a problematic role, or to confront past trauma or uncertainty. For some, the act of writing is inspired by the white heat of conflict. For others, it is coldly instrumental, intended to deceive or confuse the enemy. Some writers are motivated by the existential imperative to own one's own identity in a police state. Some believed they were fulfilling their patriotic duty in the face of possible invasion, or obversely, exposing protected institutions as the playthings of a powerful elite. Elsewhere, the purpose might be to readdress sexual or class inequalities in a notoriously hidebound profession, or to smooth the transition of a service into something more modern and appropriate. In many of its most popular forms, the spy novel might simply offer its readers a glimpse of a glamorous lifestyle and vicarious access to a world of secrecy, excitement and influence. Each of the spy authors examined in this collection, to a greater or lesser extent, used writing to engage with le Carré's central question of what espionage and its literature might be about. That there are as many different responses as texts testifies to the richness of the tradition of writers in intelligence and offers insights into why they set about their craft. For the reader, such writers and their work have helped to illuminate the meaning of espionage, its structures and operations, a world characteristically the preserve of the initiated and firmly kept away from prying eyes.

Notes

1. See Maddrell, "What We Have Discovered".
2. See Wilkinson, *Secrecy and the Media*.
3. See Cockerill, *Sir Percy Sillitoe*.
4. See Burton and Morrison, "Secrets, Leaks and the Novel".
5. Norwich, *The Duff Cooper Diaries*, 481.
6. Clarke, *Voices Prophesying War*, 127.
7. Woods, *Neutral Ground*, 63.
8. *Lloyd's Magazine*, December 1918, 169-176.
9. Spark, *Curriculum Vitae: Autobiography*, 148.
10. "The Vice President Appears on Meet the Press with Tim Russert," The White House, September 16, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/vicepresident/news-speeches/speeches/vp20010916.html>.
11. Le Carré, "The Writer and the Spy." For a recent look at how former spy le Carré wrote in a context of private and public history, see Dylan and Burton, "An anarchy of treason".

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