War, Espionage, and Masculinity in British Fiction

Editor

Susan L. Austin
Landmark College

Series in Literary Studies

VERNON PRESS

In the Americas:
Vernon Press
1000 N West Street, Suite 1200,
Wilmington, Delaware 19801
United States

In the rest of the world:
Vernon Press
C/Sancti Espiritu 17,
Malaga, 29006
Spain

Series in Literary Studies

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022945870

ISBN: 978-1-64889-507-4

Cover design by Vernon Press using elements designed by flatart / Freepik.

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Editor

Susan L. Austin is Professor of Literature at Landmark College, the premier college for neurodiverse students. As a graduate student at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, she read extensively in the field of feminist criticism, but as she settled into scholarship, she found that while her feminist background was useful, it was also limiting, that if traditional masculine views of women were often objectifying and oppressive, those masculine views were also shaped by often-oppressive societal pressures.

This volume began with a panel proposal for the 2019 Northeast Modern Language Association Conference that was inspired by rather random thoughts on whether the excessive displays of masculine performance in James Bond films might be connected to excessive displays of masculinity in online video stunts and in both private and public life. Knowing that establishing any such cause and effect was not the purview of literary scholarship, she began thinking about the differences between the film versions of James Bond and Ian Fleming's Bond. This led to a comparison of Fleming's spy to Graham Greene's very different spies, which in turn led to thoughts on how espionage, war, and standards of masculine performance were common themes in much modern and contemporary British fiction. The call for papers drew such varied and interesting proposals, that Austin, already at work editing *Arthurian Legend in the Twentieth and Twenty-first Centuries* (2021), pitched the book to her publisher, Vernon Press.

While this volume was in the final stages of editing, my husband, mystery author Stephen Seitz died suddenly. As I was working on proof corrections, I was reminded that both this volume and the NeMLA panel that started it were in large part inspired by Steve's interest in, in-depth knowledge of, and spontaneous mini lectures on Ian Fleming, James Bond, the Bond franchise, and mysteries in general. This book would not exist without my husband's influence and encouragement. With that in mind, I dedicate this book to his memory.

–Susan Austin

Introduction

This volume began with a panel proposal for the 2019 Northeast Modern Language Association Conference. The initial inspiration for that panel came from re-watching Martin Campbell's 2006 *Casino Royale*, which opens with Daniel Craig's Bond smashing things with heavy equipment, followed by an elaborate parkour chase involving many crashing objects, and a gunfight in which Bond overcomes overwhelming odds. The film got me thinking about what an unrealistic standard the filmed versions of James Bond set for masculine behavior and how this might be linked to excesses in masculine performance online – where young men seem to be compelled to share unlikely basketball shots or potentially dangerous physical stunts – and in daily life – encouraging macho behavior which can contribute to violence in the home, in public, and on the national and international level. On film, James Bond is the man who survives the worst challenges a man can face and succeeds – and he's irresistible to women, a very manly man, one worthy of a panel discussion at a time when we recognize that living up to certain models of masculinity can be toxic, both for the men involved and those around them. In Fleming's books, Bond suffers effects of the poison in his masculinity, experiencing more doubt, failure, and rejection than usually appears in the films while still presenting a fantasy version of manhood.

Then I started thinking about how different Graham Greene's spies are – how conflicted, how insecure, how comparatively unsuccessful – and it seemed as if Greene needed to be included too, to provide some balance. Adding Greene made me start thinking about other writers who might be included. It struck me that war and espionage are inextricably linked, that as James Purdon has put it, "The spy novel is a phenomenon of modernity, intimately connected with war and the fear of war" (536). From there the list of British authors I might include in a discussion of masculinity in the context of war and/or espionage got very long very quickly. While literary criticism has long recognized that World War I inspired a crisis of masculinity, our understanding of what that means has been changing. As Kathleen Starck summarizes it, most critics now accept that "Masculinity is neither a stable nor a monolithic category. Instead, there are many different types of masculinity—i.e. masculinities—which are in constant flux. Their configurations are dependent on the distinct historical and cultural circumstances of their construction" (33). Given two world wars and the pressures of building, maintaining, then losing most of an empire, masculinities in British war and spy literature of the twentieth century could provide rich

"historical and cultural circumstances" to explore and re-explore, hence the title of the panel and now the book.

When the proposals came in, it became clear that I was, as contributing author Dennis S. Gouws put it, "onto something," but also that I should expand the scope to include works shortly before and after the twentieth century. As it happened, the proposals created a logical arc, starting chronologically with Rudyard Kipling's *The Light that Failed* (1891) and ending with Ian McEwan's *Saturday* (2005). The proposals, and later the papers seemed to connect, to feed and support each other. In short, it already felt like a book. The shift from panel to book brought some content changes but the arc remains essentially the same. This volume creates a conversation about literature from different periods in recent British history and about different views of masculinities both in the works analyzed and among those writing the analyses, which strikes me as fitting, given that we no longer expect to have one shared understanding of what it means to perform as a man.

While there are many fairly recent works that touch upon one or more themes of this book, none that I know of discusses war and espionage and masculinities in British fiction over such a long time period. Recognizing espionage fiction as a legitimate genre in British fiction, Margret Scanlan devotes a section of *Traces of Another Time: History and Politics in Postwar British Fiction* (2014) to British spy fiction and the influence of Kim Philby, but masculinity is not a focus. Praseeda Gopinath's *Scarecrows of Chivalry: English Masculinities After Empire* discusses masculinities in British fiction, many of which are shaped by war, and she includes a section on masculinity in Ian Fleming's James Bond narratives, but war and espionage are not the focus of the book.

Many works with similar themes only cover material from after World War II. Victoria Stewart's *The Second World War in Contemporary British Fiction: Secret Histories* discusses the influence of covert operations "assesses the importance of secrecy as both a theme and a structural device in contemporary fiction, and in particular examines the emergence of secrecy as a key focal point for fictional depictions of the Second World War" (2), though masculinities are not an explicit focus of the work. Kathleen Starck's *Of Treason, God and Testicles: Political Masculinities in British and American Films of the Early Cold War* only covers films and part of the Cold War. Brian Baker's *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres, 1945-2000* includes a chapter discussing masculinities in a number of works and authors explored in this volume, but each work is explored in greater detail here, and again, the time period is shorter.

A number of books take a broad historical view of espionage fiction, though most do not spend much time on the subject of masculinity. In *Neutral Ground: A Political History of Espionage Fiction,* Brett F. Woods traces important

developments in the spy novel through history, focusing on authors he finds have made significant contributions to the genre. Oliver S. Buckton's *Espionage in British Fiction and Film Since 1900* "identifies recurring patterns of narrative, types of hero, and archetypes of villains, that have remained consistent in spy fiction throughout the changing historical eras" (xiv) and concludes that "The spy story… has demonstrated a resilience and power to adapt to changing political currents and geographical alignments that maintains its relevance as a barometer" (323). *Anxieties of Empire and the Fiction of Intrigue* by Yumna Siddiqi "probe[s] what fiction of intrigue reveals about the discursive and material elements of Empire during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and the anxieties to which it points… [as well as] how fiction of intrigue serves the ideological interests of Empire by allaying these anxieties" (3). In *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture,* Allan Hepburn analyzes the functions and appeal of spy fiction and includes discussions of masculinity, though mostly in context of homosexuality, suggesting at one point that "The fictional representation of masculinity in spy novels reinforces the idea that straight men do not like sex very much" (198). Building upon Allan Hepburn's discussion of how spies, especially traitorous ones, have been associated with homosexuality, in *Double Agents: Espionage, Literature, and Liminal Citizens*, Erin G. Carlston explores literary and cultural assumptions about espionage, Jewishness, and homosexuality. While sexuality complicates characters' lives in some chapters of this volume, most of the characters discussed would identify as heterosexual and their sexuality is treated as just one aspect of their masculinity.

With the exception of the first chapter, which covers works from three different times, and chapters nine and ten, which cover both original works and their film adaptations, the chapters in this volume are in largely chronological order by subject matter rather than publication date. While it was tempting to put the three chapters on works by Ian McEwan together, *The Innocent*, centered on a real spy tunnel built by the United Kingdom and the United States, clearly belonged in the Cold War section of the book.

The first chapter, Pierre Dumont's "Deception, Desire, and the Dulcibella: Courtship and Romantic Love in the Spy Novels of Childers, Fleming, and le Carré," begins with a discussion of Erskine Childer's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), then moves on to Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale* (1953), then to John le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1974) to explore three different ways romance and espionage are connected and shape the structure in spy novels in three different eras. Dumont begins by summarizing Jon Thompson's defense of the spy novel and popular literature in general, and Thompson's observation that the spy novel also provides insight into trends in twentieth-century modernism. He then initiates a discussion of how romance functions in the highly homosocial world of spy novels, and the importance of gentlemanly behavior, especially in

Childers. Dumont observes that in this very early spy novel, main characters Carruthers and Davies begin the novel as amateurs at both romance and espionage, but both grow to become more mature and more professional through their experiences together. Romantic interest Clara Dollman may be instrumental in their growth, but she remains primarily an object of masculine exchange, more symbol than a developed character. Dumont goes on to argue that although James Bond appears to be professional and fully developed as a spy at the beginning of the novel, it is his romance with Vesper Lynd, another woman used by men to influence the behavior of other men, that fully hardens him into the professional he will become. Dumont notes that John le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy* repeats the motif from *Casino Royale* of a romantic interest that proves a professional threat, in this case as Haydon uses George Smiley's love of his wife to influence the protagonist.

Continuing the theme of traditional British masculine identity and gentlemanly behavior raised in the Childers discussion, Dennis S. Gouws begins Chapter Two, "Kipling's Modern Chivalry: Masculinity and War in *The Light that Failed*" with a discussion of how the concept of chivalry evolved, expanding beyond the nobility, and shaping standards of behavior for commoners who wished to establish themselves as English gentlemen. Gouws goes on to argue that in *The Light that Failed,* Kipling challenges the chivalry-based standard that encouraged men to fawn over idealized women and readily sacrifice themselves in war to prove their valor, the latter a senseless loss given modern technologies of war. Gouws finds that the book celebrates the martial side of chivalry, however, the side that honors and encourages the deep and loving friendships and sense of brotherhood that men develop on the battlefield.

In Chapter Three, Elizabeth Carroll's discussion of R.C. Sherriff's 1928 play, *Journey's End,* echoes the themes of masculine duty, sacrifice, and bonding during warfare that Gouws raises in his chapter. Carroll follows a brief introduction of the play with a discussion of the expectations for manly behavior shared by men who served in World War I, how their experience of fear and/or shellshock made them feel unmanly, and how Sherriff – himself a victim of shellshock –shared these beliefs, as is evident from the play. Carroll goes on to argue that the play's protagonist, Captain Dennis Stanhope, has conflict with two of his men, Raleigh and Hibbert, because they represent two sides of himself that he feels he needs to repress, Raleigh the innocent young man he used to be, and Hibbert, the fear-ravaged man he is.

Adrienne Major's "Towards a New Masculinity: Sayers, Shellshock, and a *Wimsical* Imagination" furthers the discussion of how Edwardian standards of masculinity both led to men volunteering for war, then feeling unmanned if they succumbed to what they perceived as a feminine weakness like shellshock. Major goes on to argue that in writing shellshock into her character Lord Peter

Wimsey, Dorothy Sayers modelled a masculinity defined by physical strength and prowess, gentlemanly behavior and dress, some vulnerability, and appreciation of the abilities of women – a more practical standard of masculinity to take into World War II.

As noted above, the postwar spies of Graham Greene and Ian Fleming present very different masculinities in their writing. The next four chapters begin with the more conflicted model typical of Greene. In chapters on two of Greene's post World War II novels, Li Chen, writing about *The Heart of the Matter* (1947) and I, writing about *The Quiet American* (1955), observe similar patterns of anxiety related to post-war masculinity and empire. Both chapters show the challenges and insecurity of imperialism. Both feature aging men conflicted over the heritage of imperialism, threatened by the challenges of doing their jobs in dangerous, unstable foreign countries, and challenged by younger romantic rivals. While Henry Scobie from *The Heart of the Matter* is clearly the more virtuous of the two, both he and Thomas Fowler share a sense that being a proper Englishman requires proper behavior, whether it is Scobie, known for his fairness in policing, or Fowler who believes it is his responsibility as a reporter to remain objective and uninvolved with the politics around him – until he sees the dangerous behavior of an American spy, who also happens to be his romantic rival, jeopardizing Vietnamese lives. Both also have moments of weakness when they cannot maintain the strong façades they feel they ought to present.

That masculine sense of self should be expressed through competition with American men in two British novels set in the 1950's, *The Quiet American* and *The Innocent* by Ian McEwan, is not surprising given that traditional ideas of masculinity privilege the powerful over the less powerful, and that the United States was gaining power and influence in the world, replacing the United Kingdom as a dominant superpower. The next two chapters cover masculinity in *The Innocent*, a novel based on a real espionage operation, from different perspectives. "Covert Innocence: The Cold War, Suspicion, and the Failures of Masculinity in Ian McEwan's *The Innocent*" by Patrick Thomas Henry examines the character of Leonard Markham, another insecure Englishman abroad who fears he cannot compete with the masculinity of another American spy. Unlike the jaded Fowler, Markham begins his foray into the world of espionage as a relative innocent, albeit one with a certain sense of entitlement, and he does not outman his romantic rival, but as with the men in Sherriff's World War I trenches, he becomes a man through his experience and a loss of innocence. While Henry's study focuses on masculinities within the novel, Roxana Oltean connects the masculinities involved in McEwan's novel and those in the real world project in "'We're Supposed To Have A Special Relationship:' Cold War Men and Espionage Narratives of Operation Stopwatch/Gold in Ian McEwan's

The Innocent." Oltean finds that in terms of maintaining their country's proper reputation, the British came out ahead in the real world, having kept their involvement in this secret operation more or less secret and publicly allowing the United States to appear solely responsible for it, winning ironically by conceding.

This brings us to the fictional British spy who never concedes his country's power or prominence and almost always succeeds in a hegemonically masculine manner, James Bond. My chapter, "Masculinity in *The Living Daylights*: The Story, the Film, and a Dream of a Man" analyzes the failure of Bond's masculinity in one of the few stories where Bond is not successful as either a lover or a spy, then compares it to the film version, in which Bond not only succeeds but shows himself the better man than any other in the film. While agreeing with Lisa Funnell that the reason Bond films are so popular is that they present a way for viewers to experience, briefly and vicariously, the privilege of this white European dream of an alpha male, I conclude that this film version of Bond presents a model of masculinity that can only appear sustainable in dreams or fiction.

In contrast to the elegant screen Bond, John le Carré's George Smiley (discussed in Chapter One) and Jonathan Pine from *The Night Manager* (1993) show that the less glamorous and confident version of masculinity shown by Greene's Scobie have also retained their appeal. Dany Jacob's "Fragile Masculinities in *The Night Manager*: How 'The Worst Man in the World' brings out the Best" explores masculinities interacting in the post-Cold War era of the novel and compares them to the interactions in Susanne Bier's post-9/11 miniseries adaptation. Jacob observes that while the toxic masculinities of the novel interact with each other with little influence from the feminine, Bier's decision to change Pine's spymaster Leonard Burr to Angela Burr, who is not only female but pregnant, changes that dynamic significantly. Jacob writes about the fractures and fragility of characters' masculinities in relation to female presence and performance, the structures of masculine interaction, and Richard Roper's attempts to construct a highly patriarchal family from the members of his organization. Loyalty to the organizational or aspirational family replaces the loyalty to government typical of pre-Cold War espionage tales, but families too are vulnerable.

A similar sense of vulnerability pervades Jonathan Readey's "The Man at the Window: Ian McEwan's *Saturday* as a Narrative of Contemporary Masculinity." Readey begins by discussing the opening scene of the novel in which protagonist Henry Perowne watches the descent of a fiery plane over London from the window of his comfortable home, at once observing potential dangers of the outside world but separated from the action, manhood no longer defined as boldly volunteering for the field of battle or serving the glorious cause of

empire, country, or freedom from communism. As in *The Night Manager,* in the post 9/11 world of *Saturday*, the enemy is no longer the heathens resisting your chivalric attempts to save them with civilization, or a foreign country threatening your border or way of life, but an unaffiliated group, or possibly a random fellow-citizen you might meet on the street. Readey argues that Perowne's sense of masculinity relies on his ability to compartmentalize, to focus on the small, more controllable pieces of life, such as one's home. As Perowne learns, the locked windows and doors of his house only offer the illusion of safety, an illusion he defends by invoking the chivalric sense of duty and decency reminiscent of masculinities dating back to the British Empire, thus reframing ideas in the early chapters of this book.

Taken together, the chapters in this volume present masculinities that define and redefine themselves as the British Empire fades and Great Britain evolves, but one idea persists. While it is worth noting that the male characters discussed at length in this collection are all either middle class or above, it is important that the idea of the English gentleman – a man who behaves properly in every situation – remains influential. Even the more morally challenged Brits, like Greene's Fowler and le Carré's Roper, have some standard of proper behavior that they try to live up to. While Fowler seduces a young Vietnamese woman without any thought about what it might mean for her future, he aspires to do the right thing professionally, trying to be politically objective and, since one can't really cover a war without experiencing it, he does at least occasionally put himself in danger. While arms dealer Roper in some ways re-enacts some of the worst offenses of the British Empire by exploiting international conflicts for his own benefit, he also expects those within his circle to maintain loyalty and a certain standard of behavior. That said, there is also an element of snobbery and entitlement in much of this good behavior, as there can only be the designation gentleman if there are other, non-gentlemen, be they foreign foes, communists, Americans, lower-class blokes, or bounders who need to be defeated, educated, or simply out-manned.

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Chapter 1

Desire, Deception, and the Dulcibella: Courtship and Romantic Love in the Spy Novels of Childers, Fleming, and le Carré

Pierre Dumont

American University

Abstract

This chapter explores three different ways romance and espionage are connected and shape the structure in Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903), Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale* (1953), and John le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1974), concluding that while women are important to the plot, the books follow patterns observed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick in which women function primarily as objects of masculine exchange.

Keywords: Masculinity, Romance, Spy fiction, Espionage, Erskine Childers, Ian Fleming, John le Carre, James Bond (character), George Smiley (character)

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From the educated, international yachtsmen of the early twentieth century, to the suavity and sophistication of Fleming's James Bond, to the cynical and defeated spy masters of the works of John le Carré, spies have held a distinct place in readers' imaginations. Whether scouting out moles or discerning plots of international intrigue, such figures have, over time, been attributed their own medium: the spy novel. However, spy characters are not always alone. Indeed, it is not uncommon for a spy character to have a romantic counterpart, one that acts in response to his own professional actions. In Erskine Childers's 1903 novel *The Riddle of the Sands*, two rather unprofessional spies find themselves awkwardly fawning over a female love interest. In Ian Fleming's 1953 novel *Casino Royale*, James Bond finds himself distracted from spy work by the attractive Vesper Lynd. In John le Carré's 1974 novel *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, former British spy George Smiley is given the unpleasant task of uncovering a mole that has invaded the Secret Service, while also coping with a failed

marriage. Such works demonstrate how romance and espionage can be connected, and how the spy novel's essential structure is often dependent upon an invocation of the romantic. In Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands*, Fleming's *Casino Royale*, and le Carré's *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, women play very different but important roles in the lives and careers of very different spies. The significance of this romantic element is to establish a counterpart of the spy narrative: in these spy novels, matters of espionage are often entwined with romantic elements. Moreover, in these particular spy stories, romantic matters are often displaced in favor of homosocial bonds.

In discussing these aspects of the espionage narrative, one often encounters the question of the worth of spy fiction for literary study. To counter the notion that popular fiction (in particular, crime fiction) is less deserving of critical attention than "higher" forms of literature, Jon Thompson offers the following: "many of the techniques and forms of popular literature have been appropriated by high literary forms… In the high modernist period of the early twentieth century, this process of assimilation of popular culture was regularly accompanied by high modernism's very conscious attempt to define itself in opposition to popular culture" (Thompson 5). Thompson argues that, rather than being antithetical to "higher" forms of literature, popular fiction was actually necessary to forms of literature generally regarded as greater intellectual achievements. This is of course relevant to spy fiction, and the spy novel's often-conceived-of status as a "lower" form of literature ought not prohibit it from closer scrutiny. While some disparity in quality does exist between forms of literature, such a distinction is often not as bifurcated as readers might initially surmise. Indeed, for Thompson, one need look no further than Mikhail Bakhtin, for whom "the provenance of a given genre is less important than the articulations it makes about society" (Thompson 6). Spy fiction in particular says a great deal about modern society, especially in terms of gender and masculinity.

Spy fiction is not only relevant for literary study; it is also a useful lens for understanding twentieth-century modernism. Indeed, it is perhaps not surprising that spy fiction, a genre so concerned with elusiveness and uncovering, should correlate with modernism, a literary movement characterized by "strangeness, distance, and alienation" (Thompson 20). As Thompson describes, "modernist writing is fascinated with uncovering, revealing, decoding, sleuthing. Within the modernist worldview, there is the assumption of a "remoter 'something' – a hidden truth, a concealed clue to existence, a sense that experience is coded" (Thompson 111). For Thompson, as for many others who study popular fiction, the aims of modernism and the spy novel are not dissimilar. The advent of spy fiction in the late nineteenth century, then, comes at an appropriate time and can be seen as intertwined with the rise of modernism in literature.

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