

LITERATURE ASSESSMENT COVER SHEET 2020–21

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Andrew Wachtel wrote that 'as a created phenomenon, national identity is always potentially up for grabs', as such this 'national identity' can be represented a many number of ways, depending on who grabbed it.¹ In this essay, I am detailing the representation of nations at large within the spy novels of John le Carré's 'The Spy Who Came in from the Cold' and John Buchan's 'Greenmantle'. I do this by focusing on the concept of national borders and boundaries, – their concreteness, the tribalist focus on difference, and the converse similarities between nations – the separation of how nations represent themselves and how their spies act, and how the nations are represented through their care of their own agents. Le Carré writes of the arbitrary boundaries of East and West, – where tribal nationalism is dismissed – spy networks working conversely from the public presentation of their nations, and the agencies' lack of care for individual agents. This is contrasted with Buchan's writing of concrete, enforced imperial boundaries – where tribalistic beliefs are rampant – spy networks existing as extensions of their state's public beliefs, and their care for individual agents, despite the risks.

Nations are peculiar things, they exist not only as imagined communities, but also as political constructs – with borders that entrench that. This is reinforced by Joyce MacMillan, writing in the Scotsman that 'nations are formed by acts of human imagination and political will, and made real through the construction of institutions that can record and in some way represent the culture and people of a given area'.² As such, while national borders may seem – at times – arbitrary, they are a cornerstone of national identity and how the nation itself is represented. Speaking specifically about an example given in the novel - of East and West Berlin - G.W.S Robinson wrote in 1953, a whole eight years before even the earliest foundations of the Berlin wall, that Berliners found that; 'half their city figures as an exclave, separated from the other half and cut off from the surrounding country. West Berlin is not simply a detached part of one country surrounded by the territory of another; it is

¹ Wachtel, Andrew, 'Introduction', *Making a Nation, Breaking a Nation: Literature and Cultural Politics in Yugoslavia* (Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press : 1998) p.02

² McMillan, Joyce, 'National borders are imaginary, so we can reimagine them', *The Scotsman* (03/07/2020) <<https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/national-borders-are-imaginary-so-we-can-reimagine-them-joyce-mcmillan-2902469>> (accessed: 10/12/2020)

a German province surrounded by German territory'.³ The severity of the damage in the USSR's national boundaries that West Berlin causes is explained further, Robinson details how; 'any exclave is, in proportion to its size, an obstacle in the territory of the country in which it lies. West Berlin is in addition, for ideological reasons, a threat to the political stability of the East German state.'⁴ Le Carré represents this conflict of national boundaries, when he puts his protagonist, British spy Leamas, in conversation with two West-German guards, when he asks; 'what are your rules for shooting to protect a man coming over? A man on the run.'⁵ They admit that, regardless of the seeming stability of the city borders, their hands are tied in terms of realistically enforcing them – for fear of escalating tensions; 'we can't give covering fire. That's the truth. They tell us there'd be war if we did'.⁶ The preposterousness of the situation is not lost on Leamas, as he enquires further – clarifying that the literal lines on the map are more important than anything, despite how arbitrary it may seem; 'that means you can't shoot until a man's over the boundary?'⁷ The absurdity of this stalemate – with both sides putting up the pretence of enforcing their national borders but refraining from taking any concrete action – is made an example of later in the chapter, when an attempted escape to the West by a fellow agent goes awry and he is fired upon. It is revealed that the East-Germans have a similar philosophy to their border as the West, as it is detailed how; 'the East German sentry fired, quite carefully, away from them, into his own sector.'⁸ This seeming arbitrariness of physical borders, in contrast with cartographical ones represents the nationhood of Germany as a mostly political issue – with the people and culture stuck in the middle.

While the borders themselves may at times seem arbitrarily drawn, the negative emotions created and fermented towards the 'other' can be very real. This tribalistic nationalism is one other way in which nations are represented – at least, through the eyes of the beholder. John J. Mearsheimer speaks of the correlation between

³ Robinson, G.W.S., 'West Berlin: The Geography of an Exclave', in *Geographical Review*, Vol. 43:04 (October 1953) p.557

⁴ Robinson, *Geographical Review* p. 545

⁵ Le Carré, John, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (London : Penguin : 2014) p.05

⁶ Le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.06

⁷ Le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.06

⁸ Le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.09

nationalism and aggressive tribalism, stating that ‘people who love their own nation can easily come to be contemptuous of the nationalities inhabiting opposing states’, and details how the rivalries created by political differences can deepen these feelings; ‘the problem is worsened when domestic elites demonise a rival nation to drum up support for national security policy’.⁹ This tribalism is believed by le Carré to be deeply problematic, and he represents this in his novel through the many conversations between Leamas and East-German agent Josef Fiedler; ‘I just think the lot of you are bastards,’ said Leamas savagely. Fiedler nodded. ‘That is a viewpoint I understand. It is primitive, negative and very stupid – but it is a viewpoint’.¹⁰ Fiedler continues, stating how he believes these nationalistic tendencies to be one of the only flaws in an otherwise perfect, stoic British spy. He explains Leamas’ feelings as ‘a little resentment here, a little pride there [...] the distortions of a tape recorder’.¹¹ Stephen J. Whitfield – in his book ‘The Culture of the Cold War’ - speaks of the sermon given in 1954 by Reverend George M. Docherty, where he speaks of the similarities between the USA and the USSR, regardless of any state boundaries; ‘apart from the mention of the phrase ‘the United States of America’ it could be the pledge of any republic. In fact, I could hear little Moscovites repeat a similar pledge to their hammer-and-sickle flag in Moscow with equal solemnity. Russia is also a republic that claims to have overthrown the tyranny of kingship’.¹² This similarity between East and West is reiterated by le Carré, as Liz confronts Leamas, stating that ‘all cats are the same in the dark’ and that – through her experiences being treated by both sides’ agencies – ‘it makes you the same,’ Liz continued, ‘the same as Mundt and all the rest...I should know’.¹³ ¹⁴ This idea – of both sides believing stoically that they are ideologically opposite of one another, while their actions are almost interchangeable – is reiterated by the British agents themselves; ‘I mean, you’ve got to compare method with method, and ideal with ideal. I would say that since the war, our methods – ours and those of the opposition

⁹ Mearsheimer, John J., ‘Why We Will Soon Miss the Cold War’, in *The Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 266:02 (August 1990), p.39

¹⁰ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.137-138

¹¹ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.141

¹² Whitfield, Stephen J., *The Culture of the Cold War* (Baltimore, MD : John Hopkins University Press : 1996) p.89

¹³ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.244

¹⁴ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.225

– have become much the same'.¹⁵ John M. Hanley - a former member of the American intelligence agency – enforces this idea, writing in an article for 'American Diplomacy' that; 'those of us previously or currently in the game will notice more similarities in how U.S. and Russian agencies operate'.¹⁶ This fermentation of nationalistic resentment of the rival, in conjunction with the simultaneous similarities in their methods of espionage, represent the nations of the USSR and the United Kingdom as fundamentally very similar – despite what tribalistic aggression may be felt by their operatives.

As stated above, the two nations – at the very least in terms of their handling of their secret services – act very similarly. However, on the public level – in terms of how they are represented – they could not be more different. This 'Jekyll and Hyde' scenario, where the nation presents itself as one way, yet has their secret service agents act in another is reiterated by Richard Lea and Sian Cain; writing for 'The Guardian' on the day of le Carré's death, stating that 'Le Carré explored the gap between the West's high-flown rhetoric of freedom and the gritty reality of defending it, in novels such as *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* and *The Night Manager*'.¹⁷ This idea is reiterated by Simon Chesterman, in his 2006 article for the 'Michigan Journal of International Law', as he explains how nations openly outlaw the act of spying, while also actively engage in surveillance and espionage against other nations. He details that; 'the fact spying on other countries violates their law is far different from the assertion that the activity itself is illegal, as if some skulking shame of criminality were attached to the enterprise. Our spies are patriots'.¹⁸ The head of the British spy agency, Control, himself explains this two-faced concept of nationhood; 'I mean, you can't be less ruthless than the opposition simply because your government's *policy* is benevolent, can you now?'.¹⁹ Ivy, once again in her fit of rage against Leamas, exposes this contradiction, the brutality of

¹⁵ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.18

¹⁶ Handley, John M., 'Comrade J: Russia's Master Spy in America', *American Diplomacy* (Chapel Hill, NC : American Diplomacy Publishers : 2008)

¹⁷ Richard Lea & Sian Cain, 'John le Carré, author of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, dies aged 89', *The Guardian* (14/12/2020) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/dec/13/john-le-carre-author-of-tinker-tailor-soldier-spy-dies-aged-89>> (accessed: 14/12/2020)

¹⁸ Chesterman, Simon, 'The Spy Who Came in from the Cold War: Intelligence and International Law', in *Michigan Journal of International Law*, Vol. 27:04 (2006) p. 1071-1072

¹⁹ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.18

British spies despite the persona portrayed by the state; ‘everywhere’s the same, people cheated and misled, whole lives thrown away, people shot and in prison’.²⁰ Milton Zuniga writes of the representation of the nation, through the British spy, and how le Carré subverts this. He writes; ‘for society, spies had become the ideological liberators, the infiltrators that could help entire countries find their path towards social freedom’ and that ‘having been an intelligence officer, John le Carré uses writing to depict a troubled and inglorious vision of espionage. He creates scenarios based on historical conflict that challenge the accepted notion of Western democracy and the spread of Communism across Russia and Eastern Europe’.^{21 22}

Le Carré also represents the nations at the forefront of the Cold War as uncaring of their individual citizens’ wellbeing – regardless of their friendly faces depicted to the public. Munthir A. Sabi, writing in 2008, speaks of Leamas’ use as a pawn of the British spy agency – with no regard for his own safety; ‘the theme of this novel is a tragedy, not only because the protagonist dies miserably with his girl-friend by the Wall of Berlin, but for being treacherously used by his own agency as a dispensable tool for the execution of “The Rolling Stone” project, under which he is brutally mangled’.²³ This is shown in le Carré’s work as Leamas is finally able to put all of the pieces of the puzzle together; ‘and suddenly, with the terrible clarity of a man too long deceived, Leamas understood the whole ghastly trick’.²⁴ However, as is the case throughout the novel, both sides are equally guilty of this – when Hans-Dieter Mundt, leader of the East-German spy agency (and a British mole) brings Ivy from Britain only to use her as evidence against Leamas, he does so to a loyal supporter of his nation’s cause; ‘I am sorry that a girl whose perception is clouded by sentiment, and whose alertness is blunted by money, should be considered by our British Comrades a suitable person for Party office’.²⁵ When Ivy asks Leamas for an explanation as to the strike of betrayal she’d just been blown, he explains that; ‘your

²⁰ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.244-245

²¹ Zuniga, *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations*, p.08

²² Zuniga, Milton, ‘Alienated Selfhood and heroism: A Poststructuralist Reading of John le Carré’s Spy Fiction Novels’, *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations* (2014)
<<https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2646&context=etd>> (accessed: 10/12/2020) p.03

²³ A. Sabi, Munthir, “‘The Spy Who Came in from the Cold’ by John le Carré: the Ironic Story of the Spy Who is Crushed by “The Rolling Stone” of his own British Agency’, in *Al-Adab Journal*, Issue 85 (2008)

²⁴ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.228

²⁵ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.220

job was to discredit me. Fiedler was shot and Mundt was saved, mercifully delivered from a fascist plot. It's the old principle of love on the rebound'.²⁶ Fiedler, in another one of his many foreshadowing comments on the similarities of the two agents, argues with Leamas, stating that 'this is hardly the time to philosophise, but you can't really complain, you know. All our work – yours and mine – is rooted in the theory that the whole is more important than the individual'.²⁷ This lack of care in the individual, who the nations then deceive and ultimately destroy, is another way in which le Carré represents the nations' similarities – despite the apparent difference in ideology.

In many ways, John Buchan's 'Greenmantle' is a more innocent form of spy novel – with all the biases and beliefs of the time. In contrast with the seemingly arbitrary national boundaries, and constant espionage of 'The Spy Who Came in from the Cold', Buchan's novel confronts a challenge of borders on an imperial scale, and of a 'purer' style. David Stafford explains how 'the need to defend Empire made sense only when the Empire could already be challenged; the need to defend order only when "society" felt under threat' – that there was little constant surveillance, and that the British seemingly only attacked when provoked.²⁸ This is detailed in the novel, where the mission is not directly involved in the war at hand, but is an attempt to preemptively quell a problem which may appear – it is stated that; 'as long as we are in the dark it works unchecked and we may be too late. The war must be won or lost in Europe. Yes; but if the East blazes up, our effort will be distracted from Europe and the great coup may fail'.²⁹ If the Cold War of le Carré's books is a war of cataclysmic scale which is handled in the shadows, then the war of Buchan's novels – the First World War – is one of disastrous scale fought out in the open. As such, the anxiety of enforcing national borders that is in 'The Spy Who Came in from the Cold' are forgone, and replaced with overt imperial warfare to expand said borders – as is written by Robert Gerwarth and Erez Manela; 'we should see the First World War not merely as a war between European nation states, but primarily as a war of multi-

²⁶ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.240

²⁷ le Carré, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*, p.126

²⁸ Stafford, David, *The Silent Game: The Real World of Imaginary Spies* (Athens, GA : University of Georgia Press : 1991) p.214

²⁹ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.107

ethnic, global empires'.³⁰ When the Foreign Office detail the importance of Hannay's mission, and make no mistake of his role in reinforcing imperial control, they put it in the context of British colonies which may be affected – they speak of the 'Hell which may spread', and remind him that 'beyond Persia you remember, lies India'.³¹ Charles Jones reiterates on this idea, when he writes that; 'the importance of an empire's periphery is crucial also to John Buchan'.³² This importance and solidity enforced of the imperial borders is reiterated by all characters, even the antagonists. Colonel Stumm, when speaking of his nation's wish to become a powerful actor on the world stage uses the imperial markers of colonial boundaries as a gauge, proclaiming; 'you see that map,' and he pointed to a big one on the wall. 'South Africa is coloured green. Not red for the English, or yellow for the Germans. Some day it will be yellow'.³³ This is while unknowingly confronting the novel's protagonist - 'the unquestioning imperialist Richard Hannay' – who is stated as doing the exact same thing, fighting; 'for your own skins and your Empire and the peace of Europe'.³⁴ ³⁵ This representation of the nations of Britain and Germany is – as said before – almost 'purer' in a sense when compared to le Carré's depiction. While Hannay's imperial mission to strengthen and expand the empire's borders may be abhorrent in many other ways, at least he is open and concrete in his mission – as are the antagonists who he must face.

In another act of contrasting with le Carré's representation of nationhood, Buchan – instead of distancing and vilifying tribalistic nationalism – enforces it. Hannay does not go into the spy 'business' for glory or political gain, but as a nationalistic duty – the Foreign Office advisor guesses his purpose in his motivations; 'I take it you are in this business to serve your country, Hannay?' 'I reckon I am', I said. 'I am certainly not in it for my health'.³⁶ He reiterates, stating that 'you are fighting, not because you

³⁰ Robert Gerwarth & Erez Manela, 'Introduction', *Empires at War: 1911-1923* (Oxford : Oxford University Press : 2014) p.03

³¹ Buchan, John, 'Greenmantle', *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories* (Ware : Wordsworth : 2010) p.105

³² Jones, Charles, 'The Ottoman Front and British Propaganda: John Buchan's *Greenmantle*', in *Bellicose Entanglements 1914: The Great War as a Global War*, ed. Johann Jessen & Klaus Jan Phillip (Münster : Lit Verlag : 2015), p.160

³³ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.135

³⁴ Jones, *Entanglements 1914: The Great War as a Global War*, p.160

³⁵ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.111

³⁶ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.103

are short of a job, but because you want to help England'.³⁷ This bold-faced British nationalism sits alongside negative use of national stereotypes when confronted with the antagonists – the Germans, as they are described as; 'beer-swillers'.³⁸ David Trotter, writing in 1990, details this negative representation of the German antagonists when he writes of; 'Colonel Stumm, with his pyramidal head and suspiciously effeminate habits, is a caricature – but one which Buchan's readers had, in 1916, good cause to fear'.³⁹ That is not to say, however, that the Germans were impervious of such fervent nationalistic belief, the aforementioned Colonel Stumm raves about the German nation holding within it; 'the greatest people on earth,' he said, 'as their enemies will soon bear witness'.⁴⁰

While le Carré's novel was written at a time when the spy agencies of the world had long been established and reinforced by constant use, Buchan was a pioneer of the spy genre, and as such the real-life spy agencies of Britain and her contemporaries were still young. As such, they were still very-much tied to their governmental 'big brothers' – this is in great contrast to the agency of 'The Spy Who Came in from the Cold' which is all-but independent from the state's open pursuits. As Phillip Davies recalls, in the real-life history of the British spy agency the SSB (Secret Service Bureau), it was a 'Cabinet decision that created the SSB', and that 'the essential purpose of the SSB was never to function as an independent operational entity [...] from its very inception, it was intended to act as an institutional 'cut out' between the War office and the Admiralty (and later, more grudgingly, the Foreign Office)^{41 42} While Leamas could be seen as seemingly working outside the confines of the government's control, Hannay is very much aware of the state's involvement. Buchan is open with the government's – through the Foreign Office – involvement and control. He writes that; 'there might be other things in the war than straightforward fighting. Why on earth should the Foreign Office want to see an

³⁷ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.103

³⁸ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.125

³⁹ Trotter, David, 'The Politics of Adventure in the Early British Spy Novel', in *Intelligence and National Security*, ed. Mark Phythian, Vol.05:04 (1990) p.30

⁴⁰ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.132

⁴¹ Davies, Phillip, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying: Structure and Process in Britain's Secret Intelligence* (Oxon : Frank Cass Publishers : 2005), p.26

⁴² Davies, *MI6 and the Machinery of Spying: Structure and Process in Britain's Secret Intelligence* p.26

obscure major of the New Army, and see him in double-quick time?⁴³ This representation of the nation is contrasted with le Carré's as it depicts a nation more in control and aware – at least, willingly – of its agents' operations and actions. Britain's relationship with its own spies – by treating them as humans in their own right – is another way in which Buchan and le Carré diverge, while le Carré's depiction of the agents' autonomy in their own lives is bleak at best, Buchan writes his Foreign Office higher-ups as compassionate to the possible wants and needs of their agents. Hannay is told, when given his briefing, that; 'I shall perfectly understand if you decline. You will be acting as I should act myself – as any sane man would', and is not swindled into 'just one more job'.⁴⁴ In contrast to le Carré once again, Buchan doesn't write his spy protagonists as pawns of the spy agency, but as valuable assets and comrades who should be protected as individuals. As such, other agents are willing and able to aid Hannay in his task – when all seems lost in the conclusion to the novel, the protagonist and his friends are saved by Russian forces; 'Sandy gripped my shoulder and was shouting in my ear: 'They're coming, Dick. Look at the grey devils! ... Oh, God be thanked, it's our friends!'⁴⁵ It is then revealed that Peter Pienaar, a fellow agent of Hannay's, was to thank; "You are safe, my old friends' – it was Peter's voice that spoke – 'I will take you back to our army, and get you breakfast'.⁴⁶ It seems obvious, but to say these representations of the nation's secret agencies are drastically different would be an understatement. While Hannay is actively encouraged to make his own mind up on even accepting the mission, and then – when he does – is aided in times of peril by fellow agents, Leamas is deceived and ultimately doomed to death by his agency as just another piece of collateral damage in a grander deception.

Overall, both writers represent their depicted nations in drastically different ways. John le Carré presents both Eastern and Western sides' borders as almost arbitrary, – with nationalistic sentiment disregarded – their spy networks diverging from their nation's public policy, and their care for their agents being almost negligible. In contrast, John Buchan presents British imperial borders as being strengthened and

⁴³ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.101

⁴⁴ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.103

⁴⁵ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.301

⁴⁶ Buchan, *The Complete Richard Hannay Stories*, p.302

expanded, - with tribalistic sentiment being openly discussed – her spy network working in tandem with public policy regarding the war, and the protagonist being encouraged and reinforced by the network instead of deceived.

WORDS: 3299

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