



## **"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**

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### **Abstract**

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October, 1977, Time magazine published in its issue a feature by Stefan Kanfer, containing a biographical background of David Cornell, alias John le Carré, his work, and its aesthetics, entitled: "Master of the Spy Story: John le Carré Strikes Again". The new strike by le Carré was the publication of his new "spy story", The Honourable Schoolboy.

Prior to this, he published his memorable "spy story", The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, described by a fellow-novelist, Graham Greene, as the "best novel I have ever read." This novel is analysed briefly in the light of this interview and biographical background by Kanfer in his article, to underscore le Carré's care and use of the essential elements of the novel: consummate characterization, intricate but logically flowing plot, enchanting description of nature including human nature, and realistic observation of the life of spies abroad.

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.

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In the wake of the publication of *The Honourable Schoolboy* (1977), *Time* magazine issued an edition with John le Carré's portrait, inset with various episodes from his own work with the caption: "Master of the Spy Story: John le Carré Strikes Again" (October 3, 1977). This masterly, main feature, was written by Stefan Canfer and is abstracted in the Index thus:

Cover: David Cornell (alias John le Carré) has a background as complex as the agents in his thrillers. His newest novel reveals the spies and wherefores of espionage□ and is a form of disguised autobiography. See Books. (*Time*, p. 6)

This feature begins with a splendid encomium: "John le Carré, 45, is the premier spy novelist of his time. Perhaps of all times." Kanfer (58) Another eulogium by a fellow-novelist, Graham Greene, referring to *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1963), says: "The best spy novel I have ever read." Kanfer (68) With three and a half million readers concurring with Greene, it "earned enough to bankroll the whole Foreign Office staff... [So] Cornell handed in his resignation and assumed the identity of John le Carré, thriller writer." Kanfer (68)

Yet, he was not deemed influential enough to be aligned along other important twentieth-century fiction-writers; *20<sup>th</sup>-Century Fiction* (Macmillan, 1987), introduced by George Woodcock and written by a galaxy of prominent critics, does not include his name, biography, or work. One of his predecessors, Ian Fleming (1908-1964), famous for his James Bond, finds a comfortable space in this valuable reference: "The earlier James Bond novels were among the fore-runners of a renewed taste for the spy stories in the 1950s and 1960s." Vinson (221) With the experience of a varied career, Stewart F. Sanderson explains, in journalism, the City, newspaper management and as Personal Assistant to the Director of Naval Intelligence during the Second World War



"ensured Fleming an immediate success as the author of a series of spy thrillers." Vinson (220)

Quite disappointingly, Sanderson goes on to conclude:

The excellence of Fleming's achievement in an admittedly minor branch of literature may be measured thus: the forgetful reader who picks up one of James Bond novels again after ten or twenty years will find it as fresh and engaging as ever. (Sanderson, in Vinson, 221)

But, of course, Sanderson is dead right in his assessment of the status of the spy fiction (and crime stories, detection novels and thrillers, for that matter); they lose much of their brilliance and dazzle soon, for reality is usually stranger than fiction: "[these works] have subsequently proved in the light of recent revelations of the workings of the CIA, to be less fantastic than the realities of certain actual or perceived intelligence operations." (Vinson, 221)

To prove that Sanderson is reasonably right in considering this genre "an admittedly minor branch of literature," one can check any book on fiction, especially this type of the novel, to see that it is not even a minor form of literature, while the gothic novel still holds its place (see for instance Jeremy Hawthorn, *Studying the Novel: An Introduction*, Edward Arnold, 1989). In Walter Allen's *The English Novel: A Short Critical History* (1955), this "minor branch" is overlooked completely; and in Lee T. Lemon's *A Glossary for the Study of English* (1971), it is stingily given one sentence: "Cloak and Dagger or spy novels involve espionage rather than private crime." This short "definition", a la mode, is, of course, included in a whole paragraph on the "detective novel or story." (12)

The reason behind this might be that it is a highly-specialised form of fiction that postulates the experience of the writer in this



sphere. Fleming's close association with the British Naval Intelligence is remarkable in its influence on his work. (Vinson, 220) David Cornell, who lives at his own retreat overlooking the sea in Cornwall, with a rambling house in London, Hampstead, and a ski-chalet in the Swiss Alps, and whose income is virtually consumed by gradual income tax (80%), loves England, and is averse to leave it for overseas tax havens, admits, finally: "I can't live elsewhere: this country is the source for me. I understand the choreography here." (Kanfer, 72) Of course, the country is part of his inspiration; but his background, education, and experience are the essential ingredients of his talent as "a master of the spy story."

David Cornell was born in 1931, received a public school education, and attended the universities of Berne and Oxford, excelling in foreign languages. Later, to please his father's pride, he taught at Eton and spent five years in the British Foreign Service. He told Dean Fisher, in a series of interviews for the Time: "From early on, I have been something of a spy;" Fisher comments: "The espionage began when David was five." Left by his mother, Olive, to live with his father, Ronnie, he wondered about his absences; he was simply "away": "I wondered if my father was some great spy who went off and did nationally vital things." (Kanfer, 67) After his Swiss sojourn, during which he "delved into German letters and discovered new modes of expression and thought," Cornell joined the Army Intelligence Corps. His fluency in German won him assignment in Vienna, where he added "human perspective to his fresh literary perception;" he says:

I spent a great deal of time with extraordinary victims of half a dozen wars. Estonians, for example, who had been imprisoned by the Germans, fought for the Germans, been imprisoned again by the Americans. (Kanfer, 67)



He met RAF officers who had bombed Berlin in 1945 and returned for the airlift of 1948-49. These ironies altered his life: "It was like reading the right book at the right time. I saw the right things at the right time". (Kanfer, 67)

After Eton, Cornell joined the Foreign Service; from 1961 to 1963, he served as second secretary in the British Embassy in Bonn and for two years after that he was consul in Hamburg. During this period he was restless as diplomat, whose function included those of an intelligence operative, so he began to write fiction. As Foreign Service forbids its staff to write using their own names, Cornell claims to have seen the name Le Carré (the square) on a London shop window. (Kanfer, 68), which is not true, as he confessed later.

Like one of his fictive British agents, the pseudonymous author used to scribble in trains, constructing this character who was to become his alter ego, George Smiley. Unlike his creator physically, who is "ruddy and handsome," Smiley, like le Carré, is an Oxonian, an ardent student of German literature, and an intellectual manqué; he is married to a lady named Ann, and like le Carré, he is going to separate from her. Control, the mastermind of British counter-espionage at Cambridge Circus, in enlisting Alec Leamas' consent to a project whose supposed aim is to kill Mundt, his counter-part in the Zone (the [East] German Democratic Republic), tells him that the latter tried to kill Smiley, and elaborates:

George Smiley knew the [Fennan] case well. He isn't with us anymore but I think you [Leamas] must ferret him out. He's doing things on seventeenth-century Germany. He lives in Chelsea, just behind Sloane Square, By-water Street, do you know it? (The Spy who Came in from the Cold\*, p. 22)



Leamas agrees to undertake the mission: "God knows.... I'd like to take a swing at Mundt," (Spy, 25) for he had already liquidated his network in Berlin, leaving him jobless, retired. His last agent, Karl Riemack, has already been shot while crossing from the east, speeding on his bicycle; soon after, Elvira, Karl's mistress, is assassinated in West Berlin. Thus, Leamas' blood has already been boiling with the desire to avenge his agents on Mundt:

Why? We have got nothing left in East Germany, nothing at all. You [Control] just said so □ Riemack was the last. We've nothing left to protect. (Spy, 21)... If it is a question of killing Mundt, I'm game. (Spy, 22)

Who is Hans-Dieter Mundt? To Control, he is apparently a very distasteful man, "Ex-Hitler-Youth and all that kind of thing. Not at all the intellectual kind of Communist. A practitioner of the cold war." (Spy, 22). To Leamas, who already knows his dossier and photograph intimately, and who has known by heart "his rise to power as second man in the Abteilung and effective head of operations," "Mundt was hated even within his own department." (Spy, 14). Leamas knows all this from his agents, including Riemack, and more:

Until 1959 Mundt had been a minor functionary of the Abteilung, operating in London under the cover of the East German Steel Mission. He returned to Germany in a hurry after murdering two of his own agents to save his skin and was not heard of more than a year. Quite suddenly he reappeared at the Abteilung headquarters in Leipzig as head



\* Subsequently, Spy

of the Ways and Means Department, responsible for allocating currency, equipment and personnel for special tasks. At the end of that year came the big struggle for power within the Abteilung. (Spy, 14)

As the number and influence of Soviet liaison officers are already radically reduced, several of the old guard are disposed of, on ideological grounds and three men emerge:

Fiedler as head of counter-intelligence, John took over from Mundt as head of facilities, and Mundt himself [got] the plum □ deputy director of operations □ at the age of forty-one. Then the new style [liquidation] began. (Spy, 14)

The new style of Mundt means the systematic liquidation of all of Leamas set-up, beginning with a girl who is a small link in the network; "They shot her dead in the street as she left a West Berlin cinema," and ending the whole section with the killing of Karl:

And now they had Karl, and Leamas was leaving as he had come □ without a single agent worth a farthing. Mundt had won. (Spy, 15)

It is quite normal for Leamas to detest Mundt, the unscrupulous killer, who is so trigger-happy that he kills first and interrogates later, which makes Fiedler quite suspicious. (Spy, 150) Le Carré's use of the toothless dog image expresses Laeamas' frustration admirably:

It is said a dog lives as long as its teeth; metaphorically, Leamas' teeth had been drawn; and it was Mundt who had drawn them. (Spy, 13)



Consequently, nobody is more eligible for this job of Mundt's elimination than Leamas; he doesn't mind staying out "in the cold" a bit longer to undertake the feat of his life. (Spy, 20) Leamas concurs with Control that they "ought to try to get rid of Mundt", to which Control responds: "I really think we ought to get rid of him if we can manage it." (Spy, 20) Alec Leamas, like the readers of *The Spy who Came in from the Cold*, are really cheated, for no one can suspect Control of sacrificing such a fine, disillusioned ex-worker for the Circus, for the sake of Mundt, who is virtually London's man, sabotaging the Abteilung from the inside. It is, of course, a customary British style □ to do the most fantastic and unscrupulous thing in order to "divide and rule." Control explains to the gullible, trusting Leamas the ethics of secret service:

... we do disagreeable things, but we are defensive....

We do disagreeable things so that ordinary people here and elsewhere can sleep safely in their beds at night.

Is that romantic? Of course, we occasionally do very wicked things... And in weighing up the moralities, we rather go in for dishonest comparisons; after all, you can't compare the ideals of one side with the methods of the other, can you, now? (Spy, 20)

Leamas' wildest guess would not have been that he is going to be the sacrificial lamb for acquitting Mundt of the accusation of being an agent of the British Intelligence, and thus protect him from his loyal and ideologically dedicated rival, Fiedler. This, of course, is one of the "wicked things" but Leamas does not suspect Control of such wickedness.

If tragedy means "representations of serious and important actions which turn out disastrously for the chief character,"





(Abrams, 173) Leamas is as tragic a character as Oedipus of Sophocles, who is "eventually doomed as a result of his efforts to avoid committing an offence against the moral law." (Murray, 168) Like the Sophoclean tragedy, the doomed fate of Leamas is foreshadowed at every turn, but overlooked by everybody, except Control. Consider the following paragraph from chapter XII "East," where Leamas and his escort, the Russian Peters, are about to land in the east:

Leamas unfastened his seat- belt.

It is said that men condemned to death are subject to sudden moments of elation: as if, like moths in the fire, their destruction were coincidental with attainment.... Leamas was aware of a comparable sensation; relief, short-lived but consoling, sustained him for a time. It was followed by fear and hunger.

He was slowing down. Control was right. (Spy, 113)

Control is right when he says: "this is your last job... then you can come in from the cold." (Spy, 56) But nobody is able to guess, even wildly, that he is going to come in, cold but dead, as well.

Leamas finds out the truth on the verge of the end of the Tribunal trial while imminent death lurks for him on the east side of the notorious Wall. It is too late to save himself when he discovers that he is really the scape-goat sacrificed by the unholy alliance of Control, Smiley, and Mundt to eliminate Fiedler, who has been trying to prove Mundt's treachery and perfidy to his own people. Leamas cries, prodded by the other scape-goat, Liz, his co-worker at the Psychological Research Library in London, while fleeing for West Berlin and the Wall, freed by Mundt himself:



I'll tell you what you never knew, never to know, neither you nor I. Listen: Mundt is London's man, their agent; they bought him when he was in England. We are witnessing the lousy end to a filthy, lousy operation to save Mundt's skin. To save him from a clever little Jew [Fiedler] in his own department who had begun to suspect the truth. They made us kill him, d' you see, kill the Jew. Now you know, and God help us both. (Spy, 226)

Is the bitterness of this discovery: Leamas betrayed by his own people, and Liz by her comrades in the English Communist Party, essentially different from that of Oedipus when he discovers, to his horror, that in trying to avert his destined fate, he has already killed his father and married his own mother? And why? To satisfy the gods (both natural and supernatural) whose sport is the killing of people like flies? Leamas and Liz soon join Karl Riemack as expendable victims and for the same "wicked" reason: to keep Mundt's secret intact.

Cornell's sympathy for his character, Leamas, is quite evident in every element of his characterisation; as writer, he claims to have been deeply influenced by the naturalism of Balzac's "fact, fact, fact," but especially by his devoted, deep love for his own characters. (Kanfer, 76) Ironically, his most favourite character, Leamas, is openly associated with Balzac's pet personages; Leamas as part of a plan to ostensibly kill Mundt, masquerades as defector into the Zone, so he has to impersonate and live up to that assumed identity:



even when he was alone, he compelled himself to live with the personality he had assumed. It is said that Balzac on his deathbed enquired anxiously after the health and prosperity of the characters he had created. Similarly, Leamas, without relinquishing the power of invention, identified himself with what he had invented. ... When alone, he remained faithful to these habits.

He would even exaggerate them a little, mumbling to himself about the iniquities of his Service. (Spy, 140)

From the beginning, after the tragedy of killing his last agent in Berlin, Karl, for whom he waits long hours in vain, the reader's sympathy is aroused for the frustrated Leamas. Although he is not the reflective or philosophical type of man, he realises that "Intelligence work has one moral law □ it is justified by results." (Spy, 13) He also realises, resignedly, that he is already written off; "it was a fact of life which he would henceforth live with, as a man must live with cancer or imprisonment." (Spy, 13) While he is contemplating his failure, which he has met as one day he would meet death, "with cynical resentment and the courage of a solitary," (Spy, 13), the reader is given the privilege of a close-up of Alec Leamas' physical features:

Leamas was a short man with close, iron-grey hair, and the physique of a swimmer. He was very strong. This strength was discernible in his back and shoulders, in his neck, and in the stubby formation of his hands and fingers....

He had an attractive face, muscular, and a stubborn line to his thin mouth. His eyes were brown and small; Irish, some said. It was hard to place Leamas. (Spy, 15)



At the very beginning of his career, Leamas shows a strong propensity for operational work; "You might as well have asked a jockey to become a totalisator clerk as expect Leamas to abandon operational life for the tendentious theorising and clandestine self-interest of Whitehall" (Spy, 13). As operative, especially in this demanding occupation, Leamas not only possesses the wish to be one, but the traits and talents, physical as well as moral, that qualify him for his mission. He demonstrates his body strength in at least three episodes: when he hits Ford, the grocer, causing him "a fractured cheek bone from the first blow and a dislocated jaw from the second" (Spy, 45); when he hits one of Mundt's guards in the dark killing him (Spy, 161-3); and in prison when he intimidates other prisoners by hitting one of them with a hoe: "he seemed to stumble... As he strove to recover his balance the prisoner to his right doubled up with a grunt of agony, his arms across his stomach", (Spy, 47) and they never "crowd" him again.

Once he agrees to Control's plan to eliminate Mundt, he is subjected to a very severe policy of apparent decline; Control instructs him to be very cautious and secretive during the whole process:

Incidentally, if you should meet any old friends in the meantime, I don't think there's any point in discussing this with them.... Let them think we've treated you badly. It's well to begin as one intends to continue, isn't it? (Spy, 23)

He really shows his honesty to his promise, as well as stamina and endurance, in his gradual decline from unemployment, to meagre retirement pay, to sickness, to drink, to arduous work, to aggression, and to imprisonment, especially the last "the nauseating enclosure of the cell". Moreover, he:



could not keep out of the taste of prison, the smell of prison uniform, the stench of prison sanitation heavily disinfected, the noises of captive men. It was then, at night that the indignity of captivity became urgently insufferable. (Spy, 46)

With the termination of his imprisonment and his preparatory course of apparent decline, tirades against Americans, and reiterated grievances, he longs for a "walk in the friendly sunshine of a London park... into the free, free space of London." (Spy, 46) As he strolls "through Hyde Park to Piccadilly, then through Green Park to St. James's Park, to Parliament Square, ...Whitehall to the Strand... near Charing Cross station," Leamas finds London "beautiful that day." (Spy, 48) A stranger tries to catch up with him ostensibly to give him back a parcel he has already left by a bench, to get rid of it; it turns out to be Ashe, the first of a chain of the Zone's agents to allure him into the GDR as defector.

His progress into the east, guided by a hierarchical chain of agents, and their stages of interrogation, reveal almost all the aspects of Leamas' personality, but especially his actual ignorance of the real, ultimate goal of his pre-planned defection. Even before that, while he stayed on in Berlin, he was aware of the Personnel Department's evaluation and assessment of his traits and idiosyncratic performance as being "stubborn, contemptuous of instructions."

(Spy, 12). During those exhaustive interrogations he is told that he

is "a proud man" by Kiever, Peters, and Fiedler. (Spy, 75, 99, 125)

Ashe, the first of this chain, tells him: "Alec! You speak German like a native" (Spy, 59); his retort to him while sitting with Kiever at a night-club table shows his keen observation, characteristic of



agents in general, but more sharply in Leamas (he never overlooks any hints or incidents):

You followed me from prison the day I was released, with some bloody silly story of meeting me in Berlin. You gave me money you didn't owe me. You've bought me expensive meals and you're putting me up in your flat...

Your membership card for this place is made for someone called Murphy. Is that your name? [Ashe replies, "No"]... Then why is Murphy registered as the tenant of your flat? (Spy, 65)

Women in this novel prove to be "femmes fatale" to operatives of the opposing networks; behind Karl's demise is his mistress, Elvira, "a forty-year old blonde, tough as nails," (Spy, 11) despite all the stern warnings of Leamas, "[Karl] trusts me. He told me everything," (Spy, 8) she tells him unwittingly, which elicits this onslaught from Leamas:

The damned woman... and that fool Karl who'd lied about her. Lied by omission, as they all do, agents the world over. You teach them to cheat, to cover their tracks, and they cheat you as well. (Spy, 10)

Ironically, history does repeat itself, and despite Control's mild and stern warning to Leamas, he becomes attached to Elizabeth, a co-worker at the same library in which Leamas is employed, before his "defection." In her testimony before the Praesidium's Tribunal (Chapter XXI) she destroys every hope for Leamas to prove his case against Mundt. It is not difficult to calculate the type of co-operation and arrangement between Mundt and Control to eliminate Fiedler, using this uncalculating, sincerely socialist, young lady:



[Liz] was a tall girl, ungainly, with a long waist and long legs. She wore flat, ballet type shoes to reduce her height. Her face, like her body, had large components which seemed to hesitate between plainness and beauty.

Leamas guessed she was twenty-three and Jewish.  
(Spy, 31)

As their intimacy develops, she invites him recurrently to meals at her flat; during their meetings he "never [speaks] much," (Spy, 35) but when she presses him to tell her about his philosophy in life, his retort is spontaneous (strangely, Fiedler, later, is going to ask the same question, Spy, 131)

"Oh, Liz... oh no. You are not a bloody Communist?" She nodded, blushing like a small girl at his laughter, angry and relieved that he didn't care.

She made him stay that night and they became lovers. He left at five in the morning. She couldn't understand it; she was so proud and he seemed ashamed. (Spy, 37)

Leamas, is, of course, under surveillance, not only by eastern agents from the Zone, but by the Circus, his own people, as well; Control expresses his regret for his past sickness (fever), but after "a very long silence," he surprises Leamas by:

"You know she is in the party, don't you?"  
Control asked quietly.

"Yes." Leamas replied. Another silence. "I don't want her brought into this."

"Why should she be?" Control asked sharply.  
(Spy, 55)



Leamas keeps repeating to control: "I want her kept clear of it," and hears the same answer "Oh, quite, quite," (Spy, 55) but to no avail, for she has already been recruited without her knowledge or desire for the grisly job of killing Fiedler, another doctrinaire who is a German Jew. When Control tells him it is his last job after which he "can come in from the cold," (Spy, 56) and asks him whether he wishes her to be taken care of, Leamas bursts into:

I just want her to be left alone... I just don't want her to be messed about. I don't want her to have a file or anything. I want her forgotten. (Spy, 56)

Although Control agrees with him that it "would be insecure to do anything now," (Spy, 56) Smiley and a colleague visit her and offer her help and money, Smiley leaving his card on the table for her to contact him in case she needs him. All these incidents are going to be used, despite Control's promise, in the Tribunal to incriminate Fiedler and Leamas and acquit Mundt. Fiedler, losing his case against Mundt, fulminates against Leamas, using the metaphor of the dog:

An old dog like Leamas, engaged in the crowning operation of his career, falls for a... what did you call her? ... a frustrated little girl in a crackpot library? London must have known: Smiley couldn't have done it alone... Don't tell me Smiley's conscience goes that far. London must have done it. (Spy, 216)

Fiedler is ironically, telling the truth, but too late to save himself or this "frustrated little girl;" more ironically, both Fiedler and Leamas are convicted for plotting against Mundt. Leamas and Liz are incarcerated, to be released soon by Mundt himself and told to run for the Wall; it seems too much for Leamas to comprehend and too perfidious to his trust:





Leamas was determined to keep Liz very close to him, as if he were afraid that Mundt would not keep his word and somehow snatch her away at the last moment. (Spy, 239)

Again Leamas is cheated, now by Mundt, who could not eliminate them with his "new style" in prison, but, like Karl, kills them across the Wall, for there it is covert, and nobody could tell who is the killer. Leamas, before his pitiable death has his last look at Liz with Smiley's words "The girl, where is the girl?" (Spy, 240) in his ears:

Then they fired □ single rounds, three or four and he felt her shudder. Her thin arms slipped from his hands... She was dead her face was turned away, her black hair drawn across her cheek as if to protect her from the rain.

They seemed to hesitate before firing again; someone shouted an order, and still no one fired. Finally they shot him, two or three shots. He stood staring round him like a blinded bull in the arena. (Spy, 240)

In the world of espionage and counter-intelligence, expenses are paid in human currency; human beings are expendable for good reasons, or for no reason at all, except survival of the "fittest". During the first phase of his interrogation by Peters, Leamas states one of the facts of intelligence work □ dealing with defectors :

Your people have a rough way with defected agents; so have mine. I'm not going to sit on my fanny in St. Moritz while you roll up every network I've given you. They are not fools; they'd know who to look for. For all you and I know they're on to us now. (Spy, 76)



At this juncture, Leamas begins to contemplate the sequence of his escorts-cum-interrogators: Ashe, Kiever, Peters:

that was a progression in quality, in authority, which to Leamas was axiomatic of the hierarchy of an intelligence network. It was also, he suspected, a progression in ideology. Ashe, the mercenary, Kiever, the fellow traveller, and now Peters, for whom the end and the means are identical (Spy, 81)

When Leamas finishes the story of Karl Riemack and the information he used to smuggle into the Berlin network, Peters wonders: "Do you mean to say all this intelligence came from Riemack?" (Spy, 86), and assures Leamas, "he must have had help." (Spy, 86) Peters re-iterates his point:

But did you never have the feeling he got assistance from above as well as from the agents he afterwards acquired?... When you sent all this material back to the Circus, they never suggested that even for a man of Riemack's position, the intelligence was phenomenally comprehensive? (Spy, 86)

All these hints by Peters do not unbalance Leamas' trust in Karl's calibre for massive intelligence gathering, "he bloody well did and that's all there is to it", but when Peters adds "Karl Riemack's mistress, the one who came over to West Berlin the night Riemack was shot... She was found dead a week ago. Murdered," (Spy, 89) Leamas is shocked, and wonders how "she knew more about Riemack's work than [Leamas] did," and why Control has not told him about her? (Spy, 90) Leamas' guess, while trying to sleep, is exact:



Elvira, knowing the identity of Riemack's special collaborator, had been murdered by that collaborator. (Spy,90)...

As he fell asleep he muttered, "Karl was a damn fool. That woman did for him, I'm sure she did." Elvira was dead now, and serve her right. He remembered Liz. (Spy, 91)

Elvira, Karl's mistress, is, of course, absolutely different from Liz; she is bold, enterprising, and promiscuous. When Leamas asks her about the car she is driving, she retorts:

It's my husband's. Karl never told you I was married, did he?... My husband and I work for an optical firm. They let us over to do business. Karl only told you my maiden name. He did not want me to be mixed up with... you. (Spy, 8)

Leamas asked Control whether Elvira was killed; he answered evasively: "God knows... I'd like to take a swing at Mundt." (Spy, 23) Later, when Peters tells him that "She was shot from a car as she left her flat," (Spy, 89), Leamas wonders:

why Control had never told him... so that he would react suitably when Peters told him? It was useless speculating. Control had his reasons; they were usually so bloody tortuous it took you a week to work them out. (Spy, 90-91)

Actually, it takes him more than a week to find out that "Mundt was a British spy" (Spy, 228), and that Karl and Elvira were eliminated to cover up the fact; later Leamas and Liz become expendable for the same reason. Mundt does not take chances where his survival is concerned.



Leamas' progress into the east is not merely a progression in the quality and authority of his successive interrogators, but in wit and devotedness, as well. Fiedler, the ultimate "target" of Control's plan, is the doctrinaire who searches for the motives that prompt people to spy for their country or party. Moreover, as head of CI service, he tries to find out why people are lured into betraying their own nation, country.

Fiedler deals with Leamas as an "experienced intelligence officer" (Spy, 127), and his interrogation develops into a duel of wit and pure intelligence: he presses Leamas wittily to tell him everything about "Rolling Stone," especially the beneficiary of this project (Spy, 127-8) to no avail, for Leamas, sincerely, does not know: "You bear it in mind. In Rolling Stone you can't even tell what country he's [agent] working in." (Spy, 128). When Leamas is handed over to Fiedler, he asks Peters "Is he good?" "For a Jew, he's not bad," he replies. (Spy, 121)

Fiedler had spent the war in Canada. Leamas remembered that, now that he detected the accent.

His parents had been German Jewish refugees, Marxists, and it was not until 1946 that the family returned home, anxious to take part, whatever the personal cost, in the reconstruction of Stalin's Germany.

"Hello," he added to Leamas, almost by the way, "glad to see you."

"Hello, Fiedler."

"You've reached the end of the road." (Spy, 121)



Leamas is really infuriated by this bit of news; Peters has hinted at somewhere deeper into the Iron Curtain, and now this confinement: "contrary to what Peters told you, you are not going further east. Sorry." (Spy, 122) Leamas explodes, jabbing a finger in Fiedler's direction, shouting:

I know you, you sadistic bastard; it's typical of you...

What are you now? A creeping little acolyte to Mundt and twenty-two Russian divisions sitting on your mother's doorstep. Well, I pity you, Fiedler, the day you wake up and find them gone. (Spy, 123)

At the time of publication of this book, this prospect seemed as far-fetched as star-wars, but it happened and the notorious Wall that divided Germany into two states was demolished one late evening in November, 1989 (See Newsweek, November 20, 1989, "The Wall 1961-1989: The Wall Comes Down" pp. 10-16).

Ironically, the novel begins on the western side of the Wall (Chapter 1) where Leamas waits for Karl, and ends on the eastern side when Leamas tries to pull Liz over the Wall, fails to do so, and both sag down to the ground, and peter out, like Karl. The realism of the depiction of the Wall can be compared to the Newsweek reportage, to find out that fiction sometimes proves to be more truthful than factual history, for a realistic writer chooses those aspects which show the nature of the object described more subjectively, and this surpasses any objectively factual depiction of these objects. On their way to the east, the reader is granted a quick glimpse at the Wall:

As they crossed the fifty yards which separated the two checkpoints, Leamas was dimly aware of the new fortifications on the Eastern side of the wall □ dragons' teeth, observation towers and double aprons of barbed wire. Things had heightened up. (Spy, 117)



Another look at the Wall and its political importance, by Comrade Karden Mundt's defence lawyer who begins with a tirade against British "record of sabotage, subversion and human trafficking" who "devise this desperate plot" against Comrade Mundt; he goes on:

What other course lies open to them now that the rampart has been built across Berlin and the flow of Western spies has been checked?... Comrade Fiedler is guilty... of [conspiring] with imperialist spies to undermine the security of the worker state, and shed innocent blood. (Spy, 195)

Here, of course, are multiple layers of irony: Karden is the tool that the British espionage uses across the Wall to shed the innocent blood not of Mundt, their spy, but Fiedler, their arch enemy.

Fiedler tries his best to undermine Mundt's tyranny of terror by uncovering his role as a British agent; at the Tribunal he tells the judges the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; but, ironically, to no avail, for Liz, with her ignorance of the whole case, is going to incriminate him and Leamas: Fiedler addresses the court, briefing them on Mundt's treachery:

Ever since 1960□ the year Comrade Mundt became Head of the Counter Espionage section of the Abteilung□ indications have reached us from all over the world that there was a highly-placed spy in our ranks. You all know Karl Riemack was a spy; we thought when he was eliminated that the evil had been stomped out. But the rumours persisted. (Spy, 184)

Like most truth-tellers, Fiedler proves unconvincing to the Tribunal, and Liz undermines what little he does achieve.



But, like Elizabeth Gold, he is a staunch believer in the Communist Party's ideology, and like her, he is a Jew; ironically, again, he sympathises with her, seeing that she is at a loss, for:

She couldn't lie unless she knew what was at stake;  
she would fumble on and Alec would die□  
(Spy, 203)

He almost shouts to the Tribunal: "It was all most cleverly done... Let her go. She cannot tell us what she doesn't know." (Spy, 213) Like all Jews, Fiedler has indications of suffering from the persecution complex; he complains to Leamas:

And all the time he was whispering Jew... Jew.  
I could understand, I'm sure I could, if he had done it for an idea, for the Party, if you like, or if he had hated me. But it wasn't that; he hated□  
(Spy, 173)

He is so dedicated to his ideology that he believes his work with CI service to be part of his devotion to the Party; moreover, he presses Leamas to tell him of his "Motor", which, he explains, is "the engine, the spirit, urge; whatever Christians call it." To which Leamas reacts quickly, "I'm not a Christian." He smiles and explains:

... the thing that embarrasses you... I'll put it another way. Suppose Mundt is right. He asked me to confess,

you know; I was to confess that I was in league with British spies who were plotting to murder him. You see the argument□ that the whole operation was mounted by British Intelligence in order to entice us - me, if you like□ into liquidating the best man in the Abteilung. To turn our own weapons upon us. (Spy, 173)



This search for motives in a spy is based on two authorities;

The Abteilung and its organisations like it are the natural extensions of the Party's arm. They are in the vanguard of the fight for Peace and Progress. They are to the Party what the Party is to socialism; they are the vanguard. (Spy, 134)

and on Christianity, the Bible itself (according to Fiedler):

Some Roman said it, didn't he, in the Christian Bible□ it is expedient that one man should die for the benefit of many□ (Spy, 134).

Leamas' reaction is typical of western-style intelligence and Counter-espionage agents; they are not as dedicated to "peace and progress" as socialist agents, who are virtually partisans and doctrinaires. During a walk in the afternoon, Fiedler asks Leamas about his philosophy; "to Leamas that was the most difficult question of all;"

"What do you mean a philosophy?" he replied; "we're not Marxists, we've nothing. Just people."

"Are you Christians, then?"

"Not many, I shouldn't think. I don't know many."

"What makes them do it, then?" Fiedler persisted;

"they must a have a philosophy."

"Why must they? Perhaps they don't know; don't even care. Not everyone has a philosophy." Leamas answered, a little helplessly. (Spy, 133)

This does not make Fiedler hesitate to express his own doubts about Leamas' incentive for defection□ it looks to him as if it were rigged by Smiley and his colleagues at Cambridge Circus; subsequent to Rolling Stone project (Spy, 132):





"I'm beginning to like you. But there's one thing that puzzles me. It's odd□ it didn't worry me before I met you."

"What is that?" [Leamas asks]

"Why you ever came. Why you defected?" Leamas was going to say something when Fiedler laughed. "I'm afraid that wasn't very tactful, was it?" he said. (Spy, 147)

He does not hesitate to utter his qualms concerning his jealousy which makes him see treachery behind every tree, adding, "we get like that, people in our world," but Mundt has already gone too far in shooting agents, friends or foes:

There'd been other things before [Mundt] was afraid that we would catch one who would talk too much□ (Spy, 150)

As if they have gone too far in their walk and in their conjecture, and Mundt himself has been eavesdropping on them, he waits for them, arresting them on their arrival. Leamas kills a guard before he is tied like an animal after they beat him brutally. It is the "new style" of Mundt:

He must have lain there for hours before they came.

It grew hot from the light, he was thirsty but he refused to call out. At last the door opened and Mundt stood there. He knew it was Mundt from the eyes.

Smiley had told him about them. (Spy, 163)

During the following interview, dramatic irony reaches its peak; Mundt, London's man, who spies for them, is fully-informed in advance of the carefully and meticulously designed plot to "frame" him and apparently to kill him□ while in fact, Fiedler, who is trying to ferret Mundt out, is the virtual target for



elimination by the British. Leamas, on the other hand, has been cheated by Smiley and Control, so he thinks that he is on a mission for the liquidation of Mundt; Leamas' indignation and fury at the killing of his last agent in Berlin, Karl Riemack, has been calculated a viable incentive for him to do the job in collaboration with Fiedler, Mundt's rival and hater:

"Where is Fiedler?" Leamas asked finally.

"Under arrest," Mundt replied curtly.

"What for?"

"Conspiring to sabotage the security of the people."

Leamas nodded slowly. "So you won," he said.

"When did you arrest him?"

"Last night."

...

"What about me?" he asked.

"You are a material witness. You will of course stand trial yourself later."

"So I'm part of a put-up job by London to frame Mundt, am I?"

Mundt nodded... "That's right," he said. (Spy, 165)

Suppose that Mundt's scruples had driven him to tell Leamas the truth□ that Fiedler is the target, not himself□, would have Leamas believed him? No, of course not, for Leamas is experienced enough to face treachery, perfidy, and betrayal with equanimity, but does not believe that he is literally used as a tool and a scape-goat for saving a ruthless killer of agents on both sides of the Wall. Yet, Leamas, with all his pains of torture by his captors, admires Mundt, since he despises technique in interrogation, for he is a "man of fact and action." (Spy, 166)



In his self-assured sedateness, Mundt tells Leamas that he is going to be tried for murder, if necessary, and:

"On the other hand, there could be mitigation in your case. You were blackmailed by British Intelligence; they accused you of stealing money and then coerced you into preparing a revanchist trap against myself. The court would have sympathy for such a plea."

Leamas seemed to be taken off his guard.

"How did you know they accused me of stealing money?"

But Mundt made no reply. (Spy, 167)

This slip by Mundt could have opened Leamas' eyes to the truth of the cheating and deception of British Intelligence, but he is soon preempted and diverted by Mundt's statement that "Fiedler would fall into the trap. Fiedler hates me." He continues:

"Your people knew that of course. It was a very clever operation. Who prepared it, tell me. Was it Smiley? Did he do it?" ... Leamas said nothing. (Spy, 167)

Ironically, Mundt knows better than Leamas who has designed this "clever operation," for he has been in continual contact with them since his facile and apparent escape from Britain, after killing two of his own agents.

David Cornell, alias le Carré, depicts the personal idiosyncracies of his characters, even minor ones, very carefully, but Mundt gets his own share of neat characterisation, for he is the master-mind of the Intelligence Service of the Zone and the beneficiary of "Rolling Stone"; Mundt's portrait is drawn with extreme care for fine distinguishing features:



Mundt's appearance was fully consistent with his temperament. He looked an athlete. His fair hair was cut short. It lay mat and neat. His young face had a hard clean line, a frightening directness; it was barren of humour or fantasy. He looked young but not youthful; older men would take him seriously. He was well built.

His clothes fitted him because he was an easy man to fit. Leamas found no difficulty in recalling that Mundt was a killer. There was a coldness about him, a rigorous self-sufficiency which perfectly equipped him for the business of murder. Mundt was a very hard man. (Spy, 166)

Le Carré's characterisation is sometimes done indirectly, by proxy, sometimes even deviously; in addition to the use of direct description of the appearance and the temperament of a character, the reader is provided with the impressions, conjectures, or even rumours of other characters. The above description of Mundt is almost attractive, but it is modulated by Leamas' view of him as a hard man "perfectly equipped.. for... murder." Whether to take these impressions and rumours seriously or whether they are valid or incorrect are left teasingly to the reader; he/she has to decide for himself, to be active, not hypnotised by mesmeric descriptions. In describing Leamas, for instance, he resorts to an unidentified woman:

The air hostess thought he was interesting. She guessed he was North Country, which he might have been, and rich, which he was not. She put his age at fifty, which was about right. She guessed he was single, which was half true. Somewhere long ago there had been a divorce. (Spy, 15)



Why the air-hostess? Is she really interested in her clients, or because she is supposed to be pleasing in appearance and character? Whatever the reason, other people's impressions of a character are more important than what he/she thinks of her/himself. Who thinks that Leamas:

looked like a man who could make trouble, a man who looked after his money, a man who was not quite a gentleman [?] (Spy, 15)

And who says that Leamas is "Irish"? (Spy, 15) No one is pinpointed for the relief of the reader; his curiosity is tickled and he/she is left guessing. The same mode is employed with other, minor characters; "Smaller roles", comments Stefan Kanfer "are no less memorable":

"My minor characters are always getting out of scale" confesses their creator. "I keep promising them a treat in the next book if they'll just keep quiet now." (Spy, 60)

The curator of the Psychic Research library is not granted even a name, let alone a surname, yet he is described compendiously in one sentence: "a very old man with first war shellshock who, said Liz, sat awake all night in case the Germans made a counterattack." (Spy, 34) At Le Mirage in Holland, Leamas is introduced to a Russian, Peters, by Sam Kiever, and he proves to be the first in a series of interrogators; he is described thus:

He was wearing a macintosh with leather buttons. He was about Leamas' height, but older. Leamas put him at about fifty-five. He had a hard, grey hue and sharp furrows; he might have been a soldier. He held out his hand.

"My name is Peters," he said. The fingers were slim and polished. (Spy, 74)



These chosen features of a character, such as "slim and polished" fingers, are impeccably drawn into the picture as a token of temper and conduct; but the writer leaves no opportunity to illustrate the traits of his characters, recurrently through the watchful eyes of others:

Leamas watched him take a cigarette from the box on the table, and light it. He noticed two things: that Peters was left handed, and that once again he had put the cigarette in his mouth with the maker's name away from him, so that it burnt first. It was a gesture Leamas liked: it indicated that Peters, like himself, had been on the run. (Spy, 81)

Peters spends three days with Leamas, interrogating him very intelligently and exhaustively, asking him some prompting questions to lead him on; for his report is going to be the basis for all subsequent investigations.

Almost simultaneously, a carefully designed visit by Smiley and another colleague takes place; again, characterisation of these men is conducted through the eyes of Liz Gold, the unfortunate associate of Leamas. They ask her some questions and finish by telling her to call in case of need; as she watches them:

She thought they were a little too smart for policemen: they came in a small black car with an aerial on it. One was short and rather plump [Smiley]. He had glasses and wore odd, expensive clothes; he was a kindly, worried little man and Liz trusted him somehow without knowing why. The other was smoother, but not glossy□ rather a boyish figure, although she guessed he wasn't less than forty... The plump one did most of the talking. (Spy, 109)



Liz is not going to meet this short and plump man, Smiley, till the end when he urges Leamas "Jump Alec! Jump man... The girl, where's the girl?" (Spy, 240)

Before she is smuggled out of prison by Mundt himself, Liz meets the Commissar, who tells her that they are going to shoot "Leamas, and the Jew, Fiedler." According to this Commissar, Leamas has killed a guard, and "the Jew... made an accusation against a loyal comrade." (Spy, 220)

The Commissar's character-sketch is somewhat satirical:

The woman looked at [Liz] with her small, cunning eyes. She was very large; her hair was scant, stretched over her head to a bun at the nape of her thick neck. Her face was heavy, her complexion flaccid and watery. (Spy, 220)

As Liz is in no mood to eat her food, this woman declares she must eat it, "with a grotesque attempt at reluctance"; driven by her zeal and belief in the Party's ideology, she harangues:

Jews are all the same,... Comrade Mundt knows what to do with Jews. We don't need their kind here. If they join the Party they think it belongs to them. If they stay out, they think it is conspiring against them. It is said that Leamas and Fiedler plotted against Mundt. (Spy, 220)

On hearing this, Liz suffers from deep regret and sharp compunction; if only Leamas had told her what he was planning to do, she would have done everything □ not withstanding her party loyalty □ to save Leamas, all for love:

...whether she had lied or told the truth □ or even, she was sure, had kept silent □ she had been forced to destroy a human being; perhaps two, for was there not also the Jew, Fiedler, who had been gentle with her, taken her arm and told her to go back to England?... It comforted her that Leamas and Fiedler were on the same side. (Spy, 221)



Isn't it curious that the only two loyal and honest figures are Jews: Liz and Fiedler, and the villain of the piece is Mundt, the "ex-Hitler-Youth", who hates Jews, like other Nazis? Is it the influence of the holocaust and anti-Semitism, even after the fall of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reich?

Le Carré's brand of realism in this novel is bitter; he achieves this realism through truthfulness not only in characterisation, but in other elements of fiction as well. He told Kanfer that:

When I first began writing, Fleming was riding high, and the picture of the spy was that of a character who could lay women, and drive the fast cars, who used gadgetry and gimmickry and escape. When I brought back, but did not invent, the realistic spy story, it was misinterpreted as a great new wave. (Spy, 59)

His characters, unlike Fleming's, do not "lay women" and use "gadgetry and gimmickry", and his plot also differs from Fleming's, for the latter "did not go in for the convoluted deceptions that later practitioners of the spy story have sometimes imposed on their readers as well as on their fictional characters." (Sanderson, in Vinson, 221) If this novel illustrates these "convoluted deceptions" splendidly, they are essential ingredients of intelligence work, and the bitter realism of le Carré is based on them.

Setting and local colour enhance the novel's realism and are expedient in creating the suitable atmosphere of doom and conspiracy; Leamas' apartment in London is almost bare, consisting of the most barely essential furniture and facilities. He lives beneath what he is really worth, to give others the impression that he is really broken, for

If it was true that Alec [Leamas] had robbed the Circus, he would take the wrath of Personnel with him to the grave□ and Personnel would not so much as pay for the shroud. (Spy, 27)





Of course it is not true that Leamas has been guilty of "peculation"; actually, it is the first step in a preplanned operation to "defect" to the Abteilung in order to eliminate Mundt; he has already agreed willingly to undergo a harsh and long course of apparent decline, for he has been "treated... badly" by the Circus. So, his abode is consistent with this deterioration:

His flat was small and squalid, done in brown paint with photographs of Clovelly. It looked directly on to the grey backs of three warehouses, the windows of which were drawn, for aesthetic reasons, in creosote. Above the warehouse there lived an Italian family, quarrelling at night and beating carpets in the morning. Leamas had few possessions with which to brighten his rooms... From a yellow, crumbling geyser he obtained hot water for a shilling. (Spy, 27-28)

Consequently, it is not extremely implausible to be told that "He needed a job. He had no money, none at all. So perhaps the stories of embezzlement were true. (Spy, 28)

Leamas spends a miserable time in prison, suffering from the stench of sanitary facilities, the dignity of captivity, and the foul manners of other prisoners whom he despises. "He seemed a quiet prisoner. There had been no complaints against him." The Governor, who is "vaguely interested" in Leamas' case attributes this to "the Irish blood he swore he could detect in Leamas," and approves of his intention of making a new start. As he is freed, he strolls through London which looks and smells so fresh after the misery of gaol:

London was beautiful that day. Spring was late and the parks were filled with crocuses and daffodils. A cool cleaning wind was blowing from the south; he could have walked all day. (Spy, 48)



But he is still burdened by his brown parcel which contains all his belongings, which again indicate his dire poverty: "□insurance card, driving licence and E.93... in a buff OHMS envelope□" (Spy, 49) so he has to get rid of it. A tall man "with rather curly brown hair," Ashe, catches up with him with the parcel and the journey of his "defection" to the east begins.

Interestingly, his progress through the east ends in another stroll in fresh air through the woods by the house, with Fiedler, the most ambitious and intelligent of all his interrogators. They leave the house which stands on a hill:

The ground fell steeply away from beneath his window, the crowns of pine trees [were] visible above the crest. Beyond them, spectacular in their symmetry, unending hills, heavy with trees, stretched into the distance. Here and there a timber gully or fire-break formed a thin brown divide between the pines, seeming like Aaron's rod miraculously to hold apart massive seas of encroaching forest. (Spy, 126)

During this outing, the conversation between Leamas and Fiedler no longer sounds like interrogation, but widens into broad talk and frank debate of "an intriguing problem;" (Spy, 127) Leamas discovers guts, endurance, and "a defined purpose" in Fiedler, and Fiedler, in turn, comments: "you will need a friend and that friend will be me. I give you my word as a German." (Spy, 139)

This outing in fresh warm air and "dark and heavy" sky ends in a catastrophe; Fiedler is arrested and Leamas re-incarcerated in darkness, guarded by the brutes of Mundt. Things begin to deteriorate from bad to worse; Leamas kills a guard, is beaten brutally, and taken to hospital where he opens his eyes on Fiedler, who tells him: "Mundt had a special interest in beating me up. Apart from the confession... Because I am a Jew." (Spy, 170-1).



Fiedler adds to the delight of Leamas who is lying in a hospital bed: "Mundt is under arrest." (Spy, 172) Leamas retorts that Mundt "is a bastard" (Spy, 173) but, ironically, he cannot be beaten with such facility. It is only by the end of the proceedings of the Tribunal that Leamas discovers the quite unbelievable truth: "And suddenly, with the terrible clarity of a man too long deceived, Leamas understood the whole ghastly trick." (Spy, 217)

The final act of this tragedy takes place on a stage carefully prepared for the demise of these two scape-goats, Leamas and Elizabeth. As they pant for freedom across the Wall, they have to negotiate this rainy stage, at night, as cautiously and circumspectly as possible: "Two minutes", Leamas gasps to Liz while she stares at "the wall, and the black ruins rising behind it" (Spy, 238):

Before them was a strip of thirty yards. It followed the wall in both directions. Perhaps seventy yards to their right was a watch tower; the beam of the searchlight played along the strip. The thin rain hung in the air, so that the light from the arclamps was sallow and chalky, screening the world beyond. There was no one to be seen; not a sound. An empty stage. (Spy, 238)

Freedom lies tantalisingly near at hand; they grope across this field of death, the silence is torn by bullets, and they fall, first Liz, and then Leamas writhing to death:

Finally they shot him, two or three shots. He stood glaring round him like a blinded bull in the arena. As he fell, Leamas saw a small car smashed between great lorries, and the children waving cheerfully through the window. (Spy, 240)



The same fate faces The Honourable Schoolboy, Jerry Westerby, but Smiley and Guillam survive; and Smiley, writing to his divorced wife outreaching himself in explaining the nature of intelligence and CI work, says:

That is the sword I have lived by, and as I look round me now I see it is the sword I shall die by as well. These people terrify me but I am one of them. If they stab me in the back, then at least that is the judgment of my peers. (The Honourable Schoolboy, 543)

This justifies the end of both Leamas and, later, Westerby; they deal with a double-edged sword and they have to face the consequences. In my next paper I am going to investigate how David Cornell buttresses his realism with exhaustive research, in addition to his own background in Intelligence and Foreign Service work.

Too long and detailed. This could have been cut to half its size.



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