THE MORAL UNDERGROUND:

A SURVEY OF THE RISE AND FALL OF

THE MODERN THRILLER AS A VEHICLE OF

MORAL CONCERN

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THESIS ABSTRACT

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The central theme of this thesis is the moral attitude represented by the modern
European thriller during the 1960-s. It is the contention of the thesis that the
thriller -- a collective term for detective and spy novels -- has taken on itself
to explore complex moral problems at a time when so-called 'legitimate' literature
has abandoned the morally problematic in favour of the esthetically stimulating.

The thesis relates this moral concern and complexity to the social and cultural
phenomena of the times and to the broader context of the dialectics between the
Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman concepts of reality.

The structure of the thesis:

After a general defence of popular literature, the early chapters re-trace the
development of the genre through the conventional detective story and the early
spy fiction of the 1930-s. By way of a number of authors, the thesis demonstrates
the emergence of certain key themes and stylistic approaches. After this survey
of the precursors, a chapter is devoted to the perticular vision of reality
the modern thriller represents in the universal scheme of western culture.

The next several chapters demonstrate, through closer analysis of a representative
group of authors, how the moral thriller reaches its heights in the mid-sixties
and then begins its decline towards the end of the decade.

The thesis concludes with a general summary and a brief rationale of its method
and critical approach.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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<u>ERRATUM</u>

The name of Friedrich Durrenmatt
has been mistakenly spelled as
Friedrich Durenmatt throughout
the text.

Introduction

The thriller -- or detective and spy novel -- has never been a favourite subject of literary criticism. Although critics such as G.K. Chesterton, George Orwell, Edmund Wilson, C. Day Lewis, Jacques Barzun and many others of lesser reputation have given serious consideration to this genre, it has remained a literary no-man's land in which the majority of serious scholars either did not care to, or feared to tread.

The thriller, rightly or wrongly, has been considered by many a type of sub-literature, together with the nurse romance, the comic book and pornography.

It is the intention of this thesis to deal seriously with detective and spy fiction, in particular with the immediate pre-World War II and post-war developments that have taken place in this genre.

I will attempt to prove that the detective and spy fiction of this period merits serious literary analysis;that it cannot be classified as sub-literature; and that this genre has produced works of significant symbolic content throughout the phase under study.

I shall also attempt to provide a fairly comprehensive survey of the thriller's last thirty years, its roots, its relationship to the social and cultural milieu, and the ebb and flow of certain key themes within what I consider to be the genre's 'finest hour', the period between the mid-nineteen fifties and 1970.

This survey -- and the analysis of phenomena pertaining to it -- will be carried out through the study of selected authors and schools of authors, with emphasis on patterns perceived, particularly those of moral and archetypal character.

The scope of this thesis does not extend to the morality of espionage _per se_. In fact, I have not included either comment or reference to the numerous works, memoirs and biographies, of real-life spies or detectives. The only interest of this thesis is fiction, and its relevance to universal reality, without regard to the 'real-life' context this particular genre purports to imitate.

What I am interested in is not the thriller's ability to reproduce a credible facsimile of the environment from which it derives its subject matter, but the vision of reality contained within the thriller, and its mutations under the influence of cultural changes.

My reasons for excluding the American thriller are primarily editorial. The genre has produced such a volume of works on both sides of the ocean that one must, in order to be able to keep the material down to manageable proportions, restrict the survey to one or the other.

After restricting the scope, the choice is not really difficult. Two critics, writing about two different facets of the genre, seem to agree that the American thriller is of only secondary interest when compared to the European.

"America has produced many novels of espionage, but no outstanding ones. The British have had a corner on this part of the thriller genre from the beginning. Is it because so many Englishmen with literary inclinations and talent have at one time or another worked for one of the security services? Or is it rather that the cold war is more abstract to Americans, and we are satisfied more easily with stock characters, stock situations and plots, and the similar rhetoric that we hear from TV?" [1]

"On the middlebrow level, the pseudo scientific novel of detection is nearly dead in the United States, and, indeed, though invented in America, it has flourished chiefly in the form of British importations from Conan Doyle and Chesterton to Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers." [2]

I have chosen, therefore, to explore the primary creative source of a unique literary phenomenon, the rise and fall of the modern thriller as a vehicle of moral concern.

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[1] Ralph Harper, The World of the Thriller (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), p. 19.

[2] Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Stein and Day, 1966), p. 498.

CHAPTER I

CAIN, ABEL AND THE INSPECTOR:

THE CONVENTIONAL DETECTIVE STORY AND ITS

RELATIONSHIP TO THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL

ENVIRONMENT

Human existence is naturally highlighted by birth, sexual union
and death. The act of love, progenitor of life, and the act of
murder, perpetrator of death, are thus the human activities most
causally related to the truly climactic points of existence. Literature,
with few exceptions, has always been preoccupied with the climactic,
for it is through such acts that humans attain the divine dimension,
and arrogate the powers vested in God -- the giving and taking away
of life. Sex and murder are at the root of all myth, ritual and
fiction; and even their most one-dimensional literary manifestations
are of central concern.

Ralph Harper, in his recent study, The World of the Thriller,
considers the genre of the thriller as "situational literature" [1] and
feels that "all thrillers are basically concerned about two things:
death and responsibility." [2] He goes on to say that,

> "Thriller literature is situational literature, crisis literature.
> In the language of Karl Jaspers' existentialist philosophy it is
> the literature of boundary situations. Man is always in situation,
> but only occasionally for most men is life reduced to total
> questionability by any particular situation. Jaspers, following
> Kierkegaard, suggested that there are a few special situations like
> those concerning death, fate, guilt, and major choices that bring
> individuals to the boundaries (border, frontier) of their lives,
> and where they must decide what they want to live by. Paul Tillich's
> schema of existential anxieties is a systematic (and more subjective)
> working out of Jaspers' suggestion: the anxieties of death and fate,
> guilt and condemnation, meaninglessness and emptiness (each pair
> containing an absolute and a relative threat). The plots of thrillers,
> unlike novels of manners, ideas, romantic love, travel adventures, are
> principally designed to illustrate such critical situations." [3]

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[1] Ralph Harper, The World of the Thriller (Cleveland: The Press of
Case Western Reserve University, 1969), p. 51.

[2] Ibid., p. 60.

[3] Ibid., p. 51.

While his definition is fitting, I would like to study the thriller on a broader scale, relating it far more closely to the mainstream of the novel and other archetypal modes of expression than Harper does in his study. It is my contention that the thriller is a more significant mimetic vehicle than has been recognized by critics at large. When Harper compares the thriller to novels of manners, ideas and travel adventure -- genres which do not deal with critical situations -- he makes no qualitative judgment. Perhaps subjectively, I consider certain thrillers on par with tragedy and the epic because they concentrate on the vital issues of human existence. Again, opposed to Harper, I feel that novels of romantic love are in fact related to thrillers in a contrapuntal way. The literary treatment of love-fiction and death-fiction abound in common characteristics. First, there is a 'norm' established for both fields of activity: birth, union and death should occur naturally, and their conflict-free and peaceful procession forms the basis of a socially and religiously sound universal order. When the natural process is disturbed, literature can, at last, make its entrance; deviation from the norm provides the only true impulse for the dramatic.

The primary motivations for upsetting the norm (and, consequently, the motivations for fiction) are usually greed and pride: to possess and to excell motivate all forcible upsets in the system, whether expressed in the sex-act or the killing-act. The primary methods of these are also essentially restricted to exercising man's two basic powers, those of his brawn and of his brain. In oversimplified terms, most love stories are

about rape or seduction, and most death stories are about violence or intrigue. In either case, man upsets the natural order of things by overstepping the socially determined scope of his two resources, his strength and his mind, briefly attaining a heroic (or villainous) dimension, and, as a consequence, provoking into action the hitherto inert defensive powers of the universal order. This is the cue for God or his agent, the Inspector, to get moving and restore the status quo.

Whether we talk about tragedy or penny dreadfuls, these two essential modes of action, physical or mental, applied in 'excess' to attain life-giving or death-causing powers, have sustained imaginative writing throughout history. Whether we consider the fact that thrillers share many common features a manifestation of a classical pattern or the stigma of the 'formula', the fact remains that most literary works can be classified under one genre or another without loss of critical respect for either the attitudes or the creative abilities of their authors. The thriller has not fared as well as the many 'serious' genres or sub-genres, and I suggest a very human case of snobbery as the cause. In fact, the thriller started to be taken seriously only recently, mostly as a consequence of its increasingly moral and problematic content. Strangely, this new critical attitude coincides with the period in which morality has been ruled irrelevant as a criterion of esthetic judgment.

One of the few critics of importance who had taken a positive attitude towards the thriller is Jacques Barzun who, in 1960, summed it up as "-- the abundant, variegated, illustrious, classical genre -- the detective story." [1] Barzun makes a good case -- or a good defense, depending on one's point of view -- for elevating the thriller to the level of 'legitimate' literary works:

> "All that I have been saying about the genre could be summed up in one word: the detective story is a _tale_. (Italics by Barzun) The pleasure it affords is that of any narrative in which the ancient riddle of who is who unravels itself to an accompaniment of wordly wisdom. In the detective tale proper there is a double satisfaction answering a double curiosity -- what can the solution be ? and how was the solution arrived at ? But to recapture this innocent pleasure one must be sophisticated enough to abdicate other sophistications.
> The case for the detective story cannot of course stop on this dogmatic note, for certain merits of the genre and certain objections to it are yet to be named. Among the objections is that of sameness -- "read one and you have read them all." My description of the form could even be recited in support of the charge: it would be foolish to deny that detection in literature submits to very rigid canons. It is an art of symmetry, it seeks the appearance of logical necessity, _like classical tragedy,_ (Italics by P.G.) which is why it cherishes the unity of place -- the locked room, the ship or train in motion. Its successes thus partake always of the _tour de force_. As Yeats rightly remarked, "The technique is supairb."
> But these very limitations, when appreciated, draw our eyes to the points of differences between one tale and another. Indeed, superficial sameness is a common attribute of tales, in contrast with the surface variety we expect of novels and novelistic short stories. If you read Boccaccio and Margaret of Navarre and Bandello and the _Cent Nouvells Nouvelles_ and the _Contes Drolatiques_, you will find these tales as alike among themselves as any comparable number of detective stories. In the one group lovers plot against husbands and are either successful or ridiculous. In the other the detective is confronted by the inexplicable, and he reasons his way to the explanation with or without apprehending the culprit. Fairy tales also betray a strong family likeness." [2]

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[1] Jacques Barzun, "Detection and Literature", in _The Energies of Art_, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 319.

[2] Ibid., p. 311.

The only point that remains debatable in our effort to 'legitimize' the thriller, is the question whether popular literature can be evaluated on the same level with other, 'higher' types of literary expression. Perhaps the answer is all too obvious: myth, the fairy tale, popular ballads and stories have been joined, in the twentieth century, by detective and spy novels to continue the tradition of a basically simplistic, yet humanly relevant body of literature, formulated in the archetypal mold. There are other, similarly archetypal types of expression currently in use. These include proletarian literature with its political oversimplifications, the various kinds of nurse and business-girl romances which reduce emotions to the lowest common denominator, and pornography which does the same to sexuality. When any genre becomes 'purified' to the extent of the above-mentioned examples, there is a parallel reduction in multi-dimensionality. When the original archetypal 'formula' of Love, Death, Power and Cunning is sub-divided into only one of its elements, and applied within the confines of a specific subject, we are, indeed, confronted with sub-literature.

As far as I am concerned, sub-literature is a term applicable only to a type of writing which deliberately strips away all 'foreign matter' in order to concentrate on a restricted set of clichéd 'essentials'. Thus, a pornographic novel is sub-literary if it describes an escalating pattern of intercourse with an increasing number of participants. If, however, the author adds to this essential formula elements of character, parody or the problematic, the work is no longer sub-literature. Similarly, if a

detective story proceeds on its formulated course without regard to these same elements, it is not worth consideration. However, there exists a sufficient body of detective literature, indeed, the majority of the surviving output of this genre, which possesses a sophistication of style, structure, character development and symbolic or problematic content warranting serious study. The spy or the detective, from Sherlock Holmes and Richard Hannay, from Inspector Van der Valk to Alec Leamas is, in fact, a culture hero in the manner of Prometheus, the Knights of the Round Table, Robin Hood, Dr. Faustus or Hamlet. These culture heroes may not be 'real' in the naturalistic sense, but they are spiritually valid:

> "The deeds of the culture-heroes also are "impossible", in that they are miraculous, incredible, superhuman. However, their objective and their "meaning" are not alien to the reality; on the contrary, they are useful. They promote and strengthen this reality; they do not explode it."[1]

Having established the 'credentials' of the thriller as a subject of serious literary criticism, we shall now turn to the genre and its heroes to explore the significance of what they do, and of how they do it, in a human, social, moral and esthetic sense.

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[1] Herbert Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1961), p. 150.

I have explained in the introduction why this study concentrates only on the detective and spy fiction of England and the European continent; although America has produced a large volume of works in the genre, including some outstanding and multi-dimensional works by Raymond Chandler and Dashiel Hammett, American thrillers place excessive emphasis on the brutal and violent aspects of crime and espionage. This in itself would not prohibit inclusion in this study. However, the coherence of the development of the European thriller provides us with a complete and self-contained case history, while the radically different American thriller and its own unique development rate separate analysis. R.G. Collingwood points out one of the major differences between European and American treatments of the genre:

> The detective story, the most popular form of amusement offered by the profession of letters to the modern public, is based partly on appeal to the reader's fear, but partly on a rich medley of other emotions. In Poe the element of fear was exceedingly strong, and either because of his influence, or because of something ingrained in the civilization of the United States, the present-day American detective story shows a stronger inclination towards that type than those of any other nation. American corpses are the bloodiest and most horribly mangled; American police the most savage in their treatment of suspects."[1]

It is precisely this 'rich medley of other emotions' the European thriller exploits, emotions relating to political, ethical and moral problems. It is, indeed, remarkable, that the gory details of murder are rarely exposed in either the traditional detective story or the spy novel. In contrast

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[1]R.G. Collingwood, The Principles of Art, A Galaxy Book (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 86.

to American detective fiction, English and European murders are rarely

committed in the reader's presence. The murder is usually discovered

and then reconstructed after the fact. The narrative technique developed

for these novels may be either the cause or the result of this shying

away from explicit violence. The traditional detective story has no

omniscient author, but is usually presented through the persona of a

witness. A witness to the detection, not the crime! According to

Jacques Barzun:

> "...by virtue of Doyle's almost unique success in giving a soul
> to the detective's partner -- the common man -- we have in the
> two a companion pair to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, a contrast
> and concert capable of occupying our imagination apart from the
> tales in which the two figure."[1]

The presence of the hero's involved and partisan chronicler is

characteristic of most post-Doyle novels. Holmes has his Dr. Watson,

Poirot his Colonel Hastings, Lord Peter Whimsey his Harriet Vane. This

persona provides the common benchmark as well as the common perception, so

that through his eyes we both understand and appreciate the hero's unique

feat.

The plot, of course, also begins after the crime has been committed.

The victim is discovered and the detective is either summoned or had been

accidentally present. Usually, on his holiday, the potential solver of the

crime displays some reluctance to get involved. As we shall see later in our

discussion of the spy thriller, this initial reluctance to enter the fray

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[1] Jacques Barzun, "Detection and Literature", in The Energies of Art
(Vintage Books, New York: Random House, 1962), p. 317.

is a common and significant theme of the thriller.

As he begins to unravel the crime, additional complications arise; these are usually additional murders, committed mostly to cover up the identity of the murderer. Those killed in the course of the investigation are also persons whom the detective initially suspects of being the murderer. The subsidiary murders, as well as the inevitable red-herrings, finally lead to the last and most significant clue which, of course, is not at all understood by the narrator. This important but incomprehensible clue then necessitates the gathering of the main characters. The detective then proceeds to give a condensed review of the case, while the narrator registers the central characters' reaction as they are confronted with the facts. The final, so far mysterious clue is then revealed, and the guilty character gives himself away either because he is trapped into revealing his identity or is helpless against the incontrovertible logic of the detective's reconstruction of the case.

> "We know that the culprit is the smooth solicitor with the pince-nez, but we still cannot see how he could have been in London and Buenos Aires at the same time. The final lecturette which leads up to this disclosure, far from being a rehash, is an illumination which is also an emotional peak, because it releases the tension of intelligent curiosity we have laboured under from the beginning." [1]

After narrative technique and plot, the most important aspect of the detective story is the person of the victim. The very nickname of the genre, 'whodunit' gives us a clue here: the victim is the 'it' — significantly, the most insignificant ingredient of the whole scheme. The first victim, done in by the original crime, either dies before the novel

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[1] Ibid., p. 310.

begins, or is eliminated in the first few chapters. He has no identity, no emotional hold over the reader. He is usually wealthy, eccentric, and, significantly, mate or childless:

> "I always take a look at the book first to see if there's a chapter headed, "Finding of the Body." And I know that everything is all right when it says, The body was that of an elderly gentleman, well dressed but upside down. Always, you notice, an "elderly gentleman". What they have against us I don't know. But you see if it said that the body was that of a woman — that's a tragedy. The body was that of a child! — that's a horror. But the body was that of an elderly gentleman — oh, pshaw! that's all right. Anyway, he's had his life — he's had a good time (It says he's well dressed.) — probably been out on a hoot. (He's found upside down.) That's all right. He's worth more dead than alive."

Stephen Leacock has put his finger on the essential fact; the unattached and abstracted figure of the victim indicates that the solving of the crime is never motivated by revenge for the victim. It is "the variation from the norm which invites inquiry." [2] What is at stake is not retribution, but the setting right of the universal order. The violator must be discovered not because he killed a person of significance, of heroic magnitude or someone inspiring love. He must be apprehended in order to protect the mechanical functioning of the system based on individualism and private property.

The victim is a mere token, a minor sacrificial animal, a mere excuse to perform exorcism on the body of ailing society; this society is based on the value of individual life and property. The act of murder negates the values; it is an act of sabotage that must be solved so that

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[1] Stephen Leacock, "Murder at $2.50 a Crime," in The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 327.

[2] Jacques Barzun, "Detection and Literature", in The Energies of Art, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1962), p. 309.

it won't occur again. Edmund Wilson, in his 1944 essay, "Why do

People Read Detective Stories?" interpreted the popularity of the

genre as a result of its cathartic effect on the reader. Wilson's

interpretation, although somewhat dated by now, provides some pertinent

comments:

> "... the detective story has kept its hold; had even, in the two
> decades between the great wars, become more popular than ever
> before; and there is, I believe, a deep reason for this. The
> world during those years was ridden by an all-pervasive feeling
> of guilt and by a fear of impending disaster which it seemed
> hopeless to try to avert because it never seemed conclusively
> possible to pin down the responsibility. Who had committed the
> original crime and who was going to commit the next one ? ...
> Everybody is suspected in turn, and the streets are full of
> lurking agents whose allegiances we cannot know. Nobody seems
> guiltless, nobody seems safe; and then, suddenly, the murderer
> is spotted, and — relief! — he is not, after all, a person like
> you or me. He is a villain — known to the trade as George Gruesome
> — and he has been caught by an infallible Power, the supercilious
> and omniscient detective, who knows exactly where to fix the guilt." [1]

Unfortunately, 'fixing the guilt' is only a partial answer, because

contrary to Wilson, the murderers are among us — they are not the easily

dissociable Gruesome Georges. The murderer is, very much like the enemy

spy, a built-in subversive, who violates the system from within. His

motive is gain — social, economic or other — and he wants to acquire it

out of turn. He wants to gain not by the slow and arduous 'natural'

process, but by short-circuiting this process through an act of murder.

He is, therefore, twice the offender: he offends against social values

as well as against the laws of nature. His deviation from the 'norm'

throws a monkey-wrench into the universe. And the detective's motivation

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[1] Edmund Wilson, "Why do People Read Detective Stories," in A Literary
Chronicle: 1920-1950, Doubleday Anchor Book (Garden City: Doubleday &
Co. Inc., 1952), p. 328.

is not really revenge, even if he so protests, but the readjustment
of the great universal clock, Time, symbol of the orderly procession
of things. (In many detective stories the clock or watch that stops
on the murderer's blow is used not only to fix the time of the crime
but also to fix the guilt.) And when Hamlet says:

> "The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, That ever I
> was born to set it right."[1]

he expresses not only the traditional reluctance of the detective to get
involved, but also his main motivation. His sentiment is forever echoed
by all sleuths and spies, trouble-shooters on behalf of the universal order,
and its most powerful symbol, Time. When Macduff enters the scene with
Macbeth's severed head in the play that must be one of the models of modern
detective stories, he reiterates the time-crime motif in very explicit
terms:

> "Macduff. Hail, King! for so thou art: behold where stands
> Th' usurper's cursed head. The time is free."[2]

I would like to consider some further historical proof towards
establishing both the archetypal validity of the detective story and its
prime significance as a vehicle dedicated to the maintenance of the universal
Law-and-Order. The first archetypal murder story in the Judeo-Christian
culture is, of course, the story of Cain and Abel. It is a most revealing
example.

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[1] William Shakespeare, Hamlet, I.5.

[2] William Shakespeare, Macbeth, V.8.

First, the victim's character is totally indifferent. It is true
that God "had respect unto Abel and his offering:"[1] but no reason is
given for this respect. On the other hand, Cain's motivation is plausible
enough. Then comes the murder, which is given such short shrift in the
narrative, that even Ellery Queen notes:

> "Chapter 4 of Genesis merely remarks: 'Cain rose up against
> Abel his brother, and slew him', we may assume the instrument
> to have been a forked-stick plow, or a primitive hoe, since it
> came to pass 'when they were in the field.' and Cain, as
> everyone knows, was a 'tiller of the ground.' "[2]

The very vagueness in the description of the act of murder and how
it is committed is an indication of the Judaic tradition of underplaying
the physical aspects of violence. In this respect, too, the story of Cain
and Abel can be considered a precursor of the European detective story, just
as the moral thriller of the post-war period is a direct descendant of the
traditional genre. The difference between the moral thriller — be it a
detective or a spy novel - and the traditional detective story, is basically
a matter of the respective cultural _milieu_: the traditional detective
defends the moral system against violators, while the modern detective or
spy attacks the amoral system because it violates his sense of humanity.
But in essence, from Cain and Abel to Friedrich Durenmatt and John le
Carré, the polarities are established along moralistic lines, and the
concept of good and evil is based on Judeo-Christian thought. (Perhaps,
one may conjecture that the American thriller, considered by Collingwood

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[1] Genesis IV, 4.

[2] Ellery Queen, "The Detective Short Story: The First Hundred Years," in
The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and
Schuster, 1946), p. 476.

to be strongly inclined to present bloody detail, is more akin to the Greco-Roman tradition and its tendency for externalization.)

Ellery Queen also finds the story of Cain and Abel wanting in one crucial aspect as a detective story:

> "This historic fratricide nevertheless cannot be said to have initiated the literature of detection for the profound reason that the case lacked the essential element -- a detective." [1]

Ellery Queen may be right from a technical point of view. However, the more we delve into the essential aspects of the detective story and its particular vision of reality, the more we see that detection, just as revenge, is merely incidental. Whether it is Hercule Poirot or God himself, the basic role is to restore the status quo of society or the world. God's interest in the case is merely to remove the offender and place him at the periphery of his system. He is not concerned with revenge, because although he threatens Cain that "a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" [2] he also gives him protection:

> "Therefore, whoever slayeth Cain vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." [3]

Once East of Eden, Cain is allowed to prosper, multiply, build a city and, in fact, become one of the precursors of all mankind.

Indeed, the threats and accusations heaped on Cain's head are sheer rhetoric, unsupported by action. Similarly, in most detective stories, the murderer is far more feared and respected than hated. He is a figure of fascination and power, just as Cain is.

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[1] Ibid., p. 477.

[2] Genesis, IV., 12.

[3] Ibid., IV., 15.

Thus, in spite of Ellery Queen's objection, we can safely accept

the story of Cain and Abel as the first archetypal detective story.

Firstly, the victim is of no importance. Secondly, restoration of

order, and not revenge, is the mainspring of the action. Thirdly, the

agent of restoration — in this case God — is not personally involved

in the story. The murdering act violates the system represented by

God or the Detective, but they are not themselves targets of the act.

The agent of restoration is detached from both the victim and the

criminal.

There can be, of course, valid interpretations which associate Cain

not with an act of negation but with the first act of rebellion against

an unjust status quo. A debate on this would be pointless, since one's

attitude depends entirely on whether one supports the established order

or is against it. Gilbert Keith Chesterton is, of course, on the side of

the angels, and his essay, A Defence of Detective Stories, is one of the

finest conservative articulations on the subject:

> "There is ... another good work done by detective stories. While
> it is the constant tendency of the Old Adam to rebel against so
> universal and automatic a thing as civilization, to preach
> departure and rebellion, the romance of police activity keeps in
> some sense before the mind the fact that civilization itself is the
> most sensational of departures and the most romantic of rebellions.
> By dealing with the unsleeping sentinels who guard the outposts of
> society, it tends to remind us that we live in an armed camp, making
> war with a chaotic world, and that the criminals, the children of
> chaos, are nothing but the traitors within our gates. When the
> detective in a police romance stands alone, and somewhat fatuously
> fearless amid the knives and fists of a thieves' kitchen, it does
> certainly serve to make us remember that it is the agent of social
> justice who is the original and poetic figure, while the burglars
> and footpads are merely placid old cosmic conservatives, happy in
> the immemorial respectability of apes and wolves. The romance of

the police force is thus the whole romance of man. It is based
on the fact that morality is the most dark and daring of
conspiracies. It reminds us that the whole noiseless and
unnoticeable police management by which we are ruled and
protected is only a successful Knight-errantry." [1]

As we shall see later, the tragic dimension of the moral thriller
of the post-war era springs from the fact that the "noiseless and
unnoticeable police management" becomes a manipulative, anti-human
and amoral force. And, consequently, the typical hero of such novels
becomes a foe of this kind of system. His knight-errantry results, of
course, in practical failure, and moral victory.

As we have woven our way through those aspects of the detective story
which have a relevance to this particular study, from narrative technique
to symbolic action, one other point should now be included. This concerns
the ultimate beneficiary of the plot. We know, that according to the
traditional rules of moral justice, the criminal is barred from enjoying
the fruit of his labours. The agent of adjustment, the investigator, is
also disinherited: an interest in the stakes would eliminate his
detachment and integrity. It is always someone inconsequential, innocent
and uninvolved who reaps the benefits. In Hamlet it is Fortinbras. In
Cain's case it is probably us, the heirs of Cain. And in most detective
stories it is cousin Freddy, the harmless tennis-bum.

There is only one qualification: the inheritor shall have to be capable
of upholding the norm.

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[1] G.K. Chesterton, "A Defence of Detective Stories," in The Art of
the Mystery Story, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster,
1946), p. 6.

The brief survey of the traditional detective story provided
in the previous chapter is, of necessity, an incomplete one. Its
sole purpose is to be a point of departure for a detailed and intensive
study of the spy fiction of the 1960's. Therefore, I have dealt with
only those aspects of the detective story which, in my judgment, are
relevant to what is to follow. These are mainly aspects of the detective
story's social stance, the universal implications of its structure,
method of characterization and its moral position.

The traditional detective story is important mainly as one of the
two major tributaries of the spy thriller of the 1960's, the other being
the spy fiction of the late 1930's and of the Second World War. These
two are the direct precursors of the moralistic <u>detective</u> fiction of post-
war years, which has a history closely related to the major subject of this
study, the <u>spy</u> fiction which developed, declined and fell between the years
1960 and 1970.

For our purposes, the most important characteristic of the traditional
detective story is its main concept; it is a ritualistic treatment of a
recurring theme, of the individual violating the universal order through an
offence against human life or property or both, and the subsequent correction
of this moral wrong by an agent of superior mind, integrity and detachment
on behalf of the aforementioned order. As we shall see further on in this
study, the modern spy novel rests on a diametrically opposite concept. In
the latter type it is a generally superior individual whose integrity, mind
and existence is violated by the universal order. Another significant
feature of the modern spy novel is the questioning of the validity of this
universal order on behalf of the individual.

CHAPTER II

FROM 'WHODUNIT' TO 'WHYDUNIT':

THE BEGINNINGS OF MORAL CONCERN

IN DETECTIVE AND SPY FICTION - THE

POLITICIZATION OF THE THRILLER

In historical perspective, the social and cultural background that gave rise to two such diametrically opposed themes had to go through radical changes. It would be out of place here to describe the changes that occurred between 1930 and 1970. Suffice it to say that they have been the most sudden and drastic in recorded history. If one went looking for another period in history that would provide an appropriate parallel, the early 17th century might be the best bet. It is the period in which a previously accepted and static world view is suddenly and radically challenged. It is also a period of political and social turmoil, a time in which morality, ethics and religious beliefs are suddenly overthrown. The difference between early Elizabethan and late Jacobean drama, if closely analyzed, would reveal differences of the same type and extent existing between the traditional 'whodunit' and the modern spy story.

I have given the 17th century example to emphasize how major changes in belief and Weltanschauung create parallel changes in literary expression. In the beginning, we have literature that accepts and serves as an expression of the status quo. Say, Kyd's Spanish Tragedy and Agatha Christie's The Murder of Roger Ackroyd. As the social and cultural changes begin to make themselves felt, we can witness the creation of works which are intellectually aware of these changes, but emotionally deplore them. Shakespeare's King Lear and Durenmatt's The Judge and His Hangman would be the relevant examples. The next stage brings works conceived according to the new mode of thought, showing up the old order as corrupt, evil and without redeeming features. Webster's The Duchess of Malfi represents a developmental

stage similar to John le Carré's <u>The Spy Who Came in from the Cold.</u>
After a measure of success, the new mode declines into the ludicrous or
into conscious parody, as the originally effective devices have to be
carried to the extreme and beyond, in order to maintain the interest of
the audience. Ford's <u>'Tis Pity She's a Whore</u> and Adam Diment's <u>The Great
Spy Race</u>,for example.

I offer these seemingly incongruous juxtapositions to point out that
literary expression appears to change in cyclic patterns, that these patterns
recur at various times in history and are always correlated with intellectual
discovery and social change.

When we look at the traditional detective story, we see it at its
historic heights in the early 1930's. It is the type of story that is based
on respect for the individual, the main component of the universal order.
The detective is the protector of the individual and his role in the system.
Life if sacred, and all are equal before the law. Today we know that
<u>de facto</u>, all are not equal before the law, that this concept is in essence
a myth of the liberal-capitalist society. We also know that the detective
story, dedicated to uphold this society, is also devoted to uphold the myth.
It is interesting to note that the famous cliché, "The butler did it!" is one
of the traditional red herrings of the detective story. In the course of
the investigation, one or more lower-class characters -- butler, chauffeur,
maid, gardener -- invariably become suspected of the crime. Yet, in the end,
it is always a member of the ruling class or one who wishes to become part
of it (poor cousin, ambitious secretary, retired officer) who had committed

the murder. Which goes to show that even if often snobbish in tone,
the detective story is basically a liberal-democratic genre, and
essentially anti-elite. There may be an 'opiate-of-the-masses'
connotation to this liberalism, it may be an idyllic ruse to dupe the
plebs, but, as William Empson puts it;

"The essential trick of the old pastoral ... was felt to
imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor ..." [1]

Genuine or not, the essential attitudes of the detective story were
based on the value of the individual, rich or poor, and his equality before
the law (or God). This attitude, as far as humanity was concerned, was
substantially qualitative. One man's death, no matter who he had been,
was worth investigating, worth the risk and the fuss.

And then came the Second World War and the millions killed through
combat, bombing and extermination. The universal order which had been
violated every time murder or theft were committed, died of a massive
haemorrhage.

Even in a form of fiction unconcerned with naturalistic reality, it
was difficult to maintain the pretense that one human life, rich or poor,
really mattered much after the war. After witnessing death and destruction
on a scale never before experienced, no one could really get excited about a
poisoned spinster or a bludgeoned peer. What occurred was a kind of emotional
inflation. The small change of individual lives has lost its significance,

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[1] William Empson, Some Versions of   Pastoral, New Directions
(Norfolk: James Laughlin, 1960), p. 11.

when millions had been and would be at stake, particularly after the introduction of the various technologies of mass murder. The morality that had centered on the individual, on the sanctity of life and property, the respect of eccentricities, the morality so ably underpinned by the detective story, had also been lost. In fact, the detective story in its traditional sense, has never been seen since. In its place came the thriller, concerned with bigger stakes, a different set of ethics, written in a form and structure far less defined than that of the traditional detective story.

The detective novel, essentially an exercise in technique within a moral culture, began its gradual transformation into a commitment to morality within a technological culture. But, before this transformation is completed in the late 1960's, the genre had gone through many phases.

As the previously qualitatively-oriented world order was being taken over by quantity, as the change from hand-made to mass-produced occurred in all spheres, from consumer goods to murder, death in single doses, as treated by the traditional detective story, became irrelevant. Clearly, the ante had to be raised in some way to renew flagging reader interest and involvement; a new relevance had to be sought.

There were actually three ways to 'escalate' thrills. The first, and most obvious of these was to provide a more vivid, sensory picture of violence, shifting the emphasis from 'who done it' to how it was done?

In his 1944 essay, "Raffles and Miss Blandish," George Orwell provides perhaps the most comprehensive analysis on the type of thriller which concentrates on sex and violence, and the reasons of its success during the war years.

The book in question, James Hadley Chase's <u>No Orchids for Miss</u>

<u>Blandish</u>, written in 1939, is, in many ways, a milestone in thrillers.

It signals a change in moral attitude:

"The detective ... is almost as great a rogue as the gangsters, and actuated by nearly the same motives. Like them, he is in pursuit of "five hundred grand." [1]

It also goes a long way in its presentation of physical violence, a

feature always underplayed in traditional detective fiction:

"The book contains eight full-dress murders, an unassessable number of casual killings and woundings, an exhumation (with a careful reminder of the stench), the flogging of Miss Blandish, the torture of another woman with red-hot cigarette ends, a strip-tease act, a third-degree scene of unheard-of cruelty and much else of the same kind." [2]

In Orwell's view, the theme of this novel is "the struggle for power

and the triumph of the strong over the weak" [3] another significant departure

from the liberal-equalitarian stance of the traditional detective story.

Orwell goes on to analyze the reasons for the great success <u>Miss Blandish</u>

enjoyed in England during the Blitz, an interesting fact, considering that

this book has, indeed, been conceived in the spirit of the fascist power

instinct. As such, it is a valuable document of its times. Having read

[1] George Orwell, "Raffles and Miss Blandish," in <u>A Collection of Essays,</u> A Doubleday Anchor Book (Garden City: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1954), p. 145.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

Miss Blandish after a number of James Bond novels, it still stands out in

my memory for its unredeemed and powerful brutality. [1]

Orwell explains the paradoxical success of Miss Blandish in the

England of 1940 by way of a cartoon:

> "Early in the war the New Yorker had a picture of a little man
> approaching a news-stall littered with papers with such headlines
> as 'Great Tank Battles in Northern France,' 'Big Naval Battle in
> the North Sea,' 'Huge Air Battles over the Channel,' etc. etc.
> The little man is saying, 'Action Stories, please.' That little
> man stood for all the drugged millions to whom the world of the
> gangsters and the prize-ring is more 'real', more 'tough', than
> such things as wars, revolutions, earthquakes, famines and
> pestilences." [2]

We can thus see that the type of 'escalation' that results in an

emphasis on the 'how', means a departure from reality as well as from

morality. It signifies an essentially pagan treatment of the genre which,

in many of its manifestations, is very much involved with a religious or

ethical approach to reality.

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[1] The spirit of Miss Blandish is today alive and well in North America,
on the eve of another radical social and moral change, which I expect
to be not unlike the one Europe has undergone in the years of the war.
It is ironic that we seem to have come full circle in thirty years;
in 1939, it was detective fiction that needed a 'shot in the arm' to
make it relevant to an age concerned with the massive and the powerful.
In 1969, it was the new spy thriller, the culmination of the changes
that began in the late 1930's, which, according to Time Magazine, has
come to the same phase of its development: "By now, jaded readers of
international spy fiction expect to get two books in one: a perversely
complicated thriller and a perverted sado-sexual romp at least as
inventive as the wares on the pornography shelf."
"Fadeout and Flagellation," Time Magazine, November 28, 1969, p. 86.

[2] George Orwell, "Raffles and Miss Blandish," in A Collection of Essays,
A Doubleday Anchor Book (Garden City: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1954), p. 147.

The second type of 'escalation', perhaps predictably, turns the 'whodunit' into the 'what'sbeingdone'. Here, the emphasis is on increasing the stakes. The villain does not merely kill one man, and will not usually relish elaborately torturing anyone. He may even be a fairly unassuming type, the representative of an organization or a conspiracy. What he has is a weapon or a formula that could destroy a whole nation, a continent or even all mankind. This type of plot, although it had its roots in the pre-war Fu Man Chu stories, has been resurrected with a vengeance after the war, no doubt because, in this instance, reality was catching up with fiction through the development of nuclear and bacterial weapons and the Laser Beam. What gave this approach a relevance was the underlying fear that a criminal conspiracy, a madman or megalomaniac could, indeed, get hold of a potent weapon causing mega-deaths in the process. While this type of thriller may border on science-fiction, it rightfully belongs in the suspense category, for the mechanics of destruction, unlike in science-fiction novels, are rarely elaborated on. These novels usually have a discovery-of-danger, pursue-and-destroy-the-villain kind of plot, treated in a relatively orthodox manner, and Alfred Hitchcock's recipe for suspense stories in general is perfectly applicable to its techniques:

> "This difference (between the pure suspense story and the element of suspense necessary to all narration) lies in the fact that Suspense is here accompanied by Danger -- danger mysterious and unknown, if possible. Or, if the danger is known -- then as inexorable or as insurmountable peril as may be imagined." [1]

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[1]Alfred Hitchcock, "Introduction to Suspense Stories," quoted in Anthony Boucher, "Trojan Horse Opera," in The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 248.

Our interest in this type of story is limited to its universal and
political attitudes. Flourishing in the 1950's, it had been an instrument
of political propaganda, capitalizing on the very real fears of people.
The bogeymen in these novels were usually German, Russian and Chinese,
or people of indeterminate nationality bearing German-Russian-or
Chinese-sounding names. They were either in the pay of one of these
countries or were backed by some vague, Mafia-type syndicate with the
aim of destroying or threatening and blackmailing the country of their
choice. The morality of this kind of story is purely quantitative:
anything is permissible to the hero, because he is out to save the lives
of millions of threatened people. So much for the complexity of the moral
problem as portrayed in such novels.

The most interesting example of the high-stakes type of suspense
novel is Ian Fleming's James Bond series. As we shall return to Bond later,
at this stage I would like to limit the discussion to those aspects of Bond
which are relevant to the historical development of the modern thriller.

In many ways, the Bond stories are a link between traditional suspense
fiction and the modern, morally concerned thriller, while belonging to neither
category. Bond is still knee-deep in old values. He is a former WW II
officer, in Her Majesty's Service, and, while he displays the traditional
reluctance before every assignment, he is basically loyal to the cause, never
questioning the purpose or the method of the operations he is involved in.
While he thus shows a morally conservative streak (as well as a socially
snobbish attitude) his sexual attitudes and activities reveal a highly
'progressive', amoral bent. In Bond, the element of detection has all but

disappeared, replaced by the thrills of chase. At the same time, Bond is both pursued and pursuer (like Richard Hannay in John Buchan's The 39 Steps) but also a professional spy (unlike Hannay). Bond's adventures are all played for very high stakes, from preventing the diversion of a nuclear rocket that could destroy England in Thunderball to saving the world's agricultural output in On Her Majesty's Secret Service. At the same time, however, he is by no means a knight-errant, he is vindictive, ignoble and deadly. He obviously relishes having his famous 'license to kill'. Perhaps as a concession to realism, Bond is on the receiving end of a lot of torture and suffering, and, according to a review I read in the early 1960's, he makes so many operational errors that only the Deus ex Machina keeps him alive.

In spite of both its popular success and voluminous output, Fleming's series fails to achieve literary significance. Bond is a comic-strip hero, predictable and without any character development or human complexity. In terms of this study, the only importance of the Bond novels lies in the fact that they attracted a popular readership to spy fiction, and, by their excesses of unreality, may have provoked the popularity of spy fiction as a vehicle for serious moral thought. In other words, it is conceivable that in any genre, an excess of invention and irrelevance to reality may trigger a reaction that converts the genre into a vehicle for a viable vision of reality.

After this brief outline of the successors to the 'whodunit' -- the 'how' and the 'what' oriented suspense novel -- we can now enter into a discussion of the third and to our purposes most interesting school in which the 'who', the 'how' and the 'what' become mere subsidiaries of the 'why':

this is the most complex question literature can attempt to answer, and the use of the thriller as a vehicle for such questioning, is one of the most interesting developments in the literature of our time. It indicates a genuine attempt by the writer to procure a mass audience for his personal vision. This attempt is obviously a significant departure from literary norm; writers have always tended either to serve the mass audience with trash or to withdraw from it and cultivate a not highly communicable private code.

When the question 'why' was first asked in the thriller form, this opened up a rich variety of meaningful opportunities; the thriller could become a vehicle of causes, of social and political concern, of conflicts of conscience, or moral, metaphysical and existential debate. And the reader, too, becomes ready to accept this intrusion of the problematic:

> "Like MacLeish's Hamlet, they know the answers -- all the answers. It is the question that they want to know; and that question must be something urgent, vital -- a matter of life and death to the protagonist, not merely a pretty puzzle." [1]

Perhaps it is all too dramatic to pinpoint a date and name an author as the originator of all this renewal and change. We have surveyed enough of the precursors and discussed enough of the background to know that the moral spy wasn't built in a day; his appearance is preceded by a combination of many factors. It is a direct result of the Zeitgeist of the 1930's.

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[1] Anthony Boucher, "Trojan Horse Opera," in The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 248.

But perhaps we can forgive Anthony Boucher's eloquence in the 1940's

as he credits the birth of the phenomenon to the English mystery

writer, Eric Ambler:

> "At last Ambler came; and from his Background to Danger (1937,
> originally Uncommon Danger) we may date the transfiguration of
> the spy story (though perhaps that transfiguration really began
> in another medium, in the film melodramas of Alfred Hitchcock).
> Ambler showed that human characterization, good prose, political
> intelligence, and above all a meticulously detailed realism, far
> from getting in the way of intricate spy adventures, can strengthen
> them and raise them to a new plane."[1]

We can safely accept Boucher's timetable. More so because, in the

subsequent and highly complex development of the various schools of the

thriller, it will be very difficult to maintain a guiding chronology.

But, in 1937, such a possibility still existed. It was a time of political

polarization in bourgeois society which (not unlike the 1970's) made it

difficult to choose sides. The Spanish Civil War was on; Munich and

the German-Soviet pact were around the corner. Within five years a whole

set of national and political alliances will have tumbled and re-grouped

in most unexpected ways. The political background was fertile for spying

and partisan intrigue. Betrayal was in the air at all levels.

The politicization of spy literature is only one way of bringing morality

and the problematic into the genre, and even in the heydays of the politically

committed spy, we should be able to discern the parallel appearance of the

metaphysically and existentially committed agent. But the first plunge into

the problematic and the relevant is a political move. And Eric Ambler is the

author who made that first move.

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[1] Ibid., p. 246.

CHAPTER III

FROM SERMON TO VISION:

AMBLER, PRIESTLEY AND GREENE –

THE EARLY MORAL THRILLERS –

THE EVOLUTION FROM MORAL RHETORIC

TO SYMBOLIC ACTION

The contribution of Eric Ambler to the shaping of the thriller as
a vehicle of problematic content is twofold: first, he brought the topical
into the fiction, thereby increasing its immediacy and relevance, and,
secondly, he had a message. His topical and partisan orientation had set
the tone not only of scores of wartime novels, but also influenced all spy
fiction toward taking a historically plausible and politically relevant
direction. Since Ambler, both the finest and the run-of-the-mill specimens
of the genre have often been as relevant as yesterday's news -- at the ever-
present risk of sacrificing their claim for universality of a more enduring
sort. Ambler himself, in my opinion, has fallen victim to his own virtues.
In spite of Boucher's admiration for his 'human characterization, good prose
and political intelligence,' the very factors that made Ambler exciting to
his contemporary readership, make his novels appear dated to the reader of
today. It seems that as the journalistic bases of his novels lost their
actuality, so has the prose lost its interest. Naturally, all fiction
commandeered as a vehicle of a mundane message ties its fate to the burden
it carries. It is also natural that the major part of this burden is rhetoric.
Rhetoric is an excellent propaganda tool, but does not stand the test of time.
Although it keeps the vehicle going over rough terrain while the battle goes
on, it becomes dead weight as soon as the fighting is over. Since in wartime
there's no time and no reason to camouflage this rhetoric by converting it
into symbolic action, imagery, characterization or other sophisticated tactical
weapons, even a soundly built structure and a still powerful vehicle cannot
save the entire machinery from the scrap-heap. That is, until historical

necessity demands a re-fitting and the old war horse is back in battle
with some minor alterations. This is what's happening to Ambler today,
but for a long time his fiction lay dormant, read only by devotees of
the genre and belated romantic anti-fascists. The only reason for sifting
through this kind of rhetorical burden years after the fact is the pleasure
of verifying a prophecy come through. But yesterday's prophecy, no matter
how apt, has all the excitement of I-told-you-so:

> " 'Do you ever read newspapers?'
> 'As little as possible, these days. Why?'
> 'Have you ever heard of a little thing called the Rome-Berlin axis?'
> 'Who hasn't?'
> 'Have you ever looked at what it means on a map?'
> 'I can't say I have bothered to.'
> 'You should. It's interesting. A solid strategic unit from the
> Frisian Islands in the North to the toe of Italy in the South.
> The toe is waiting to kick Great Britain in the pants. The head
> is there to gobble up what's left. The Rome-Berlin axis is one
> of the most effective principles of European power-politics that
> has ever been stated. It's given Italy and Germany a free hand
> in Spain. It's cocked the biggest snook yet at the League of
> Nations idea. It's deprived France of her Little Entente allies.
> It's frightened the rest of Europe so badly that it lives now in a
> permanent state of jitters. Even the United States have become
> uneasy. The world is slowly beginning to turn on the Rome-Berlin
> axis and already the strain is telling. Something's got to snap,
> something's going to snap; and if it's not the Rome-Berlin axis,
> it's going to be you and me. The statesmen of the so-called
> democracies,France and England are busting themselves in their
> efforts to make it the axis that goes first. And they look like
> failing. Things are moving too quickly for them. They try to buy
> off Italy and fail. They try again. They can't hit out for fear
> of hurting themselves. They're out of their depths and they know
> it. They're as mixed as my metaphors. They're confused and
> confounded. And meanwhile we drift nearer and nearer to war.
> The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are getting ready to go; and,
> Marlow, if those boys ride out again across Europe, you can say
> good-bye to all your dreams. It'll be a war that'll make the world
> safe for everything except mankind. A government will be formed with
> President Typhus at the head of a congress of corpse-fed rats." [1]

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[1] Eric Ambler, _Cause for Alarm,_ Penguin Books (Harmondsworth, 1961), p.97.

It is a pity that such a sincerely felt, well articulated and
timely sentiment reads so pathetically in another era. Yet, when one
has to look up the date of publication for reassurance that one is
reading is not just a hindsight but genuine and concerned prophecy, the
literary value of the work is certainly compromised. While Ambler is an
important pioneer of the modern spy novel, none of his works stand out in
retrospect. His novels still carry some of the vestiges of traditional
detective fiction; his policeman, such as Colonel Haki in Journey into Fear
still represent benevolent authority, and the pattern of betrayal is still
contained within a coterie of easily identifiable villains. His heroes,
although sensing the danger represented by the evolving technological
system, still carry a portfolio of moral certainties in their patriotic
attaché cases. They are, in fact fixed points in a universe about to fall
off its axle, unaware of the absurdity of the modern world. Ambler, himself
a man with a strong engineering background, usually employs engineers as
protagonists, who represent the point of view of the sane mechanic, basically
constructive and unimaginative. They are -- according to the archetypal
pattern -- reluctant to get involved in the intrigue, and want out after the
adventure is completed. When the hero of Cause for Alarm, Marlow, is offered
another adventure-prone job by his erstwhile employer, a munitions manufacturer,
he refuses:

> "... I have come to the conclusion that I am more suited to a works
> job.' 'Once an engineer always an engineer, eh? Well, I can
> sympathize with that.' [1]

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[1]Ibid., p. 246.

There are many reasons why the pre-war and wartime heroes of spy novels generally refuse to stay in the espionage business. The propaganda purpose of these novels necessitated that its readers be able to identify with the protagonists. The war effort depended on the enthusiasm of non-professional soldiers, factory workers and others, it was, indeed, the last war fought by amateurs. Thus, the amateurs had to be elevated to heroic status in the fiction of the times. The fact that the protagonists acted in a temporary capacity is also a symbol of the desire to revert to the old way of life after the war is over. After all, to many participants, the war was fought to restore and to maintain the old values. While the more left-leaning authors recognized that there will be no return to pre-war social values, the mood and method of their presentation belies their rhetoric. Another, perhaps less substantial but more intriguing reason for these sane, reluctantly-warring engineer types attaining heroic dimensions, is the authors' yearning to hold onto something solid and structured in the fact of oncoming chaos. Most interestingly, while engineers account for a majority of pre-war and wartime spy heroes, the post-war genre is populated with professional agents, people totally committed to the absurd, with no hope of return to a solid, structured existence.

The best-crystallized rationale for the wartime amateur hero is given in J.B. Priestley's 1942 novel, Black-out in Gretley:

"Actually I didn't like the job much -- it's boring most of the
time, though I see now that I'd have been worse bored in the
army ... I hated the Nazis like hell, so this kept me going
through some long dingy stretches. And anyhow, I hadn't a dog's
chance of working now at my own profession, doing sensible civilized
work in a sensible civilized world." [1]

Priestley's novel, subtitled a 'Story of -- and for -- Wartime' does

not try to conceal its earnest propaganda tendencies. And perhaps this

predilection to sermonize, this explicit rhetoric is what makes these novels

so difficult to accept today. My own personal recollection of Priestley's

novel, which I had first read in 1950 at age fourteen, has been one of great

suspense, good characterization and plotting. Reading the book was an

experience I recalled fondly, until I looked at it more analytically in preparation

for this work. Naturally, it was a disappointment the second time around.

But it is the very explicitness and the constantly voiced decent sentiments

which impressed me at the time, so it must have been an effective book,

fulfilling its announced purpose.

While today we cannot place too much value in the literary accomplishments

of Ambler and Priestley, they have influenced the future course of the genre.

Their moral committment, explicit rhetoric and olive-drab sense of decency

provided important themes for modern spy fiction. One of these themes will be

reflected in all the important works of the 1960's, from John le Carré to Len

Deighton: this is the motif of nostalgia for the values and attitudes of the

Second World War, constantly recalled by the agents and protagonists in the

amoral environment of their operations. Just as the civilized world of

peacetime provides moral and emotional anchorage for the wartime hero, so is

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[1] J.B. Priestley, Black-out in Gretley, (New York and London: Harper
& Bros., 1942), p. 3.

the modern hero grasping for the moral certainties he remembers to have
experienced during the war. Perhaps the best expression of this nostalgia
comes from the foreword of A.J. Liebling's collection of wartime reports,
published in 1964:

> "The times were full of certainties: we could be certain we were
> right -- and we were -- and that certainty made us certain that
> anything we did was right, too. I have seldom been sure I was right
> since ... I know that it is socially acceptable to write about war
> as an unmitigated horror, but subjectively at least, it was not
> true, and you can feel its pull on men's memories at the maudlin
> reunions of war divisions. They mourn for their dead, but also for
> war." [1]

One cannot underrate the thematic influence of Ambler and Priestley
on later works. And they have also lead the way among their contemporaries
in contributing to the war effort. In their wake,

> "... almost every top-flight mystery writer (made an attempt) to
> save the Empire from Fascism by the intervention of his star
> detective." [2]

And while the Empire -- or the Allies -- still represented a system
determined to protect the liberties and the value of the individual, organized
society was well on its way to turn into the overall villain of the 1960's.
It is interesting to trace how this happened in fiction. As I mentioned
before, the policeman, provided he is of a neutral country or an ally, is still
a man of benevolent authority. This is a feature of both Priestley's and
Ambler's works. However, the authors afford a different treatment to enemy
institutions. Little did they know that the arguments they have presented
against the Gestapo and the Ovra, will be used by the authors of the 1960's
against the friendly 2ième Bureau, the C.I.A. and MI 5. Of course, by that

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[1] A.J. Liebling, Mollie and Other War Pieces, Ballantine Books (New
York, 1964), p. IX.

[2] Anthony Boucher, "Trojan Horse Opera," in The Art of the Mystery Story,
ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 246.

time the modern spy novel had developed one of its most significant themes, the villainy of the system, of organized society's confrontation with the new hero, the individual. This complete turnabout from the world of the traditional detective to the world of the modern spy, seems to have begun in the late 1930's. In a germinal form, it appears in Ambler's Cause for Alarm. It describes the dialectic relationship of the crime syndicate and the government secret service, an association that has been frequently and darkly hinted at in connection with all the secret services of the world; this real or imagined unholy alliance of the criminal element and the espionage establishment is also a factor in pitting the heroic individual against the villainous system:

"But in nineteen-twenty-three, the Fascisti had an idea. They smashed the Mafia. It took them some time, but they did it. It was, they claimed, one of the blessings of Fascismo. But like some other Fascist blessings, it was mixed ... The big majority of the boys ... were recruited by the Ovra, drafted to different parts of the country, so they couldn't get organized again, and set to work on behalf of the Government. That wasn't so good for the Italian public. The Ovra's first job was to liquidate the opposition -- the Liberals and the Socialists. That was in nineteen-twenty-four. They did a swell job. The murder of the opposition leader, Mateotti, a few hours before he was due to produce documentary evidence in support of a speech indicting the Fascist Government, was an early success. But it was only a beginning. These were the holy fathers of American gangsterism, and they knew their stuff. The ordinary Italian is a nice guy. He's a bit inclined to dramatize himself and his country, but he's a nice guy: he's fond of his wife and kids, he's a hard worker and as independent as they come. But you can't fight terrorism with indignation. The Government knew that. They consolidated their position by creating the Ovra. Its liquidation of the opposition was as bloody a page of history as you'll find. Beatings, clubbings, killings -- it's all in a day's work to the Ovra. The Mafiosi tradition has survived. The Ovra is all-powerful. It has become a regularly constituted secret police force. The Italian Government have even admitted its existence." [1]

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[1] Eric Ambler, Cause for Alarm, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth, 1961), p. 90.

From the villainy of an _enemy_ government organization, the spy
novel will proceed to a point where all organizations -- no matter which
side they're on, come to signify universal evil.

While the novels of Ambler and Priestly have made the first steps in
a direction that resulted in a radically different new genre, they are still
deeply embedded in the tradition that preceeded them. In terms of style,
they maintained the artificial casualness characteristic of Agatha Christie
and others. The speech from Ambler's _Cause for Alarm_, quoted above, is a
good example of this: while making what is essentially a political statement
of some gravity, the passage is full of phoney colloquialism, belaboured
verbal _legerdemain_: "nice guy", "the boys", "swell job", "they knew their
stuff", etc. It all sounds like an academic or a politician desperately
trying to assume the 'common touch'. Which is exactly what this particular
style is about: the inordinate amount of political and social sermonizing
in these novels had to be suitably sugar-coated:

> "In most other countries the people simply wouldn't live in a town
> that offered them so little of what a town can offer. But the
> British can take it. I hoped they go on taking it until the day
> Hitler screamed for the last time, and that then they'd pull these
> damned places down and throw bricks at the greedy old fakers who'd
> pop up to tell them they were now all poor again. I go where the
> Department tells me to go, and every time I catch a Nazi agent or
> anybody who sells out to one, then I'm delighted, for you don't have
> to tell me what sort of world Hitler and Himmler would leave us with;
> but that doesn't mean I haven't my own ideas or that I don't know
> what I'd do to the idiotic old noodles who come to these places and
> ask the people to fight and sweat for "our traditional way of life."
> Holy Moses!" [1]

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[1] J.B. Priestley, _Black-out in Gretley_, (New York and London: Harper
Bros., 1942), p. 28.

While the content is certainly radical, the style and the methods

of characterization remain highly conservative. Perhaps because of its

moralistic orientation, this particular genre advanced first in terms of

content, and acquired a new style gradually afterwards. It is both

amusing and significant how in Priestley's spy novel, <u>Black-out in Gretley</u>,

the plot works to a very traditional climax, complete with the hero

confronting the villain with the evidence of his crime in the drawing-room

fashion of all traditional detectives from Sherlock Holmes to Hercule

Poirot, including the inevitable 'here's where-you-slipped-up' speech:

> " ' I'm quite fascinated, as you see, Neyland,' he said, in a small,
> dry voice, 'but where I come into all this nonsense I simply can't
> imagine.'
> 'Then I caught you out nicely this morning, Colonel,' I went on, in
> an easy, bantering tone. 'You may remember that I said I'd heard
> that when Scorson of the Air Ministry of Supply spoke to you on
> Wednesday night, he put in a good word for me, for that Charters
> job, and you said that he had and that it had just made the difference.
> But ----' And I deliberately paused. He fell for it at once. 'There's
> no question of catching anybody out,' he said contemptuously. 'You
> sounded so pleased because you'd heard that Scorson had recommended
> you to me that night, that of course I pretended he had, out of
> ordinary politeness. What is there in that?'
> 'Enough to hang you, Tarlington,' I said, dropping the bantering tone
> which had served its purpose." [1]

This beautifully theatrical speech by the hero is made while he's

nursing his wound received in a gun-battle minutes before. But he's well

enough to include a sermon in the conversation:

> "I wouldn't be here, in this condition, telling you all this,' I said
> to him, 'if the whole case wasn't in the bag, with all essential evidence
> already in the hands of the police. I only came -- and stayed on --
> because I like to round off my own jobs myself. Vanity, if you like.

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[1] Ibid., p. 260.

Probably that's my weakness. Yours is pride, Tarlington.
You see yourself as a rightly privileged person, quite
different from the common crowd, and you're ready to pay a
big price to keep your privileges. You hate democracy and
all it means. There's something fundamentally stiff-necked,
arrogant, dominating and conceited about you that just can't
take it. When Hess flew over here, he was looking for people
like you." [1]

After this speech the hero gradually loses consciousness, but is

still well enough to notice the arrival of the police, at which time, the

classic whodunit courtesy is gracefully extended to the apprehended spy:

" 'All right, Superintendent,' I heard the Colonel say. 'Just a
minute' and he went into the other room.
There was a shot before anybody had a chance to move.
Apparently I was heard to say: 'Well, there wasn't any other way
of doing it.' But I don't remember. I was out." [2]

However, in spite of the high cliché-content of this and many other

wartime spy novels -- one might call them opportunistic adaptations of the

traditional formulae -- they do constitute a few steps towards a new genre.

An interesting motive, and one to which we shall return in later chapters,

is the propaganda-inspired and yet universally and permanently accepted image

of World War II as a moral war. While Ambler made the first step from neutral

toward moral content, Priestley adds a left-wing humanism to this:

"In the last war, which seemed to you a straightforward nationalistic
affair, I've no doubt you did a good job. But this war, which is
quite different, was too much for you. I heard you speak the other
night. You only said what a lot of people of your kind keep on
saying -- telling the people to keep in their old place, to fight
and work and suffer to maintain something they no longer believe in
-- and if you ask me, every word of this stuff is worth another gun
or whip to Hitler and his gang." [3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 260.

[2] Ibid., p. 264.

[3] Ibid., p. 263.

The parallel Priestley draws between the two wars indicates that while the First World War was a merely national one, the Second World War contained the seeds of a social revolution. Thus, the struggle against an evil enemy and ideology as well as an unjust social balance within, gives the war a universal sense of moral justice.

This positive morality attached to the Second World War will provide one of the key themes of the spy novel of the 1960's. Almost invariably, characters will express a nostalgia for that war as the last conflict in which moral issues had been clear-cut and an opportunity existed to do the right thing. The spy-fiction characters of the 1960's will be longing for the certainty as well as the absolution from individual guilt and ethical responsibility WWII offered.

This view of the war certainly has not originated in fiction, and has been one of the few attitudes shared by a majority of the world's population until recently; Ambler and Priestley had been mainly responsible for introducing this theme in the thriller.

While Ambler and Priestley had done much to change the tone and content of the traditional detective story or thriller, it was Graham Greene who transformed this vehicle into a new mode of literary expression. Although today's thrillers appear to be the conflux of a large number of tributaries, no other works published in the 1930's and '40's have had such a formative influence on the new spy fiction as those of Graham Greene. Greene's 'Entertainments', although grounded in historically authentic situations, have relegated the topical into the background and concentrated on universal themes and concepts. Up to Greene's appearance, the genre survived on the

ritualistic repetition of a few basic structures. Raymond Chandler, one
of the few Americans who made significant contributions to the thriller,
points out the limitations of the genre by comparing the average with the
outstanding specimen:

> "... the strange thing is that this average, more than middling
> dull, pooped-out piece of utterly unreal and mechanical fiction
> is not terribly different from what are called the masterpieces
> of the art. It drags on a little more slowly, the dialogue is
> a little grayer, the cardboard out of which the characters are
> cut is a shade thinner, and the cheating is a little more obvious;
> but it is the same kind of book. Whereas the good novel is not
> at all the same kind of book as the bad novel. It is about
> entirely different things. But the good detective story and the
> bad detective story are about exactly the same things, and they
> are about them in very much the same way." [1]

Greene, however, expanded the potentials of the genre first by bringing
in related themes from theology. He also made the thriller a scene of
symbolic action, thereby eliminating the need for the sermonizing used by
lesser writers. And, last but not least, Greene added the element of
surrealism not only in characterization, but by deliberately running counter
to the accepted patterns of action, by shifting the emphasis from dramatic
scenes to the marginal and thus providing structural surprises as well as
unexpected twists in the plot. The point is, of course, that the traditional
mystery was no mystery at all. The experienced reader could foretell each
twist by the way the author built his plot and suspense. Just like the avid
moviegoer who can anticipate the action by the traditional crescendos and
vibratos of the music track, the constant thriller reader could be fairly
effective at predicting the fate of the characters and the function of most
scenes, objects and settings. The physical shape and the colouring of the
events may have changed from book to book, but the pattern of action was nearly
always predictable. Greene pulled the rug from under the reader, so to speak.

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[1] Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," in The Art of the Mystery
Story, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 225.

One sequence of episodes in Greene is of particular interest, for
it contains the essence of many of his major themes and offers an excellent
microcosmic illustration of his contribution:

To begin with, we should recall the traditional approach to murder: the
killing (if presented at all) takes place, almost without exception, at
night. Perhaps, in a locked room or in some isolated and foreboding place.
There are never any witnesses, and the victim is alone, unsuspecting of
the attempt to be made on his life. Another key factor is, that very much
like in Gothic novels, the appearance of daylight signifies a break in fear
and tension, just as the company of others renders the potential victim
immune from murder. As long as there is company and night does not fall,
he is safe. In numbers and in illumination, one finds sanctuary.
There is sportsmanship in this unwritten yet rarely broken rule, besides the
suggestion of a structured universe in which no one, not even the forces of
evil, play unfairly.

And then came Graham Greene's <u>Brighton Rock</u> (1938) in which the rules
are broken, and what is perhaps the most potent theme of mid-century thrillers,
emerges with full force. In my opinion, Kolley Kibber's death in the first
three chapters of <u>Brighton Rock</u> signals the beginning of '20th century Gothic',
the unrelieved presence of suspense and danger, chase without benefit of pause,
sanctuary, or protector. While this sequence in <u>Brighton Rock</u> might also count
as an important technical innovation, the significance is in its implicit
universal statement -- the presentation of unrelieved anxiety as the human
condition.

How Graham Greene achieves this vision can be seen as one follows
the victim, Kolley Kibber (or Hale), to his destruction:

> "Hale knew they meant to murder him before he had been in
> Brighton three hours." [1]

The victim, thus, is not unsuspecting. And the reader is party to
his fear, from the first sentence of the first chapter. But Hale -- or
Kolley Kibber -- also has hope. Hope in the protective structures of the
civilized universe he has known:

> "He was damned, he told himself with the temporary courage of
> another whisky, if he'd let that mob frighten him into spoiling
> his job. What could they do while he had people round him?
> They hadn't the nerve to kill him in broad day before witnesses;
> he was safe with the fifty thousand visitors." [2]

In a point-counterpoint pattern, which follows the fluctuating changes
between hope and despair in the victim's mind throughout, at first he attempts
to escape loneliness in the crowd as he meets Ida:

> "What'll you have?' he said, approaching the big woman with
> starved gratitude. She could save my life, he thought, if
> she'd let me stick to her." [3]

Then he receives forebodings of inevitability, proving the futility of
escape:

> "At the foot of the Cosmopolitan steps, in the shadow the huge
> bizarre building cast, he remembered that the mob had bought
> his paper. They hadn't needed to watch the public house for
> him: they knew where to expect him." [4]

Again, Hale sees a glimmer of sanctuary: the police -- only to realize
that this particular protective power exists above the sphere of his despair.

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[1] Graham Greene, _Brighton Rock_, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth: 1961), p.5.

[2] Ibid., p. 9.

[3] Ibid., p. 9.

[4] Ibid., p. 11.

(Greene's policemen, in many of his novels, do assume certain divine
characteristics.) At the end of the passage, despair returns with
increasing force:

> "A mounted policeman came up the road: the lovely cared-for
> chestnut beast stepping delicately on the hot macadam, like an
> expensive toy a millionaire buys for his children; you admired
> the finish, the leather as deeply glowing as an old mahogany
> table top, the bright silver badge; it never occurred to you that
> the toy was for use. It never occurred to Hale, watching the
> policeman pass; he couldn't appeal to him. A man stood by the
> kerb selling objects on a tray; he had lost the whole of one side
> of the body: leg and arm and shoulder; and the beautiful horse
> as it paced by turned its head aside delicately like a dowager.
> 'Shoelaces,' the man said hopelessly to Hale, 'matches.' Hale
> didn't hear him. 'Razor blades.' Hale went by, the words lodged
> securely in his brain: the thought of the thin wound and the
> sharpness of the agony. That was how Kite was killed." [1]

When Hale is finally confronted with his eventual murderer, the Boy,
this cold and deadly encounter strips away the illusion of reality he had
hitherto maintained:

> "We'll be going, Fred.' the boy said.
> Hale rose. His hands were shaking. This was real now: the boy,
> the razor cut, life going out with the blood in pain; not the deck
> chairs and the permanent waves, the miniature cars tearing round the
> curve on the Palace Pier. The ground moved under his feet, and only
> the thought of where they might take him while he was unconscious
> saved him from fainting. But even then common pride, the instinct
> not to make a scene, remained overpoweringly strong; embarrassment
> had more force than terror, it prevented his crying his fear aloud,
> it even urged him to go quietly. If the boy had not spoken again,
> he might have gone.
> 'We'd better get moving, Fred,' the boy said.
> 'No,' Hale said. 'I'm not coming. I don't know him. My name's
> not Fred. I've never seen him before. He's just getting fresh,'
> and he walked rapidly away, with his head down, hopeless now: there
> wasn't time; only anxious to keep moving, to keep out in the clear
> sun; until from far down the front he heard the woman's winy voice
> singing, singing of brides and bouquets, of lilies and mourning
> shrouds, a Victorian ballad, and he moved towards it as someone who
> has been lost a long while in a desert makes for the glow of a fire." [2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 12.

[2] Ibid., p. 16.

Hale joins Ida and hopes her presence will ward off his killers.
And, again, in a contrapuntal mode, he first receives hope through
the sensual warmth of Ida, then plunges into despair as he notices his
pursuers closing in:

> "'It's a long walk,' Hale said, 'to the Palace Pier in this
> sun. We'd better take a taxi.' But he made no immediate pass
> at Ida in tha taxi, sitting there bonily crouched with his
> eyes on the parade: no sign of the boy or Cubitt in the bright
> broad day sweeping by. He turned reluctantly back, and with
> the sense of her great open friendly breasts, fastened his mouth
> on hers and received the taste of port wine on his tongue, and
> saw in the driver's mirror the old 1925 Morris following behind,
> with its split and flapping top, its bent fender and cracked and
> discoloured windscreen. He watched it with his mouth on hers,
> shaking against her as the taxi ground slowly along beside the
> parade." [1]

And now, in an increasing rhythm or shifting hope and despair, first,
Hale seeks reassurance of what seems to be his last refuge, the girl's warm,
protective presence:

> " 'Here we are,' Hale said. 'You'll stay with me, won't you, even
> if I'm not sick?'
> 'Of course I will,' Ida said, hiccuping gently as she stepped
> out. 'I like you, Fred. I liked you the moment I saw you. You're
> a good sport, Fred. What's that crowd, there?' she asked with joyful
> curiosity, pointing to the gathering of neat and natty trousers, of
> bright blouses and bare arms and bleached and perfumed hair." [2]

And just as this protection is secured, and Hale once more heads
toward the 'gathering of neat and natty trousers' and 'bright blouses', hope
again disappears -- never to be regained, partly because Hale still plays
the game according to the old rules: he can't seek out the policeman and
his 'common pride, the instinct not to make a scene' renders him incommunicado.

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[1] Ibid., p. 18

[2] Ibid., p. 20.

He cannot confess his situation, not even to Ida:

> " 'Get me a watch, Fred,' Ida said, pushing him gently, 'and
> give me threepence before you go. I want to get a wash.' They
> stood on the pavement at the entrance to the Palace Pier; the
> crowd was thick around them, passing in and out of the turnstiles,
> watching the pedlar; there was no sign anywhere of the Morris car.
> 'You don't want a wash, Ida,' Hale implored her. 'You're fine.'
> 'I've got to get a wash,' she said. 'I'm sweating all over. You
> just wait here. I'll only be two minutes.'
> 'You won't get a good wash here,' Hale said. 'Come to a hotel
> and have a drink —'
> 'I can't wait, Fred. Really I can't. Be a sport.'
> Hale said: 'That ten shillings. You'd better have that too while
> I remember it.'
> 'It's real good of you, Fred. Can you spare it?'
> 'Be quick, Ida,' Hale said. 'I'll be here. Just here. By this
> turnstile. You won't be long, will you? I'll be here,' he repeated,
> putting his hand on a rail of the turnstile." [1]

Hale is now as good as dead, and the reader learns of his death only

indirectly, through the surrealistic device of constant references to Time,

as the boy, Pinkie, goes about establishing an alibi. The clock striking

half past one is the climatic hint of violence, as everything else goes on,

in a low-key, tempered narrative, until Hale becomes a thing of the past:

> " '...He got lost somehow. I liked him. You didn't know
> whatever he'd be saying next. I owe him money too.'
> 'You saw about this Kolley Kibber at Brighton the other day?'
> 'Found him dead, didn't they? I saw a poster.'
> 'They've had the inquest.'
> 'Did he kill himself?'
> 'Oh, no. Just his heart. The heat knocked him over. But the
> paper's paid the prize to the man who found him. Ten guineas,'
> the ghost said, 'for finding a corpse.' He laid the paper bitterly
> down on the wine barrel. 'Give me another Ruby.' " [2]

The death of Hale takes thirty-two pages in Brighton Rock, and these

pages introduce the concept of inexorable evil and despair into the genre.

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[1] Ibid., p. 20.

[2] Ibid., p. 30.

While few of Greene's followers have been able to accomplish his mastery

and control of the narrative (the passages cited above are rich in imagery,

particularly those associating with crowds and light -- the two central

symbols of hope in the chapter), many have maintained his dual dimension

of consistently juxtaposing hope and despair, a duality which has strongly

influenced the spy novels of the 1960's.

The development of the murder narrative in Brighton Rock also pointed

the way and showed the sinister effectiveness of the bloodless, understated,

indirect or implied presentation of violent action. While the traditional

detective story, too, shied away from explicit, physical murder scenes, it

had, in the course of the story, compensated for this lack by presenting

extensive clinical details in the reconstruction of the crime.

Greene's method of repressing explicit action, and concentrating

instead on a number of operative symbols and images, seems to have been

influenced by the cinema: the blurring of certain elements in the action,

the use of apparently unrelated objects to tell part of the story, the inter-

cutting of 'close-up' interior monologue with the panoramic presentation of

the environment, the shifting of focus between various depths on the human

scale are reminiscent of Alfred Hitchcock's film-making.

The first chapters of Brighton Rock seem to me as influential in the

development of the genre's style as Eric Ambler's early rhetoric is to its

contents.

Greene's other significant contribution to the thriller was his application

of surrealistic effects. Since surrealism and despair provide perhaps the

simplest formulation of the absurd, Greene can be credited with being the

father of the 'absurd spy', a phenomenon to which we shall return to in
later chapters. Elements of surrealism are present in most of Greene's
'Entertainments', from <u>Confidential Agent</u> to <u>Our Man in Havana</u>. His first
spy novel proper, <u>The Ministry of Fear</u>, does, in fact, register a virtual
manifesto of surrealism in spy fiction, in the form of the hero's nightmare:

> " '... It sounds like a thriller, doesn't it, but the thrillers are
> like life — more like life than you are, this lawn, your sandwiches,
> that pine. You used to laugh at the books Miss Savage read — about
> spies, and murders, and violence, and wild motorcar chases, but,
> dear, that's real life: it's what we've all made of the world since
> you died. I'm your little Arthur who wouldn't hurt a beetle and I'm
> a murderer too. The world has been re-made by William Le Queux.'
> He couldn't bear the frightened eyes which he had himself printed on
> the cement wall; he put his mouth to the steel frame of his bunk and
> kissed the white cold cheek. 'My dear, my dear, my dear. I'm glad
> you are dead. Only do you know about it? do you know?' He was
> filled with horror at the thought of what a child becomes, and what
> the dead must feel watching the change from innocence to guilt and
> powerless to stop it.
> 'Why, it's a madhouse,' his mother cried.
> 'Oh, it's much quieter there,' he said. 'I know. They put me
> in one for a time. Everybody was very kind there. They made me
> librarian ...' He tried to express clearly the difference between
> the madhouse and this. 'Everybody in the place was very — reasonable.'
> He said fiercely, as though he hated her instead of loving her, 'Let
> me lend you the History of Contemporary Society. It's in hundreds of
> volumes, but most of them are sold in cheap editions: <u>Death in
> Piccadilly</u>, <u>The Ambassador's Diamonds</u>, <u>The Theft of the Naval Papers</u>,
> <u>Diplomacy</u>, <u>Seven Days' Leave</u>, <u>The Four Just Men</u> ...' " [1]

Outside of the element of life imitating art, this passage poignantly
concludes the transition from the traditional detective story to the modern
thriller. It is, also, a clear statement of the vision of reality which will
eventually produce a whole genre dedicated to it, a genre which, in fact, will

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[1] Graham Greene, <u>The Ministry of Fear</u>, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth:
1963), p. 70.

be conceived in the atmosphere first envisaged here:

> "... All the next few hours were with him in the street: a small
> crowded hall full of the familiar peaceful faces -- the chemist
> and his wife, the daughters of the headmaster, the bank manager
> and the dentist with his blue chin and his look of experience,
> the paper streamers of blue and green and scarlet, the small local
> orchestra, the sense of a life good and quiet and enduring, with
> only the gentle tug of impatience and young passion to disturb it
> for the while and make it doubly dear for ever after. And then
> without warning the dream twisted towards nightmare; somebody was
> crying in the dark with terror -- not the young woman he was waiting
> to meet, whom he hadn't yet dared to kiss and probably never would,
> but someone whom he knew better even than his parents, who belonged
> to a different world altogether, to the sad world of shared love.
> A policeman stood at his elbow and said in a woman's voice,
> 'You had better join our little group,' and urged him remorselessly
> towards a urinal where a rat bled to death in the slate trough.
> The music had stopped, and the lights had gone, and he couldn't
> remember why he had come to this dark vile corner, where even the
> ground whined when he pressed it, as if it had learnt the trick of
> suffering. He said, 'Please let me go away from here,' and the
> policeman said, 'Where do you want to go to, dear?' He said,
> 'Home,' and the policeman said, 'This is home. There isn't anywhere
> else at all,' and whenever he tried to move his feet the earth whined
> back at him: he couldn't move an inch without causing pain." [1]

The Ministry of Fear is rich in symbolism. It provides a comprehensive

world view, while, in fact, it is Greene's contribution to the war effort.

Priestley's Black-out in Gretley, published a year before, seems twenty years

behind in conception as well as execution. Greene's book is still relevant

today, while Priestley's effort is remarkably dated. Perhaps this is so

because Priestly totally submitted his vehicle to the message it carried,

while Greene deliberately transcended the confines of the genre, of the times

and the circumstances:

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[1] Ibid., p. 72.

"A phrase of Johns' came back to mind about a Ministry of Fear. He felt now that he had joined its permanent staff. But it wasn't the small Ministry to which Johns had referred, with limited aims like winning a war or changing a constitution. It was a Ministry as large as life to which all who loved belonged. If one loved, one feared." [1]

The triple pun is obvious. The Ministry of Fear, guiding people's lives in a nightmare of terror ... the ministry -- or priesthood -- of fear and of love, forcing the individual into involuntary but inescapable involvement with the morality of good and evil ... and the ministry of fear as servitude to the forces of terror and anxiety. This latter meaning is yet another key theme of the spy novel of the 1960's, reflected in the works of Friedrich Durenmatt, Hans Habe and Anthony Burgess.

Just as Green had achieved a dramatic distinction between piety and faith in his theologically oriented prose, he had, in his early spy fiction, begun to differentiate between the traditional values of a structured existence and the **existential** morality under conditions of chaotic despair. According to Harrison R. Steeves, outside of the detective story:

"There's nothing in art -- even in the lowest forms -- more unswervingly optimistic, and nothing more steadily moral, at least in its acceptance of moral principles ... This optimism and this morality, however, organic as they are, in no sense critical or philosophic. They are casually and naturally accepted, as unexacting readers accept most simple views of life." [2]

It is mostly due to Greene's contribution that today, spy fiction has become a vehicle for a critical and searching morality, using symbolic and surrealistic means towards existential exploration.

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[1] Ibid., p. 236.

[2] Harrison R. Steeves, "A Sober Word on the Detective Story," in The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), p. 520.

Greene, Ambler and Priestley had, between 1938 and 1943 established a successor-genre to the traditional detective story, which kept severing most connections with its precursor as it gained sophistication. Of course, Ambler and Priestley hung on to the umbilical cord, while even in 1938 Greene came much closer to the modern spy fiction of John le Carré, Habe and Durenmatt.

But a curious question remains: what is the reason for such a wide time lag between Greene and his successors?

With the exception of Friedrich Durenmatt and Hans Habe, who wrote their key novels in German in the mid-fifties, there had not been a continuation of the approach Greene first applied in 1938 in Brighton Rock and in 1943 in The Ministry of Fear. Before the publication of The Spy Who Came in from the Cold in 1963, there had been no significant examples of thrillers with a critical-moral approach, save for the odd work by Graham Greene himself, (e.g. The Quiet American).

This twenty-year gap is of great interest. Plain common sense dictates that we look at two possible causes of this historical hiatus. These causes must have a commercial denominator. Thrillers are not indifferent to the economic laws of supply and demand. This otherwise unaccountable two-decade absence of a critical-moral concern, may have been due to a lack of consumer interest. (Whether the type of stimulus provided by the moral thriller was not needed or was satisfied from other sources, is also of interest.)

At any rate, one cannot enter into a discussion of the spy novel of the 1960's without making an attempt to discover the causes of the twenty-year time-lag between it and its forerunners.

In the following chapter I will examine the economic, political and cultural background of this curious post-war lull in a genre that has proved itself so vital and exciting at its beginnings. This chapter will be mainly devoted to the development of the type of culture that issued forth the spy fiction of the 1960's and influenced its concepts, themes and moral attitudes.

CHAPTER IV

OPERATION "MIMESIS";

THE SPY IN THE CULTURAL MILIEU

THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN - GRECO-ROMAN

POLARITY - THE POST WAR

PRESERVER OF THE MORAL TRADITION

"Let's not ignore this fine film just because it has a social conscience." [1]

This statement appeared in an avant-garde movie magazine in late 1969, and it sums up, better than volumes of cultural punditry, the elite's attitude towards 'message' in that era. It is obvious that the discussion of social issues had become gauche in the eyes of a major segment of the intelligentsia. Although the writer of the film review avoids using the term, 'morality', it is evident that his disdain extends to all content that might be termed didactic -- social, political, moral or ethical.

In my view, within the context of popular art, social, political or ethical content **equals** moral commitment. This moral commitment has obviously been rejected by followers of an esthetically oriented cultural expression. Conversely, and simultaneously, the purely esthetic has been rejected by a much wider audience, primarily because of its failure to establish a relevance to reality as perceived by them.

The dissociation of the moral and the esthetic imagination is, of course, one of the perpetual dialectic forces of western culture. The separation of styles into a 'high' and a 'low' type of expression, a basic Aristotelean concept, is another important factor leading to the development of contemporary 'subcultures'. When the movie critic deplores the presence of 'social conscience' in an otherwise 'fine' work of art, he is defending esthetic purity against the vulgarizing effect of popular morality, the integrity of high style against the corruption of low style, the **encroachment**

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[1] Clive Denton, "Five Cents' Worth of Movies," The Five Cents Review. Vol.I., 2., August, 1969. p. 5.

of one subculture on another. The separation of styles has a long line of historical precedents, and is, according to Erich Auerbach, the principal symptom of a Classicistic culture. This separation is essentially based on Aristotle's description of imitation in Chapter II of Poetics [1], and the distinction drawn between a higher and a lower type of object for mimesis is at the root of the conflict between what we call the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian vision of reality.

It would be tempting to fully retrace Erich Auerbach's journey of discovery in his pioneering book, Mimesis, The Representation of Reality in Western Literature. However, I shall restrict my sampling of Auerbach, and of others who have contributed to my understanding of the juxtaposition of the two major cultural trends in occidental culture and society, to those instances which can be directly related to the thriller.

The necessity of going back as far as Aristotle and the Bible via Auerbach in a study of the modern thriller becomes evident as we attempt to establish the position of the thriller on the literary map of its times.

I have previously defined the traditional detective story as an "exercise in technique within a moral culture" in contrast to the modern thriller, which I consider to be "a commitment to morality within a technological culture." [2]

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[1] "7. Poetry now diverged in two directions, according to the individual character of the writers. The graver spirits imitated noble actions, and the actions of good men. The more trivial sort imitated the actions of meaner persons."
Aristotle, "Poetics," in Criticism: The Major Texts, ex. by W.J. Bate (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1952), p. 21.

[2] Cf. Supra., Chapter II., p. 24.

The important element here is the paradoxical relationship the detective story or the thriller bears to the dominant forces within the respective universal context; the genre seems to be in opposition to the mainstream of the culture.

In order to place this polarity in the proper perspective, we shall have to find an acceptable definition of the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian representation of reality, survey the history of their conflict and then apply our findings to establish the cultural significance of the thriller.

The definition and contrasts between the Greco-Roman and the Judeo-Christian mode of representation are outlined by Auerbach on the basis of a comparison between the Homeric epic and the Old Testament:

> "We have compared these two texts, and, with them, the two kinds of style they embody, in order to reach a starting point for an investigation into the literary representation of reality in European culture. The two styles, in their opposition, represent basic types: on the one hand, fully externalized description, uniform illumination, uninterrupted connection, free expression, all events in the foreground, displaying unmistakable meanings, few elements of historical development and of psychological perspective, on the other hand, certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, "background" quality, multiplicity of meanings and the need for interpretation, universal historical claims, development of the concept of historically becoming, and preoccupation with the problematic." [1]

This differentiation also gives us the point of departure: the first part of Auerbach's description, dealing with the Homeric, appears to have a relationship to the traditional detective story. It, too, is a fully externalized,

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[1]Erich Auerbach, _Mimesis_, trans. by W.R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 23.

uniformly illuminated, uninterrupted narrative, freely expressed, lacking symbolic meaning, etc.

By contrast, the thriller as developed by Eric Ambler and Graham Greene, fully answers the description of the Judeo-Christian representation of reality. By also equating "externalization" with a predilection for the esthetic and the formal, and, at the same time, accepting the fact that "preoccupation with the problematic" is a synonym for moral concern, we can now relate this to our previous "technique in a moral culture" versus "morality in a technical culture" concept. What appears to emerge is the following: The traditional detective story, an essentially Greco-Roman type of representation, a highly externalized exercise in technique, by being in contrast to the dominant culture of its era, suggests that this era, is, in fact, dominated by Judeo-Christian concepts. Conversely, the modern thriller, a genre rich in multiple meanings, universal historical claims, the problematic, etc., by representating a style opposite to that of the mainstream of the culture of its times, defines these times as Greco-Roman oriented.

At this point, the above may sound like inverted logic. However, let us proceed a step further. We have now accepted the synonymity of two terms: Greco-Roman equals esthetic. Judeo-Christian stands for moral. We should now add a third set of contrasting labels which have become associated with the above two, that of Classic and Romantic. By virtue of the same polarity, we now have two triple classifications, each covering roughly the same concept, but from a slightly different angle: Greco-Roman is classic is esthetic; Judeo-Christian is moral is romantic. Let me hasten to add that the term 'romantic' in this context merely means 'as opposed to classical.'

These three terms, in fact, say the same thing from a historical, cultural and philosophical point of view. At the risk of making a too plausible case for my structure and thereby inviting suspicion, I must add that the polarity is far from being exhausted; parallels are also available from a sociological and political point of view, and cannot be ignored:

> "... the great and sublime events in the Homeric poems take place far more exclusively and unmistakably among the members of the ruling class; and these are far more untouched in their heroic elevation than are the Old Testament figures, who can fall much lower in dignity (consider, for example, Adam, Noah, David, Job); and finally, domestic realism, the representation of daily life, remains in Homer in the peaceful realm of the idyllic, whereas, from the very first, in the Old Testament stories, the sublime, tragic, and problematic take shape precisely in the domestic and commonplace." [1]

Thus, to further distinguish between the two types of expression, we can produce the sociological labels: the aristocratic and the common, or the elite and the popular are also pertinent to our lineup of polarities.

The political equivalent, too, asks to be included: In a 1967 lecture at Sir George Williams University, Connor Cruise O'Brien marked the division between the two extreme forces in contemporary culture as "The esthetic imagination of the aristocrat versus the moral imagination of the leftist," or the one side there is the "Left-wing Tradition from Cromwell to Mao-Tse-Tung -- a puritan tradition" and on the other side the non-realistic art of opulence, born of a sense of "beauty that only long-established wealth can bring." [2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 22.

[2] Connor Cruise O'Brien, "Burke, Tolstoy and Yeats," Sir George Williams University, Lecture presented to the English Department, Montreal: January 1967 (Verbatim).

This essential schism in the representation of reality in western culture can be supported by terminology from sources as different as Auerbach, O'Brien, Barzun and Marshall McLuhan. And as the synonyms proliferate, it may be useful to register a series of operative terms at both ends of this polarity, thereby gaining license to interchange some of them from time to time:

Greco-Roman[1]	Judeo-Christian
Esthetic	Moral
Classical	Romantic
Aristocratic	Popular
Right-wing	Left-wing
Opulent	Puritan
Form	Content
Medium	Message
Sublime	Organic
Physics	Biology
Rational	Emotional
Political conservatism	Political reformism
Artifice	Realism
Technology	Humanitarianism
Conventional Detective Story	Modern Spy Thriller

The list could go on and on. But what we have here is sufficient to establish the indisputable presence of a cultural polarity and the obvious relationship between the traditional detective story and the left-hand column, as well as the connections between the modern spy thriller and the list on the right side.

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[1]While I have been consistent in applying the terms Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman after Auerbach, Matthew Arnold's definition of Hebraism and Hellenism are equally applicable throughout this thesis.

What remains to be proven is our previous hypothesis, i.e. that the genre -- in this case both the detective story and the spy novel -- is in opposition to the cultural mainstream of its times.

If this assumption is correct, we must establish that the **era** in which the detective story flourished -- roughly between the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the Second World War -- was an age to which we could generally apply, in the cultural context, the terms listed in the right-hand column, and vice-versa, that the 1960's was a decade which can be best associated with the series of terms on the left-hand side. Impressionistic as this method may be, a pattern undeniably appears, a pattern that bears out the hypothesis to a very convincing degree.

My contention is that the first five decades of the twentieth century had been dominated by an essentially moralistic and popular culture. Although there had been movements and individuals creating significant strides towards an esthetic and amoral culture, from Joyce to the Dadaists, from the Bloomsbury group to Gide, the period was dominated by a long line of moral realists, writers with a 'message', in whose works the "two realms of the sublime and the everyday are not only actually unseparated but basically inseparable." [1] This indivisibility of the sublime and the everyday is, according to Auerbach, one of the basic tenets of the Judeo-Christian perception of reality. In the English-speaking culture of the first five decades of this century, this school of literary expression maintained almost total dominance.

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[1] Erich Auerbach, Mimesis, trans. by W.R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 22.

It is also remarkable that the non-separation of styles tends to bring about a unity of audiences. The best-sellers of the period between 1920 and 1950 had critical acceptance -- and vice versa. From Kipling to Sinclair Lewis, Orwell to Steinbeck, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Conrad, Galsworthy, Shaw, Dreiser, etc. we see little distinction between popularity and quality.

It is also interesting to note that most of the authors who had, in this period, attained both popularity and critical praise, could be called socially progressive. This, of course, is in complete contrast to their esthetic conservatism. (They are almost invariably realists working in a 19th century mould.) In the same period, the detective story, which, as we have seen, is usually in opposition to the cultural mainstream, had been technically highly innovative, while maintaining a socially conservative attitude!

We must also remember that the esthetic avant-garde of this period, Joyce, Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Gide and Celine, were socially elitistic, and therefore 'reactionary' while, because they were operating in 'high style', they had not attained popularity. This interesting parallel between the detective novel and the avant-garde brings up another point: the fact that both schools are at odds with the cultural mainstream, yet clearly different in their approach, appears to prove the existence of a cyclical pattern between Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman perceptions. The avant-garde and the rearguard are both in contrast to the au courant. As for the dominance of the so-called popular book -- in this case the moral-realistic works of the leading authors between 1900 - 1950, -- we must also remember that stylistic innovation provides a poor vehicle for content, while the lack of esthetic experimentation allows the author to reach his audience with the 'message':

"The increasing popularity of the "popular" book, (or best-seller)
-- like our increasing tendency to motor over the most-travelled
roads -- re-inforces the mirror effect and makes it increasingly
difficult to learn from our literary experience. Usually the book
that is **popular** pleases the reader because it is shaped by the same
forces that mold his non-reading hours, so that its dispositions
and convictions, its language and subject, re-create the sense of
the present, to die away as soon as that present becomes the past.
Books of that sort are generally unreadable for succeeding ages."[1]

As the cycle progresses, and the cultural pattern changes from Judeo-
Christian to Greco-Roman, the literature that dominated the previous period
because of its very relevance to its times, suddenly loses attraction. In
the 1960's the popular authors of the first five decades have gone into a
definite decline, while the avant-garde of that same period has been re-
discovered with a vengeance.

The acceptance of the idea of cultural cycles is essential to the
understanding of the theories expounded in this thesis. Before going into
the details of the Greco-Roman cycle which I consider to be dominating the
1960's, it should be worthwhile to return to Auerbach's Mimesis which deals
at length with the dialectic relationship of these two major cultural forces,
proving the existence of the cyclical pattern through textual analyses of
major works spread over two millenia. Without going into a précis of his
evidence, which I consider valid and convincing throughout, allow me to present
one of his key conclusions:

"... I came to realize that the revolution early in the nineteenth
century against the classical doctrine of levels of style could not
possibly have been the first of its kind. The barriers which the
romanticists and the contemporary realists tore down had been erected

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[1]Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image, (New York: Atheneum, 1962), p. 167.

only toward the end of the sixteenth century and during the
seventeenth by the advocates of rigorous imitation of antique literature.
Before that time, both during the Middle Ages and on through the
Renaissance, a serious realism had existed. It had been possible
in literature as well as in the visual arts to represent the most
everyday phenomena of reality in a serious and significant context.
The doctrine of the levels of style had no absolute validity.
However different medieval and modern realism may be, they are
at one in this basic attitude. And it had long been clear to me
how this medieval conception of art had evolved, and when and how
the first break with the classical theory had come about. It was
the story of Christ, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality
and the highest and most sublime tragedy, which had conquered the
classical rule of styles." [1]

It is my contention that during the 1960's, the wheel has completed its

turn, and after nearly two centuries of a chiefly Judeo-Christian, realistic,

morally-oriented and stylistically indivisible culture, we have arrived into

a Greco-Roman, artificial, amoral, esthetically-oriented culture, featuring

a distinct and increasingly prevalent separation of styles. Let us consider

the evidence:

To begin with, one of the criteria set down by Auerbach, to help in the

recognition of a Greco-Roman culture:

"... the realistic depiction of daily life was incompatible with
the sublime and had a place only in comedy or, carefully stylized,
in idyll." [2]

As we shall see, the 1960's had, in fact, ended the realistic

representation of daily life in culturally dominant literary and other artistic

forms. As Daniel Boorstin sees it:

"Aggressively "modern" artists insist that only now (when they are
finally freed from the need to represent) can their work become truly

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[1] ErichAuerbach, Mimesis, trans. by W.R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1968), p. 554.

[2] Ibid., p. 23.

interesting and expressive. But the force of their argument
is reduced by one simple fact. They now have a vested interest
in non-representation (much as for centuries they once had a
vested interest in representation)." [1]

Boorstin attributes this trend in art to what he terms the Graphic
Revolution, the sudden proliferation of mechanical means to make realistic
representations of objects. The Graphic Revolution manifests itself in
technological innovations such as photography, the motion picture, etc.
Photography, in Boorstin's theory, is responsible for the death of
representational painting, while movies have made realistic literature well
nigh unnecessary because of their ability to fully represent external reality.
"There is no place in art for life", quoth artist Ad Reinhardt in Time
Magazine (January 27, 1967).

The lack of scope for experimentation and discovery is the factor that
drives literature towards non-representation. And non-representation brings
about the separation of styles; the separation of styles, in turn, causes the
separation of audiences, for the less-cultivated reader cannot perceive a
relevance to his life in non-representation and therefore cannot relate to it.

While non-representation opens a new dimension to literature, that of
the sublime, it has to sacrifice a major portion of its audience. To this
new literature, "The visible world is no longer a reality and the unseen
world is no longer a dream." [2] Marshall McLuhan uses the above quotation from
W.B. Yeats to support his theory that we are now witnessing "the transformation
of the real world into science fiction " [3] and have thereby created a world

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[1] Daniel J. Boorstin, The Image, (New York: Atheneum, 1962), p. 169.

[2] Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media, Signet Books (Toronto: The
New American Library of Canada Ltd., 1967), p. 46.

[3] Ibid.

in which experimentation supercedes representation because, in our drive towards novelty, we have arrived to a point at which if something works, it's obsolete.

This trend, of course, makes writers turn away from the lack-lustre world of reality and the moral concerns attached to it. Experimentation with the self -- psychological discovery -- and toying with the undiscovered parts of the outer universe -- science fiction -- thus become the only opportunities left for the creative imagination. The avant-garde of the 1960's often combines these two realms to create the current high-style. John Barth, William Burroughs, **Robb-Grillet, J.R. Tolkien,** Jean Genet, Iris Murdoch, Susan Sontag, Peter Weiss, to mention only a few, all operate in this extra-terrestrial dimension, and so do those authors who have been significantly revived during the last decade, such as the Marquis De Sade, Hermann Hesse, Céline, etc.

This avant-garde which has been forced to abandon realism and in turn forced the fragmentation of today's culture, is numerically and vocally far more powerful than the literary elite of any other era. It and its various cultural allies such as the hippies, pop-groups, drug-cults have succeeded in creating a highly significant social and cultural force. These forces have been variously described as 'sub-cultures' by established critics and cultural theorists. What these theorists have not realized is that, as far as cultural dominance is concerned, this so-called 'sub-culture' has become, in fact, the super-culture of the era, forcing the various traditional (and therefore 'reactionary') cultural forces to take the defensive. Naturally, these 'reactionary' forces include all adherents to the Judeo-Christian, moral and realistic types of literary or artistic expression. What is also not yet clear

to most is that liberalism -- the political ideal of the Judeo-Christian
culture -- is no longer a 'progressive' force. In many ways the so-called
New Left has taken over the cultural and social concepts of the Old Right,
while skillfully manoeuvring the Old Left into a position of conservatism
which it can ill afford to maintain. The so-called generation gap is one
of the manifestations of the new Greco-Roman culture: youth rejects the
old morality, experiments with itself as well as with the existing social
structures, aims at transcendental exploration of the inner world through
narcotics and hallucinogens, trans-terrestrial discovery of the outer world
through technology. In such a heady chaos of broken-through dimensions,
created by the supremacy of Greco-Roman esthetic experience over Judeo-
Christian morality, the structured beliefs and artistic concepts of the
previous era seem decidedly stodgy. Were it not for the moralistic spy
thriller of the 1960's, the pagan cultural forces would have had no effective
counterbalance at all. As we shall see later, the resistance put up by the
thriller against the Greco-Roman takeover could not be long-lasting. But,
for about five years, between 1963 and 1968, the thriller stood its ground, one
of the few expressions of a morally and realistically oriented cultural force.
Naturally, according to the pattern we have observed regarding the traditional
detective story, which stood against the cultural mainstream while supporting
the existing social system, the modern thriller, too, at least up to a point,
supports the ideals of liberal-democratic society, especially against what it
considers to be its greatest threat, fascism. Ironically, the fascism these
thrillers fight against in the name of the individual, closely resembles the
social revolution advocated by the Greco-Roman cultural force. By negating
the positive values so ardently built up by several centuries of Judeo-Christian

dominance, the new forces, in spite of their quasi-humanist sloganeering, are helping to destroy a world based on the individual's inviolability. Granted, this may be necessary in view of the team-technology and the population explosion shaping our future world.

It is also significant that while the moralistic thrillers of the 1960's regularly made the best-selling lists up to 1968, they have gone into a decline both in terms of volume of production and popularity after this date. Which goes to show that however valiant the resistance to it, the Greco-Roman culture is here to stay.

One more possible area of misunderstanding should be cleared up regarding the position of the moralistic thriller in the new culture of separated styles: the spy-novels of the 1960's are not low-style as opposed to the high-style of the dominant cultural forces of Burroughs, Barth, Tolkien et al. The low-style of the new Greco-Roman culture appears in the guise of electronic mass-media. Television, films and records are the dominant manifestations of today's classical low style. It is also interesting to note that, especially in music and cinema, there are certain specimens which are both high-style and low-style. A rock-group like the Beatles or the Rolling Stones is high-style to one segment of its audience which perceives the subtleties and is 'in' enough to understand the cult-code of their lyrics and musical phrasing, while the massive audience perceives quite another facet of the performance. Sex exploitation films are another example of this phenomenon: the subtle 'in'-jokes and the so-called 'put-ons' contained in these works allow one part of the audience to view them as parody, while the uninitiated segment of their public perceives them as straight fare.

The difference is subtle but important: The thrillers of the 1960's are not low-style as opposed to high-style via a differentiation in the audiences perception of ambiguities. The thrillers represent the last indivisible genre of the period, the last literary manifestation of the Judeo-Christian vision of reality, in which the sublime and the everyday are basically inseparable. To use the old term, both high-brows and low-brows get the same communication out of these thrillers. Any difference between the perception of the two groups is only a matter of degree. In other words, spy thrillers, just like other realistic works may contain several levels of meaning, but no deliberate ambiguities.

All this of course means that neither the detective story nor the spy thriller can truly be called low-style in a classicistic period (the genre does not go along with the separation of styles), or sub-literature (because in the romantic - realistic period no division exists between styles).

However, the traditional detective story has certain classicistic attributes in the romantic period -- it is an oft-told tale, adhering to a formula, -- and conversely, the spy-thriller displays romantic characteristics in a classicistic period. This seems to show that the genre is in some ways at odds with its times. At the same time, critical reaction over many years indicates that this is a result of the genre being behind its time rather than ahead of it.

In the foregoing I attempted to establish the general cultural framework in which we must view the development of the spy novel of the 1960's. We have seen that the history of the spy novel is integrally related to the cyclically alternating domination of culture by the Greco-Roman style. We have also

examined the relationship of these two cultural currents to the social and political framework, and can conclude that the Judeo-Christian culture is simultaneous with the ascendancy of the masses, while the Greco-Roman culture is usually accompanied by a trend toward elite rule in society.

While we have stated that the Judeo-Christian concepts favour the inviolability of the individual versus the supremacy of the system in Greco-Roman concepts, we should further refine this point: on the surface, the Greco-Roman offers better opportunities for self-realization and individual domination of the system. However, the esthetic bent of the classicistic concept only stresses man's responsibility to himself, to the noble or aristocratic values inherent in his character, while the Judeo-Christian ethic views man in terms of the community, imposing on him a norm that is and can be shared by all individuals, regardless of caste. In other words, the Judeo-Christian world measures man by his ability to live up to the norms of society, while the Greco-Roman judges man in terms of his fulfilling only those commitments he chooses to make.

Since we live in a society, we must have norms. The tragic dimension of the spy-hero comes from the fact that he is committed to these norms, even though he sees them disappear all around him. He becomes, ultimately, twice betrayed, first by his enemies and secondly by his own side, as he continues to struggle for the preservation of Judeo-Christian morality. As he goes into battle, it becomes eventually clear to him that he is unequipped to face a world which rides roughshod over his principles, his style, his very existence. As a result, he clings to the one experience in his lifetime

which has given him an enduring sense of righteousness, the Second World

War, and its simplistic and therefore comprehensive morality. It is no

accident that the adventure we see him in, always represents his last

mission. It is no accident that his battles are either lost or end in

Pyrrhic victory. He is, like the proverbial generals of modern times,

fighting the battles of the previous war and is therefore doomed.

The modern spy is twice betrayed and twice a loser: he is defeated

on the level of reality, and his moral victory becomes increasingly

irrelevant in an amoral universe.[1]

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[1]It is pertinent to mention at the end of the present chapter that
my assumptions about the basically amoral and esthetic concerns of the cultural
mainstream of the 1960's have been disputed by the Examining Committee. While
I would certainly agree to reducing the apparently 'sweeping' tone of my
statements regarding this subject, I could not alter their substance.
In support of my views, I will quote part of an article, published by Time
Magazine (June 29, 1970), entitled "The Silent Generation". The subject is
the literature of the 1960's:

> "We prided ourselves on being excellent critics, even of
> ourselves, as if we had a third eye looking in rather than
> out. Skeptical vision is a quality of the good journalist
> -- and our generation has produced an extraordinary number
> of good journalists -- but it is usually fatal to the novelist
> or poet, who must have conviction in order to create. Our
> outstanding artists of prose and poetry can be counted quite
> literally on the fingers of one hand. Even the best of them
> seem uncomfortable with the major theses of life and death.
> Their concerns are more with language and style, as is the
> case with John Updike, 38, or with a relatively narrow range
> of human experience, as is true of Philip Roth, 37. There is
> no Faulkner, no Hemingway, no Fitzgerald, no O'Neill in our
> lost generation. The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test may well be
> our Great Gatsby, and Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mamma's Hung You in
> the Closet and I'm Feelin' So Sad our Desire Under the Elms."

While Time Magazine is not cited here as a literary authority, its editorial
views reflect a fair cross-section of both the learned and the pragmatic in
contemporary thinking, and I consider this article an indication that my views
are shared by a sampling of opinion significant enough to encourage me in
maintaining the substance of my statements.

CHAPTER V

KING LEAR TURNS IN HIS BADGE:

FRIEDRICH DURENMATT AND THE

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DOMINANT

THEMES OF THE MORAL THRILLER

In their thrillers, Graham Greene and Eric Ambler sounded the first alarm about time running out for the old universal order. Both these writers operated in the field of espionage, using international conflict as their background, writing immediately before and during World War II.

In the detective story, no similar development occurred for a number of years thereafter. Years after the appearance of the morally problematic in the spy thriller, the detective story kept marking time, generally fitting Harrison R. Steeves' description:

> "The absence of seriousness in the detective story is apparent
> first of all in the nonchalance, or even sardonic humour, of
> the attitude it takes toward crime, and in its habitual
> compromise with retributive justice through the hundred and
> one expedients which will save from the gallows the perpetrator
> of an offense which has any colourable sanction. This indifference
> to moral intention, however, seems to me a small matter. A literary
> divertissement can, as Lamb pointed out, dispense with moral
> consistency."[1]

As the traditional detective story operated in the framework of events that occur after the commission of the crime and before retribution, there was, indeed, little opportunity to moralize. The fact that H.R. Steeves had been unable to perceive the moral significance of the structure of the traditional detective story, may be more a comment on his times than on his critical equipment.

The detective story, in order to become a vehicle for significant moral discussion, had to break away from its powerful and time-honoured conventions. The transition had been far easier for the spy novel; it had no comparable

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[1] Harrison R. Steeves, "A Sober Word on the Detective Story," in
The Art of the Mystery Story, ed. by Howard Haycraft (New York: Simon and
Schuster, 1946), p. 517.

long-standing structures, and its loose framework was ready to contain
any type of content. It was also born out of national or political conflict
and had, from its beginning, dealt with treason and loyalties, both of
which are more open to moral questioning than the act of murder, a universally
acknowledged evil.

The only significant shift away from the traditional type of detection
during the years preceding and immediately following World War II occurred
in the so-called 'hard-boiled' novels of the American author, Raymond
Chandler. However, while Chandler introduced the element of possible
corruption, allowing his hero, Philip Marlow to go as far as seriously
thinking of accepting a bribe, or allowing a criminal to go free, in the final
analysis his hero, his villains and plots ran according to form. Chandler's
major contribution to making the detective story more of a realistic imitation
and less of a technical exercise had been in terms of style and colour of
character. His hero remained essentially the stalwart supporter of the norm,
shabby in comparison to the dapper Hercule Poirot, but essentially an optimistic
creation, adjusting minor defects in an otherwise unquestioned universal order:

> "In everything that can be called art there is a quality of
> redemption. It may be pure tragedy, if it is high tragedy, and
> it may be pity and irony, and it may be the raucous laughter of
> the strong man. But down these mean streets a man must go who
> is not himself mean, who is neither tarnished nor afraid. The
> detective in this kind of story must be such a man. He is the
> hero, he is everything. He must be a complete man and a common
> man and yet an unusual man. He must be, to use a rather weathered
> phrase, a man of honor, by instinct, by inevitability, without
> thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the
> best man in his world and a good enough man for any world. I do
> not care much about his private life; he is neither a eunuch nor
> a satyr; I think he might seduce a duchess and I am quite sure he
> would not spoil a virgin; if he is a man of honor in one thing,
> he is in all things. He is a relatively poor man, or he would not
> be a detective at all. He is a common man or he could not go among

common people. He has a sense of character, or he would not know his job. He will take no man's money dishonestly and no man's insolence without a due and dispassionate revenge. He is a lonely man and his pride is that you will treat him as a proud man or be very sorry you ever saw him. He talks as the man of his age talks, that is, with rude wit, a lively sense of the grotesque, a disgust for sham, and a contempt for pettiness. The story is his adventure in search of a hidden truth, and it would be no adventure if it did not happen to a man fit for adventure. He has a range of awareness that startles you, but it belongs to him by right, because it belongs to the world he lives in. If there were enough like him, I think the world would be a very safe place to live in, and yet not too dull to be worth living in." [1]

It became the task of Friedrich Durenmatt, the Swiss author who, according to the publisher's blurb in his first detective story, The Judge & His Hangman, published in 1954, "was originally intended for the Church and studied theology -- as well as philosophy and literature --" [2], to pull the rug from under the complacent reader and toss him into the uncomfortable new reality. He accomplished this in his very first detective work, by revealing that the murderer in question is none other than the assistant of the inspector investigating the case. Literally, a 'whole world collapsed' at this revelation. A police officer, the very pillar of the social order, stabbing the reader in the back! One can trust no one these days. And this, of course, is Durenmatt's point, elaborated on in subsequent novels, as he first destroys the belief in the police, then the necessity of crime solving, the idea of the innocent citizen, and finally, the viability of having a moral philosophy at all.

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[1] Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder," Ibid., p. 237.

[2] Friedrich Durenmatt, The Judge and His Hangman, trans. by Cyrus Brooks, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. i.

Durenmatt's contribution was a timely one. He helped make the detective story survive the shipwreck of Judeo-Christian morality in literature by turning the minor genre into a lifeboat of moral seriousness. His work is also remarkable for its lack of heroics, uncomplicated, often rudimentary plotting, a highly rhetorical style of decidedly World War II vintage, which is only slightly relieved by the crusty irony of an aging pedagogue. His descriptions are homey and explicit, his characters, although crudely drawn, are essentially believable. While the action in his novels is often chilling and sinister, the atmospherics do not follow suit. The reader is exposed to an old-fashioned, rational intellect exposing terror in a rather schoolmasterly manner.

All this, of course, indicates that Durenmatt has little patience with hiding his intent, which is frankly moral. The 'who, what and how' clearly take second place to the 'why'. The undeniable nightmare effect of some of his novels is caused not by the plot, not by the characterization of the background, but by the revelation -- the usually pacifying part of the conventional detective story.

In his first work, The Judge & His Hangman, the murderer turns out to be the assistant to the inspector conducting the case. In the Pledge, the detective pledges himself to solve the case of a murdered child and fails at it. The case is solved accidentally, after the death of the murderer, and while the solution proves the validity of the detective's theory, it comes too late; in his obsessive pursuit of the murderer, the investigator destroys his own career, the people around him and ends up an **alcoholic** on the skids.

In Traps, a travelling salesman is given a night's lodging in the village home of a retired judge. For amusement, the judge and his retired friends, a prosecutor, a defense attorney and a hangman, invite their guest to play the role of the defendant in a mock trial. The proceedings, conducted during a Lucullean meal and with great conviviality, lead to the discovery of the salesman's moral guilt in the death of his boss who died of a heart attack:

> "The question at issue was, he (the Judge) declared, whether the
> prosecutor or the attorney for the defense was right; whether Traps
> had committed the most extraordinary crime of the century or was
> innocent as a lamb. He, the judge, found himself unable to subscribe
> completely to either view. As the attorney for the defense maintained,
> Traps had been tricked and trapped by the prosecutor's examination,
> and consequently had admitted to a good many things that had not
> happened precisely in the way described. But, on the other hand, he
> had committed murder, though not out of diabolic premeditation,
> rather by sharing in the ethical indifference of the world in which
> he functioned as sales manager for a synthetic textile named Hephaeston.
> He had killed because it was utterly natural for him to drive another
> man to the wall, to proceed ruthlessly, come what might. In the world
> through which he roared at high speed in his Studebaker, there would
> have been no serious consequence for their dear Alfredo; but how he had
> the kindness to come here to them, to their quiet little house among
> the trees ... to their quiet, white painted cosy little home, to four
> old men who had illumined the world with the pure radiance of justice,
> which, to be sure, often bore strange features, he knew, knew, knew
> very well that the justice grinning out of four weather-beaten faces,
> reflected in the monocle of a white-haired prosecutor and the pince-nez
> of an obese attorney for the defense, sniggering out of the toothless
> mouth of a drunken judge who could barely control his tongue and
> gleaming with red glow upon the bald pate of an executioner emeritus
> (growing impatient over this lapse into poetry, the others howled:
> "The verdict, the verdict! ") — this justice was indeed grotesque,
> crotchety, pensioned-off justice ("The verdict, the verdict! "),
> in whose name he now sentenced their dearest, their best, their noblest
> Alfredo to death ..." [1]

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[1] Friedrich Durenmatt, Traps, trans. by R. & C. Winston, Ballantine Books (New York: 1960), p. 114.

After which, Alfredo Traps bids boozy goodnights to his legal friends, retires to his room and hangs himself.

In the Quarry, which is Durenmatt's most complex thriller, a mortally ill, old detective inspector enters the private clinic of a doctor, suspected of performing sadistic operations without anaesthesia in Nazi death-camps. His objective is to uncover the criminal, but clearly the old man is a loser -- he is weak, dissipated and his identity is discovered by the evil doctor immediately upon his arrival. The helpless old man, totally in the hands of his quarry, tries to stave off fate by engaging the Nazi in moral and philosophical polemics. Playing for time, so as to be finally saved by a superficially planted deus ex machina, he finally gains temporary reprieve for his sickly life and dated, though noble, philosphy.

Sometimes explicitly, sometimes by inference, and occasionally through symbolic action, Durenmatt's detective stories build up a comprehensive structure of moral thought, most of it highly original and significant in concept.

The policeman-murderer in The Judge and His Hangman is a symbolic figure. He hides behind the law and uses the machinery of the state to commit a crime.

Equating officialdom with crime (Eric Ambler took the first step in this direction in Cause for Alarm), the author turns on the reader, destroys the sense of security he hitherto derived from the detective novel by removing the one fixed point in the bourgeois-liberal social order, the incorruptible sleuth.

Having removed the moral protection of the citizen in The Judge and His Hangman, Durenmatt destroys a second, crucial myth in The Pledge: he shows that there is no absolute good in fighting evil. He selects the most extreme crime man can think of -- the sex-murder of a child -- as if to make sure that there can be no dispute about the truly evil nature of the act. Then he proceeds to show that the revenging of this most evil of crimes cannot lead to good per se, particularly if the revenger chooses to lower himself to the criminal's level, in order first to understand, and then capture him. Inspector Matthai, the policeman assigned to the case, after analyzing the psychosis of the child-murderer, attempts to trap him by offering a bait -- another child, of the type murdered by the madman. He acquires this child by taking in her and her mother, and showing kindness to them. When, however, he finally sets his trap, the murderer avoids it, and both the child and the mother discover the real motives for the detective's kindness; in the end they leave him with contempt. From there on the Inspector goes on the skids, becomes an alcoholic and a psychological invalid. He never succeeds in capturing his man, and the solution to the crime is revealed only years after, in the deathbed confession of an old woman, who admits that the murderer was her 'dear departed' husband.

Thus, the single-minded pursuit of vengeance produces nothing but alienation and frustration. And, in the wider context, Durenmatt offers a structure completely antagonistic to the conventional detective story: the detective fails to right the wrong committed against society, the murderer dies peacefully, undiscovered and unpunished, and, in fact, the detective is the total loser. Furthermore, there is absolutely no beneficiary to either the crime or the

solution. Here we can see the concept of the absurd enter the detective story; the action occurs and dies away in the echo-less wasteland of an indifferent universe, without any logical connection being established between law, justice, existential or moral good.

In Traps, Durenmatt begins to deal with the moral repercussions of the changing concepts of guilt, brought about by the shift from Judeo-Christian to Greco-Roman concepts: it is quite clear that Alfredo Traps cannot be pinned down to any criminal act. While his boss's heart attack may have been related to Traps' seducing his wife and undermining his position, in the amoral context of Traps' life there is no reason to assume any responsibility or guilt. Traps' fatal mistake is that he accepts the invitation of the ancient legal gentlemen, steps out of his context and enters the world of Judeo-Christian morality, represented by a "grotesque, crotchety, pensioned-off justice" (Cf.Ch.V.p.76).Thus, by living according to one code and being judged according to another, Traps becomes the first victim of the conflict between the two world views. In fact, he is the only one we can chalk up to the Judeo-Christian side -- from Traps on, the victims are moral types destroyed by an amoral system. The debate between the moral and the amoral ends with the victory of the moral side. But, barely a year later, in Durenmatt's next novel, The Quarry, the victory of the forces of morality is, to say the least, Pyrrhic.

The Quarry can be termed Durenmatt's summary work in detective fiction, bringing to fruition the many motifs which have surfaced in his three preceding novels. The result is a fully structured vision of reality, in which the sermonizing and the simple allegories of the previous works attain the level of symbolic action.

In _The Quarry_ the detective story comes to terms with contemporary reality via surrealism. The very improbability of the plot, the grotesque characters and the abstract polemics all serve to illustrate that Durenmatt has fully perceived the nature of the changed universal order, and makes his moralistic pitch in full realization of the doomed condition of his own philosophy.

The situation is familiarly archetypal; the detective, the former knight errant, now out of step with the new order, assumes the role of Don Quixote. What saves the hero, Inspector Barlach, from assuming the comic aspects of his quixotic role is his awareness of the changes:

> "He was glad to be through with serving the state. Not because he would have more time now to read Moliere and Balzac, though that would be wonderful. No, the main reason remained the fact that something was wrong with the nice, simple, homely order of the world. He knew, he had found out. People were always the same whether they went to the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul or the Cathedral in Bern on Sundays. The big criminals were running free while the small ones were stuck in jails. And anyway, there were all kinds of crimes nobody paid any attention to, only because they were more aesthetic than some sensational murder which gets into the headlines. But actually they were both the same, provided you looked at the facts and had the imagination.
> Imagination, there was the crux of the matter, imagination! Out of sheer lack of imagination a good, upstanding businessman will — between his _aperitif_ and lunch — commit a crime by closing a shrewd deal. A crime of which nobody has any notion, least of all the businessman, because nobody has the imagination to see all its consequences. The world was bad out of slovenliness, and well on the way to going to the devil out of slovenliness. This was a danger bigger than Stalin and all the other Joes taken together. The civil service was no longer the place for an old hunting dog like him. Too much petty stuff, too much snooping. But the worthwhile game, the game that should be hunted, the really big beasts, were under the protection of the state, like beasts in a zoological garden." [1]

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[1] Friedrich Durenmatt, _The Quarry_, trans. by Eva H. Morreale, A Black Cat Book (New York: Grove Press, Inc. 1961), p. 21.

While the main motif of Traps, the businessman parable, returns here to illustrate the continuity of the author's philosophy, the passage establishes a number of other key themes: the dissociation of the hero from the state machinery and his subsequent role as a free agent, the fact that the state protects the criminal and is on its way to become the main offender against the individual. And, of course, the oft-recurring reference to 'slovenliness' as the main danger facing humanity, indicates the indifference of both the inner and the outer universe, a condition of the absurd.

The plot has Inspector Barlach, gravely ill, retire from the force. In his sickbed he leafs through a magazine and notices the photograph of a Dr. Emmenberger, who runs a clinic for rich patients, providing hormone treatments to extend their lives. Barlach notices the resemblance between Emmenberger and an infamous Nazi surgeon who operated on concentration camp inmates without anaesthesia, and decides to investigate. (He also suspects that the Doctor convinces his patients to leave their fortune to his clinic and then kills them.) With the help of his family doctor, Barlach enters the clinic as a patient. Here we can see another Durenmatt leitmotif emerge. Both Barlach and Inspector Matthai in The Pledge, undertake a kind of Orphic journey to the underworld, sacrificing themselves in a final act of total commitment. This is quite a difference from the attitude of the conventional professional detective, who remains detached and usually untouched by events.

Inspector Barlach, without the power of the state backing him, has only the support of a handful of allies: his doctor, Hungertobel, a shabby old journalist (who gets killed early in the novel) and the mystic Jew, Gulliver.

The lineup of characters includes the sadistic Nazi Doctor and his head nurse as the enemies, and Dr. Lutz, Barlach's former superior, as the neutral representative of the state.

As the old Inspector is exposed by the Nazi Doctor, and in turn reveals that his mission is to expose him, the Doctor openly admits his past and proceeds to prepare an operation to kill the Inspector. In the last minute the Inspector is saved by the giant Jew, Gulliver, a concentration camp survivor whose mystic role is the hunting down of Nazi criminals, and who appears out of nowhere and disappears after freeing the Inspector and killing the Nazi. This legendary wandering Jew character is, significantly, only known to Barlach, who summons him in the beginning of the novel. The quasi-spiritual role of Gulliver is also emphasized by his entrance lines, "Gulliver leaves no trace ... I work invisibly." Which seems to indicate that the Gulliver-figure is, in fact the embodiment of an idea. I strongly suspect that this idea is the Judeo-Christian idea of morality, gone 'underground' in the Greco-Roman age. Gulliver's farewell to Inspector Barlach further underlines the character's symbolic significance. It is a statement of resigned determination to uphold the Judeo-Christian moral values in a classicistic age:

> "The giant rose.
> "What will happen now?" whispered Barlach.
> "Nothing will happen," answered the Jew. He grabbed the old man by the shoulders and jerked him forward, so that their faces were close together, one's eyes reflecting the other's. "Nothing will happen, nothing," whispered the giant once more. "Nobody -- except you and Hungertobel -- knows that I was here; inaudibly I glided, a shadow, through the corridors, to Emmenberger, to you -- nobody knows that I exist, only the poor devils that I save, a handful of Jews, a handful of Christians. Let the world

bury Emmenberger and let the newspapers write eulogistic
obituaries with which they will commemorate this dead man.
The Nazis wanted Stutthof, the millionaires, this clinic.
Others will want other things. We as individuals cannot save
this world, that would be so hopeless a task as that of poor
Sisyphus. It was not given into our hands, and not into those
of a mighty person or a people or of the devil -- even though he
is the most powerful of us all -- but into God's hands, who makes
His decisions alone. We can help only in single instances, not in
the whole -- the limitation of the poor Jew Gulliver, the limitation
of all people. Therefore we ought not to try to save the world but
to get through it -- the only true adventure that remains for us at
this late hour." And carefully, like a father with a child, the giant
lowered the old man into his bed." [1]

The references to Christians and Jews, the "late hour", the mention of

Sisyphus, the idea of "trying to get through the world" all reflect a stoic

existentialist attitude, an awareness of the rearguard role played by these

benign moralists, as they retreat, pursued by the new and vigorous pagan

forces. The final foray of Barlach and Gulliver succeeded in killing the Nazi

Emmenberger. But when we juxtapose Emmenberger's philosophy with that of the

gently resigned moralists, it becomes increasingly clear that Judeo-Christian

morality is in trouble, that the Greco-Roman esthetic world is the coming

thing. The former believes in a structured universe, the latter in chaos.

The former longs for responsibility, the latter for freedom. The old detective

stands for the right of the individual and the protection of the weak. The

modern, one can safely say, absurd man, stands for experimentation and

manipulation, the unlimited power of the elite:

"All right, let's see what kind of a belief I have and put it on a pair
of scales, and then let's see which of us has the greater faith, when
we put yours on the other side. I, the nihilist -- since you call me
that -- or you, the Christian ... I believe in matter (how shabby and

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[1] Ibid., p. 126.

empty it is by comparison to say, 'I believe in a God') -- matter that is seizable as animal, as plant, or as coal, and not seizable, hardly calculable, as atom. It needs no God or whatever else is invented for it. Its only incomprehensible mystery is its being. And I believe I am a particle of this matter, atom, energy, mass, molecule -- as you are -- and that my existence gives me the right to do what I want. ... Nothing is holy but matter: man, animal, plant, the moon, the Milky Way, whatever I see, are accidental groupings, nonessentials, as the form of the waves of the water are something nonessential. If they are not, something else exists. When life on this planet dies out, it will appear somewhere in the universe on another planet. It is ridiculous to attribute permanence to man, for it will always be only the illusion of permanence. It is ridiculous to invent systems of power in order to vegetate for a few years as the head of a state or some church. It is senseless to strive for the welfare of man in a world structured like a lottery -- as if it would make sense to have each ticket win a penny, as if there existed another yearning but this one -- for once to be the singular, sole, unjust man who wins the whole lottery. It is nonsense to believe in matter and at the same time in humanism. One can only believe in matter and the I. There is no justice. How can matter be just? There's only freedom, which cannot be earned -- for then there would have to be a justice; which cannot be given -- for who could give it? -- which can only be taken. Freedom is the courage to commit crime, for freedom itself is a crime."[1]

The confrontation is uneven. To the brilliant rationale of the Nazi, the old Inspector has only emotional answers. And while emotionally both the author and the reader are on his side, it is clear that we are backing a loser.

This emotional attitude gives the modern thriller one of its most powerful literary devices. This tragic awareness of one's own datedness, this resigned, yet noble clinging to the values of a passing epoch, gives a tragic dimension to the heroes of Durenmatt, le Carré, Hans Habe and others. This is what leads to the 'last assignment' syndrome which is an integral part of nearly all moral thrillers. This is what causes Durenmatt to make all his protagonists old, fatigued or sick men. (In fact, Durenmatt had been forced by previous success to resurrect old Inspector Barlach for The Quarry); the old man was

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[1]Ibid., p. 114 - 115 - 116.

already working on his "last case", was "mortally ill" and "had dared
all in one last, audacious throw" [1] in The Judge and His Hangman.

A highly symbolic device, the tired, old and sick hero is an archetypal
character who reflects both the state of the genre and the moralist's attitude
towards the ascendant Greco-Roman cultural cycle of the past decade. In a
way, the moral burden, symbolized by the burden of age and disease in
Durenmatt's novels, is the sort of ballast the writer himself has to carry
with stoic resignation in an age indifferent to such things. In Durenmatt's
foreword to Traps, which could serve as another manifesto of the moral thriller,
he reveals the popular authors' dilemma:

> "... on all but the cheapest level a modicum of depth is demanded,
> self-revelation, good old true-to-lifeness; there is a call for higher
> values, for moral principles, useful mottoes; something has to be
> discarded or supported, now Christianity, now popular nihilism. In a
> word, what is wanted is Literature. But suppose the author more and
> more stubbornly refuses to produce this sort of thing. Suppose he is
> well aware that the foundation of his writing lies within himself --
> in his faith or doubts, in his consciousness or unconsciousness, the
> proportion of each varying from case to case; but suppose also that
> he feels most strongly that none of this really concerns the public,
> that it suffices if in what he writes, shapes, forms, he presents the
> surface invitingly, and nothing more; that he works away at the surface
> and nowhere else, for the present keeping his mouth shut, neither
> commenting nor sounding off. Having reached this conclusion, he will
> falter, hesitate, become utterly perplexed. He is almost bound to.
> The suspicion rises that there is nothing more to tell; abdication is
> seriously weighed ..." [2]

In one fell swoop, Durenmatt here rejects didacticism, stream-of-
consciousness and superficiality, in other words, Eric Ambler, James Joyce and

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[1] Friedrich Durenmatt, The Judge and His Hangman, trans. by Cyrus Brooks,
Penguin Books (Harmondsworth: 1969), p. 111.

[2] Friedrich Durenmatt, Traps, trans. by R. & C. Winston, Ballantine Books
(New York: 1960), p. 12.

James Bond. It is more difficult to discern what he does stand for. A
detective-story writer, left temporarily without a genre, Durenmatt, too,
seems to be gearing for a last battle, similarly to his heroes. And so
Durenmatt assigns to himself, and to those who will follow his concepts,
the mission which will be attempted again and again throughout the history
of the modern thriller: a last, desperate rearguard action in the name of
morality, often using the weaponry of the new foes, such as surrealism and
absurdity, in an attempt to maintain a bridgehead for moral concern in an
environment of dominant amorality:

> "We are no longer threatened by God, by justice, by fate as in the
> Fifth Symphony, but by an automobile accident, a dam breaks as a
> result of faulty construction, the explosion of an atomic plant
> through the error of some absent-minded laboratory technician, a
> wrong setting on an incubator. Into this world of breakdowns we
> follow our road, bordered by signboards advertising Studebaker,
> Bally Shoes, icecream, and the tombstones of accident victims,
> but along whose dusty edges we may also find a few possible stories,
> with humanity visible in a commonplace face, with hard luck haphazardly
> acquiring a universal validity, with justice and the judiciary process
> displayed, and perhaps even with grace manifesting itself, caught,
> focused and reflected by the monocle of a drunken man." [-]

In his occasionally bathetic foreword, Durenmatt neglects to mention his
possibly most significant contribution to the modern thriller, the introduction
of the aging and sick hero. Perhaps he had not been consciously aware of the
great significance of this factor. But he had, in fact, reintroduced a key
archetype, a figure who represents the final stages of the decline of a passing
social and universal concept, a tragic hero who is brought out of mothballs to
confront the emerging new order, and who, in his fall, registers nostalgia
toward the passing, and emotional resistance towards the oncoming age.

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[1] Ibid., p. 15.

This man, out of step with the times, old and ill, voluntarily resigns his powers, in order to enjoy peaceful old age, only to be provoked into a final confrontation by the cruel audacity of the new forces. He is, of course, a familiar figure. He is the character who, after the Copernican concepts have annihilated the medieval universe, helplessly curses the new: "Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world."[1] Whether **it** is King Lear or Inspector Barlach, whether it is the Renaissance or the 'Age of Aquarius' which threatens the Christian, moral existence, theirs is the tragedy of a man clinging to dated concepts in a changing universe.

And it is, perhaps, not mere coincidence that the medieval old man is a King and a Knight, while his contemporary equivalent is a detective; both had, in their respective times, symbolized the structure, both were morally responsible to protect the weak and the innocent.

What seems even more remarkable is the fact that today's hero operates within the framework of legal and clandestine activity, and it is precisely the same type of imagery Shakespeare had chosen to characterize his hero:

> "Let the great gods,
> That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
> Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
> That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
> Unwhipp'd of justice: hide thee, thou bloody hand;
> Thous perjur'd and thou similar of virtue,
> That art incestuous: caitiff, to pieces shake,
> That under covert and convenient seeming
> Hast practis'd on man's life: close pent-up guilts,
> Rive your concealing continents, and cry
> These dreadful summoners grace. -- I am a man
> More sinn'd against than sinning."[2]

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[1] William Shakespeare, King Lear, III. 3.

[2] Ibid. (Italics by P.G.)

Perhaps this relationship between Durenmatt's choice of genre and background, and Shakespeare's choice of imagery is due to the fact that it is the legal system and the concepts of justice which are the last to change in a changing society, and therefore can serve as the most potent symbols of the status quo. Whatever the reason, the fact remains that when King Lear divides his kingdom among his daughters, and when Inspector Barlach turns in his badge, both are doing one and the same thing. And their subsequent fate, too, as they confront the ruthless forces of a new, amoral universe, is tragedy of the same nature.

CHAPTER VI

OEDIPUS IN BERLIN:

THE NOVELS OF JOHN LE CARRE.

POPULAR SUCCESS, MORAL

CONCERN AND ESTHETIC ACHIEVEMENT

In Friedrich Durenmatt, the moral thriller has had its pioneer, the first codifier of its thematic premises. However, just as with the archetypal story of Moses and Josuah, the pioneer stops short of entering the promised land, the originator cannot bring his vision to full fruition. Picasso's saying, "First I make it new, and then someone else makes it pretty," applies to Durenmatt. And the writer who made it well is John le Carré. His second spy novel, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, is universally acknowledged as the most important work of its kind in the 1960's.

Writing about le Carré, Ralph Harper remarks that:

"The development of a moral sense in the history of the thriller may not have reached its end yet, but it must have reached some kind of climax." [1]

Le Carré had, indeed, achieved the climactic point not only through his well-structured execution of all the important themes inherent in the genre, but also by giving these substantive elements form, and the dimension of symbolic action.

While most studies on the subject grant both honours -- that of origination as well as accomplishment -- to le Carré, and ignore Durenmatt either because he is non-English or because his novels are not strictly spy stories, I would rather credit le Carré with dramatically extending the extant potentials and bringing them to a truly tragic conclusion.

The simultaneity of certain themes emanating from a variety of national sources makes it almost impossible to say who influenced whom. In the rather

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[1] Ralph Harper, The World of the Thriller, (Cleveland: The Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1969), p. 37.

confusing cultural _milieu_ created by the so-called 'Communications and Graphic Revolutions', dates of publication have come to mean very little. Works written _and_ published at a certain time do not necessarily catch the public fancy, and even if they exist in library catalogues, are not culturally influential until discovered by the popular audience. In studying the origin of influences among the thrillers of the 1960's, the brevity of the period and the close adjacence of publication dates forbids the tracing of lineage on a chronological basis. Durenmatt's The Judge and His Hangman was published in German in 1954 and came out in English the same year, but was reissued in paperback only in 1967. Le Carré's first significant work, Call for the Dead, appeared in 1961, and Durenmatt's The Quarry also carries an English publication date of the same year. In other words, Durenmatt's zenith coincides with le Carré's beginnings. Yet, another important spy novel, Hans Habe's The Devil's Agent, which I consider to be one of the most mature treatments of the themes under discussion, was published in German in 1958, carries the Library of Congress catalogue number 58-8741, but was published in a popular English edition only in 1966.

As we are dealing with popular works, one author's influence upon another is not only determined by intellectual sympathy; public demand may stimulate one to follow the lead of another, long after the first author made his impact on the few _literati_. What is important is that a trend emerges, develops, comes to a climax and declines -- whether by plagiarism, osmosis, mercenary design or devotion to the _Zeitgeist_. Similarly, chronological evidence, while in our case it is never contradictory to the argument, is of little interest.

John le Carré's first spy novel, Call for the Dead, appeared in 1961
(and made no popular impact whatsoever), while his last novel to date,
A Small Town in Germany, was published in 1968, a respected but only mildly
popular book. In the intervening years, hundreds of spy novels had appeared,
some providing highly original variations on the main themes, some mere
imitations of successful executions, others making forward strides into the
next phase of the genre, the phase of parody.

Le Carré's three major books, The Spy who came in from the Cold (1963),
The Looking Glass War (1965) and A Small Town in Germany (1968), show certain
variability, provide a unified vision throughout, but proffer very little in
the way of progressive development. One could easily switch the chronology
of these three novels without noticing any graduation in concept. All dominant
themes are as fully operational in the first novel as they are in the last.
And yet, in these five years spanning the publication dates of the le Carré
books, the genre itself has gone through significant changes. Thus, while
A Small Town in Germany is a 'good vintage' moral spy novel, quasi-parodies
of the moral trend began appearing as early as 1961 with Len Deighton's
The Ipcress File, and culminated in the year of A Small Town in Germany with
Adam Diment's The Great Spy Race (1968).

While le Carré and others still produced 'existential thrillers', others
recognized that this particular school had its day, and proceeded to hasten the
decline of the genre by carrying it, quantitatively as well as qualitatively,
into the parody stage. In a way, the moral spy novel's fate is   parallel to
the fate of its heroes: The world keeps moving while they keep standing in the
same place.

The reasons why the existential thriller has ceased to fulfill popular emotional needs by the end of the 1960's are manifold: a lessening of international tension between the major powers and a concurrent increase in domestic concerns in England may be the historical cause.

The so-called 'Sexual Revolution' and the resulting massive exploitation of sex in cinema and in print have shifted popular taste away from genres which had been restrained in their presentation of physical detail, be it violence or sex. This, of course, is a direct consequence of the ascent of Greco-Roman cultural forces as discussed in Chapter IV.

Another reason for the declining interest in the moral spy novel has been the widespread erosion of the 'system' which has served as the villain of the piece. This system, based on the polarity of two opposing forces which act in unison to crush the spy, representative of the moral individual, has lost its potency. As we shall see later, while the spy story still requires a polarity of forces for its survival, this polarity will shift away from the traditional forces of good and evil, of West and East, of State and the Individual, and will, instead, pit against each other the two poles of the so-called 'Generation Gap', youth and innocence versus age and experience, the latter two becoming the villainous force.

John le Carré's novels are essentially exposés of the 'system'. Their moral stance is based on the polarity of two opposing forces, two antagonistic state machineries whose interaction results in the downfall of the individual. His books are, in fact, critiques directed against dated structures on behalf of the individual.

The advanced stage of literary achievement reached by le Carré is also inextricably involved with structure. Durenmatt's writing consists mainly of limpid rhetoric, loosely hung on a skeletal plot in an effort to expose certain important themes. In le Carré's novels, the themes provide the very fabric of the structure, the merely declarative becomes symbolically active. Durenmatt's symbolism is carried mostly by dialogue, description and characterization. In le Carré it is the action that reaches symbolic dimensions.

Naturally, we have also advanced in time. Durenmatt's apocalyptic vision is le Carré's reality. It is perhaps The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, le Carré's most successful novel, which demonstrates this point most succinctly: The Spy tells the story of a British Intelligence operation, ostensibly conducted against one Mundt, deputy head of East German Intelligence. The instrument used by the British is Alec Leamas, leader of a British spy ring in Berlin. As the novel begins, Leamas is awaiting the return of one of his operatives on the western side of a Berlin checkpoint. In the last minute, the returning spy is intercepted by Mundt's men and killed. The loss of his last good operative spells doom for Leamas:

> "Leamas was not a reflective man and not a particularly philosophical one. He knew he was written off -- it was a fact of life which he would henceforth live with, as a man must live with cancer or imprisonment. He knew there was no kind of preparation which could have bridged the gap between then and now. He met failure as one day he would probably meet death, with cynical resentment and the courage of the solitary. He'd lasted longer than most; now he was beaten."[1]

This brief passage, very early in the novel, at once establishes the major leitmotifs of the genre: the hero is a dated man. He cannot 'bridge the gap'

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[1] John le Carré, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, Pan Books (London: 1965), p. 13.

between the then -- World War II -- and the now -- the amoral Cold War.
The metaphor used here, 'cancer', is indicative of the state of the traditional
world -- it is rotting from within. And the 'courage of the solitary'
characteristic of this beaten man, positions him as the representative of
the individual. Durenmatt's Inspector Barlach finds himself in the same
position: he, too, is detached from the system he had served as he goes into
his solitary struggle against evil. But in Barlach's case the system is
merely indifferent. To Leamas, it will be hostile.

The so-called 'last assignment syndrome' is also taken care of early in
the novel. Leamas is reassured by Control, the spymaster figure in the novel
that:

"This is your last job. Then you can come in from the cold." [1]

The nostalgia regarding the moral rightness of the Second World War is
also exposed. In le Carré's novel it is reflected from the other side of the
fence, in the form of an admission by Control, but, again, serving as a kind of
fixed point against which all deviations are measured:

"I would say that since the war, our methods -- ours and those of
the **opposition** -- have become much the same." [2]

Notice the clarification Control feels necessary to make between "our
methods" -- 'ours and those of the opposition.' This subtle grammatical
difference is revealing. After all, he could have said something like 'our
methods and those of the opposition'. But it seems to be le Carré's intention
to clearly position both polarities under the umbrella of 'ours', to make it
quite obvious that they both stand for the same thing.

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[1] Ibid., p. 52.
[2] Ibid., p. 19.

The same applies to the position of the two individuals who find themselves in internecine battle in a war waged between two systems, while, in fact, their moral attitude should place them on the same side. I am referring to Leamas and Fiedler, the German intelligence officer whose destruction is the real objective of Leamas' mission, and with whom he develops a moral and intellectual affinity. In one of their conversations, le Carré uses the same subtle grammatical device to establish that these two represent the same moral attitude:

> "... all our work -- yours and mine -- is rooted in the theory that the whole is more important than the individual ... The exploitation of individuals can only be justified by the collective need, can't it?" [1]

Both Leamas' and Fiedler's downfall is caused by the fact that when it comes to the crunch, they both opt for individuality and morality -- two dated concepts. In Leamas' case the motivation for making the moral choice happens to be love. Fiedler's choice is motivated by his sincere belief in communism. In other novels the moral choice may be motivated by pity, bravado, revulsion or a sense of duty -- but in each case it is an essentially emotional impulse that pits the hero against the system. One can conclude that in spite of the intellectual quality of French existentialism, moral choice is never made on an objective, rational basis.

All thriller authors, from Durenmatt to Deighton, acknowledge the intellectual superiority of the amoral system -- and then defy it. Out of _hubris_ or a quixotic dare, out of desperation or nostalgia for old values, the heroes challenge the system in the name of their own concept of humanity. In direct proportion to the authors' awareness of the changed universe, the heroes either

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[1] Ibid., p. 116.

triumph (occasionally), or win a limited, moral victory at the expense
of their life.

It really depends on the audience's point of view whether the limited,
and often empty moral victory fully compensates for the death of the hero
or for the cause that is lost. But the audience generally sympathizes with
the loser, for he is closely identified with the moral stance of the majority.
This is, then, the stuff of tragedy, archetypal and transcendental, which
wrings a universality out of le Carré's novels, no matter how topical their
background:

> "... it does not matter in the least whether the fictional world bears
> any resemblance to the world of history, in particular contemporary
> history. That is a matter of coincidence, and quite secondary.
> What should be obvious, however, is that in the middle of the twentieth
> century the heroic and the tragic sense of life are equally strong and
> viable, and that from neither point of view must it be held that good
> always triumphs over evil. Some good always loses; there is always
> some reason to weep. There is reason to rejoice, too, even in tragedy.
> This is true even of the end of The Spy Who Came in from the Cold." [1]

Indeed, the end of The Spy does summarize the symbolic significance of
the action for the benefit of the reader. In a characteristically understated,
and yet essentially 'purple' passage, le Carré manages to cram a great deal of
significance into a few lines:

> "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." [2]

'The blind bull in the arena' signifies Leamas' unawareness of the role he
had played, summing up the essentially Oedipal irony of his fate. The small car,

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[1] Ralph Harper, The World of the Thriller, (Cleveland: The Press of Case
Western Reserve University, 1969), p. 91.

[2] John le Carré, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, Pan Books (London:
1965), p. 223.

smashed between two large trucks, is a rather straightforward metaphor of the individual caught up in the confrontation between two great powers. And, of course, the 'children waving cheerfully through the window' is loaded with symbolism: it stands for the futility of the whole struggle that had taken place, its irrelevance to the innocent reality of the uninvolved majority. It contains the same irony one can find in W.H. Auden's poem, "Musee des Beaux Arts," about the plowman going about his work while Icarus crashes into the sea; as well as the oft-used cliché about life going on, no matter what tragic events had befallen the hero of the piece.

The children, separated by 'the window' from the scene of the action, contain an admission of this being a multi-tiered universe, an admission of the fact that the stakes for which the whole angst-ridden battle had been fought is of little relevance to those outside the world of the spy. In a way this reduces the tragic dimension, but it also enforces what most moralist spy novels attempt to communicate, the fact that the entire milieu of the spy novel is inhumane, and should be kept separate from our lives. The spy is, in essence, our proxy in a battle fought for the determination of our future reality, a battle fought out in the cold, removed from our everyday lives. While this statement appears to deny my previously established view that the moral spy novel represents a Judeo-Christian attitude (this kind of heroic struggle would place the genre squarely in the Greco-Roman realm), the key to this apparent contradiction is in the fact that this and other similar novels render their action deliberately sterile and inorganic only at the very end. In the course of the plot the action is constantly and continuously tied up with the organic realism necessary for a moral statement.

After the above digression in which I have attempted to show how
le Carré follows and extends the themes first explored by Durenmatt, let
us return to the plot of <u>The Spy Who Came in from the Cold</u>: Leamas, his
Berlin operative destroyed by Mundt, returns to England where Control offers
him a chance to revenge himself on the German. Control suggests a complex
plan aimed at discrediting Mundt in the eyes of his own superiors in East
Germany which would destroy him.

Leamas goes along with the plan. It requires him to discredit himself in
the eyes of his British colleagues, be fired from the Secret Service and go
on the skids, a disgusted, drinking wretch of a man, and thus a suitable
candidate for defection offers from the other side.

Control's expectation is logical. A man of Leamas' calibre should
eventually be contacted by the East Germans, to be pumped for information
about the British setup in Germany. Once Leamas goes over to the Germans, he
would feed them information damaging to Mundt and thus accomplish his revenge
and destroy this highly efficient and dangerous enemy.

The plan goes into operation. After a few rotten jobs, Leamas is placed
in a library by way of a former intelligence man who works for the Labour
Exchange. The Head Librarian hates Leamas, but one of the assistants, Liz
Gold, a young Jewish Communist Party member, falls in love with him, and becomes
his mistress.

In the meantime, to make his descent even more credible, Leamas punches
a grocer in a minor argument and lands in prison for three months. On the day
of his release from prison, he is finally contacted by the East Germans. Leamas
co-operates, and for the sum of 15,000 pounds consents to fly to Holland for a
de-briefing by the East Germans.

While he is in Holland, the story of his defection is leaked to the British papers (this had not been part of the original plan and Leamas realizes that this must be Control's doing), and so Leamas agrees to go to East Germany to be interrogated by Mundt's assistant, Fiedler, a dedicated and brilliant Communist counter-intelligence man. Fiedler is Jewish, and he suspects Mundt, a former Nazi, of being a double agent. The information given him by Leamas further confirms his suspicion. At the same time, Mundt, too, smells a plot, and makes an attempt to arrest both Fiedler and Leamas, in order to silence them. Mundt fails, and Fiedler, having assembled sufficient evidence of Mundt's treachery, convenes a tribunal to confront Mundt with his offence.

Before defecting, Leamas had asked Control not to involve his mistress, Liz Gold, in anything of a clandestine nature:

"I want her to be kept clear of it," demands Leamas, and Control's ambiguous answer, "Oh, quite, quite," [1]

apparently satisfies him.

Naturally, while Leamas is in Germany, Liz Gold is ensnared into the plot. She is visited by George Smiley, a member of Control's inner circle, ostensibly to explain to her the mysterious disappearance of Leamas. Smiley also assures Liz that if she were in need, the "friends of Alec" would look after her. This, of course, more or less gives away Leamas' true identity, and to compound the 'error', Smiley also leaves one of his calling cards with Liz.

Shortly afterwards, Liz receives an invitation from the Communist Party Centre to participate in an 'exchange tour' of East Germany. The trip is in

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[1]Ibid., p. 51.

recognition of her dedicated party work. Liz is surprised that the Central

Committee knows of her activities, since she has never operated beyond

the realm of her small district cell. Nevertheless, considering the trip

an honour, she accepts and leaves for East Germany.

Back at the tribunal, Fiedler presents a very convincing case of Mundt's

career as a double agent. It all stands up very well, until Mundt introduces

his witness for the defence, Liz Gold. Liz admits of having been visited by

Smiley, tells the tribunal how Smiley had also paid off Leamas' outstanding

debts, etc. Which, of course, proves that Fiedler has played into the hands

of the British by trying to destroy Mundt.

This is when Leamas finally realizes that he had been used as an unwitting

tool in a scheme which radically differs from the plan Control described to

him: instead of trying to destroy Mundt with concocted evidence of his role as

a double agent, Leamas has been given real evidence of Mundt's double role, and

then discredited in the last minute by Liz Gold's confession. This means that

the British plot to 'destroy' Mundt, is in fact an attempt to clear him. Mundt

is, of course, a double agent, and the British operation had been planned to

destroy Fiedler, who has been suspecting Mundt.

After the tribunal, in another reversal, Mundt arranges for the escape of

Leamas and Liz over the Berlin Wall. What Leamas does not know is that while

he himself is slated to escape, Liz will be killed, for she knows far too much

by now.

While Liz and Leamas make their way towards Berlin by car, Liz asks him

the question that finally triggers Leamas' first outburst of bitterness since

the beginning of the operation:

"What will happen to Fiedler?" Liz asked suddenly and this time
Leamas answered.
"He'll be shot."
"Then why didn't they shoot you?" Liz continued quickly. "You
conspired with Fiedler against Mundt, that's what they said. You
killed a guard. Why has Mundt let you go?"
"All right!" Leamas shouted suddenly. "I'll tell you. I'll tell
you what you were never, 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 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." [1]

It is interesting to note here that le Carré makes a great deal of both

Fiedler's and Liz Gold's Jewishness. We have also noted the significance of

the Jew, Gulliver in Durenmatt's The Quarry, as a character symbolic of Judeo-

Christian morality. Le Carré's first spy novel, Call for the Dead, featuring

George Smiley as the central character and Mundt as the villain, also uses a

Jewess to present the moral dillemma of that book:

'Why did she do it?' Mendel asked suddenly.
Smiley shook his head slowly: 'I think I know but we can only guess.
I think she dreamed of a world without conflict, ordered and preserved
by the new doctrine. I once angered her, you see, and she shouted at
me: "I'm the wandering Jewess," she said; "the no-man's land, the
battlefield of your toy soldiers." ...
'Was she a communist?'
'I don't think she liked labels. I think she wanted to help build one
society which could live without conflict. Peace is a dirty word now,
isn't it? I think she wanted peace.'
'And Dieter?'
'God knows what Dieter wanted. Honour, I think, and a socialist world.'
Smiley shrugged. 'They dreamed of peace and freedom. Now they're
murderers and spies.'
'Christ Almighty,' said Mendel. [2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 210.

[2] John le Carré, Call for the Dead, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth: 1966),
p. 156.

Socialism, the Judeo-Christian utopia, as opposed to the Platonic Republic, the Greco-Roman dream, is a moral paradise, and the Jewess in Call for the Dead turns spy in order to bring it about. Again, interestingly, as a balance to the Jewish character working for the other side, Smiley investigates the case with the assistance of an Inspector Mendel. It appears that almost all of le Carré's morally representative characters are either Jews or belong to another minority: Felix Leiser, the sacrificed agent in The Looking Glass War is a Pole; Leo Harting, the moral protagonist of a Small Town in Germany, is a naturalized Briton of German origin, a former refugee from the Nazis. Leamas of The Spy Who Came in from the Cold is the most English of all these characters, but he, too, is an Irishman.

Whether this represents a kind of structural pun, meaning that people concerned with morality are a minority, or that certain moral themes can be best crystallized through the figure of an alien (alienated?) person, may be pure speculation, and far-fetched at that. However, there is no reason why such intriguing questions should not be entertained, even if the answer is tentative and unsubstantiated.

But there is no question that le Carré consciously equates morality with Judeo-Christian values, no matter which side of the cold war they are on, or what form they appear in: according to Leamas, the Controls and Mundts are the enemies of man, and the price they pay — or the right they have acquired is "to despise God and Karl Marx in the same sentence." [1]

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[1]John le Carré, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, Pan Books (London: 1965), p. 215.

In The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, as the plot races to its finale,
Leamas gradually develops an awareness of his real role in the operation.
Yet he is still a cynic -- morally aware but essentially corrupted by the
system:

> "They used us," Leamas replied pitilessly," They cheated us both
> because it was necessary. It was the only way. Fiedler was bloody
> nearly home already, don't you see? Mundt would have been caught;
> can't you understand that?"
> "How can you turn the world upside down?" Liz shouted suddenly.
> "Fiedler was kind and decent; he was only doing his job and now
> you've killed him. Mundt is a Nazi, do you know that? He hates
> Jews ... what side are you on? How can you ...?"
> "There's only one law in this game," Leamas retorted. "Mundt is their
> man; he gives them what they need. That's easy enough to understand,
> isn't it? Leninism -- and martyrs? They're a squalid procession of
> vain fools, traitors, too, yes; pansies, sadists and drunkards, people
> who play cowboys and Indians to brighten their rotten lives. Do you
> think they sit like monks in London balancing the rights and wrongs?
> I'd have killed Mundt if I could, I hate his guts; but not now. It
> so happens that they need him. They need him so that the great moronic
> mass that you admire can sleep soundly in their beds at night. They
> need him for the safety of ordinary, crummy people like you and me." [1]

But Leamas' subsequent action belies his words. When, after the above
conversation, they finally reach the Berlin Wall, and Leamas, followed by Liz,
climbs the wall, he has to make a clear-cut moral choice, and his cynicism
runs out: helped by Smiley from the other side, Leamas is ready to climb over.
But as he tries, the searchlights come on, and a sharpshooter kills Liz. He
turns back, takes his place beside the dead girl, and waits to be shot down.
And as he dies, he affirms the morality of the individual in a last, desperate
gesture against the manipulative system.

From even a cursory look at The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, and in spite
of its superbly original and intricate plot, one cannot escape a certain feeling

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[1] Ibid., p. 214.

of familiarity. Both the internal structure of the novel and the structure

of the universe it represents bears a strong resemblance to Oedipus Rex.

In both works, the hero is associated with a riddle; he enters the

action open-eyed and emerges from it blinded (N.B. Leamas, the "blinded

bull in the arena")[1]; just as Oedipus, Leamas sets out to rid his people

of the plague -- Mundt -- who had killed Leamas' best people. In both cases,

the hero is manipulated by the Gods, Apollo and Control respectively. And in

both works the hero is dedicated to his own self-destruction without knowing

it. The Sophoclean irony of this fact gradually emerging first in the hero's

and consequently in the audience's consciousness is also common to both works:

> "The reader's gradual understanding of the unfolding of these tragic
> ironies is always just one step behind Leamas' understanding, until
> at the end the full realization of perfidy is too much even for Leamas
> to take in." [2]

And, of course, in both works the hero submits his will to the collective

and is betrayed by his own side, as he proceeds towards self-destruction and

self-realization in a two-tiered universe where fate is to be decided on one

level and executed on another:

> "Oedipus has behaved well as a man and has merited heroism; he is the
> winner, despite the horrors that befall him, as Antigone is the winner
> in her play. If there is a villain in the piece it is Apollo; but
> Apollo cannot be blamed, for the calculations of the gods are in a
> different sphere from the calculations of men. When a man behaving
> admirably as man is nevertheless tripped up by forces beyond his
> understanding, we have tragedy. Oedipus then is a perfect example
> of the tragic hero." [3]

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[1]Cf. Infra ., p.96

[2]Ralph Harper, The World of the Thriller (Cleveland: The Press of Case
Western Reserve University, 1969), p. 91.

[3]Greek Drama, ed. Moses Hadas, Introduction to "Oedipus Rex," Bantam
World Drama Series, (New York: 1968), p. 112.

As a contemporary tragic hero, Alec Leamas comes closer to the Sophoclean model than the hero of any other genre created in a period noted for its lack of authentic tragedy. His attaining of this dimension is in no small part due to le Carré's recognition of the two-tiered universe in a manipulative society molded by Greco-Roman concepts.

Just as many critics look upon Oedipus as an essentially Christian hero in a pagan context, we can accept Alec Leamas as the Judeo-Christian hero carrying our proxy-fight into the pagan environment. While the world Leamas represents is undivided, the world he has to operate in is double-tiered:

> "The mist, the dusty files, the inclement climate, low-key violence, the Ministry of Works colour-scheme, pale, coffee-and-cigarets people, the clerical pettiness of major intrigue ... a structured universe with its own great chain of being, from vague powers behind desks to the agents in the field." [1]

The level of the Gods -- administrative -- and the level of humans -- operational, is evident in both Oedipus Rex and The Spy Who Came in from the Cold. The fate of the two heroes, the structure of the two works, the similarities of the action all suggest that le Carré based his novel on the Oedipal archetype.

Throughout this study we have seen and shall see examples of how the detective story and the spy novel manifest certain archetypal patterns, generally associated with 'legitimate' literature. It is perhaps opportune at this stage, in connection with the work that is acknowledged as the best of its genre, to reassert the claim made earlier that the thriller should not be considered sub-literature and that it merits serious critical attention.

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[1]Paul Gottlieb, "The Black and Grey World of Spying," review of A Small Town in Germany, by John le Carré, in The Montreal Gazette, November 30, 1968. p. 23.

As we shall see later, the pattern set by Durenmatt and le Carré has been imitated by a multitude of lesser writers. But even the epigones who have taken advantage of the le Carréesque twists of fate, the gimmick-free sombre atmosphere and the black-and-grey reality of his bi-level universe, as well as those who have carried these patterns to ludicrous extremes and thereby developed parodies, deserve attention in any analysis of popular culture.

Le Carré's other works, while not attaining the heights of The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, are all major novels within the genre, His A Small Town in Germany, while not strictly a spy novel, belongs here by virtue of its topicality and universal moral conclusions.

The Looking Glass War, published in 1965, two years after The Spy, follows essentially the same pattern as the latter. It could be argued that this fact indicates exploitation of a successful formula. However, the additional symbolic features of this novel suggest development rather than repetition. We have been conscious of the 'Second World War Nostalgia Syndrome' in both Durenmatt's works and in The Spy. In The Looking Glass War this theme attains its best dramatic realization. As in The Spy, the story of The Looking Glass War concerns an operation in which the agent is manipulated and finally betrayed by Control. However, this action takes place on a far pettier scale than in The Spy. In the latter, the agent's death is the result of the confrontation of two major powers. In The Looking Glass War, he is actually the victim of a futile inter-departmental struggle. Symbolic of the World War II theme, the hero, Felix Leiser, is an out-of-touch wartime operative who is thrown behind the East-German border with an out-dated World War II crystal radio

set supplied by Control.   The man has long lost his Morse-efficiency, and
he is a sitting duck for the East-German security forces; they get an easy
radio fix on his whereabouts, and surround him.   As a final irony, while
Felix Leiser keeps clumsily transmitting his useless message on his
obsolescent radio to the last, there is no one to receive it -- his own
side had written him off as soon as be began his mission.

Both the reasons for and the failure of Leiser's mission are grounded
in the persistent myth of wartime glory; the outfit that sends him across
the East-German border is a withered branch of military intelligence which
hasn't had much to do since the end of World War II.   A pilot flying a
charter flight for school children purposely overflies East Germany, and
photographs what could possibly be some rocket sights.   He hands over his film
to a British agent, who is subsequently overrun by a car.   The film gets lost,
too.   The military intelligence people see a chance in this chain of events to
mount an operation and thereby resurrect their dormant organization.   As the
operation gathers momentum, a new affluence makes itself felt in the place.
Official cars appear, plans are drawn, an agent is recruited, a house is rented
in Oxford where the agent is trained by a variety of instructors.   However,
as the operation begins, Control gets wind of it and eventually sabotages the
whole thing because it might prove to be an embarrassment to the British
Government.   The other reason: Control's department deals in political intelligence
and resents the meddling of political amateurs.   The military group, at the same
time, considers the operation their 'baby', and goes ahead.   Eventually, of
course, the superior department, Control's branch, triumphs, the agent is
captured by the other side and the Ministry decides to deny him.   Indeed, they

decide to declare him a common criminal who escaped to East Germany in
the hope of getting asylum. Their negative proof: no modern intelligence
service would equip its agent with a twenty-year old radio transmitter,
or send a man, so obviously out of touch, for an important mission.

It becomes increasingly obvious from The Looking Glass War that the
system is the real enemy of the individual and that the actual enemy, the
East Germans, are not even needed to prove the point. The 'other side'
plays but a token role in the novel, and all the heroes and villains come
from within.

While the oft-expressed sentiment about World War II is as crucial in
this novel as in most of the moral spy stories, it is now treated with a good
deal of irony:

> "It was simpler in those days. We could say they'd died for their
> country. We didn't have to tell them the details; they didn't
> expect that." [1]

> "The box was a gift from the war. The man who gave it to him was
> dead, the occasion for giving it past; there was no inscription on
> the lid." [2]

> "He recognized that it (the Department) provided shelter from the
> complexities of modern life, a place where frontiers still existed.
> For its servants, the Department had a religious quality. Like
> monks, they endowed it with a mystical identity far away from the
> hesitant, sinful band which made up its ranks." [3]

The perilous, but still treasured moral sense derived from the Great War
is here transformed into a somewhat ridiculous burden, symbolized in the action
by the ancient radio transmitter. And, while some of the 'good' characters still

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[1]John le Carré, The Looking Glass War (London: William Heinemann Ltd.,
1965), p. 34.

[2]Ibid., p. 24.

[3]Ibid., p. 64.

persist in being patriotic, the wife of a younger department member sums

up the situation:

> "Loyalty without faith. It's very hard for you.' She said this with
> total dispassion, as if she had identified a social evil." [1]

And while the agent, the naive and loyal Leiser, a naturalized

Englishman whose main desire was to be accepted by his true-blue Briton

colleagues, behaves gallantly and even heroically to the end, his heroism

is so devastatingly pointless, that even the last passage of the novel (a

good place to look for 'significance' in most spy novels) fails to bring a

sense of redemption or the almost mandatory ray of hope:

> "Snow gathered like ash and was dispersed. They had gone, leaving
> nothing behind them but tyre tracks in the hardening mud, a twist
> of wire, and the sleepless tapping of the north wind." [2]

Le Carré's <u>A Small Town In Germany</u>, his last novel to date, published

in 1968, again deals with the conflict between morality and expediency, using

identical World War II terms of reference. It is basically a revenger's tragedy,

the story of a man with whom the world has fallen out of step: The hero, Leo

Harting, a minor official at the British Embassy in Bonn, and a naturalized

Englishman of German origin, begins a private war against a neo-Nazi leader by

stealing a file which contains information about the Nazi.   The

British are embarrassed, because they had no intention of ever using the file:

the neo-Nazi is an emerging political force and Britain will need all the

European support she can get in future Common Market negotiations.

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[1] Ibid., p. 57.

[2] Ibid., p. 246.

As Harting disappears with the files, the neo-Nazi youth attack the British Embassy, burn down the library of the Hanover legation, and it becomes imperative to capture him. However, throughout the novel he eludes his would-be captors, and finally dies during a frantic neo-Nazi meeting during which he fails to assassinate the target of his revenge.

A Small Town in Germany, while it excels in atmosphere and characterization, shows no further development of the themes exposed in previous le Carré novels. It does, however, articulate the position of the moral man in the contemporary context in a tone of resigned pessimism:

> "He's our responsibility after all. It was us who put it into his mind back in those days: the notion of absolute justice. We made him all those promises: Nuremberg, denazification. We made him believe. We can't let him be a casualty just because we changed our minds ... Leo hasn't changed. He's the stay-behind man. That's not a crime, is it?" [1]

Although the characteristic themes remain, again there are subtle changes between A Small Town in Germany and previous novels. Harting acts completely on his own, he is in fact against the British, but the author pins the responsibility for his actions on his British masters at the very point when, as in all other le Carré books, they decide to disown the hero:

> "You say we have no part in it. We have. He's our product, you know that, we made him what he was, crushed him between all those worlds..." [2]

The moral stance taken during World War II is being abandoned by the very people who created it. The reasons for this abandonment of a previously elevated moral position are articulated here along the same lines as in The Looking Glass War, where the 'Department' is willing to do anything to come alive again and

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[1] John le Carré, A Small Town in Germany, Pan Books (London: 1969), p. 280.

[2] Ibid., p. 299.

increase its operational budget. In <u>A Small Town in Germany</u> this parable
is extended to apply to Britain as a whole:

> "Brussels ... the Market ... all this. Next week it's gold, the week
> after it's the Warsaw pact. We'd join the bloody Salvation Army if it
> pleased the Americans." [1]

The conclusion of the novel is neatly summed up by one of the characters:

"All power corrupts. The loss of power corrupts even more." [2]

But, in spite of the weighty and significant rhetoric, <u>A Small Town in
Germany</u> appears stagnant. It does not have the dramatic power and the
revealing symbolic action of <u>The Spy Who Came in from the Cold</u>, and in a way
signals the beginning of the end of the moral spy novel.

All that could be said had been said between 1961 and 1968. And as there
had been no new le Carré since that last date, it would be surprising if one
came along in the 1970's, still working with the same themes. But perhaps le
Carré has learned the lesson his heroes failed to learn, and will not force
his luck by appearing publicly in the dated moral garb of the 1960's in the
'Age of Aquarius'. During the seven years spanned by his four novels, his
heroes had gone from bad to worse: In <u>Call for the Dead</u> George Smiley succeeded
in breaking up the enemy spy ring, although at a high moral expense. In <u>The
Spy Who Came in from the Cold</u>, Alec Leamas lost his life but achieved a moral
victory. In <u>The Looking Glass War</u> Felix Leiser still managed to be heroic,
although pointlessly. But in <u>A Small Town in Germany</u>, Leo Harting is more
pathetic than heroic, his last foray more grotesque than desperate. He makes
his point but it proves to be more embarrassing than hope-inspiring.

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[1]Ibid., p. 299.

[2]Ibid., p. 300.

The theme of the tired, aging heroes fighting against an amoral world, desperate, but able to transcend the system in their defeat, has been 'done to death'. And while it is interesting to examine the better contemporaries and followers of le Carré, if only to prove the existence of a numerically significant body of literature devoted to the same topics and operating along the same themes, the next chapter, dealing with such authors, will appear to be mostly variations on a theme. Yet, both in quality and quantity, the Durenmatt-le Carré school can be considered important as well as morally significant even if considered separately from the two trend-setters: after all, it consists of a group of writers who had, almost single-handedly, maintained the Judeo-Christian vision of reality in an increasingly indifferent, if not downright hostile cultural atmosphere.

CHAPTER VII

TEXTURE, PASSION AND STRUCTURE:

HANS HABE, PHILIP LORAINE AND

ANTHONY BURGESS. THE VARIOUS

EXTENSIONS OF THE BASIC

MORAL THEMES

After le Carré -- and I am using 'after' not so much in a chronological but in a qualitative sense -- three main routes became available to the thriller. The first was the route of imitation. A formula could now be exploited, needing only minor changes of character, locale, subject and plot, to maintain a semblance of originality. The paperback shelves were filled with mini-le Carré's, many of them highly readable.

These epigones have, with few exceptions, applied all the devices that made le Carré successful: the double twists, the heroes being unaware of the true objectives of their assignments, the betrayal by their own side, the 'last assignment' syndrome, the moral questioning.

The locale of the action is usually some country whose very name conjures up gray, metallic tensions, Finland, the Baltic States, Germany, Austria and, naturally, England. The weather is invariably bad, there's plenty of rain, fog and drizzle.

The Second World War still serves as the benchmark of morality, and while the heroes are not as old as Durenmatt's Inspector Barlach, they all seem to be in their late thirties or early forties to allow them to have taken part in the last war.

The hero is usually a former agent, pursuing some dull civilian profession. When contacted, he is at first reluctant, but later is either persuaded or blackmailed to serve.

There is a tendency to use Jews in secondary roles, but never as protagonists, and in the passages that feature the inevitable morality-sermon, the bombing of Dresden figures frequently to balance the atrocity-scale between the two sides.

Former Nazis comprise a considerable segment of the villains, and Israeli agents, too, make their appearance, usually as the hero's uneasy and rather selfish allies.

The subject matter is mostly a fight for the possession of some ultra weapon, or the unveiling of a neo-Nazi conspiracy; occasionally hidden World War II treasures figure, and the protection of Communist defectors or the preventing of defections from the West also has considerable space devoted to it.

The formula also crops up in fields other than espionage with many of the above criteria presented: Gavin Lyall's heroes are fliers (four novels); Nicholas Freeling's hero, Inspector Van der Valk, is a Dutch policeman (featured in seven of his eight novels); and all of them have something profound to say and a moral choice to make in the course of their adventures.

However, none of these novels break any new ground, and, in spite of the unquestionable skills that created them, and the often stimulating narrative and characterization, their significance is dwarfed by the works of Durenmatt and le Carré.

Gavin Lyall's first moral thriller, The Wrong Side of the Sky, was published in 1961, the year of le Carré's first novel, while Nicholas Freeling's first, Love in Amsterdam, appeared in 1962. From the point of view of chronology, neither can be justly called an epigone of le Carré. Let us say that they have been influenced by and in turn helped influence the tendencies present in the moral thriller. What relegates them to a secondary role as compared to Durenmatt, le Carré, Len Deighton and several others, is probably the lesser impact of their oeuvre.

To use a seventeenth century parallel, Shakespeare's period had been a time of great literary activity, full of other notable authors. Marlowe, Webster, Jonson, Dekker, Massinger, Beaumont and Fletcher shared the period with Shakespeare, and if one considers the dates of many of their plays, they have chronologically preceeded as well as followed him. Nevertheless, from today's vantage point, value judgment usually replaces chronology as the criteria of appreciation.

When I label some of the authors treated here as 'secondary', this is done from the point of view of impact, significance and cultural influence.

In this sense, le Carré is the Shakespeare of the moral thriller of the 1960's, although there are Massingers, and Beaumonts and Fletchers ahead of him as well as behind him in chronology.

Beside Freeling and Lyall, there are many other worthy exponents of the le Carré approach to the thriller. Adam Hall, James Hall Roberts, Ross Thomas, Merle Miller, Leo Rosten, Francis Clifford, Abraham Rothberg, to mention just a few from among scores of moral thriller writers on both sides of the Atlantic, produced works written according to the criteria outlined above. Their novels, however, provide us only with quantitative proof regarding the existence of a definable school of literature. They jumped on the band-wagon, instead of creating the vehicle.

The second route to be examined is that followed by a select group of authors who have produced significant variations on the major themes or have extended the same. The present chapter is a review of their best works: Hans Habe, Philip Lorraine and Anthony Burgess represent this category.

The third route, which will be the subject of the following chapter, represents the decline of the moral thriller as a genre. This decline, similarly to other literary movements, is represented by parody, and new direction arrived at by way of parody.

To begin exploring the second route:

The Devil's Agent, by Hans Habe, was first published in 1958 -- well ahead of le Carré's works, -- but conceivably influenced by Durenmatt with whom it shares a common language. Habe is a popular German writer of essentially topical fiction, mostly concerned with the question of German as well as international guilt in the destruction of European Jews.

The Devil's Agent has an authenticity of detail and a close adherence to historical fact which makes it conceivable that the story and the characters have some documentary validity. It is important to note that Habe is not primarily a thriller writer, but a novelist of moral concern. Thus it is the search for a vehicle that brought him to the espionage camp.

While Durenmatt's and le Carré's stories are quite demonstrably works of invention, Habe's novel, written in the memoir form, and avoiding the spectacular type of exploit in favour of more routine kinds of missions, may indeed be based on fact.

It is therefore all the more remarkable that The Devil's Agent arrives at themes quite similar to Durenmatt's and Le Carré's: the essential inhumanity and amorality of spying, the 'last assignment' syndrome (but with a twist), the patterns of betrayal (again with a twist), and, last but not least, an adherence to archetypal patterns.

Also remarkable is the fact that Habe's protagonist is also a moral victor and an ultimate loser.

Descended from a long line of Viennese headwaiters, George Droste, the hero, in many ways resembles Thomas Mann's charming rogue, Felix Krull. Droste's connection with the clandestine begins in the Second World War in which he serves as the batman of a German general in counter-intelligence.

His adaptability after the war gets him into the good graces of the Americans, and later, due to his social connection, he enters espionage work. He begins his activities as a double agent, working for both the Russians and the Americans, and eventually supplies information to a number of minor secret services as well. Droste is a free-lance spy, and, in contrast to le Carré's heroes, it is he who manages to manipulate the system, playing both sides in favour of the middle -- himself. Thus, when in one of the many episodes in the novel, Droste is assigned by the Americans to recover a list of wartime German agents, he locates the archives, gives part of them to the Americans, sells another part to a neo-Nazi general who wants to use the list to start a new war that hopefully will result in the re-unification of Germany, and then reveals the location of the remainder of the files to the Russians. Naturally, he collects his reward from all three sources, and by the judicious balancing of his favours, makes a small fortune.

(Incidentally, Droste's affair with the Greehahn archives, which he smuggles out of East Berlin in three coffins, must have served as the model of Len Deighton's Funeral in Berlin, which describes a highly similar mission concentrating around the so-called Broum Documents. Even more remarkable is the fact that in Deighton's book, too, several services share in the spoils, including the English, the Russians and the Israelis. Also of interest is the fact that Deighton's ambiguous villain, Johnny Vulkan, a German double-agent, bears close resemblance to George Droste.)

George Droste's memoirs begin with a statement of his intention to quit spying. He sets out to write his story for the benefit of mankind and his adopted son, Johnny, the orphan of an American agent whom George had befriended and then saw going to certain death on a meaningless assignment. Droste feels a moral responsibility to humanity as represented by Johnny; his intention is to warn against espionage committed by all sides, which he deems a self-perpetuating power game, played against the whole of mankind by a group of adventure-seeking, greedy and amoral imbeciles.

It is the sterile, non-creative evil of the espionage game against which Droste rebels. His method, however, of being active on all sides in the hope that the various evils will cancel out each other, results in failure.

As he writes his memoirs, Droste realizes that he is handling hot merchandise, which will be sought by all the secret services he had been involved with. He also comes to the conclusion that, after being the Devil's agent for so many years, one cannot quit and start a new life.

After barely finishing his manuscript, and placing it in the trust of a former mistress for safekeeping, Droste is murdered. His juggling act between the many secret services is, however, morally successful: he dies with the satisfaction of having exposed the source of evil in expiation of his career.

The atmospherics of The Devil's Agent in many ways resemble that of Durenmatt's works. The tone is bemused and conversational, and even the sense of foreboding that permeates the entire novel is handled with a redeemingly jolly roguishness.

The agile, quick-witted personality of George Droste and his cynical service of many masters seems to be archetypally related to classical comedy. He is the descendant of the shrewd servant figures of Plautus and Moliére, a relative of Mosca in Ben Jonson's _Volpone_ and particularly of Figaro in Beaumarchais' _The Barber of Seville_.

With so obviously comic an approach, Habe cannot achieve tragedy in the end. _The Devil's Agent_ is more of a tragi-comedy, ending in death but concluding in the affirmative.

Habe's work also demonstrates that the modern thriller can successfully accommodate a wide variety of archetypal modes ranging from Oedipus to Figaro. Without an essential relevance to life, such patterns could not be exploited, nor yet produce a cathartic effect.

The Devil's Agent is possibly the first post-war spy novel in which the 'gods', the Control and 'M'-type spymaster figures are stripped of their divinity. This does not mean that Habe's novel is a parody. The classical type of comic structure it represents, unlike romantic comedy which is often a parody of tragedy, has its own sources of inspiration and its own moral dignity.

Droste's deliberations often sound like the speeches of Mosca, combining his mixture of cynicism and anti-establishment sentiment:

> "... morality is above all a matter of quantity. In other words, decent behaviour in small doses lacks all value, whereas indecency, provided it is on a sufficient scale, is certainly deserving of respect. I have never joined in the complaint that small thieves are hanged while the big ones go scot-free. It serves them right if they swing. Why did they not steal more?"[1]

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[1]Hans Habe, _The Devil's Agent_, trans. by Ewald Osers, An Avon Book (New York: The Hearst Corporation, 1966), p. 19.

A simple juxtaposition of Droste's world view with that of Mosca

reveals the archetypal relationship:

"All the wise world is little else, in nature,
But parasites or sub-parasites. -- And yet,
I mean not those that have your bare town-art,
To know who's fit to feed them; ...
But your fine elegant rascal, that can rise,
And stoop, almost together, like an arrow;
Shoot through the air as nimbly as a star;
Turn short as doth a swallow; and be here,
And there, and here, and yonder, all at once ...
.... and such sparks
Are the true parasites, others but their zanis." [1]

Being here and there and everywhere, as Mosca, Figaro and Droste are,

may be the only viable moral position in a social system in which none of the

existing polarities suit the individual.

Droste, however, while conceived in the tradition of the charming rogue,

rises above the type through his perception of reality and his sense of moral

priorities which allow him to place spying in the proper -- diminished --

perspective. His rebellion against the system -- manifested in the form of

his amoral service of all masters -- is based on the same individualistic

outrage that inspired most contemporary thrillers:

"After my mother's death my father had nobody left to talk to, and so
he discussed with me the injustices of the political order. ... I was
bound to conclude from his experiences that the State was deliberately
bent on ruining the good citizen." [2]

Gaining strength from his contempt for the system, Droste is well-prepared

to bargain with it. When the Americans first confront him with their knowledge

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[1]Ben Jonson, Volpone.

[2]Hans Habe, The Devil's Agent, trans. by Ewald Osers, An Avon Book
(New York: The Hearst Corporation, 1966), p. 32.

of his past in German intelligence, he is not at all alarmed. He knows,

in fact, that his past is an advantage:

> "The uncritical adulation of the expert happens to be one of the
> deplorable features of our age." [1]

Droste's progress starts with his recognition of the true nature of

the system and the individual's relationship to it. His subsequent experience

of exploiting this situation leads him toward a comprehensive rationale:

> "Though a gambler by nature, I have never liked card games and have
> always preferred the impersonal roulette wheel -- probably out of
> some congenital soft-heartedness. Like everybody else, I hated
> losing; but equally, I disliked winning from fellow players who
> needed the money quite as much, if not more than I. For the owners
> of the casinos, on the other hand, I never felt the slightest
> sympathy ... I owe my undisputed and my spectacular climb up the
> ladder of secret agents to the total lack of pity which, with a
> growing realization of what the game was about, I felt for those
> I deceived. For eight years I served the secret services: I came,
> first to despise them and then to hate them. And if I have now
> decided not to deceive them any longer for the sake of my own
> advantage, then this is simply because I hope to damage them more
> by this frank record of my experiences then I could expect to do,
> in the present circumstances, through personal exploitation." [2]

By first taking advantage of evil and then fighting evil with its own

weapons, Droste arrives at a state of affirmation. When he discovers the true

nature of secret service work, through the character of the fanatical General

von Greehahn, the theme is closely related to the main drift of The Looking

Glass War, in which the ultimate purpose of the Department is to mount an

operation not for what it can accomplish for the country, but for the operation's

effect on the departmental budget and the staff's standing in the hierarchy.

According to Greehahn, the real purpose of a secret service is policy-making,

absolute power through manipulation of the state:

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[1]Ibid., p. 48.

[2]Ibid., p. 20.

"The secret service is instructed to discover the mood in the
opponent's camp. This is a matter of supreme importance, since
human beings -- and this includes statesmen -- are so made that
they attack whenever they believe themselves to be under attack.
In other words, if a hostile atmosphere is reported from the
other side, a hostile atmosphere is automatically created on one's
own side. What an opportunity for a secret service -- and in more
ways than one! 'In other words, Intelligence can decide over war
and peace -- " [1]

This manipulative drive of the spy-fanatics is what makes Droste, the
rogue, ultimately the positive hero; by negating the negative, by his evil
attitude towards evil, he attains goodness.

His moral attitude is, naturally, linked with a nostalgia for the
past. (I imagine this to be an exclusively capitalist characteristic: if
there were similar spy novels available from socialist countries, their
moral touchstone would have to exist in some future Utopia, for they negate
the morality of all pre-socialist societies.)

Hans Habe, a German, understandably cannot find the Second World War
nostalgia-inspiring. He goes farther back, to Lao-Tse and oriental philosophy,
to find his moral bearings:

"To me Kuang Chung's wisdom is the beginning and end of all wisdom
-- though, admittedly, a kind of wisdom that is being increasingly
forgotten. In the past there existed certain moral institutions ...
with their aid mankind was able to hobble a little way forward." [2]

Habe's novel is one of the first which is critical of the long-romanticized
field of espionage from a moralistic point of view. The Devil's Agent does
not have the structure of suspenseful revelations or the unfolding ironies
of le Carré's novels, and therefore has never achieved the popular impact of
these. However, there is reason to believe -- and the evidence of Funeral in

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[1]Ibid., p. 188.

[2]Ibid., p. 275.

Berlin seems to support it -- that Habe had written a kind of spy novelist's spy novel, a book which practitioners of the genre may have consulted in their search for themes.

Habe's other significant contribution may be the reversal of attitudes towards the secret service and towards spying in general. His book is the first in which the hitherto idealized institution appears as the villain -- in which, to use Habe's metaphor, the players turn against the casino instead of trying to rob each other.

It may be significant that this trend against the espionage establishment began in Germany in the 1950's. It coincides with Germany's loss of big-power status. The attitude spreads to England in the early 1960's, likely to be coincidental with the aftermath of the Suez crisis and England's need to adjust to its reduced international status. As le Carré states in A Small Town in Germany;

"All power corrupts. The loss of power corrupts even more." [1]

Among all spy thrillers concerned with morality, perhaps the most seriously anti-spy novel is Philip Loraine's W.I.L. One to Curtis. Published in 1967, it is the first spy thriller in which the central character is an unredeemed villain who stands for the inhuman, manipulative system and confronts a representative selection of common people who become the eventual heroes of the piece.

Curtis, a British secret service agent attached to an organization called Western Intelligence Liaison (W.I.L.), has his orders to prevent the return of an idealistic politician, Beck, to his country (unnamed).

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[1] Cf. Supra. Chapter VI. p.111.

While the plot is rather fantastic, it evolves around five private individuals whom Curtis recruits for the job. They are to be thrown into action in a certain sequence, all aimed at changing Beck's mind about his political comeback. They are all known to Beck in one context or another, and their job is to first persuade, then bribe, and, failing these, blackmail or murder Beck. The five individuals are unknown to each other and are brought together in a Swiss resort town near where Beck is staying.

Each is assumed by W.I.L. to be suited for his role because of personality, emotional or intellectual influence over Beck.

Curtis has carte blanche to deal with these people, and the case file contains the following phrases, which the author-narrator approaches with intensive contempt:

> " 'The degree of moral or psychological pressure which may be imposed
> on them...', 'Since they are what is known as "private individuals" ...',
> Estimated degree of vulnerability ...', 'The subjects are, in this case,
> and as a last resort, expendable.'
> Do you, I wonder, find these phrases as horrifying as I do? Perhaps
> you are unwilling to believe, as I was, that they do in fact emanate
> from a Government Department, albeit a strange mid-Atlantic Department,
> spawn of the mismating of two continents." [1]

This frankly editorial style is made skillfully acceptable by the quasi investigative-journalism approach taken by the narration. It allows the author to present his case against the espionage establishment with a rage and passion unsuited to the convention of the omniscient narrator.

The five people chosen to sabotage Beck's return to power are:

Number one, Katia, an earth-mother-type prostitute, Beck's former mistress and the mother of his child. Curtis is using emotional blackmail to force her to co-operate and apply the same against Beck.

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[1] Philip Loraine, W.I.L. One to Curtis, Pan Books (London: 1969), p. 6.

Number two is a young American whose life Beck had saved once, and who idolizes the politician. His job is to talk Beck out of his journey. Curtis gets him to co-operate by deceipt: he intimates that Beck is in mortal danger if he returns to his country. Thus, the idealistic young man is deceived in order to deceive Beck.

Number three is a homosexual Foreign Office employee, who is blackmailed to bribe Beck if previous methods fail. There is a similar parallel between the method of recruitment and the mission of this man.

Number four is Beck's young boy, raised by foster parents in France. As his father does not yet know of his existence, his role is to provide the dedicated and single-minded politician with a motive to live for and a reason for abandoning his political ambitions.

Number five is a convicted Italian murderer. In exchange for his life, he is to murder Beck when other methods are exhausted.

Artificial as this structure may be, it provides a neat, ascending pattern,with each character called upon to exert gradually greater pressure on Beck, as, in turn, they are being pressured along the same escalating scale.

This mathematical calculation is, of course, the whole point: the novel is designed to show how the best laid plans of spies and fiends fail when they are up against the incalculable,human nature.

And, naturally, the whole pyramid of intrigue collapses when the five 'instruments' eventually make contact, unite and foil Curtis' manoeuvre. Their human dignity and sense of individuality, the factors Curtis ignored, become the cause of his failure. The mission, however, does succeed. Although the convict-assassin kills Curtis instead of Beck, the politician's plane blows up in mid-air. The operation is successful, but the perpetrator dies as well, and a different kind of affirmation develops: the prostitute and the young American fall in love; she will be eventually accepted by her illegitimate son;

the assassin gets away with the money intended to bribe Beck; the haunted young homosexual, dying of a wound received during the operation, spends his last months in peace. This affirmation occurs when the characters finally move outside the framework of espionage, while the whole structure is condemned by the author from the humanist's point of view.

W.I.L. One to Curtis is a fictitous exposé, recollected after the fact by a 'journalist', who, thanks to his narrative approach, can reveal his unabashed hatred of the system without jeopardizing his credibility. For good measure the story is paced by secret service memoranda, but it is the highly emotional narrative which is the novel's outstanding feature. The author's lack of guile is highly effective. And the approach comes as close to folkloric patterns as any thriller can ever hope to be. The five trials of Beck, the simple and non-developing characters, including such basic types as the earth-mother, the young idealist, the abandoned child, the sinner (the only one of the five 'instruments' who dies in the end), the Robin Hood-like assassin, and, last but not least, Curtis, who is a completely unmitigated villain, the kind of monster only folk-tales can produce.

The happy ending, too, is decidedly folkloric. True, Beck is destroyed, but he is not the hero of the piece, and his death is more than compensated for by the fall of Curtis. The plot, as incredible as any fairy tale, does produce a healthy, cathartic effect. Its Punch-and-Judy simplicity makes the reader root for the good people and despise the villain, almost to the point of involvement. One is tempted to shout down on stage, figuratively speaking, and warn the good guys against the villain's next trap.

The reason for the inclusion of W.I.L. One to Curtis (a not particularly popular and rather unsophisticated work) among the few novels to be dealt with in detail, is that it shows that the moral spy novel does not depend on the technique alone, that its moral relevance and universality allows the genre to be handled in a variety of different modes without loss of effectiveness.

In The Devil's Agent and W.I.L. One to Curtis, we can also notice the addition of a new theme: children make their appearance, as ideals and motivators of important characters, although for the time being, in a secondary role, remaining on the peripheries of the action. Their appearance seems logical. In a genre centrally concerned with corruption, there is need for the archetypal figure of innocence.

In The Devil's Agent, the child appears merely as a motive for the hero's positive attitude. In W.I.L. One to Curtis, the child is one among the innocent manipulated.

In the third novel in this thematically closely related group, Anthony Burgess' Tremor of Intent, children become a central and significant part of the ménage. The novel, written from an essentially Catholic point of view, handles the theme of innocence and corruption more potently than the above-mentioned works.

Tremor of Intent is, in many ways, an a-typical spy novel. Ostensibly concerned with the re-capturing of an English scientist who defected to Russia, it is, in fact, a fictionalized essay which neatly dissects the thematic peculiarities of the spy thriller, labels and preserves them in a highly conceptual solution of spirituality and esthetic artifice.

Burgess' book has a strong dose of moral concern, while, at the same time, containing some fantastic gadgetry, a wild assortment of eccentric characters, disguise and other trappings of the James Bond style -- hitherto mutually exclusive features. Perhaps it is the author's intention to deliberately synthesize the entire spy novel phenomenon, bringing together the salient features of both the moral and the amoral school.

Beginning with the nomenclature of the characters, the symbolic intention is plainly visible.

The main villain's name is Theodorescu, clearly an ironic reference, meaning God's gift. And he is overtly described in divine metaphor:

> "His hands were richly ringed, but this did not seem vulgar: they were so big, strong and groomed that the crusting of winking stones was rather like adornment by transitory flowers of acknowledged, God-given instruments of skill and power and beauty." [1]

Not far below, the allusion is further explicated:

> "The god whom Hillier took to be Mr. Theodorescu laughed in a gale that seemed to shake the bar. He said, in a voice like a sixteen-foot organ-stop... " [2]

Theodorescu is, of course, the ancient god, terrible, vengeful and gross, a symbol of the erosion of traditional moral attitudes. His assistant and mistress is called Miss Devi, another not too heavily disguised pun.

Children, a boy and a girl, figure prominently in the plot. ("Oh God, groaned Hillier. Children. He didn't like children. They were too vigorous but also too honest, the enemies of intrigue." [3]) One of the children is named

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[1] Anthony Burgess, _Tremor of Intent_, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth: 1969), p. 59.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., p. 51.

Clara, daughter of the Walter family (Walter's Flour, "The Flower of Flours") and the Christian metaphor persists throughout.

Indeed, the hero, Hillier, a professional spy ("I am able to speak boldly now, this being my last assignment" [1]), is chosen for the mission because the scientist he has to smuggle out of Russia is a former schoolmate of his from St. Augustine College. Burgess is having fun all the way with a plethora of religious allusions which should send critics scurrying for their Bible and other reference books. Tremor of Intent is, indeed, a superb piece of literary jesuitry, and worth an essay on its own. However, within the framework of this study, we can only give these metaphoric intricacies a rather cursory glance.

The basic ritual of Tremor of Intent is the duality between good and evil, innocence and corruption. It is a morality play with a few ironic twists, among them the current thesis that experience does not corrupt; only intent matters. This is well illustrated by the fact that the innocent child character, Allan Walter, consents to have homosexual relations with Mr. Theodorescu in order to steal his gun, with which he finally kills the villain who threatens the hero's life. After sodomy and murder, Allan returns to being a child.

The duality of commitment, to good or evil, is the central theme of the novel. One of the motto-like utterances of the hero bears this out:

"Ultimate reality is a dualism, or a game for two players".[2]
And Burgess exploits this duality in the generic sense as well. His literary approach seems to bring about a reconciliation between the Judeo-Christian moral spy novel (the book features many of the themes characteristic of the

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[1] Ibid., p. 9.

[2] Ibid., p. 103.

school, the last assignment syndrome, the middle aged hero, betrayal and manipulation from his own side, endless moral argumentation, etc.), and the Greco-Roman esthetic concern of the blood-sex-and-violence movement, best represented by James Bond. Tremor of Intent is, in fact, a parody of both the le Carré style and the Bond approach. To mention just a few specifics: Hillier, the hero enters into an eating contest with Theodorescu, highly reminiscent of James Bond's bridge game against Drax, the villain in Moonraker. There is also plenty of sexual detail and sensuously described sadism, copious use of drugs and gadgetry, elements completely absent from the moral thriller, but usually prominently featured in the amoral type. There is yet another characteristic irony present in Tremor of Intent: in James Bond novels a good deal of space is given to esoteric information, usually pertaining to weapons, games, clothes or heraldry, things of snobbish interest. In Burgess' book Hillier's cover is that of a typewriter expert, and the boy Allan happens to know a great deal about the history of typewriters, to the embarrassment of Hillier. In the ensuing conversations we get an inordinate amount of typewriter mumbo-jumbo, and I suspect that it has a two-fold objective: first, it is a parody of the Bond-type of esoterica, (which, by the way, never figures in moral thrillers), and, secondly, it seems to work as a satirical allusion to the writer's craft, an exhaustive mass of marginalia pertaining to the author's only weapon, the typewriter.

Hints of duality are frequent at all levels: "I am well fit, except for my two chronic diseases of gluttony and satyriasis which, anyway, continue to cancel each other out."[1] Thus the hero about himself. But, after starting off in this Dionysian manner, the Christian facet is soon revealed:

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[1]Ibid., p. 7.

"I am mentally and morally sound. I tut-tut at St. Augustine, with his 'O God make me pure but not yet'. Irresponsible, no appointment duly noted in the diary, the abrogation of free will." [1]

After introducing himself, Hillier, who also acts as narrator, begins his adventures on board the ship Polyolbion, cruising the Black Sea on its way to the Russian port where Hillier will have to kidnap Roper, the scientist, and return him to Britain. The intrigue is far too thick and Byzantine to be related in detail. Suffice it to say that the ship swarms with suspicious characters, all of whom turn out to be worthy of suspicion, including the villain, Mr. Theodorescu, who is a free-lance broker of secret information. His companion, Miss Devi, the amoral temptress, seduces the more than willing Hillier, drugs him and together with Mr. Theodorescu, pumps information out of him. Clara and Allan Walters, whose father dies of a heart-attack, eventually become Hillier's friends and guardian angels. Interestingly, Clara is a virgin whose passion is to read pornography, and Allan is a walking encyclopedia, an impish barfly who, as mentioned before, redeems Hillier by committing both sodomy and murder, while remaining pure and childlike. Incidentally, as the plot is rather secondary to the theological proceedings, Hillier never succeeds in returning his friend, Roper, who chooses to remain in Russia, mostly because of his disgust with the British class system. However, Hillier does, in the end, manage to kill the evil Theodorescu.

The characters are structured in the form of polar opposites, and are then resolved in oxymoronic reconciliation: Clara, the virgin pornographer; the angelic boy-murderer Allan; Theodorescu, the repulsive, fat god; Hillier,

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[1] Ibid., p. 10,

the moral satyr; Wriste, the cute steward who turns out to be a brutal killer, and so on. The action, too, works along the same lines: Hillier fails his assignment but succeeds at murdering Theodorescu; he is a sinner but ends up a priest in the epilogue. The two children, going through the most horrible experiences imaginable, revert to total sunny innocence in the end. There is a constant strain of Manicheism, affirming the need for evil as a pre-condition of good, and vice versa.

In Tremor of Intent, the style and the happiness of language and thought overpower the action. The theological argument is far more memorable than the story, but the entire exercise reaffirms the point that the spy novel of the 1960's has become a vehicle suitable for moral concern, universal philosophical comment and even for elevated discourse on existential theology.

Conversely, the Manichean theme of the novel touches on the raison d'être of the genre. The spy novel depends for its very existence on polarity. And whether it chooses the subject of good and evil, innocence and corruption, or individual versus the system, polarity and structure remain a central concern of the human mind. Particularly, in the 1960's, when most genre experimented with things unstructured and without polarity, it is a telling fact that one of the finest minds in modern English literature, Anthony Burgess, chooses the spy thriller as a vehicle for this statement.

The essential novelty of Tremor of Intent also springs from the fact that it does not make the moral choice offered, at least not in the same simplistic way this choice is made by everyone from Durenmatt to Philip Loraine: what the novel affirms is that a choice has to be made — be it for good or evil — in order to maintain the balance of the universe:

"But between the day and night
The choice is free to all, and light
Falls equally on black and white" [1]

These lines from W.H. Auden are the motto of <u>Tremor of Intent,</u> and
indicate the drift of Burgess' argument. It is interesting to compare
Burgess' view of neutrality with that of Habe. Habe in <u>The Devil's Agent</u>
favours the golden course, playing both sides in favour of the middle.
Habe, having no theological point of view, only a simplified, common-sense
humanity, glorifies the neutral in a clash between two evils.

But Burgess, the Catholic, still wants to see the world in terms of
good and evil, even though it had been reduced to a kind of 'them' and 'us',
a polarity lacking moral content:

> "We -- people like me and my counterparts on the other side -- we
> reflect that game. It is a pale reflection. There used to be a
> much brighter one, in the days when the two sides represented what
> are known as good and evil. That was a tougher and more interesting
> game, because one's opponent wasn't on the other side of a conventional
> net or line. He wasn't marked off by a special jersey colour or race
> or language or allegiance to a particular historico-geographical
> abstraction. But we won't believe in good and evil any more. That's
> why we play this silly and hopeless little game." [2]

The moral nostalgia is evident. This time, of course, it does not refer
back to World War II, but to something more universally acceptable, and less
likely to become dated, the concepts of Christianity. But the stance is similar
to that of le Carré or Durenmatt. Except it represents a more far-sighted view.

Once the good-evil polarity is resurrected, it is, of course, neutrality
that becomes the sin. The novel is rich in its condemnation of neutrality:
"That was where the evil lay; in the neutrals" [3], says the hero. When Allan

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[1] Ibid., p. 6.

[2] Ibid., p. 103.

[3] Ibid., p. 169.

kills the evil Wriste, an amoral agent simply doing his job and suspending

his judgment, the boy reiterates the point:

> " 'You bloody neutral,' cursed Allan. 'You're going where all the
> neutrals go.' Dull fire spat through the jacket, leaving a smoking
> hole." [1]

And just so that the reader knows where the author stands as regards

the contemporary amoral universe, Allan, the corrupted-yet-innocent child

staggers away, crying:

> " 'I think I'd better be sick,' said Allan. 'It's time somebody was
> sick.' He went and stood, like a naughty boy, in the corner. His
> shoulders heaved as he tried to throw up the modern world." [2]

Another important point concerning Tremor of Intent is its use of the

happy ending. It is the second book in which we have encountered a revival

of poetic justice. In the first, W.I.L. One to Curtis, poetic justice was

coupled with a passionate, folkloric tone. In Tremor of Intent, poetic

justice is related to the re-discovery of the religious meaning of good and

evil.

The progession is significant, if we review it as a whole: From despair

and foreboding in Durenmatt, the road leads to tragi-comedy in Habe, tragedy

in le Carré. Then, in Philip Loraine's book, we see the folkloric appear,

and a hint of the ray of hope; in Burgess, redemption is complete, provided

by the concept of religion.

But, while all this re-discovery of the Judeo-Christian past transforms

the spy thriller into an increasingly transcendental vehicle, something is being

lost. This loss is specifically caused by the spy thriller's increasing

capability to carry abstract ideas. What is lost, is the serious realism

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[1]Ibid., p. 144.

[2]Ibid., p. 145.

that characterized the works of Durenmatt, Habe and le Carré. As we
pass onto Loraine and Burgess, sophistication and abstract philosophy
replace the common touch of the former, artifice, beautiful in itself,
replaces the raw reality of what had been a true-life, moralistic trend,
and, as such, a potent Judeo-Christian resistance to the ascending pagan
culture of the 1960's. Burgess, although moral in allegiance, brings back
the esthetic with his superb styling and multi-level symbolism. Tremor of
Intent represents the final refinement of the genre, a work so perfect in
its conception and detail, that there seems no way to top it, certainly not
within the strictures of the spy thriller as we have come to know it. New
ways will have to be found, to accommodate the creative urge for novelty.
The serio-comic tone of Tremor of Intent, combining moral concern, satirical
allusion and exquisite styling, signals the end of the serious, realistic,
moral spy novel. The only opportunities still free to be explored are those
of parody.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DAWNING OF THE

AGENT OF AQUARIUS:

LEN DEIGHTON AND ADAM DIMENT -

THE DECLINE OF THE MORAL

THRILLER AND RISE

OF THE 'MODS'

Given time, all literary movements develop mannerisms of style, structural formulae which becomes ossified, and, therefore, easy to imitate. Once imitations are possible, parody is not long in coming. As the epic reaches the height of its cycle, the mock-epic is there, waiting in the wings.

Parody usually also requires a lowering of the social milieu; the genre parodied re-appears at a baser level of existence. In some works, parody is contained within. In Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, Wagner, the hero's servant, lives through his master's experiences, except that he does it on a lower level. Faustus' elevated tragedy of knowledge, power and love are represented in Wagner's sub-plot in the form of basic appetites -- intrigue, greed and lust. The hero's motivations and transcendental ambitions are brought down to the appetitive level.

The spy novels of Len Deighton and Adam Diment are all about Wagner.

Their mock-heroic spy thrillers feed on two sources: firstly, they are a lampooning of James Bond adventures, and secondly, they represent a cynical reaction to the le Carré type of moral spy thriller.

These novels ridicule the Bond fantasies by out-witting Bond at his own game. The adventures are patently absurd, the exploits even more hair-raising than Bond's. But the style is tongue-in-cheek, and the heroes are definitely non-U.

Secret agents in novels are, as a rule, upper or middle-class people. Even le Carré's Leamas belongs to the middle-class, although:

> "It was hard to place Leamas. If he were to walk into a London club
> the porter would certainly not mistake him for a member; in a Berlin
> night club they usually gave him the best table. He looked like a

man who could make trouble, a man who looked after his money,
a man who was not quite a gentleman." [1]

As for James Bond, he is the prototype of the debonair, cultivated
clubman, winning his battles on the playing fields of Eton -- or at
Fortnum & Mason.

Kingsley Amis, author of a comprehensive guide to Fleming's hero,
The James Bond Dossier, appears to consider even Bond a departure from the
absolutely blue-blooded British spy prototype:

> "This is a violent break with tradition. Unless written under
> American influence, the British cloak-and-dagger novel has in the
> past leaned heavily on lords and ladies. The line goes back
> through Sapper and Dornford Yates to Oppenheim and Le Queux." [2]

However, Amis seems either to contradict himself, or have higher ideas
of what constitutes upper class than most ordinary mortals have: James
Bond is, by virtue of his background as well as his sentiments, decidedly
upper crust:

> "His mind drifted into a world of tennis courts and lily ponds and
> kings and queens, of London, of people being photographed with pigeons
> on their heads in Trafalgar Square, of the forsythia that would soon
> be blazing on the bypass roundabouts, of May, the treasured housekeeper
> in his flat off the King's Road ...!" [3]

Amis then raises the question:

> "How would Bond's thoughts have run in his present situation if he were
> a keen Labour Party man of the sort that goes canvassing? 'His mind
> drifted into a world of soccer pitches and recreation grounds and
> Trade Union leaders, of Walsall, of the demonstrators being photographed
> with guitars across their knees in Trafalgar Square, of the pansies
> blooming outside Transport House ...' It can't be done." [4]

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[1] John le Carré, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, Pan Books (London: 1965), p. 15.

[2] Kingsley Amis, The James Bond Dossier, Signet Books (New York: The New American Library, 1966), p. 78n.

[3] Ian Fleming, Dr. No, Pan Books (London: 1962), p. 182, quoted on p. 76, The James Bond Dossier.

[4] Kingsley Amis, The James Bond Dossier, Signet Books (New York: The New American Library, 1966), p. 77n.

What Kingsley Amis thought could not be done when he wrote his book
on Bond in 1965, at the height of the spy cycle, became a reality within
three years. Amis' passage is meant as a satirical projection of some kind
of a proletarian spy novel, obviously inconceivable at the time the James
Bond Dossier appeared. The following passage is from a spy novel by Adam
Diment, one of the 'young mods' of the modern thriller:

> "Outside the polar wind denied the sunny impression I had got through
> my office window. March in London with the mutant plane trees trying
> to push green buds through a coating of soot into the carbon monoxide.
> I crossed Holborn and made my way into the gardens of Lincolns Inn
> Fields. The usually spotty secretaries with sagging figures and the
> plump young men in cheap, food-stained suits were sitting munching
> their ham rolls from grimy paper bags. Where do all the dollies go
> at lunchtime? Taken out to feast and fornicate by their rutting bosses." [1]

What in fact has happened in about 1967 to the moral spy novel, is a
two-fold transformation. First, the educated middle or upper-class hero began
turning downward socially. This began in 1963, with the publication of Len
Deighton's The Ipcress File. However, Deighton's early novels, although
featuring a lower-class Cockney hero, still adhered to the set of themes
characteristic of the moral thriller. Eventually, the fledgling social
revolution in spy novels received an ally in the 'mod' trend sweeping London.
Together, the proletarian surge and the 'generation-gap' produced an entirely
new kind of spy: young, brash, semi-literate and flippant, with a bad accent
and a lower-middle or working class background. The mod spies began their
takeover of the scene.

Their authors reflect a 'parody on both your houses' attitude. They
lampoon the Bond style by putting proletarian characters through his paces.
And they also began negating the moral spy thriller's values by making their
heroes frankly brutal and appetitive, by accepting and even enjoying the
acknowledgedly amoral nature of the espionage framework.

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[1] Adam Diment, The Great Spy Race, Pan Books (London: 1969), p. 14.

Their social approach is a logical consequence of the le Carré school's attitude. They just brought the hero's class standing down another notch. But their moral attitude is the direct consequence of the generation gap: both the new authors and their prime target audience have no personal experience of the Second World War. Consequently, neither have their heroes. And due to this lack of personal recall, references to the last war as a moral benchmark also disappear.

The 'last assignment' syndrome also disappears. Although the young spies are still reluctant to enter the fray, there is no mention of retirement after the mission. Invariably, however, a leave of absence is acquired, also invariably in the company of the girl figuring in the adventure.

The new spies are also victorious. They emerge winners in terms of their assignment, although they don't always accomplish the task set by the spy-master.

The le Carré pattern of betrayal by one's own side has also gone through an interesting transformation. Home base still figures as the necessary evil in these novels, with spymasters becoming increasingly repulsive as the years go by, but while they still manipulate the spy, there is no direct and final betrayal. The attitude is rather a 'you're on your own, and don't expect any help if you get in trouble' sort of approach, inherited from both the Bond and the le Carré school.

Physical detail -- suppressed in all moral spy novels -- enters here with a vengeance. Both sex and violence are promiscuous, and described with evocative relish:

"He fell against the dresser, supporting himself on his hand, and
stared at me pop-eyed with hate and grimacing with pain, his cheeks
bulging as though he was looking for a place to vomit. He grabbed
his white shirt and tugged it out of his trousers. He wrenched it
so hard that the buttons popped and pinged away across the room.
He had a great bundle of shirt in his hand now and he stuffed it into
his mouth like a conjurer doing a trick called 'how to swallow my
white shirt'. Or how to swallow my pink-dotted shirt. How to
swallow my pink shirt, my red and finally dark-red shirt. But he
never did the trick. The cloth fell away from his mouth and his
blood poured over his chin, painting his teeth pink and dribbling
down his neck and ruining his shirt. He knelt upon the ground as if
to pray but his face sank to the floor and he died without a word,
his ear flat against the ground, as if listening for hoof-beats
pursuing him to another world." [1]

" 'You are going to whip me, Philip, please, Hard.' She rolled over
on her tummy, wriggling her buttocks and thighs in anticipation. What
the hell can you do? I dropped the belt -- I doubt very much if I had
been able to belt something so beautiful anyway.
'I've gone off the idea,' I said, 'Now about Peters' Race.'
'Yes, right there, no -- like this,' she had her hand behind my head.
Further conversation became physically impossible for a number of
minutes. I was laying back, exhausted by this last onslaught, gazing
vaguely at the inside of her thigh. Gradually through my exhausted
brain information filtered. Something was written inside her thigh --
in a place one would not normally think to look. The numerals unblurred.
983 in pink ballpoint." [2]

While sex and sadism become a marked feature of the mod spy novel, and

drugs -- or at least marijuana -- also enter the scene, a token lip-service

to morality is still being maintained.

" 'But what moral consolation you must receive. Whatever evil you
perpetrate you can always rationalize it by saying you were forced
to do it.'
'The SS had that excuse, too,' I snarled." [3]

But the hero's gesture is inconsequential, as in this particular novel,

The Great Spy Race, he exhausts all sadistic means to accomplish his objective,

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[1]Len Deighton, An Expensive Place to Die, A Panther Book (London: 1969),
p. 169.

[2]Adam Diment, The Great Spy Race, Pan Books (London: 1969), p. 125.

[3]Ibid., p. 71.

which, by the way, is the winning of an international spy contest, with
the stakes having no patriotic or moral value.

Whether the novels quoted from are conscious or unconscious parodies
remains a question. But parodies they are, carrying both the moral and
the Superman-type spy novels' premises to a ludicrous extreme and maintaining
a cocky, non-chalant tone throughout:

> " 'Think you can handle a tricky little special assignment?'
> 'If it doesn't demand a classical education I might be able to
> grope about it.'
> Dalby said,'Surprise me, do it without complaint or sarcasm.'
> 'It wouldn't be the same,' I said." [1]

It is also interesting to note, that without exception, the novels of Len
Deighton and Adam and Diment are written in the first person singular. The
author's identification with the protagonist is complete, and the implication
is, of course, that no moral judgment will be passed on the actions of the
hero. The first person singular narrative is also the ideal vehicle for the
so-called 'put-on' which is the basic approach in these novels. Beside the
invariably cocky and snappy conversational tone, the 'put-on' is also evident
in the plotting. The more implausible the action, the more quasi-realistic
detail is offered to give the reader verisimilitude of the incongruous. The
effect is inevitably surrealistic, and through this surrealism, the mod spy
novel imperceptibly makes its way into the Greco-Roman style, providing a sense
of fun and parody for the initiated reader in a contemporary version of high-
style, and producing an exciting, sexually or sadistically titillating effect in
the low-brow reader. With the novels of Diment and especially the later works
of Deighton, the realism, problematic concern and indivisible comprehension

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[1] Len Deighton, The Ipcress File, A Panther Book (London: 1965), p. 17.

of the Judeo-Christian style gradually disappears.

Yet, in spite of the gratuitous devices, deus ex machina effects and
gadgetry of these novels, a basic awareness of the le Carré heritage is
clearly traceable. However, it is present in the negative sense. And its
denial of morality is consciously and vigorously articulated by inverted
means, putting the older, moral person's complaint against the new breed
in the mouth of a failing, tired representative of the Second World War
generation:

> "So Bob was the younger generation, what did he say he did;
> represented them. Well I think he did. He represented the whole
> bloody dim-eyed, slack shouldered shower of them. National Health
> spectacles and state aided education, smoking their drugged cigarettes
> and banning the bomb. Endlessly complaining and running down their
> country, but never trying to do anything patriotic. My God, one hated
> to use the very word patriot because people like Bob thought it some
> kind of a joke." [1]

The patriotism of the war and the morality of the Cold War spy have
had a direct relationship. By putting them down, the mod spy novels achieved
negation of both.

The older generation and what it stood for is consistently attacked in
these novels. The villains are usually older persons, or those kow-towing
to the establishment. The feelings about the older generation are not always
hostile. Occasionally, the fact that they are the enemy is regretted, but the
suggestion is there that they have become the enemy by becoming identified with
established values, in spite of their acknowledged qualities.

Perhaps the best symbolic execution of the older group occurs in Diment's
novel, The Great Spy Race, a work I consider to be the crowning achievement of

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[1] Len Deighton, Only When I Larf , (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1968),
p. 246.

the amoral, mod spy thriller, and as such the final work to be dealt with.
It is a book that completes the cycle and puts an end to the moral spy
novel. Yet, even this book, which is as far apart from the Durenmatt-le
Carré movement as a James Bond thriller, displays a sensitive awareness
of its own moral and cultural position. One scene in particular illustrates
how, while finishing the old man, and almost literally having him torn to
shreds by the wheels of progress, the young man has a tinge of regret doing
it:

> "Standing in front of that old, lousy plane so full of grim Nazi
> memories, dressed in black tails and starched white shirt he was
> the impersonation of Charon, the boatman at the Styx. He shifted
> his balance slightly and moved nearer the spinning blades of the
> propeller. Of course, the old fool was nearly stone deaf, years
> out of date and dotty -- he'd probably forgotten there was a
> rapidly turning chunk of alloy-steel behind him. The horror must
> have shown in my eyes and my scream 'Petite -- the propeller' got
> through to him. He glanced fractionally behind him and saw how
> close he was, lurched to the side away from the blurred blades
> and almost lost his balance. I fired automatically, one hand in
> a sweep across him. He was thrown backwards like a discarded doll
> under the wing. I ran over to him, my knees very weak and vomit
> rising in my throat. He might be a killer but he was still an old
> man and half mad. I pulled open his tailed coat and the white shirt
> told me all I needed to know. Three fast spreading stains around
> the heart and lung area turning his snowy white shirt a fancy red.
> His eyes gazed up at me and he looked surprised. I had only got him
> because he was off-balance -- and old man worried about falling badly.
> 'I'm sorry Petite,' I said idiotically. Then I stood up and slung
> the Schmeisser as far as I could." [1]

The way the 'Baby spy' -- as he is called in the book -- kills the old pro,
seems symbolic of the way the mod spy writers put an end to the moral spy
novel.

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[1] Adam Diment, <u>The Great Spy Race</u>, Pan Books (London: 1969), p. 157.

The regret here seems genuine, and it ought to be. While the mod novelists have, indeed, created a new style, the conceptual departure from the stifling traditions of conventional detective and spy literature had been accomplished by the moralists. Of course, one can look at this development in a different way: the moral thriller, in spite of its lonely last stand against the forces of an essentially amoral culture, may be considered a purely transitional movement, providing the bridge between tradition and iconoclasm, playing a kind of Kerensky-role between autocracy and revolution. It is the liberal tragedy in history as well as in literature, that the true reformers are hampered by their own restraints, and, like Marcus Aurelius and the Gironde, as they help destroy the old and help prepare the new, they are themselves destroyed in the process.

How this progression occurs in the spy novel may be best illustrated by a review of how novels representing various stages of development, portray the key figure of the spymaster, and the agent's relationship to him.

Control or the spymaster is, quite plainly, the God of the spy's universe. This fact is explicitly stated by Adam Diment, and appears quite obvious from the way this type of character is represented in a variety of novels. The God-Control figure is also a symbol of the establishment. The agent's attitude toward God and the establishment can be best traced through the passages describing the spymaster.

James Bond's divinity is M, the greying, retired little admiral who runs his outfit with an iron hand and benevolent severity:

"Bond was stopped by the cold eyes. M knew all this already, he knew the odds at Baccarat as well as Bond. That was his job -- knowing the odds at everything, and knowing men, his own and the opposition's."[1]

The passage implies fear and respect of M. And, in fact, Bond never argues with the old man, carries out his orders, occasionally gritting his teeth, but never questioning M's wisdom. The relationship is basically positive here: M demands and inspires loyalty. He controls his universe fully and without apology. He is the last of the absolute gods in spy literature.

Alec Leamas' view of Control is radically different. Here, the god shows signs of exhaustion, failure and hypocrisy. And, significantly, he appears literally diminished to the spy:

"He was really shorter than Leamas remembered him; (Italics by P.G.) otherwise, just the same. The same affected detachment, the same donnish conceits; the same horror of draughts; courteous according to a formula miles removed from Leamas' experience. The same milk-and-water smile, the same elaborate diffidence, the same apologetic adherence to a code of behaviour which he pretended to find ridiculous. The same banality."[2]

The passage hardly needs any comment; the description fits the enlightened liberal's concept of established society and attitude towards religion in the Eisenhower-MacMillan era.

To Droste, the hero of The Devil's Agent, his spymaster is but one of many deities. Droste is a free-lance. But his Mr. Smith does emerge as a kind of American-style God, not so much an absolute power but the representative of a corporation, bland, efficient and supported by immense wealth:

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[1] Ian Fleming, Casino Royale, Pan Books (London: 1962), p. 21.

[2] John le Carré, The Spy Who Came in from the Cold, Pan Books (London: 1965), p. 17.

"The stranger settled in the chair with the tulip cushion and began to scrutinize me with evident but not necessarily hostile interest. He wore an excellently cut light-grey flannel suit: though undoubtedly bought off the peg -- for the two buttons on his sleeves were hopelessly pining away for appropriate button-holes -- this product of the American high-class ready-made garments industry could easily compete with the best European made-to-measure suit." [1]

This particular God is underpinned by a technological society -- synthesized and neutral, the way European's see the American Way. But, his resources are such that he can successfully compete with the made-to-measure theologies of the Old World. Nevertheless this God is nearing his nadir: Droste not only deceives him, but bargains with him shamelessly. And, in the final analysis, he is unable to protect his Agent.

Len Deighton's resident deity, called Dalby in The Ipcress File and Dawlish in his other novels, is a clever man with a streak of nastiness, constantly engaged in a battle of wits with his agent. He is a petty stickler for detail, but he is occasionally helpful to the hero. However, the character is mostly played for laughs:

" 'You are loving it here, of course,' Dalby asked.
'I have a clean mind and a pure heart. I get eight hours of sleep a night. I am a loyal and diligent employee and will attempt every day to be worthy of the trust my paternal employer puts in me.'
'I'll make the jokes,' said Dalby." [2]

This is the ridicule stage towards God and society. The agent feels a tolerant contempt towards them, the bemused, smart-alecky doubtfulness of the hedging agnostic. As we have seen in Chapter VII, Anthony Burgess' Theodorescu is also a God-figure, but with very limited powers. He has no organization behind him, except Miss Devi. And, of course, he is killed by the spy hero at the end of the novel. His case, while somewhat different, also belongs in this pattern.

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[1] Hans Habe, The Devil's Agent, trans. by Ewald Osers, An Avon Book (New York: The Hearst Corporation, 1966), p. 45.

[2] Len Deighton, The Ipcress File, A Panther Book (London: 1965), p. 17.

And, finally, there is Adam Diment's conception of the fallen deity in his novel, The Dolly Dolly Spy, as quoted in an interview with Atticus in The Sunday Times:

> "One of the most interesting characters in the book is his loathsome British secret service chief, Quine, who talks camp and calls McAlpine 'Luv'. 'Quine,' says Diment, 'is God. A sort of non-caring vicious God. He's the Establishment rolled into one. He's all authority.' "[1]

The progression is quite clear: from a full acceptance of traditional authority in Ian Fleming, through the disappointed and critical attitude of le Carré, the neutral acceptance of Habe and the bemused contempt of Deighton, we arrive at the outright hostility and hate of God and the Establishment in Diment.

In marxist terms, the progression could go from bourgeois literature (Bond), through critical realism (le Carré), to socialist realism (Diment).

In essence, the spy story has attained the state of 'proletcult'. It has become a kind of black-and-white anti-establishment pastoral, the proletarian equivalent of the bourgeois Bond epic.

It is no accident that the terminology I'm using here is derived from the marxist experience. While no true marxist would accept the hedonistic Dolly Dolly Spy as a positive hero of the socialist-realist school, he is, in fact, closer to the heart of the revolutionary young generation than any other hero the spy genre has produced. His attitudes are those of the New Left, subversive towards established values, elite-oriented and Machiavellian, fearless in exploiting the weaknesses of the current system, and essentially fighting it from within.

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[1]Adam Diment, The Dolly Dolly Spy, Pan Books (Toronto: 1968), p. outside back cover.

The mod spy story, due to its adherence to the new social, cultural and generational trends, seems destined to survive into the 1970's. It is doubtful, however, that the moral spy novel will be able to achieve more success.

The newly developed mod offspring of the genre is, in plot and structure and in its vivid details of sex and violence, a continuation of the Bond epic. The differences between the mods and the Bond stories are due mainly to the influence of the moral spy story: these are the antagonistic attitude towards authority, the still-surviving occasional moralizing (although fleeting and inconsequential), and, in a negative sense, the positioning of older characters.

Gone is the aging, tired hero; the 'last assignment' syndrome; the double-betrayal and the ultimate moral victory at the expense of the hero's life. Remarkable, too, is the change of scenery: from the austere climates of the le Carré story, the mod spy novel has returned to the lush, tropical climate of the Bond novels: Japan, Spain, the South of France, the West Indies.

The new climate represents a renewed emphasis on form, style, and colour -- a set of esthetic criteria austerely controlled in the moral spy novel.

Perhaps the best example for the return of the artifice and the simultaneous abandonment of realism is a brief outline of Adam Diment's 1968 novel, The Great Spy Race:

Philip McAlpine, an agent for Dept.6 NC/NAC, Neutral and Non-aligned Countries, is entered in The Great Spy Race by his boss, 'Quine the swine'. The race is the idea of a Mr. Peters, retired super-spy who now lives in sinful luxury on a tropical island. The race is for the title of the world's greatest spy, held by Mr. Peters. McAlpine enters the competition with spies from Russia, the U.S., France, Israel, etc. The prize is the entire list of Red-Chinese

agents in the Far East, plus a sum of money. However, Mr. Peters bans the
Red Chinese from entering because of the cruel things the Red Guards had
done with an old friend of his.

McAlpine is blackmailed by his boss to enter, and is also being shadowed
by another British agent who is to make sure that if McAlpine wins, he hands
over the prize to the secret service. McAlpine is an independent spirit,
serving the department only because they have damaging evidence against him
on a drug charge.

The global treasure hunt begins, and after a hair-raising set of
adventures -- including his finding the clue to the next stage of the race
scribbled on the inside of a girl's thigh, McAlpine acquires the microfilmed
list of Chinese agents. This is, in turn, destroyed by fire when he crashes
a plane in Africa. However, he does earn the prize money for the secret service
(thereby helping the British balance-of-payment problem), and is allowed to go
on leave to smoke pot peacefully with his latest girlfriend.

The Great Spy Race, in spite of its gratuituous plot, does not lack
symbolic action. We have recounted previously the shooting of 'Petite,' the
old spy. The idea of the race itself -- the mod spy finally winning the title
from the retired Mr. Peters -- appears to have a 'changing-of-the-guard'
significance. The novel is also a well-presented rationale of the 'new morality'
-- or amorality -- reflecting the elitistic attitudes of the mod generation,
an elite, incidentally, not produced by social class of achievement, but by the
ability to experiment with the self and a sense of style or élan, a disregard
for traditional morality and the ability to keep one's 'cool' under all
circumstances.

McAlpine is a new culture hero, the first of the genre not tainted
-- or not ennobled -- whichever way one prefers it, by the experience of
the Second World War. He also remains uncorrupted by whatever experience
he goes through -- his regrets are momentary, and at the end he emerges
without any discernible signs of character development.

He accepts the universe as absurd and considers all structures irrelevant
or downright harmful -- e.g. his relationship with Quine.

His appearance -- and success -- completes the decline of the post-war
moral spy after a relatively brief period of flourishing.

As I have stated before, the new, amoral spy novel, as represented by
Deighton and Diment -- as well as Martin Waddell, Noel Behn, etc. -- have
dispensed with any sense of reality in order to develop an artifice of some
magnitude.

By using the term 'artifice' I imply no value judgment. The artifice we
have seen operating in The Great Spy Race may very well reflect the reality of
its period. The amoral spy in an absurd universe, communicating in surrealistic
prose, is a viable culture hero, and through him, the spy genre may have assured
its survival in the 'Age of Aquarius'.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION

By virtue of its "preoccupation with the problematic" [1], its stark

realism, lack of excessive physical detail, universal-historical concern,

alternating obscurity and 'high relief', and its multiplicity of meanings,

we have classified the Durenmatt-le Carré school of thrillers as a Judeo-

Christian cultural phenomenon.

Our survey of the general cultural tendencies of the period in which

this particular school reached its zenith, indicated that the 'mainstreams'

of literature and art followed contrary, Greco-Roman concepts at the same time.

We have defined Greco-Roman concepts in terms of their primarily esthetic

preoccupations, resulting in amoral tendencies, the separation of styles, fully

externalized, freely expressed and unmistakable meanings, and their emphasis

on artifice.

From the clash of cultural influences in the wake of the brief, but

widespread popular success of the 'moral thriller', we have concluded that

this genre represented a powerful but doomed 'rearguard' action against an

ascending, new world view.

We have also sought parallels of similar situations in literary history,

and by their evidence concluded that cultural change occurs in a cyclical pattern,

and that the 1960's appear to have been a period in which the revolution of such

cycles were particularly pronounced.

In an effort to define what we have been alternately calling the

Durenmatt-le Carre school, the moral spy thriller or the spy novel of the 1960's,

we have reached back to the conventional detective story as the prime precursor

of our subject genre.

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[1]Cf. Supra., Chapter IV., p. 57.

From this retrospective survey and from an analysis of transitional stages between the conventional detective story and the moral spy novel, we have concluded that in essence, the detective story was an exercise in technique in a moral universe, as opposed to the spy novel of the 1960's, an exercise in morality in a technological universe.

Through the individual authors of the transitional period, namely Eric Ambler, J.B. Priestley and Graham Greene, we have traced some of the more interesting themes which appear to have influenced the spy novel of the 1960's.

In a chapter devoted to each, we have analyzed the attitudes, themes and structure of the works of Friedrich Durenmatt and John le Carré, whose works represent the highest stage of development of the genre.

Following these chapters, we have surveyed a number of authors whose themes and preoccupations suggest a positive relationship with those of Durenmatt and le Carré.

In the last chapter we have demonstrated the decline of the moral spy story through several authors whose works represent a negative or parodying attitude toward the moral spy novel, attributing this attitude to a number of factors, including the cultural revolution and generational conflict in effect during the latter part of the 1960's.

Throughout this development, our main objective has been to isolate and define a set of criteria which, if applied to a significant number of authors and works, constitutes a recognizable literary movement.

From the evidence gathered and analyzed, it appears that such a movement has, in fact, existed throughout the 1960's.

In the course of this study, out of a necessity to place the phenomena investigated in proper perspective, we have frequently crossed the boundaries of literary criticism, collecting evidence as well as formulating hypotheses in a number of related fields.

In the 1960's we had witnessed the destruction of a number of seemingly well-established structures, and the consequent need for new ones. Within the framework of literary criticism, this may well mean the necessity to explore and inter-relate various and hitherto artificially segregated facets of culture. We have done so in the course of this thesis, seeking significant relationships between the literary genre and politics, sociology, communications economics, etc.

We have done so because it appears that close textual analysis, while possibly the most objective method available in literary criticism today, fails to relate literature to the broader context of contemporary existence, as well as restricting the opportunities for evaluation and moralizing.

We have intended to do both because of our feeling that the reading public and today's youth demand critical principles which are relevant to the actual historical and cultural context of the times.

Our field of exploration is popular literature. Such a literature cannot be studied in isolation. While recognizing that lack of isolation from external phenomena may result in reduced objectivity, we must take into consideration that this very objectivity may become increasingly irrelevant in today's and tomorrow's cultural context.

The discovery and evaluation of how literary phenomena relate to society and culture necessitates a vantage point, a set of biases and the willingness to form hypotheses. While the broadening of the terms of reference of an exploratory discipline may bring about a proportionate reduction in the mass of evidence offered to substantiate each minor particle, this is more than compensated by the possibility of structuring a comprehensive whole.

Naturally, even within the terms of these objectives, many opportunities have been missed -- by choice, shortage of space or oversight. We have not fully explored all the facets of symbolism inherent in the moral spy novel. Having gone into the basic theme of God and man's relationship and its manifold ambiguities as presented by most of the books, we could have further explored the possibility of the spy as symbol of the writer: the writer and the spy are creatures akin, dealing with information, communicating in code, working, to all intents and purposes, behind enemy lines, subversive activists within the confines of a hostile environment. As portrayed by many of these novels, the agent is essentially a creative being, trying to discard his establishment-imposed burdens, an underground hero, distantly related to Melville's and Mann's confidence men, or Fitzgerald's Gatsby.

Among the many unexplored avenues, we could have contrasted the spy novel's earnest intention to portray reality and its essentially schematic mold and ritualistic structure.

And yet, the answer to such a portentous question may be shockingly simple: who is to deny that a major portion of reality consists of ritual, and that, through reductio ad absurdum, we find a game in the core of most human activity, and that the game, whatever context it is played in, has universal validity if it is played in earnest, and for existential stakes:

> " 'Sugar, calling Baker Love,' I said.
> 'Baker Love, loud and clear. Go ahead, over,' Bob answered
> immediately, as I hoped he would.
> I said, 'Sugar. Take cash and proceed immediately to Rendezvous
> figures two. Is that Roger? Sugar over.'
> 'Roger Wilco,' said Bob and I heard him start the motor before
> he switched off.
> 'Rendezvous two ... Roger Wilco. You are like a lot of kids,'
> said Rita scornfully." [1]

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[1]Len Deighton, Only When I Larf, (London: Sphere Books Ltd., 1968), p. 247.

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