

Graham Greene, John Le Carre & Co: The British Espionage Novel and the Cambridge Five

The relationship between spies and traitors and storytellers has always been a fascinating one. With the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 intelligence services in Moscow and London became frontline forces in an ideological and political game of cat-and-mouse. And the most puzzling and written about figures were the “Cambridge Five.” A recent non-fiction writer, Richard Davenport-Hines, has even suggested that they were the starting point in a line that leads to Brexit!

This course will consider the background to the great novels of espionage in the Cold War era, including a review of the origins of the Cambridge Five and their actual careers. While we will concentrate on Graham Greene and John LeCarre, John Banville and Edward Wilson, we will also glance at John Buchan, Somerset Maugham, Philip Kerr, and Ian Fleming. Of course the story would not be complete without looking at some American reactions and interplay – for as it is clear some of the motives for the Cambridge Five was wrapped up in the fight against Hitler but also a warped feeling that they were protecting Europe against an American “Invasion.” During World War II the sense that the sun was setting -- or perhaps going behind a cloud, at least – permeated British calculations. As Harold MacMillan put it in the middle of the war, “We, my dear Crossman, are Greeks in this American empire. You will find the Americans much as the Greeks found the Romans – great big vulgar, bustling people, more vigorous than we are and also more idle, with more unspoiled virtues, but also more corrupt. “

A particularly interesting relationship between British Intelligence and its American counterpart CIA came into play with biggest of the Cambridge Five, Kim Philby, and his former student, James Angleton, later a key figure in the CIA.. Indeed, the fallout from their relationship nearly turned the CIA upside down.

We will start off in the first class with a discussion of Graham Greene’s *Quiet American*, because It encapsulates many themes discussed above, and because it has had strong reactions and political significance both as a novel and in two very different film versions. (One in 1958, and one in 2002 that you can easily stream on Netflix.) George W. Bush even made it central in a speech defending the Iraq War in 2006.

From there we will look at pre-World War II books – all the way back to Henry James’s surprising *Princess Casamassima*, and Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, The other books we will discuss in depth in the next weeks are::

Graham Greene, *The Third Man* and *The Human Condition*.

John Le Carre, *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* and *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier Spy*.

John Banville, *The Untouchable*

Edward Wilson, *A Very British Ending* and *The Whitehall Mandarin*

All these authors except Banville served in intelligence services during World War II and the Cold War, and all are available on Amazon. A fascinating book by their KGB controller is Yuri Modi, *My Five Cambridge Friends*. This is a little harder to find, but well worth the effort.

Leader: Lloyd Gardner is Charles and Mary Beard Professor of History Emeritus at Rutgers University. He is the author of 15 books on American Foreign Policy; his most recent book is *The War on Leakers*.

Thursdays: 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., 8 weeks: September 26 through November 14

Location: Presbyterian Church of Lawrenceville, Maximum 34 seats