

**COUNTERINTELLIGENCE LITERATURE:
COLD WAR AMERICAN ESPIONAGE AND POSTMODERN FICITON**

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ABSTRACT

This project examines the rise of narratives about the American intelligence community in the mid- to late-twentieth century. In particular, I define a genre that I term counterintelligence literature, works of fiction by postmodernist authors that seek to interrupt the exchange of ideas between the burgeoning intelligence community and the body of popular narratives celebrating its policies. By tracing how canonical authors like Don DeLillo, Ralph Ellison, Joan Didion, and John Barth manipulate the tropes of popular narratives to critique midcentury interventionist foreign policy and the developing national security state, this project reveals the role that popular fiction plays in influencing public opinion and the potential for literature to pose timely political challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Every visitor to the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency passes a marble wall bearing a simple inscription, a line that the CIA sometimes calls its unofficial motto: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” The inscription, taken from the Gospel of John, was chosen by Allen Dulles, one of the men most responsible for shaping the early CIA, and it says much about his influential vision of an American intelligence community. The motto declared that the new American intelligence community was exceptionally equipped to uncover the absolute Truth of any matter, following a long tradition of American institutions using Biblical language to justify their vision of their place in the world. The freedom the CIA promised through this motto was of course not just an abstract concept, but an articulation of the fundamental rights that the United States took it upon itself to defend internationally—opposition to totalitarian governments of any kind, particularly to Soviet communism. If the United States were the good guys, the ones with the divine commitment to truth, then any enemy of freedom was figured as not just a threat to Americans, but fundamentally evil. This binary division and the Agency’s ultimate inability to live up to its heroic self-image encapsulate the CIA’s ultimate failure to present itself as a force for good throughout the cold war decades. In order to give the truth to the world that would make all people free, the American intelligence community necessarily had to engage in secret, often extralegal activity. But it would take time for the Agency, which excelled in early years at promoting Dulles’s romantic portrait, to come under enough scrutiny for this irony to become widely recognized.

This project undertakes the first comprehensive study of American cold war fiction about intelligence work, emphasizing the relationship between the massive body of popular tales produced and consumed across all media and the major authors of the literary postmodernist

canon. Popular intelligence narratives, as I term them, typically follow the exploits of American operatives as they successfully carry out missions to thwart enemies of the country, reassuring the reader or viewer that intelligence work is necessary and effective. Popular American intelligence narratives both echo governmental rhetoric about the intelligence community's purpose and provide new arguments for its defense that intelligence operatives in turn used to justify their work. Intelligence narratives thus participate in a dialogue with the actual intelligence community that ultimately reinforces the importance of organizations like the CIA and of the new interventionist philosophy that came to dominate American foreign policy after World War II.

However, within the broad scope of intelligence narratives is a smaller group of works by postmodern novelists that I term counterintelligence literature, the main subject of this project. Counterintelligence literature, I argue, works to interrupt the complicity between intelligence fiction and governmental narratives, subversively using the familiar tropes and narrative structures of the popular genre in order to cast doubt on the entire enterprise of intelligence work and American postwar interventionism. The key difference between the popular intelligence narratives, which is the major concern of my opening chapter, and postmodernist counterintelligence literature, the focus of the subsequent chapters, is that the first group believes that intelligence can be effectively gathered and analyzed by American operatives, while the latter, with its disbelief in a stable, knowable history made up of discrete facts, fundamentally casts doubt on the whole enterprise. The postmodernist authors of counterintelligence fiction are certainly not arguing for the overthrow of the U.S. government, but all are advocating to curtail its sudden reliance on the new intelligence community and the simultaneous commitment to defending freedom at any cost all over the world. The rapid build-up of intelligence agencies in

the immediate aftermath of World War II facilitated interventionist foreign policy by giving government leaders a way to commit resources and intervene in global events without disclosing the extent of their involvement. The political affiliations of the postmodernist authors discussed in this project vary (though they tend to be shades of leftist), but all viewed the new intelligence community as a threat because of its unknown scope and its ill-defined powers. Recognizing the interplay between popular fiction and governmental rhetoric, I argue that these authors disruptively manipulated the tropes intelligence fiction to craft counternarratives that warn against unlimited interventionism and domestic surveillance.

The term counterintelligence literature is thus suggestive in that it provides new, productive links between a few well-observed phenomena: postmodernist art's play with genres, the overlap between postwar American literature and intelligence work, and the participation of canonical postmodernist authors in various New Left movements. Each of these elements has been individually explored in other studies, but this project seeks to bring these questions about literary postmodernism, the creation of the American intelligence community (whose ranks were largely drawn from Ivy League English departments), and the tendency of our most celebrated metafictionists to be highly critical of their government. Counterintelligence is the branch of intelligence work that deals with infiltrating and undermining enemy operations, as well as with protecting their own ranks from enemy counterintelligence. All of this, of course, is itself intelligence work in service of a given agency, so counterintelligence is not simply opposed to intelligence work. The act of disguising oneself, working within enemy territory to destabilize their operations, provides a new way to describe the way that postmodernist authors take up elements of popular culture and repurpose them to create art with strikingly different messages about the state of contemporary society.

In addition to the complementary nature of intelligence and counterintelligence, I have several reasons to prefer the term intelligence fiction, or intelligence literature, to similar phrases like spy stories or espionage fiction. First of all, former members of organizations like the CIA and historical scholars overwhelmingly use phrases like “the intelligence community” and “intelligence work.” Since this project is frequently interested in official government rhetoric, it makes sense to retain the language this community uses to describe itself. Second, many fictional texts that take up the nest of anxieties around the rise of the American intelligence community deal with characters other than a central operative or group of operatives that can be labeled a “spy” uncomplicatedly. Often these texts follow outsiders to the intelligence community who are drawn into the world of international espionage or serve as its unwitting pawns. Finally, and most importantly, this project is concerned with the concept of intelligence—how it is gathered and produced, what distinguishes it from fact or information—more than the apparatus or even the effect of espionage. Putting intelligence at the center of my terminology reinforces my commitment to this line of inquiry.

In the course of examining counterintelligence literature’s relationship to governmental narratives, I have had to grapple with the question of literature’s political efficacy. Since Frederic Jameson’s famous declaration that all art in the age of global capitalism represents “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense,” critics and practitioners of literary postmodernism have argued over whether any artistic production can do anything to regulate the behavior of corporations or governments working on a scale unknown before the twentieth century (9). Indeed, this question is particularly relevant when discussing bodies like the CIA, which are arguably unknown in scope and impossible to effectively, permanently regulate. Surely, no individual work discussed in this project did much to harm the

operations of the CIA, and few of the novels discussed in Chapters 2 to 5 attained the popularity of most of the films and television shows celebrating intelligence work. Nonetheless, as I hope this project will indicate, there is something important in the entire body of counterintelligence literature produced in the cold war decades, an alternate narrative that has proved more lasting than many of the now-forgotten texts that were so avidly consumed in these decades. The fact that nearly all of our most celebrated postmodernist authors produced at least one novel explicitly dealing with the intelligence community, and that not one of them is uncritical of American foreign policy, is an odd set of facts that invites more exploration. Throughout this project, I investigate the value of texts that didn't have an immediate impact on the object of its critique, suggesting that these works become increasingly important as we continue to assess literary postmodernism and the role that literature plays in dealing with global political issues.

While this project is the first to focus on American fiction across media relating to intelligence work in the cold war decades, there are a number of scholarly works that have been foundational and allowed me to develop this concentrated study. Timothy Melley's *The Covert Sphere* (2012) and Michael Kackman's *Citizen Spy* (2005) are the two most focused extant studies of American espionage fiction. I'm particularly indebted to Melley, as I build my project from his core theory that fiction is necessary to understand public myths about the intelligence community because it is so difficult to find reliable historical information about American covert activities. However, while Melley analyzes most high postmodernist literary authors, as well as a small sampling of films and a few video games, there is very little mention on the whole of popular American spy narratives. This project's focus on the cold war years, rather than Melley's coverage of fiction until the present, allows for more analysis of popular narratives and more attention to postmodern artists' relationship to it. Kackman's work is vital as a work from a

parallel discipline—film and media studies—that provides a useful vocabulary for how to talk about texts not typically treated in traditional literary studies projects. Kackman is one of the only scholars who has devoted serious, sustained attention to popular American intelligence narratives. Although his work exclusively analyzes television, his book is another excellent model for how to relate the political climate of a given historical moment to that era’s popular fiction. Alan Nadel’s *Containment Culture* (1995) is an invaluable portrait of American cold war culture and the narratives that defined it. His long chapter on the role of intelligence narratives during the Kennedy era, especially its serious attention to popular narratives, informed my understanding of the relationship between popular artists and the formation of governmental policy.¹

Finally, I have benefited from the work of historians who are interested in the ways in which American intelligence work intersected with fictional and academic production, particularly Frances Stonor Saunders’s *The Cultural Cold War* and Robin Winks’s *Cloak and Gown*. Saunders’ groundbreaking study was the first full discussion of the way the CIA influenced cultural production through the Congress of Cultural Freedom and similar programs, paying artists to produce work that would align with American democratic ideals. While her project is more of a historical analysis than a work of literary criticism, Saunders nonetheless usefully addresses fictional production and historicizes the role the CIA played in influencing public opinion about intelligence work.² Winks’s thorough account of the relationship between the early CIA and Yale University complements this project’s analysis of the interdependence of the intelligence community and fictional narratives and provided invaluable information about the key leaders of the intelligence community who defined its purpose and public image.

In order to show how the division between intelligence and counterintelligence fiction reflected a growing rift in the cultural discourse around the American intelligence community, this project will tell many stories: the history of the American intelligence community as it rapidly grew in the mid-twentieth century, and how its internal divisions led to PR fiascos that invited Congressional scrutiny; the simultaneous rise of postmodernism first in various academic discourses and then in wider American popular culture; and the story of postwar American literature, fiction that draws from, or pointedly ignores, this history and aesthetic tradition, and the varying levels of impact individual works had on a society that was particularly in flux. What follows is an overview of these stories, which subsequent chapters will underline key aspects of them as necessary.

A Concise History of the American Intelligence Community

The bombing of Pearl Harbor marked the beginning of a new era in American foreign policy. Pushing the country into active involvement in the Second World War, the unexpected attack also convinced many American leaders that they needed better strategic intelligence capabilities. As American troops and airpower were increasingly deployed to Europe and scientists were enlisted to create greater, more efficient weapons, the first formal American intelligence agency was also created. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) was a mix of military men and Ivy League academics, an odd pairing that would create tension in the American intelligence community as it developed over the next several decades. During the war, OSS men learned British and French intelligence procedures, but also developed their own distinctly American identity as eager, adventurous operatives willing to develop and pull off outlandish plans. The head of the OSS, Major General William Donovan, was particularly enamored with the romantic image of the spy, earning the name “Wild Bill” for the grandiosity of his operations.

After World War II ended, President Truman was reluctant to keep an intelligence agency in peacetime that was created to be a tool of war. He disbanded the OSS almost immediately, but the memory of Pearl Harbor and the realization that, as Donovan put it, the U.S. was the only world leader without an established intelligence community, pointed to the need to fill the void with something. The need to anticipate global events seemed particularly urgent as the United States eyed the Soviet Union, the wartime alliance already on shaky ground as Europe worried about the large number of Soviet armed forces on its borders. Intelligence was also sure to play a larger role in a world with nuclear weapons: in the new geopolitical landscape that historian Adrian Lewis terms “artificial limited war,” the U.S. could not use all of its weapons and tactics as they did in total war, and it became more critical to analyze other forces’ intentions and capabilities to determine an appropriate response. Various presidential administrations would use the threat of the bomb or military buildup in other weapons types as foreign policy negotiating tools, but oftentimes covert rather than overt aggression was utilized. Every administration would struggle to devise an appropriate strategy to combat the Soviet Union without resorting to nuclear war, but the new American intelligence community always played a prominent role.

The postwar Truman administration made a series of decisions that would fundamentally define foreign policy throughout the cold war decades, creating what we now know as the national security state³ and declaring the United States a prominent world power. These decisions were enormously influenced, at least at the outset, by the ideas of George Kennan, one of the country’s first “Soviet experts.” Kennan first articulated the idea of containment in 1946 in a famously long telegraph sent from Moscow when he was asked to share his views on the nature of the Soviet threat. He elaborated on the term a year later in a *Foreign Affairs* article titled “The Sources of Soviet Conduct.” In these documents, Kennan characterized the Soviet Union as a

very serious force that was totalitarian and interested in aggressively expanding its sphere of influence. He also argued that there was no way to directly combat them or roll back the influence they had already established Eastern Europe and Asia; rather, the United States had a responsibility to take a hard line and prevent them from gaining any further geopolitical power.

Kennan's ideas were taken up by other government advisees and leaders. Containment was the main theme of the address to Congress that has come to be known as the Truman Doctrine, and was expanded upon again in NSC-68, a document drawn up by a committee of advisors in 1950 that was to define the new national security policy.⁴ These documents, each a little more extreme than the last, committed the United States to an interventionist role in international affairs, over the protests of those who believed that isolationism, not manifest destiny, was the mythology that most defined the American way of life.⁵ Acknowledging the rapid decline of the British empire, the Truman administration declared America to be the only world power capable of combating the Soviet Union, which was declared to be nothing short of terrorists taking advantage of the postwar devastation of Europe.

But by the mid-twentieth century, a few historical developments made such a declaration particularly dangerous. First, the development of advanced airpower and long-range missiles negated the geographic protections on which the United States had traditionally relied. So, when the American government swore to protect nations around the globe, they were doing so from a position of unprecedented vulnerability.⁶ Second, new mass communication technologies made global public opinion a greater factor than ever in considerations of how to conduct war. This meant that the decision to use nuclear weapons or send military forces to meddle in other countries' wars bore a cost beyond that of human life: the U.S. had to maintain its new image of strength in the face of the Soviet threat without the world condemning them for taking measures

too extreme, like a preemptive nuclear strike. Finally, an extension of the previous two changes, the responsibility of nuclear weapons forced the United States (and soon, the Soviet Union) to engage in limited war. Throughout the cold war decades, both the Soviet Union and the United States would build up different aspects of their military stockpiles in an ongoing attempt to best the other side's capabilities, but the bulk of these weapons—which far exceeded the power it would take to devastate the other side—could never be used.

In part to compensate for the practical uselessness of these military arsenals, the U.S. developed covert operations that provided a valuable alternative to threats of nuclear force. One of the many outcomes⁷ of the 1947 National Security Act was the creation of the Central Intelligence Agency, the successor to the OSS that had been disbanded at the end of the war. Truman had expressed concern about keeping a peacetime intelligence agency, but the rising Soviet threat, the new awareness of American vulnerability, and his administration's declaration that the U.S. would be an active world leader necessitated a way to reliably follow and anticipate geopolitical developments. The issue wasn't disagreement over the necessity for an intelligence community, but conflicting opinions on its scope and role, splits between the new CIA and other government agencies, and competing visions within the intelligence community itself all fostered confusion and conflict in these new agencies from the outset. The vague wording of the few relevant sentences in the National Security Act left plenty of room for these disagreements, and these initial divisions would lead to repetitive crises over the cold war decades about what role America in general and the intelligence community in particular would play in global affairs.

The heart of these splits came down to one question: Was the American intelligence community primarily engaged in espionage, or in covert operations? Espionage entailed the gathering and analysis of information, which might involve reading public sources, intercepting

enemy communications and breaking their codes, or running agents who would be able to provide verbal accounts of situations in Soviet-controlled areas. So, while espionage sometimes involved active operations, ultimately the goal was always analyzing large bodies of data gathered from different types of sources to produce intelligence reports useful for policymakers—not acting on that intelligence. Covert operations went beyond these measures and entailed propaganda warfare, providing financial support to anti-communist political groups, and more violent paramilitary ventures that sought to destabilize or overthrow rulers perceived as unsympathetic to U.S. interests. Advocates of extending CIA activities into the realm of covert operations argued that the only way to fight Soviet forces was to match their aggression, pointing to the invasion of the Ukraine and the brutal repression of revolt in East Berlin after the death of Stalin as reasons to fight with equal commitment. Plus, American operatives struggled to gather notable intelligence in the closed Soviet system; advocates of using more militaristic means underlined this limitation by pointing to the advantage enemy intelligence officers had in their open access to the American free press. Other prominent voices argued that covert operations were risky, expensive, often backfired, and were morally unsound. They worried that using fundamentally undemocratic methods—operating without the consent of Congress or the knowledge of the American or international public—could only endanger democracy everywhere. Questions about secrecy's role in a democracy, the necessity of using unscrupulous means to achieve the U.S. government's new international mission, and the motivations of advocates for covert operations would haunt the CIA throughout the cold war decades, rising to a fever pitch at certain crisis points.

There is a large body of scholarship detailing the history of the CIA and other intelligence agencies, as far as historians can know it.⁸ It's not pertinent to this project to relate

all of that history here, and parts of the intelligence community's complex history will be detailed in later chapters.⁹ Generally, historians break the history of the CIA during the cold war decades into three eras: the early years, from 1947-1961, in which there were no great public intelligence failures and presidential administrations increasingly relied on the Agency's covert operations branch; the 1960s and early 1970s, in which notable failures like the botched Bay of Pigs operation and significant intelligence miscalculations in Vietnam led both policymakers and the American public to doubt the intelligence community's ability; and 1974 on, when journalists and disgruntled operatives-turned-memoirists exposed illegal CIA operations, leading to the public Congressional investigations of the intelligence community that curtailed the scope of their operations. This trajectory is generally characterized as the intelligence community's fall from grace, although as I discuss in this project's first chapter, the actual extent of the Congressional trials' limitations on covert agencies is debatable, and at any rate the Reagan administration used the covert operations branch of the CIA frequently. But the increased public doubt about the efficacy and trustworthiness of the intelligence community is pertinent to this project, as it affected the way that popular intelligence fictions were written.

The Wilderness of Mirrors: Counterintelligence and Postmodernism in Postwar America

Counterintelligence was part of the fabric of the CIA from its earliest days, charged with two tasks: penetrating enemy intelligence networks and protecting the American intelligence community from enemy penetration. So, counterintelligence has a foot in both the covert operations and espionage functions of the CIA, both part and overseer of the operations of other branches. American counterintelligence was largely created by one operative, James Jesus Angleton, a figure who serves as an odd intersection of many subjects this project examines.¹⁰ While a student at Yale, Angleton created the little magazine *Furioso*, which published poems by

the likes of Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and e e cummings. Angleton would go on to become personal friends with each of these poets, and later H.D.'s daughter Perdita would serve as his secretary at his first intelligence posting in the wartime OSS. One of Angleton's biographers goes so far as to call him "a minor modernist figure" (Holzman 32). His obsession with the modernists would earn him the codename The Poet and would exert an immense influence on his abstract, hyper-intellectual way of speaking. Described by many as a genius, Angleton also drew the scorn of more practical CIA men who believed him to be a ridiculous paranoid. It's true that as head of CIA counterintelligence, Angleton learned to be distrustful of more or less everyone.

Angleton, as head of CI, would assess the legitimacy of Soviet defectors, run propaganda and disinformation campaigns in enemy territories, and attempt to penetrate enemy intelligence agencies, all the while alert to possible security breaches within the CIA. An anecdote that nicely sums up the various attitudes his odd, potentially genius way of thinking inspired in his colleagues was the case of the KGB operative Anatoliy Golitsyn, who defected to the West in 1961. Golitsyn told interrogators that there was a mole somewhere in the highest tiers of American intelligence, and when several other pieces of intelligence that he shared were verified and useful, many in the CIA believed that Golitsyn was an asset of unprecedented worth. He did not have many specifics about the supposed American mole, so his charge was not easily acted upon, but Angleton immediately started to go through all the possibilities. The few extra details Golitsyn offered about the mole's station and what information he had leaked did not obviously match any American operative.

Here, Angleton's thoroughness, verging on incurable paranoia, blossomed. Golitsyn, he reasoned, could be telling the truth, and the mole was just clever enough to always be out of reach. Or, Golitsyn was a Soviet disinformation agent, sent to sow discord among the highest

officers of the CIA. *Or*, Golitsyn believed he was telling the truth, but was unknowingly given disinformation by even more powerful Soviet officers who knew he was going to defect, making him an even more convincing ploy. At this point, the speculation around Golitsyn's intentions reaches a height that any writer of metafiction would envy: a few years after Golitsyn's interrogation, another KGB operative, Yuri Nosenko, defected and claimed that Golitsyn was indeed a disinformation agent—but then, Golitsyn had said from day one that the Soviets would surely send agents after him to try to discredit his information. Who was the liar? What were the risks involved in discounting the word of either or both supposed defectors? Although most were inclined to believe Nosenko, Angleton ultimately could never discount the possibility that Golitsyn was legitimate and there was indeed a traitor in the highest ranks of the CIA. The case of Kim Philby, the infamous British counterintelligence leader who was revealed to be part of the Cambridge Five spy ring, was still a fresh memory as the CIA interrogated Golitsyn and Nosenko. Angleton had considered Philby a close friend, and the effect this betrayal had on his already suspicious nature led him to maintain that the mole was real until his final troubled days in the Agency.¹¹

Angleton's links to the literary world and his distrust of every seemingly solid fact isolated him in the intelligence community but align him with many of the postmodernist artists that this project examines. His oft-quoted description of counterintelligence as navigating “a wilderness of mirrors”¹² is particularly resonant with many theories of postmodern depthlessness and intertextuality. Many scholars and artists have observed that the work of an intelligence operative is similar to the work of an author: both involve making and maintaining fictions, stories about one's identity and purpose that have to be told with consistently convincing detail. The operative usually supports his tales with pieces of paper, again reinforcing their link to

writers. Fewer scholars have observed the similarity between the intelligence analyst and the scholar: both figures pore over sets of documents that tell an incomplete story and attempt to distill key takeaways from the mass of facts about the past. Analysts and scholars must synthesize perspectives, accounting for various kinds of bias or deception, and craft a historical narrative that is somehow instructive for readers in the present. If the operative and the analyst are like these academic figures, then what does it mean that right as the former were coming into their own as a distinct American group, the latter were breaking from their traditional roles and suddenly questioning what the influential historian E.H. Carr termed “the cult of facts”?

While postmodernism is one of the more contested terms in literary criticism, I will here lay out a few core qualities that I think of as central to this body of thought. As the prefix suggests, the movement is both a sequel and a challenge to the tenets of modernism. Moving on from the modernist focus on psychological response to crisis, postmodernism grants no importance to the individual mind or the supposedly critical event. Postmodernist thinkers instead emphasize the repetitions and wholesale reproductions in culture, interacting with a globalized world rather than singular central places or events. Postmodernism is engaged with decentering what is traditionally held to be important, adding a multiplicity of perspectives and questioning the foundations of the way humans think and communicate. This foundational questioning is framed as play, rather than the modernists’ self-serious reflections on societal crises

Postmodernism of course was not just a literary movement, but a wider process of questioning human knowledge that affected other academic fields and wider American culture. Historians particularly began to question how they made meaning out of the mists of the past. Notable works by Hayden White and E. H. Carr asked fundamental questions about the ways

that historical narratives are constructed, laying the groundwork for the recovery and revisionist historical work that is standard today. At their most extreme, these theories of how knowledge is generated are at odds with the assumptions that an intelligence operative must make to complete their work. This is not to say that intelligence analysts do not examine an issue from multiple sides or interrogate the validity of a source—for again, analysts are not unlike scholars. But at a certain point, the questioning has to stop, and a report must be generated, and in the mid-twentieth century, the decisions made based on those intelligence briefings enabled decisive overt or covert military action. The development of postcolonial histories—for instance, Edward Said’s *Orientalism*, published in 1978—fundamentally contradicts the world powers’ meddling in less powerful nations, often figured as treating the world like a game board, essentially denying the agency of the peoples whose voices postmodernist scholars were actively recovering. In one of the foundational texts defining American intelligence work, CIA operative Sherman Kent writes, “the knowledge which strategic intelligence must produce deserves a more forbidding adjective than ‘useful.’ You should call it the knowledge *vital for national survival*” (vii, emphasis in original). But the intelligence that enabled the U.S. to thrive of course often threatened the wellbeing of the countries in which they operated, with South American and Middle Eastern countries particularly harmed by covert meddling in elections and financial developments.

In *The Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon argues that fiction writers can take part in the recovery work of historians by crafting what she terms historiographic metafiction, narratives which both give voice to marginalized historical perspectives and draw attention to their nature as a constructed, and so imperfect, texts. In doing so, she offers a way to consider postmodernist fiction politically important, perhaps just as much so as nonfictional revisions to

the historical record. The work that I term counterintelligence literature largely falls under the umbrella of Hutcheon's larger term, and I agree with Timothy Melley's suggestion that fiction is particularly important to discussions of the intelligence community, as "it is illegal to disclose state secrets but not illegal to write espionage fiction" (10). By crafting narratives about intelligence analysts and operatives who somehow fail to carry out their work, authors of counterintelligence fiction created counternarratives to dominant fictions of unstoppable U.S. agents, narratives which were particularly important given the impossibility or illegality of exposing stories about actual American intelligence agencies. Counterintelligence literature thus worked to expose the shortcomings of the American intelligence community and the interventionist, exceptionalist ideology that enabled its continued operation.

American (Counter)Intelligence Literature

Given the divide I've identified between postmodernist thought and the ideology of the cold war American intelligence community, this project examines how postmodernist fiction writers crafted narratives about intelligence work that cast doubt on its efficacy and discouraged American leaders and citizens from continuing to rely on it as a primary tool for enacting interventionist foreign policy. Again, while this project's authors do not hold any uniform public opinions, all were aligned with the postmodernist movement and were critical of the extent to which the American government was using its new intelligence agencies to enforce its control both domestically and internationally. The chapters that follow take up the following questions: How do postmodernist authors, who do not believe in Truth or History or the primacy of an individual nation, write stories about figures who *have* to believe in those concepts in order to complete their work? What elements do these writers draw from popular intelligence fictions that have no such existential concerns, and how are these new stories compelling? Do these

counternarratives ultimately have any power to curtail the operations of the American intelligence community, and if not, what is their worth?

To lay the groundwork to answer these questions, Chapter 1 assesses the large body of popular intelligence fiction in pulp novels, film, and television, revealing how this body of work was in continuous dialogue with the way the American intelligence community represented itself to the public. I show that intelligence literature consists of two dominant types: patriotic intelligence fiction that reinforces American ideals of exceptionalism and reassures the public that the U.S. will win all conflicts without compromising traditional morals; and individualist intelligence fiction that reinforces American ideals of personal determination and portrays twentieth-century enemies as unbeatable without resorting to extreme measures. Produced during the first few decades of the American intelligence community's existence, these texts do not reflect the reality of a known organization—the restraints of necessary secrecy and the simple newness of organizations like the CIA meant that the authors of intelligence fiction couldn't know what the daily life of an American intelligence operative looked like, but also that the CIA itself didn't necessarily know what its purpose or character was. In other words, fiction helped the budding intelligence community find the language to describe itself, messages which in turn were reinforced by more fictional narratives as the cold war raged on.

The split between the messages that patriotic and individualist intelligence fiction spread, I show, mirrored the split between academic-bureaucratic types in the CIA who favored intelligence gathering and analysis and military types who favored more aggressive covert operations. When the various Congressional investigative committees put the intelligence community on trial in the mid-1970s, the two main lines of defense put forth by testifying operatives reflected the messages of the two types of intelligence fiction: that they were just

following orders (patriotic), or that they were doing what needed to be done whether it was palatable to Americans or not (individualist), which I show through analysis of the report of the Church Committee, the head Congressional investigative body. In the course of this discussion, I identify the major tropes of the two types of intelligence fiction that the authors of counterintelligence literature will manipulate for their own purposes.

Chapters 2 to 5 each take up a few works of counterintelligence literature and assess how their authors are inverting the established tropes of intelligence fiction in order to interrupt the exchange between popular literature and dominant governmental narratives. Authors of counterintelligence literature are aware of the role that fiction plays in justifying (and providing new justifications for) extralegal governmental operations, and seek to interpolate other perspectives into that cycle. Chapter 2 reads Thomas Pynchon's and Don DeLillo's fiction as troubling the ideas of causality and teleology on which intelligence work is based, thus undermining the ability of their fictional operatives to properly analyze intelligence and predict the outcome of their covert operations. After showing that intelligence work is a major concern in the early fiction of both authors, I particularly read *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and *Libra* (1988) through the lens of Hayden White's postmodern historical theory, showing that this provides a useful language to discuss these characters' fears that they are not in control of their own fates. These characters' anxieties are not just individualized crises, but a fundamental uncertainty about whether or not a person can identify useful "facts" that will help them reach an objective understanding of the world—which is an issue, as many of these characters are intelligence operatives. I argue that this contradiction—the professional need to believe in objective history, and the personal postmodern doubt that such a thing is possible—reflects the wider cultural uncertainty about what intelligence work could or should accomplish.

Chapter 3 examines Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1969), and E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971), analyzing their dramatization of widespread fear of enemy counterintelligence operations on American soil. Each of these novels follow characters who occupy marginal positions in the mid-century American political landscape, both because of their racial identities and because of their affiliation with different iterations of American leftist movements. Reading these novels in the context of the McCarthy trials of the early cold war decades and ongoing FBI and CIA domestic counterintelligence programs, I assess how the treatment of the Communist Party and the New Left in American fiction changes in the postwar decades to reflect a heightened political anxiety that utilizes the language of spy thrillers. The narrators of these novels are full of moral outrage but cannot effectively articulate their political identities among an American left that is itself fragmented, in part due to surveillance and sabotage by American intelligence agencies charged with preventing domestic instability. I argue that Ellison, Greenlee, and Doctorow challenge the authenticity of state-collected intelligence on American citizens by illustrating the impossibility of defining a person's identity in stable, concrete facts. By reading these novels in the context of McCarthy trials and blacklists that confidently declared that identity can be definitively known (and behavior accurately predicted) through a list of a person's organizational loyalties and public statements, I show that anxiety about intelligence operations was present on American soil and particularly felt by marginalized citizens who were victims not of Soviet influence, but of American institutions.

Chapter 4 shows that Margaret Atwood's *Bodily Harm* (1981) and Joan Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) and *Democracy* (1984) effectively subvert the common hyper-masculine tropes of intelligence literature by decentering their male operatives, focusing instead

on elusive women who drift into cold war proxy conflicts. In place of heroic or tragic male operatives, Atwood and Didion emphasize women who elude the patterns of predictable behavior that the narratives' sidelined covert operatives believe in and depend upon—in other words, women on whom reliable intelligence cannot be gathered. More importantly, these novels are conversion narratives, in which a female character is driven to accept political responsibility. *Bodily Harm*'s journalist-protagonist, after witnessing first-hand a violent revolution in South America, accepts the call to be a political writer instead of focusing on superficial popular culture. In Didion's novels, the change is in the female narrators who are initially aligned with the male operatives but come to realize that their personal, intuitive understanding of their subject is more effective than the surveillance methods employed by intelligence operatives. I argue that Atwood and Didion challenge the gendered governmental rhetoric of the cold war decades by emphasizing women who ultimately challenge the lack of female voices in positions of power.

In Chapter 5, I examine what I term the American intelligence memoir and analyze John Barth's *Sabbatical* (1982) and *The Tidewater Tales* (1987), and Norman Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost* (1991). Almost no scholarly attention has been paid to the large body of personal memoirs written by retired CIA operatives, although I show that they played an immense role in voicing formerly repressed public concerns about the morality and efficacy of the country's covert operations. I particularly assess the effect of the exposé memoirs that emerged in the 1970s that sought to condemn Agency operations, demonstrating that the information presented in these texts enables a more historically rich type of American intelligence fiction. Unlike earlier writers who had to voice any criticism of the Agency through vague paranoia, Barth and Mailer cite and in some cases dramatize actual intelligence operations, using episodes from the lives of the CIA

memoirists as blueprints for more dramatic narrative production. I argue that while the memoirs by former operatives purport to give the reading public reliable intelligence on the state of American intelligence operations, Barth and Mailer destabilize the concept of intelligence by crafting narratives in which operatives fail to produce any coherent message about the morality or efficacy of organizations like the CIA. By robbing operative-authors of the authority to narratize their experiences or effect meaningful reform of the CIA, these fiction writers portray a CIA that is too massive and secretive to either effectively gather and process intelligence, or to be fully understood by any one person. My final chapter, then, suggests that Barth and Mailer's narratives reflect a wider dissolution of public trust in their intelligence agencies.

This project does not seek definitive conclusions about the efficacy or goodness of the American intelligence community. As every responsible historian of this subject notes, the public will never have access to adequate documentation to understand the full story of organizations like the CIA. While it's certainly possible to come to conclusions about individual operations or eras on which a bulk of documents have been declassified, making any broader claims about the role these organizations played in twentieth-century history is more speculative than such historical arguments ordinarily are. Similarly, I neither seek to extol or condemn the rise of postmodernism in this period, although I sympathize with the work of the postmodernist authors I examine. At its best, postmodernism is said to be responsible for equalizing cultural production and allowing more play and self-awareness in academic thinking, enabling new forms of fiction and more responsible historiography. But at its worst, postmodernism is said to defang artists, reducing their production to politically ineffectual naval-gazing experiments that fail to penetrate the surface of contemporary experience. Worse, it is blamed for ushering in the "post-truth" era in which we now supposedly live, having destabilized concepts like fact and reality to such an

extent that any statement can claim to be as valid as any other.

There is, of course, validity to all of these claims about intelligence work and postmodernist thinking. But rather than simply take that safe middle ground, I'd like to argue that the rift between belief in intelligence that can be uncomplicatedly acted upon and belief that all facts are unstable—a rift that, as I've shown, existed in miniature within the intelligence community itself—is one of the most important discursive divides to trace if we are to understand the various arguments and misunderstandings that the U.S. had throughout the cold war and continues to have today. That two such fundamentally opposed ideologies could rise to the forefront of the American consciousness in the same few decades, decades marked by a very two-faced domestic culture and by militaristic covert foreign policy's betrayal of the American image as worldwide defender of democracy, enabled much of our contemporary political rhetoric. If this project brings any new understanding of the costs and significance of this discursive split between governmental rhetoric and postmodernist thought, it will be one small contribution toward bridging a cultural gap that continues to counterproductively polarize political conversations today.

CHAPTER 1

POPULAR AMERICAN INTELLIGENCE NARRATIVES

In 1963, Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA from 1953 to 1961, published *The Craft of Intelligence*. The book was part memoir, part defense of American intelligence operations—an assurance to any readers troubled by the new reality of international espionage, and a romantic picture of the work that highly trained agents conducted to protect American interests. *Craft* sold well and served, for many, as a first look into intelligence operations that most Americans were becoming aware of for the first time. It has since become a classic text, often cited as a foundational study for anyone interested in how espionage is really conducted. But less well known is a book that Dulles edited only a few years later, a collection of creative nonfiction pieces called *Great True Spy Stories*. In the collection's introduction, Dulles promises that every piece is an authentic tale of men and women throughout history who risked their lives in service of their countries, without hope of recognition. Dulles writes that although he cannot “vouch for the accuracy of all the statements in these stories,” he nonetheless intends the collection as more than mere entertainment: “My aim has been rather to present a comprehensive view of the business of clandestine intelligence as it has been practiced during the present historical era... If I were to state my motive in editing this collection it would be that of wanting to throw more light on the real role of intelligence in our national life” (xvi). In other words, the tales, written in large part by authors of intelligence fiction, might not be true in the details, but are nonetheless instructive in communicating larger unacknowledged truths about the role of intelligence work in American life.

The Craft of Intelligence and *Great True Spy Stories* encapsulate the extensive exchange between fact and fiction in American intelligence work. Dulles's authorship indicates the ways in

which American intelligence heads marketed their operations as a force for good from their earliest days of operation. Denying that their actual work resembled the exploits of popular television and pulp novel heroes, Dulles and other prominent leaders of the intelligence community nonetheless made such disavowals with a wink and were happy to leak information about successful operations, simultaneously working with the media to bury stories about tactics that the American public might find objectionable. This chapter assesses this exchange between the character of the developing American intelligence community and the growing genre of intelligence fiction throughout the cold war decades.

In the 1960s, an explosion of narratives attempted to make sense of the new American intelligence community, narratives that were challenged and changed after a number of Congressional investigations of the intelligence community in the mid-1970s. Popular fiction of course reflects dominant cultural attitudes, but intelligence fiction presents a particularly odd problem: since there was no organized American intelligence community before World War II, there was no dominant public attitude to reinforce or change when mass-produced paperbacks, television series, and films started bombarding the American public with representations of their new covert agencies. Further, since intelligence work is necessarily secret, the creators of many of these texts were in the dark about what the day-to-day operation of an operative looked like, and those who *did* know were sworn not to share this information.¹³ A last complication was that even if an author was determined to write a truthful account of American espionage and was somehow able to attain access to the daily reality of the closed community, they would find that a definitive American intelligence operative didn't exist, at least not in the 1950s and 60s when the earliest narratives were being written. The American intelligence community was riddled with divisions and competing factions from the start, struggling to balance several incompatible

visions of what these agencies could and should accomplish in the world. A few elements of the intelligence story make it perfect for thrilling popular fictions: the clear objective, the narrative tension inherent in webs of secrets, the potential for action and romance, and the opportunity to portray foreign settings are lasting appeals of the genre. However, other generic difficulties led to starkly different variations: should the emphasis be on the operative's loyalty to his country or on his individual agency? How can the protagonist have a strong personal identity when he has clear orders to carry out? In crafting the American intelligence hero, fiction writers struggled to balance the ideals of individual agency with the necessity of embodying governmental force.

Given these layers of nascent development and necessary secrecy, it's no surprise that mid-century popular American intelligence fiction was particularly varied as the genre developed from the late 1940s through the cold war decades. Since there was no wide knowledge of what American intelligence work was "really like," and since even those in the intelligence community were still trying to decide what their work's purpose and scope was, there is an unusual, reinforcing give-and-take relationship between a developing genre and a developing institution. Artists took their cues from the fantastical war stories related by larger-than-life figures like Allen Dulles, and in turn, men in positions of power in the intelligence community—and in the White House—would take inspiration from popular spy stories when envisioning new operations. By tracing the different facets of American intelligence fiction and examining what facets of that work were most attractive to various figures in power, a history of American intelligence emerges that's particularly attuned to the narratives these new agencies used to define themselves.

In choosing texts to analyze in this chapter, I have focused on those that I consider to be most representative of the conflicting attitudes in both the American intelligence community and

the American public at this time, and to the most popular of these texts. While there are a number of short-lived television shows and odd one-off spy novels that could be productively considered, my aim is to trace how fictional texts reflected and influenced broad ideological currents and so I found it most useful to emphasize those that were consumed by the widest audience.¹⁴ Another challenge that this chapter faces is the instability of many of these texts: when writing on film and especially television, the issues of multiple authors, changing audiences, a dearth of permanent public records on the production process, and overt collaboration with and often censorship by the U.S. government immediately present themselves. Rather than dealing with a single piece of fiction written and published in a relatively short period of time by one author, media scholars face the initial challenges of accurately narrating the creation, character, and reception of something like a television series that ran for multiple seasons, adapting all the while to audience reaction, disagreements with cast members, and other market factors like the rise of tie-in merchandise and the innovation of competing programs. Similarly, most of the print texts that I take up are series that span multiple years and enjoyed filmic adaptations that sometimes transcend the original in the public consciousness. Throughout this discussion of a wide array of texts, I have tried to accurately represent when and how these long-running texts change over time and minimize concern with authorship, focusing instead on the broader cultural ideologies that they represent.

This chapter's extended analysis of these popular narratives shows that this body of work is more complex than existing scholarship typically acknowledges, and sets up the relationship between the nascent intelligence community and the dominant cultural narratives about them that postmodernist authors, I argue, seek to interrupt. Identifying the key elements of narratives in this immense, dynamic genre is key to understanding the critique that authors of

counterintelligence literature accomplish by manipulating these popular narratives' tropes and messages. The distinction between counterintelligence literature and the late intelligence fiction discussed in this chapter's last sections is particularly important in that it illustrates how the authors discussed in later chapters are doing particularly radical work to challenge concepts like stable facts and articulable historical narratives, concepts which are fundamental to the continued existence of an intelligence community.

What follows is an account of the narrative exchange between the intelligence community and the popular fiction written about it, an exchange that the postmodernist literature examined in subsequent chapters seeks to interrupt. I will first situate American intelligence fiction in the context of existing American genres and British intelligence fiction, showing what the American narratives of the 1950s and early 1960s were responding to and drawing from, ultimately considering Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* as the first text to effectively bring the spy story to a distinctly American landscape. Next, I analyze the mass of popular television shows and novels that were produced in the early 1960s, identifying two major subgenres that represent competing ideologies within the intelligence community about its scope and purpose. What I term patriotic intelligence fiction emphasizes American exceptionalism and the fundamental morality of democracy over and against evil totalitarianism, implying that American ideology can't fail to win out; on the other hand, individualist intelligence fiction reinforces personal agency and toughness, arguing for increased military force in cold war conflicts. My analysis of what I consider the representative texts in these subgenres demonstrates what aspects of the intelligence community these fictions draw from, and how they in turn helped the young CIA to define itself. Finally, I discuss the intelligence scandals of the 1970s and how intelligence officials testifying in these Congressional trials justified their decisions in

the parlance of popular intelligence fiction, revealing the fragility of those narratives in the face of mid-cold war failures. The last section of this chapter shows how intelligence fiction changed to respond to these investigations, adapting the elements of early patriotic and individualist intelligence fiction to reclaim the reputation of the American intelligence operative.

Influences: The Bond Craze and Preexisting American Genres

John F. Kennedy loved James Bond, and the American public knew it. When the charismatic president in 1961 cited Ian Fleming's *From Russia with Love* as one of his favorite novels,¹⁵ an already burgeoning industry of stories about intelligence operatives exploded. Before the “spy boom” of the early 1960s attempted to define the genre in American terms, there was a long history of British intelligence fiction—logically, since British intelligence services had existed since the mid-19th century and was a preeminent power by World War I. The sudden mass production of American spy stories is often described as a money grab, authors chasing the massive success of the Bond series after Kennedy's endorsement and the blockbuster films that Hollywood began to churn out. This chapter will demonstrate that the diversity and attention to American mythology in these narratives speaks to something more complicated than that. Nonetheless, American writers did owe a debt to both British intelligence fiction and to the existing American genre of detective and crime fiction.

Ian Fleming began writing Bond novels in 1952, subsequently publishing one every year until his death in 1964.¹⁶ A former naval intelligence officer, Fleming supposedly drew from his own experiences in wartime planning, and many biographers note that WWII memorandums that were probably written by the future novelist do indeed sound like something out of one of his fictions. For instance, Fleming is credited with first conceiving Operation Mincemeat, the successful British plan to plant a corpse with disinformation papers in Axis territory in order to

disguise the planned Allied invasion of Sicily (Macintyre 11-14).¹⁷ The Bond novels certainly have some historical truth: the Soviet group SMERSH (an acronym made by combining the Russian words for “death to spies”) that Bond battles was a real counterintelligence group operating under Stalin to eliminate enemy agents attempting to infiltrate Soviet intelligence. However, the departure from the historical record is quick and fantastic. Bond’s SMERSH is an omnipresent group that actively seeks out other operatives abroad, rather than defending its own territory, and Bond’s duels with them are notoriously sensational. *From Russia with Love*, Kennedy’s favorite, provides the most detailed backstory to one of the SMERSH agents, devoting nearly a hundred pages to the life of the monstrous Red Grant, an Englishman who defects to the Soviet Union because he understands that only there can he indulge his passion for killing. Motivated by love for bloodshed rather than ideology, Grant is the psychopathic killer that is now familiar in crime stories. As the cartoonish nature of Red Grant and other Bond villains indicates, the novels are ultimately uninterested in establishing the realistic psychology of anyone but its leading man, who is lovingly developed as a paragon of British strength.

There is an enormous body of scholarship on the Bond phenomenon: its inspiration, its reflection of British values, its revitalization of British masculine identity amidst a declining empire, and the differences between the films and their source texts have been thoroughly explored and are only tangential to this project.¹⁸ But two questions should be addressed directly: What elements of these stories transcended other well-written and popular British intelligence fiction, making them a model that American authors could use as a starting place?¹⁹ Less importantly, how is the American intelligence depicted in the novels, and what does this say about the international reputation of the early CIA?

The basic elements of a Bond story are now so commonplace that it's difficult to see how Fleming was innovating. Nearly every classic Bond story includes a mission from the gruff but beloved spymaster M, a beautiful girl who often can't be trusted, and a larger-than-life villain likely to reveal his master plan at the moment when Bond seems most vulnerable. Structurally, the novels are a master class in high suspense, sometimes referred to as the "Fleming sweep," that leaves cliffhangers or dangling questions at the end of every chapter. In the novels, Bond himself is more vulnerable than he is in the popular films starring Sean Connery that American audiences consumed voraciously in the 1960s,²⁰ but he still projects a cool toughness and a discontent with a placid postwar world that made him such an influential character type.

American intelligence operatives in the Bond novels come off as a bit less competent. Fleming's recurring CIA operative Felix Leiter typically serves as a sort of sidekick to Bond. In each of the three novels in which he plays a major role, Leiter provides support, often monetary, while the British agent does most of the heavy lifting. In the very first Bond novel, *Casino Royale*, Leiter's primary role is to provide Bond with Marshall Plan money so that he can continue playing baccarat in his mission to bankrupt the crime lord Le Chiffre. In later novels, he sometimes accompanies Bond on missions, once losing a leg when a villain pushes him into a shark tank. Leiter is good-natured, but not reliable when sent on missions alone, better suited to a supporting role. This is how American intelligence is portrayed more generally in the series, as well. In the long opening to *From Russia with Love*, the heads of Soviet counterintelligence plot to assassinate an agent from an enemy country in order to demoralize Western intelligence. Before settling on British intelligence and Bond specifically as the ideal target, the characters work through every Western intelligence agency, analyzing their suitability as the mission's target. American intelligence, they conclude, can be formidable because of its vast resources, but

ultimately isn't worthy of such an attack because its operatives lack the sophistication and dedication that the British hold. One of the spymasters, in response to another's protest that the Americans have pulled off many successful operations, scoffs, "Americans try to do everything with money. Good spies will not work for money alone—only bad ones, of which the Americans have several divisions... They must have successes, Comrade General. You cannot sow a million seeds without reaping one potato" (42-3). In general, American intelligence is depicted as young, promising, but not in the first rank of intelligence services and mostly valuable (or frightening) because of the amount of money they are willing to throw at a problem. This is apt, coming from a British author who once worked with the young OSS, and in light of documents like the Truman Doctrine that promised to literally pick up the check to support democracies that were once on Britain's bankroll.

American authors, while drawing from the formula that Fleming perfected, would have to adapt their heroes to reflect American values and demonstrate that they were more than inexperienced naïfs with deep pockets. In doing so, American authors drew from fictional traditions that were already well established, particularly the detective story and wartime action stories. In describing the distinction between the spy story and the detective story, Julian Symons writes, "The lines of demarcation are uncertain, but everybody recognizes their existence" (258). While there is a large amount of overlap between the two genres, I suggest that the key distinctions lie in the intelligence hero's international field of travel and his particular embodiment of nationalist ideology, against detectives who typically worked local beats and frequently defined themselves against established organizations. The nineteenth-century tradition of detective fiction featured genteel investigator protagonists, the genre serving as a puzzle that readers were invited to solve, culminating in the reestablishment of order by the punishment of

either the criminal or the aberrant. This type of detective fiction provided the assurances of an omniscient high-class investigator and a clear takeaway, but in the early twentieth century a new type of detective fiction expressed the anxieties of wartime America. Hardboiled detective fiction was distinctly American, pioneered by Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain. This new genre was concerned with violence and chaos, a tough world-weariness in the protagonists, and an emphasis on violently subduing enemies. These protagonists fought widespread criminal networks and governmental corruption rather than individual deviants, much more in line with the pessimism of the interwar years. In the postwar years, writers like Mickey Spillane pushed the hardboiled genre to particularly violent extremes, a tradition that writers of what I term individualist intelligence fiction would also take up. Indeed, postwar detective fiction's emphasis on fighting communists rather than gangsters brings it close to the ideological concerns of intelligence fiction, but their heroes ultimately remain confined to the streets of major American cities rather than fighting the communist threat worldwide.

Where hardboiled detective fiction and film noir often focused on the darkness in the American scene and had little interest in international affairs, intelligence fiction was concerned with fighting evil abroad, shouldering the American responsibility to protect people everywhere. The new American spy hero was a way to take the beloved character traits of hardboiled and noir detectives—a tough savviness borne out of long experience, a fundamental distrust of other people—and apply them to a scene that aligned with postwar American interventionist ideology. The American intelligence hero first appeared in action stories in 1940s magazines, alongside the emergent superhero. Not yet a distinct genre, these stories were straightforward action tales that followed flat protagonists. The surprisingly short run of *Thrilling Spy Stories*, a pulp magazine that only lasted four issues from 1939-1940, followed the straightforward exploits of the

American Nazi hunter, *The Eagle*.²¹ Later patriotic intelligence fiction, primarily on television screens, would take up this tradition in a way that was more lasting, while the genre of hardboiled detective fiction was adapted for individualist intelligence fiction in pulp novels by writers like Edward S. Aarons and Donald Hamilton. But before either of those traditions were established, the blockbuster film *North by Northwest* created the first popular American intelligence hero.

Considering American intelligence fiction's links to the British tradition, it is perhaps appropriate that an acclaimed British director was at the helm of one of the early, landmark pieces of the genre.²² Alfred Hitchcock is of course the filmic master of suspense, author of as many essays on how to build pleasurable dread in an audience as of feature length films. His films explore broad themes of mistaken identity, the psychological effects of watching and being watched, and potential dangers in seemingly idyllic locales, but Hitchcock was also specifically interested in portraying the work of actual intelligence agencies. His early features *The 39 Steps* (1935), *Sabotage* (1936), and *The Secret Agent* (1936), all adapted from novels or short fiction collections, deal with literal spy agencies and the innocent civilians who are caught up in their operations. The 1942 film *Saboteur* is often viewed as a forerunner to *North by Northwest*, marking the director's move to Hollywood studios and distinctly American scenery. While *Saboteur* does not deal with international intelligence operations, it follows an innocent man who is accused of sabotaging labor operations and the FBI's attempts to arrest him. The film ends with the famous scene on the Statue of Liberty in which the protagonist tries to prevent the villain from falling to his death, the seed of *North by Northwest*'s Mount Rushmore sequence that inverts the situation.

By *North by Northwest*'s release in 1959, Hitchcock was a fixture in Hollywood. The late 1950s and early 1960s saw the release of his most canonical films, all of which deal with espionage literally or metaphorically. But *North by Northwest* pays more sustained attention to the business of intelligence than anything in the Hitchcock canon, and its massive popularity meant that it was many viewers' first exposure to the new postwar reality: that, as the film's CIA spymaster puts it, "War is hell, even if it's a cold one." The film follows Roger Thornhill (Cary Grant), an ad man whose life is endangered when enemy agents working for the threatening Phillip Vandamm (James Mason) mistake him for an American intelligence operative, George Kaplan. Thornhill is kidnapped and interrogated by Vandamm and his men, who in the face of Thornhill's protestations of ignorance merely believe he is exceptionally good at keeping his cover. As he flees for his life, Thornhill becomes involved with Eve Kendall (Eva Marie Saint), who is working for a fictionalized CIA but seems to Thornhill, never fully in the know, to be working for Vandamm. Eventually, the CIA spymaster, only ever identified as The Professor (Leo G. Carroll), gets directly involved. He reveals Kendall's true purpose as a recruited American agent and enlists Thornhill's help in preventing Vandamm from smuggling microfilm containing American secrets out of the country. Thornhill consents to play the secret agent role at last and, with Kendall, successfully recovers the microfilm, the climactic final chase scene occurring across the presidential faces carved into Mt. Rushmore.

North by Northwest is said to have been the inspiration for the Bond movies that would hit Hollywood just a few years later, in 1962.²³ The bold settings, perhaps untrustworthy woman, complicated plots broken up by clear-cut action sequences, and hero that models masculinity were all elements that would reappear in the popular franchise.²⁴ But more than this, I argue that *North by Northwest* is the first major studio blockbuster to try to assuage Americans' doubts

about intelligence work. The film is the story of an American public so in the dark about intelligence work that they resist the very possibility that they could be involved in international spy games. The tension hinges on the stress of an innocent, ordinary man becoming entangled in systems of power both larger than him and completely incomprehensible. It's a bit ahead of its time in that American intelligence doesn't come off as uncomplicatedly good; early in the film, the Professor and his colleagues make the cold, logical decision to abandon Roger Thornhill to enemy agents rather than expose their larger operation, and their treatment of Eve can be read as exploitative. But it also articulates the state of war and the necessity of using extreme tactics that one wouldn't use in peacetime. Ultimately, Thornhill, like Eve before him, is won over to the idea that such secret missions are necessary, and that Eve was not the evil woman he at one point accuses her of being, but rather an American hero. Explaining her motivation in agreeing to work for The Professor, she tells Thornhill, "Maybe it was the first time anyone asked me to do anything worthwhile." Moved by her patriotic dedication, Thornhill accepts his duty as a man and as an American and dons the mantle of George Kaplan, secret agent. The climactic chase scene in which Thornhill and Eve escape from Vandamm takes place in the most dramatic and patriotic of places, over the faces of Mount Rushmore, announcing that the United States is now the main setting for international covert intrigue. *North by Northwest* dramatizes both suspicion of all-powerful government agencies and ultimate acceptance that such powers are necessary in such extraordinary times. A few years later, the 1960s boom of American intelligence fiction would take its cue from this first major story.

Patriotic Intelligence Fiction

North by Northwest anticipated the rapid spread of American spies across all media. Bond came to Hollywood, novelists of varying literary aspiration began crafting agents, some of whom

would live between the pages of mass-produced paperbacks for the entire span of the cold war, and new television series competed for viewers on every major network. Sometimes referred to as “the spy boom,”²⁵ 1960-1965 saw the creation of a surprisingly diverse wealth of American intelligence fiction. By 1960, not much was publicly known about the American intelligence community. Not yet two decades old, even including the wartime OSS, American intelligence had avoided any large-scale public scandals; the only operations that had become widely known, or at least open secrets, were supposed triumphs like the Berlin tunnel operation or the bloodless Guatemalan coup. The American public was becoming newly aware of the importance that the CIA played in foreign policy, however, not least because of Kennedy’s avowed respect for intelligence agencies—a far cry from Truman’s distrust of a peacetime intelligence agency. But of course, the narrative by 1960 was that the United States was not at peace, nor would it be in the foreseeable future. One task of American intelligence fiction, then, was to depict stakes high enough to justify men like the operatives depicted in popular television. The U.S. was at war, the enemy was ruthless, and the fate of the free world hung in the balance: Americans needed intelligence agencies that were able to meet this opposing force.

In order to convey this message, two major strands of American intelligence literature emerged in the early cold war decades, representing different attitudes that would dominate discourse about the American intelligence community through the whistleblower trials of the mid-1970s. This first strand, patriotic intelligence fiction, asserted American dominance in the burgeoning cold war, stoking American pride in their country at a moment when the country was particularly confident in its military strength and ideological morality. Relying on black-and-white constructions of “good guys” and “bad guys,” these narratives emphasized the moral strength of its protagonists in addition to their physical skill. Patriotic intelligence fiction, as I

will show, reinforces American myths of exceptionalism and its new mission as world protector of democracy by focusing on the morality and loyalty of its protagonists and downplaying the violence inherent in covert operations. In the following section, I identify a second subgenre as individualist intelligence fiction, which reinforces American ideals of personal agency and toughness and rose to prominence in the later cold war years. As with any broad structuralist argument, this division is imperfect and there are a few texts that arguably straddle the two categories or don't fit neatly into either. Nonetheless, I find it helpful in categorizing the major ideologies that influenced how both the public and leaders of the developing intelligence community viewed this work. Indeed, there is a tradition of mapping the formulas of genre fiction like the texts discussed in this chapter, notably Bruce Merry's *Anatomy of the Spy Thriller*, which works to expose the skeleton of what he deems a "plebeian art form"; despite the preponderance of texts, Merry argues, spy thrillers all boil down to essentially the same story that uses the same tricks to engage its insatiable audience (1). Julian Symons, John Cawelti, and Martin Burgess Green also included "the spy thriller" or "the spy story" in their formalist studies of crime and adventure fiction, identifying plot elements and character types that make the genre more or less homogenous in their eyes. While acknowledging the formulaic qualities of the genre, I have found that there are at least two distinct strands of mid-century American intelligence fiction that meaningfully mirror conflicts within the intelligence community and the American public that struggled to understand it.

Patriotic intelligence fiction dominated television, in large part due to restrictions on screen violence, which were farther from being broken on the small screen than in the film industry that was already facing the dwindling appeal of 1950s Hollywood genres. All of the texts discussed in this section are filmic, as these are the most popular and culturally impactful

examples to discuss, but this story type also appeared in print.²⁶ Taking inspiration from the British series *Danger Man* (screened in the States as *Secret Agent*) and *The Avengers*, which garnered a popular following on American screens as well, the major networks put out versions of tales in which pairs or teams of operatives served as a moral center in an international world of dirty tricks. Foremost among these American series were *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *I Spy*, and *Mission: Impossible*. Each of these series had different tones and concerns, but all share protagonists who are primarily motivated by a desire to do good in the world, narratives that emphasize the tradecraft rather than the violence of intelligence work, and a message that reinforces America's place on the front lines of both the ideological and literal battleground.

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. (1964-68) was the first hit television show about American intelligence. Drawing inspiration from the Bond series—Ian Fleming in fact created the protagonist Napoleon Solo—the series was a colorful representation of fantastical spy work. U.N.C.L.E., or the United Network Command for Law and Enforcement, is an international coalition committed to preventing the rival agency T.H.R.U.S.H. from taking over the world. Like the British series *Danger Man*, in which the protagonist John Drake handles “messy jobs” that individual nations’ secret intelligence services can’t handle, U.N.C.L.E. is meant to invoke the United Nations, a fantasy of an American-led institution that can transcend national boundaries. But it certainly is also evocative of Uncle Sam, and the American Napoleon Solo is undoubtedly the virile, competent agent without whom the team could not be effective. Other U.N.C.L.E. agents are the British spymaster, perhaps acknowledging Britain’s mentor role to American intelligence but also its passing of a torch in terms of actual hands-on world leadership; and the Russian agent Illya Kuryakin, whose backstory is never clarified but whose inclusion as a prominent member of the team and particular embodiment of a cool, Western

youthfulness that made him the show's primary heartthrob argues for the conversion of any rational young person in the Soviet Union. An implicit argument of the series is one that would become familiar: that the bleak life in a Soviet country cannot possibly be more attractive than the bright world of wealth, possibility, and style that the U.S. represents.

Some commentators on the show take its increasingly comic tone as an indicator that it was not interested in nationalism,²⁷ but rather in the spy's capacity to represent a coolness that was popular among the show's young audience. Often read against the blatantly didactic, tonally serious programs of the 1950s like *I Led Three Lives* and *The Man Called X*, critics point to the glib humor and bright visual style of *U.N.C.L.E.* as indicative of its irreverence for dominant governmental ideology. But the object of parody was never the U.S., democracy, or the global spread of American values.²⁸ Rather, what the show took lightly was that the forces of communism could be a serious threat to American wellbeing when international playboys like Solo and Kuryakin were so clearly superior. The show, making no pretense to realism, did not argue that men just like its protagonists literally exist, but that the internationalism, sleekness, and capital that they stood for was very much on the rise. So, while the show in later seasons moved away from a more traditional 1950s nationalism, it nonetheless reasserted a newer American confidence in the supremacy of its commercial power. As Michael Kackman writes, "Rather than reproduce earlier programs' rigid linkage of self, nation, and state, they increasingly detached from the state and embraced instead a newly emergent model of national identity that replaced stern patriotism with commercialism, essentialist norms of gender and sexuality with camp play, and absolutist national boundaries with global mobility" (98). This idea would be repeated again and again in later spy texts as characters in the Soviet Union recognize the appeal of American democracy and capitalism and all of the luxuries it affords even the average citizen.

American exceptionalism was reinforced even more prominently when *I Spy* made headlines in 1965 as the first primetime drama on a major network to feature an African-American lead. The series followed two operatives, Kelly Robinson (Robert Culp) and Alexander Scott (Bill Cosby), nicknamed Scotty, as they carry out a variety of international missions, a large appeal of the show being its unprecedented use of foreign location footage. In some ways progressive by portraying the two operatives as equals, the show in fact reinforced reductive narratives of American equality and meritocracy by downplaying racial conflict, closing off all paths to civil rights other than peaceful integration and racial uplift. Cosby's Scotty is a model African-American citizen who finds no barriers to his progress in mid-century America, acknowledging no racial bias against anyone who is willing to work hard enough, as he did, to rise to the top of even the most elite institutions. By placing him as an agent for the American cause, *I Spy* announces an equality that the racial conflict of the 1960s belies and instructs the American public on how to best express their patriotism: by working hard, and by respecting only men who like Scotty go through humble channels to achieve equality.

The series pilot, "So Long, Patrick Henry," is a rare episode that directly acknowledges complex issues of race, and the way that it handles them signals the brand of traditional, utopian patriotism that the series advertised. Kelly and Scotty are tasked with reaching out to Elroy Browne, an African-American athlete who publicly defected to communist China. After a few years, American intelligence determined that Browne was showing signs of discontent in his new country and see a grand victory in the ideological war if Kelly and Scotty can successfully persuade him to return to the States. The major tension of the episode is the clash between Scotty and Browne, two immensely talented black men with opposing viewpoints on the promise of America. As the conflict develops, the episode establishes Scotty as a premier example of the

potential racial minorities can realize if they submit to American belief in meritocracy and traditional ascent through the ranks, whereas Browne is an overconfident, ungrateful man primarily motivated by greed. In the emotional climax of the episode, Scotty convinces Browne to return with an impassioned speech about American exceptionalism, his voice dripping with contempt for his listener. After scornfully telling Browne to go back to China to continue collecting money, he adds, “Back home, a lot of poor dummies who aren’t as smart as you are will be eating their hearts out trying to make the law of the land stick, holding the world together with one hand and trying to clean their own house with the other. Yeah, something no country’s done before ever in the history of the world.” After a bit more back and forth, in which Browne demands to know what the American spies are offering him to return to the US, Cosby stands over a seated Browne, the camera looking up from a low-angle shot: “The whole world’s trying to keep bloody fools like you from selling themselves back into slavery.” As the camera cuts to an extreme close-up of Browne, Scotty continues, “But you did it anyway. You gotta laugh at that. No deals, Elroy, nothing. You get your citizenship and a plane ticket home. After that, you’re on your own.”

Scotty is thus the show’s representative African-American man, one who recognizes that America is a place of unmatched opportunity and that to deny its position as the pinnacle of freedom is simply regressive, harmful to civil rights. The series rarely addresses issues of race so directly in the rest of its four-season run; the show’s creators were very open about their goal to make a “color-blind” show, in which Scotty and Kelly are quietly equal, without going out of their way to deliver a message about minority rights. While this appears to be an admirable mission, the result is that the series downplayed very real concerns from minority groups in America, who recognized that it was not simply a matter of hard work for a black man to become

anything like a full operative in the intelligence community. Regardless of this campaign to ignore racial tensions, the fact that the pilot of the show had Scotty delivering an emotional speech on the importance of American freedom indicates that race was a central concern, and the supposition that to be patriotic was to subscribe to the American ideals of opportunity for those willing to play by the established rules; to argue with the reality of this unbiased system is nothing less than enslaving yourself.

One last exemplar of patriotic American intelligence fiction is *Mission: Impossible*, the most successful television series about American spies and one that significantly altered the protagonist types. Where *U.N.C.L.E.* and *I Spy* were centered on the personalities of the operative duos, their goodness and unflagging loyalty, *Mission: Impossible* never concerned itself with developing its operatives as characters at all. One of the fundamental challenges of the genre of intelligence fiction is that the perfect spy is one who doesn't let their personal life and values get in the way of their mission—therefore, the perfect spy is one who doesn't have a very strong personality or backstory at all, someone relatively isolated and predictable, which is to say someone who isn't very compelling as the driving force behind a narrative or particularly good at eliciting audience sympathy. *Mission: Impossible* gets around this difficulty by leaning into the idea of a perfect operative. Rather than trying to square the circle of a strong, charismatic personality who just happens to always agree with his marching orders or subsumes his personal qualities underneath an overwhelming devotion to country, *Mission* has characters who are just perfect order-taking machines. The series displaces the focus from the personalities of its players to the mission itself, fetishizing the tradecraft of intelligence work rather than recognizable protagonist personalities. Its characters are perfect containers for American international mission, not personalities who are particularly motivated by morality but who will always carry out orders

with no viewer anxiety that they'll fail. Indeed, their extensive use of disguises that make them entirely unrecognizable, often even to the audience who knows to expect a dramatic unmasking at the end of most missions, reinforces their essential anonymity. Rather than individuals who are concerned about asserting their personal agency, the Impossible Missions Force are the perfect toolkit for the American government, the perfectly reliable means to whatever end American leaders need throughout the cold war.

The IMF in fact engages in counterintelligence work more than anything. Their missions often involve creating layers of misinformation, or getting information out of enemies by elaborately, fantastically warping their sense of reality. Such IMF cons involve getting their target to believe that he is being tried by his own country for treason and must reveal his espionage work to save his life; that a nuclear disaster has occurred and that the target is one of the only survivors; or that the target is in a mental institution, his work as an operative entirely an illusion. Other missions involve less elaborate psychological warfare, but equally complicated ruses that will pit multiple enemies of the state against each other as the IMF drives away unrecognized. The series leans heavily into the covert operations side of intelligence work, even more so than the stylish *U.N.C.L.E.* or the globetrotting pair from *I Spy*, helping the American Secretary of Defense with everything from local gangsters to international terrorists to public relations disasters in the Vietnam War. Nonetheless, the violence inherent in these operations is never emphasized; although the targets of the IMF are often killed, the team often sets events in motion so that their enemies kill each other. The focus of the show is on the construction of that plan, and the technologies that the team uses to accomplish outlandishly complicated schemes.

Patriotic intelligence fiction reinforces the values of American exceptionalism and duty to one's country. These texts do not question the goodness and supremacy of the U.S. in the new

cold war battlefields, providing its audience with the certainty that American intelligence will win every time. They emphasize technocraft over violence, both to indicate the technological superiority borne out of Western innovation and the essential goodness of its protagonists, who will avoid unnecessary acts of brutality. Ultimately, its heroes are the embodiment of American exceptionalism, their personalities subsumed in their devotion to their mission and country. These characters aren't individuals so much as they are perfect types, American ideals. The other major strand of intelligence fiction is more concerned with delineating its protagonists' personal agency and the reinforcing the importance of strong, brutal soldiers in a time of war.

Individualist Intelligence Fiction

While the patriotic intelligence hero was dominating American television screens in the early cold war years, another type of operative emerged in the pages of pulp novels, representing another impulse inside the American intelligence community and also more concerned with an ideal of American masculinity that some worried was threatened in the postwar domestic stability. In what I term individualist intelligence fiction, authors do not emphasize the protagonist's capacity to embody government ideology, but instead his determination and personal agency. These stories do not shy away from violence, marketing it as a happy fact that there are men on "our side" who are willing to be ruthless and risk their own lives and reputations to do what has to be done, with or without explicit governmental permission.

This yearning to take the most direct path to accomplishing a mission, cutting corners off of the democratic system that requires at least presidential, if not Congressional, approval for any action, has long existed in the CIA. William F. Buckley dramatizes this feeling in his novel *Stained Glass* when a spymaster, responding to his operative's fears that he is no different than a Soviet agent, reflects, "We have a conscience. Isn't it *that* easy? And that difficult? We are

required to think in terms from which Stalin is totally liberated. Even if we reject—or ‘transcend’—the norms, we are aware of them. And we are fatigued by the experience” (95-6). The tone in which heads of intelligence have talked about the lack of such restrictions on Soviet intelligence operatives is at times wistful. If patriotic intelligence fiction is a morality play in which American virtue will always triumph over the evil other, then individualist intelligence fiction is a fantasy of what American operatives could accomplish if they were freed of bureaucratic restrictions and moralizing public opinion. Patriotic intelligence fiction reassures the public that their intelligence community is made up of good men; individualist intelligence fiction makes no such promises, instead encouraging Americans that it’s better for everyone if they refrain from looking too closely at the necessary work of the intelligence community. At the same time, individualist intelligence fiction reassures Americans that the rugged individual man is alive and well in an era when there are no Great Wars to fight or new frontiers to conquer. Rather than making the tradecraft of intelligence look like a glamorous, cool lifestyle, the authors of individualist intelligence fiction put their protagonists through harrowing, unenviable missions, stressing their devotion to difficult work that no one can ever know about. The protagonists of individualist intelligence fiction aren’t unpatriotic—but their patriotism is a personal choice that entails rising above the mythos of American innocence; it’s their choice to serve without recognition, to do the job that no one else is willing to do, even if it means breaking orders to do so.

The best examples of American individualist intelligence fiction are Edward S. [Aarons’s](#) Assignment series (1955–76), featuring secret agent Sam Durrell, and Donald [Hamilton’s](#) Matt Helm novels (1966–93). Both of these series follow the thriller formula, enabled by the lack of censorship in print media to portray more violence and sexuality, and thus a very different kind

of intelligence hero that wouldn't be portrayed on-screen for some time.²⁹ The audience for these novels was distinctly male, rather than being family-friendly entertainments to watch on a weekday night. Targeting the same readership that the adventure magazines catered to in the early twentieth century, Aarons's and Hamilton's novels serve as primers on masculinity as much as on America's international obligations. While taking many stylistic cues from hardboiled detective fiction, the ideologies of these novels are starkly different than the older genre: rather than locating and stopping individual aberrant personalities or even communist sympathizers at home, Aarons's and Hamilton's heroes are tasked with ensuring that America can win its international battles.

Aarons's hero Sam Durell is a deadpan ex-gambler, and accounts of his adventures typically start in medias res, with a breathless series of violent confrontations and sexual conquests packing each page before sudden dénouements. The introductory description of him from the series' third novel is representative of his defining characteristics:

Durell was a tall man, well over six feet, with heavy shoulders and a lean waist and the delicate, long-fingered hands of a born gambler... His Cajun blood made him hot-tempered and gave him a tendency toward independent action... There was an air of competence and self-sufficiency in the way he moved and walked. He knew all about the strength of organized effort, but he also knew that in his business, a spy died fast if he waited for and depended on others. It made the difference between the quick and the dead. (9)

Borrowing the cadence of earlier detective fiction, Durell is not the rogue with a heart of gold that Chandler's audience might expect, but rather a hot-tempered man who refuses to submit to a higher authority. He recognizes that his line of work requires stepping outside the bounds of what is considered acceptable behavior. The tropes of independence, being motivated by rage rather than idealism, and distrust of others are indicative of a fundamental shift in character that

is both reflective of the more militant faction of the CIA and was later used as a line of logic as heads of intelligence defended themselves in the 1970s Congressional trials. Aarons's narrative lens is not much concerned with Durell's interiority, but rather on how he is going to get out of each fix. Each installation in the series is a third-person action tale that rarely pauses for breath, each sentence propelling the agent along through a series of mounting physical challenges. Durell's vague "Cajun" characterization allows him to embody a specifically American type of individuality, a new variation on an old cowboy type who doesn't have a specific home.

Hamilton's agent Matt Helm is an even rougher figure and his first-person narration lends itself to more robust reflection on the psychological effects of the postwar consumerist culture. The first installation in the series, *Death of a Citizen*, involves killing a number of covert agents, but more importantly it deals with Helm's rejection of a conformist, law-abiding life. The novel opens in a cocktail party, in which Helms makes pleasant small talk with guests about the Western novels he frequently writes and the three blonde children he's fathered with the pretty nurse he married at the end of World War II. When another former operative in Helms's wartime spy outfit unexpectedly shows up at the party, Helm is invited to don his old codename Eric and help his fellow soldiers complete one more mission. Helm describes his former employers as a top-secret paramilitary group: "How [Mac, Helm's boss] ever managed to sell the project to someone in authority, I never found out. It must have taken some doing, since America is a fairly sentimental and moral nation, even in wartime, and since all armies, including ours, have their books of rules—and this was certainly not in the books" (42). Bodies quickly pile up as Helm leaves his old life with something like glee, reflecting, "For a moment it was as if I had been dead for fifteen years, and somebody had opened the lid of the coffin and let in light and air" (9).

The mask now off, readers quickly realize that Helm is not a man who struggles with moral limitations, increasingly indulging his violent instincts, happier than he was being a responsible husband and father. After years of peaceful existence, Helms quickly realizes that he was only suppressing his true self during his years of domesticity. Justifying his ownership of an old truck that can barely drive at highway speeds, Helm explains to the reader, “It was like hunting. I wasn’t going to tease myself by sneaking out to murder a harmless little deer once a year, after spending four years stalking game that could shoot back. And I wasn’t going to tempt myself by putting something low and sleek and powerful in the garage, and then using it to commute to the grocery at a legal twenty-five miles per hour. I was going to give the beast inside nothing to feed on. Maybe I could starve it to death” (54). But as the series progresses, Helm continues to “feed the best inside” and his missions become more fantastically violent, his suburban persona eventually disappearing entirely. And ultimately, the series indicates that this decision is good for both Helm and the United States. The series is a reassurance that the wartime American hero has not disappeared in the calm postwar domestic scene—indeed, there are still wars to fight, and American still needs strong, violent men. The Helm series in particular is a primer on how to keep a sharp edge in the midst of grocery runs and polite cocktail parties, and a promise that there would be ample opportunities for young men to define themselves by a patriotic cause in an ongoing war against enemies all over the world.

Individualist intelligence fiction defended and defined postwar American masculinity, presenting sometimes unsavory protagonists who are willing to do what soft bureaucrats cannot. This subgenre reinforced the state of war and the need to match enemy ruthlessness, priming Americans for covert action beyond simple espionage. The series indicated that if readers couldn’t handle the brutality that men like Durell and Helm carried out regularly, then they were

better off focusing on consumerist, prosperous mid-century American life, not worrying about how that prosperity was maintained.

Establishing the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (Fiction)

Mid-century American intelligence fiction did more than instruct the public on how to think about the new covert branch of the government; it also helped shape the intelligence community by giving it ways to define itself. In the bureaucratic chaos after the end of World War II, the CIA was cobbled together from former OSS agents, almost all of whom were Yale intellectuals, manipulators of upper class social circles, and from military leaders who typically identified as working-class men (Saunders 96). This mix of personalities, experiences, and political standing, coupled with the notoriously vague language in the section of the 1947 National Security Act that established the CIA, led to something like an identity crisis in the young Agency. Different factions constantly argued over the best way to proceed in establishing Agency guidelines: was the CIA primarily devoted to the collection and analysis of intelligence through careful research and manipulation of social connections, or to militaristic covert action that aimed to disrupt or destroy unfriendly governments? In the long process of answering that question, the intelligence community drew from and contributed to the spread of popular intelligence fiction.

The innovation of new intelligence tradecraft isn't dissimilar from the plotting of fantastical intelligence fiction. The wartime OSS valued creative thinkers who could propose a number of outlandish plans to disrupt enemy forces, most of which were too impractical to be implemented but some of which could be attempted.³⁰ The operations that would become most famous were often bold enough to sound more like a movie setpiece than a real chapter of history, particularly the Berlin tunnel operation that has become a central plotline for intelligence fiction by Norman Mailer and Ian McEwan. Directors of Central Intelligence have always

delivered the line that their day-to-day work is nothing like espionage fiction, but the prolonged Congressional investigations of the intelligence community in the mid-1970s revealed that there was more overlap than one might expect. The typical work of an analyst certainly entailed more paperwork than anything, but the operations department in the early cold war decades at least sometimes engaged in brainstorming sessions that resembled a writer's room creating new gadgets and missions for Napoleon Solo.

The wartime OSS under "Wild Bill" Donovan was built on the image of glamorous derring-do, devising so many aggressive sabotage missions that British intelligence eventually condemned them for "their permanent hankering after playing cowboys and red Indians" and "their capacity for blundering into delicate European situations about which they know little" (qtd. in Waller 189). But despite the disapproval of other Allied intelligence agencies, the war stories of these "Oh So Social" gentleman spies made its way into the characterization of the patriotic intelligence hero of many television series. Bill Donovan never got the postwar intelligence agency with himself at the head that he desired, but his image as an American superhero was leveraged by the men who did rise to the top of American intelligence, notably Allen Dulles, who became the master marketer of American intelligence's brand. In books like *The Craft of Intelligence* and *Great True Spy Stories*, Dulles generally denied the veracity of the popular fiction gentleman spy while in fact encouraging readers' belief in him. Openly addressing the issue of intelligence fiction in a chapter on popular misconceptions about the CIA, Dulles writes, "Most spy romances and thrillers are written for audiences who wish to be entertained rather than educated in the business of intelligence. For the professional practitioner there is much that is exciting and engrossing in the techniques of espionage, but those untutored in the craft of intelligence would probably not find it so" (200). He concludes about the fictional

spy hero, “If at least we get pleasure in reading about him, let us keep him for such uses—even though he be a myth” (202). However, these claims come only after hundreds of pages in which Dulles confesses the frequent use of dead drops, hidden cameras and recording devices, encryption and code breaking strategies, and the constant innovation of new gadgets for field operatives to use—essentially, all of the activities that a viewer of any of the popular television shows of the 1960s would expect an American spy to perform. There is very little in *The Craft of Intelligence* or *Great True Spy Stories* about analysts poring through stacks of information.

In his recent study of the relationship between the CIA and the American press, David P. Hadley devotes a chapter to the ways in which Dulles cultivated friendly relationships with reporters at every major newspaper in order to promote select operations while repressing other stories. When faced with something that couldn’t be positively spun or buried altogether, “Dulles also used the CIA’s mystique to answer criticism,” implying that there was much more to the story that the public simply couldn’t know about, or any number of successes that couldn’t be advertised but that were crucial to the well-being of the nation (72). This strategy allowed the public image of the CIA to survive even the catastrophe of the Bay of Pigs, but at the expense of Dulles stepping down from his position as DCI. Other heads of the CIA would be talented at managing the Agency, but less adept at nurturing a positive image with the media and the press. In 1974, a number of public relations disasters occurred from which the intelligence community has never fully recovered: *New York Times* reporter Seymour Hersh published two searing exposés of CIA domestic spying operations, and memoirs by disillusioned former operatives Philip Agee and Victor Marchetti exposed a number of unsavory international operations. These publications and tangential CIA involvement in Watergate led to three public Congressional investigations into the intelligence community.³¹

The most prominent of the Congressional trials was the hearings of the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities—also known as the Church Committee, after the Democratic Senator leading the hearings. The DCI at the time was William Colby, who decided to cooperate with the investigating committee to an extent that many other intelligence leaders, notably former DCI Richard Helms and head of counterintelligence James Angleton, found untenable. A particular source of discontent in the Agency was Colby's relinquishing of "the family jewels," an extensive report detailing damning CIA top-secret operations from its earliest days. The stories that would receive the most attention in the Church committee hearings were a number of assassination plots and Angleton's domestic mail-reading operation: the only thing more shocking to the public than government-sponsored murder was the idea that CIA counterintelligence would turn its weapons against American citizens. The documentation of these and other shocking secrets, couched in the righteous, declamatory language of the Church Committee's final report, shattered the established narratives of American intelligence fiction.

The final report of the Church Committee listed 96 recommendations to curtail the "excesses" of American use of covert operations. Ranging from the need for clearer legislative language in describing the CIA's scope and purpose, to an explicit ban on human experimentation, assassinations, and other actions considered fundamentally immoral, these recommendations seemed to offer not only a clear plan for regulating the clandestine arm of the government, but also a restoration of virtue to a country that felt it could no longer trust its elected representatives. In a section titled "The Dilemma of Secrecy and Open Constitutional Government," the Church committee took a stand against a series of presidential administrations that had sought to keep the American public in the dark:

What is a valid national secret? What can properly be concealed from the scrutiny of the American people, from various segments of the executive branch or from a duly constituted oversight body of their elected representatives? Assassination plots? The overthrow of an elected democratic government? Drug testing on unwitting American citizens? Obtaining millions of private cables? Massive domestic spying by the CIA and the military? The illegal opening of mail? Attempts by an agency of the government to blackmail a civil rights leader? These have occurred and each has been withheld from scrutiny by the public and the Congress by the label "secret intelligence." In the Committee's view, these illegal, improper or unwise acts are not valid national secrets and most certainly should not be kept from the scrutiny of a duly constituted congressional oversight body.

(12)

In light of the crimes of the intelligence community listed here as well as the revelations of the Pentagon Papers and Watergate, the public could not help but be comforted by the Church Committee's clear declaration that widespread secrecy had no place in a democratic government. The entire report tends to cast the investigators as heroes, men who are finally doing something to protect Americans from harmful abuses of power by the executive branch and its personal army of covert operatives. The use of rhetorical questions in the above passage is indicative of the oratory the committee's findings take on, the list of recommendations closing the first of six lengthy volumes reading not unlike a manifesto.

Not everyone was satisfied with the conclusion of the investigation, or comforted by the establishment of the permanent oversight committee. Many within the intelligence community denounced the whole affair as an extended morality play, in which American officials could declare their commitment to openness and the primacy of human decency while hypocritically conceding the necessity of covert activities. Thomas Powers in his influential biography of DCI Richard Helms writes, "For all the tinkering, the machinery itself was not much changed. The

CIA still worked for the President, and in addition to its job of preventing unpleasant surprises by watching the world with an educated eye, it remained the covert arm of American policy. A President needed more choices than the dispatch of a white paper or the Marines” (9). Indeed, the Reagan administration, which certainly made use of the Marines, was not prevented from also using the CIA to facilitate the support of Nicaraguan forces in the infamous Iran-Contra Affair a decade after the Church Committee’s report.

I suggest that the Church Committee didn’t merely put American intelligence on trial: it interrogated the narratives created by men like Dulles that had been reinforced by popular fiction for decades. While the trials arguably did little to curtail the actual operations of the CIA, this interrogation forced popular fiction about the intelligence community to change and enabled new fictional genres to emerge. Late cold war intelligence fiction, beginning in the mid-1970s, was in conversation not with the wartime images of patriotic derring-doers and paramilitary cold warriors, but with a new governmental rhetoric that condemned excessive secrecy. These new forms of intelligence fiction focused on the harmful effects of secrecy on a governmental system that is otherwise an unquestionable force for good. The conflict of the bulk of late intelligence fiction hinges on the negative consequences of the intelligence community operating without Congressional and public knowledge. Secrecy, once glorified as a glamorous game, became the primary antagonist.

Intelligence Fiction after the 1970s Scandals

Intelligence fiction warped around the Congressional investigations of the 1970s. The genre was fading fast, at least in television, by the late 1960s, and while pulp novels continued to sell consistently, the intelligence hero was much less prominent in the early 1970s, as the Vietnam War and widespread domestic unrest made the relatively light narratives about what Americans

knew to be very serious concerns look silly. On-location shooting of a romp in Southeast Asia suddenly didn't seem so appealing to American audiences. Individualist intelligence fiction fared better during this slump, but numbers were down across the board until the very public testimonies of actual spies who, the world now knew, committed extralegal actions regularly drew cultural discourse back to the role of the intelligence community. In the late cold war years, authors of intelligence fiction benefitted from more information about actual intelligence work than any writers had before 1975, and their works indicate how the familiar intelligence narratives created in the early cold war years changed in response to these dramatic events.

On the one hand, individualist intelligence fiction morphed to accommodate stories of men who come to distrust their own agencies. Individualist intelligence fiction always relied to some extent on miscommunication or even conflict between operative and agency, but rather than the ultimate reconciliation between the two, the new form of individualist intelligence fiction portrayed the agency as villainous or callous enough to value its large-scale goals over the lives of its men, willing to sacrifice even its most valued operatives if deemed necessary. This story remains very familiar in the twenty-first century and has been written about compellingly by scholars of conspiracy narratives.³² The 1975 movie *Three Days of the Condor* and Robert Ludlum's *Bourne* trilogy are the most relevant to this project and are discussed below. On the other end of the spectrum, there was a late resurgence of patriotic intelligence fiction in response to both the Congressional trials and this new brand of individualist intelligence fiction. Authors of the new patriotic intelligence fiction aimed to clearly restore the line between the good and bad guys, arguing that even if the revelations of the Congressional investigations were shocking or disappointing, the intelligence community was still integral to protecting American lives and the world's freedom. The most prominent authors of the new patriotic intelligence fiction are

Tom Clancy and William F. Buckley, Jr., who will be analyzed after a look at the new individualist intelligence fiction.

These new types of intelligence fiction that openly critiques organizations like the CIA remain importantly distinct from the counterintelligence literature discussed in later chapters. Ultimately, a given author's relationship to postmodernist ideas determines what category the work falls into. This project seeks links between literary postmodernism and the work of intelligence operatives; the creators of the intelligence fiction discussed in this section have no affiliation with the postmodernist movement or with the university, another key location in this project (and many other studies of American intelligence). Further, while these texts invert or mockingly exaggerate the tropes of intelligence literature, they do not do so in such a way as to cast doubt on the very possibility of gathering reliable intelligence or predicting enemy intentions or attaining a complete view of history. Rather, they critique a given aspect of American intelligence work while still suggesting that the essential enterprise is sound.

Three Days of the Condor, based on a novel that was significantly less successful than the film adaptation, follows a CIA "reader" who returns from lunch one day to find his entire office of fellow analysts dead. After a frantic call to Langley in which he asks to be brought in because he has no field experience and fears for his life, the man who with difficulty remembers his codename Condor quickly pieces together that some faction in the CIA ordered the death of his colleagues. Like Clancy's Jack Ryan, Condor is an analyst—he explains that his job is to "read everything," from press releases to novels, in order to "get ideas" about what the enemy is up to and how to respond. But also like Ryan, Condor quickly discovers that he has an immense aptitude for field work after all, his academic study of spy novels indeed giving him a number of ideas for how to recognize enemy operatives, wire phones, and kidnap a civilian woman,

eventually seducing her into willingly helping him. Condor eventually realizes that his CIA superiors were after him, and by extension his whole office, because he had uncovered a top-secret counterintelligence plot to start a war in the Middle East in order to increase the US government's power as peacekeepers. The film ends with Condor triumphantly telling the head operative after him that he just delivered the entire story to the *New York Times*. After berating him—"You have no idea how much damage you've caused"—the operative leaves Condor with haunting doubt by asking, "How do you know they'll print it?"

Three Days of the Condor directly treats themes that were on the mind of the American public in the 1970s while still maintaining a hyper-masculine hero at the center of the drama. Condor's turning over of his story to the *New York Times*, the building shot from a low angle so as to look like a monolith of integrity in a dirty world, is clearly to be taken as an unquestionable triumph. The corrupt counterintelligence operative's speech about the necessity of dirty work rings hollow in the face of Condor's essential goodness and commitment to honesty, and while his last question adds one last intrigue for the viewer to turn over, the takeaway is that if the good guys are to win, then American intelligence has to be curtailed. In older intelligence fiction, an individual operative is turned loose, with minimal communication with his agency, in order to perform the kind of work that Condor's superiors carried out. In the new individualist intelligence fiction, the stakes aren't performing that work secretly, but exposing such actions: the new masculinity is standing up to corrupt agencies instead of working for them.

Perhaps the most damning popular portrait of the American intelligence community in the wake of the 1970s scandals is Robert Ludlum's Jason Bourne series. *The Bourne Identity* begins as a thriller in which a total amnesiac tries to remember who he is as legions of shadowy figures constantly threaten his life. The man, who soon recovers the name Jason Bourne,

discovers that his face has been surgically altered, that he has a set of skills that only a life engaged in covert violence could explain, and that millions of dollars are waiting in an account bearing his name in Paris. Bourne, with the help of the Canadian economist Marie St. Jacques,³³ makes a series of alarming discoveries that lead him to falsely believe that he was a ruthless, prolific assassin. For a long stretch of the novel, the narrative follows Jason's attempts to align that information with the decent, essentially moral man he appears to be in the present. Eventually, he learns that he is in fact a deep cover American intelligence operative, a graduate of the Medusa program, an operation so secret that only a small handful of men in Washington have ever even heard of it. Bourne, whose real name is David Webb, agreed after the death of his wife and children in Vietnam to pose as the ultimate assassin in order to challenge the international terrorist known as Carlos the Jackal, drawing him out into a confrontation to defend his title. The novel's complicated plot, in which many key figures die before information can be disseminated, persistently leaves Bourne pursued not only by Carlos's men, but also by American intelligence officials who, lacking the revelatory files, believe he really is an assassin. By the end of the novel, the right people have been informed of Bourne's real identity and his amnesiac status and the CIA manages to call off its hit on him, but Bourne's climactic confrontation with Carlos ends with the Jackal's escape: mission not accomplished.

The Bourne series works from the premise of traditional individualist intelligence fiction: Jason Bourne is a ruthless killer who operates without the knowledge of all but a few Agency officials, who willingly agreed to pose as the ultimate assassin in order to avenge the deaths of his wife and sons. But ultimately, the failure to actually accomplish the mission robs the spymasters at Treadstone of the satisfaction that the ends justified the means. The next two installments in the series do even more to demonstrate that Treadstone doesn't care for Bourne as

a man as much as they care about him as a tool. In *The Bourne Supremacy*, knowing that he will refuse them if they ask for help with a mission, the remaining men of Treadstone goad Bourne—who has made a nearly complete recovery from his traumas and is living happily with his real name, David Webb—into reassuming his identity as an assassin by kidnapping Marie. The final book of Ludlum’s trilogy³⁴ sees Bourne making an uneasy alliance with the American intelligence community to finally kill the Jackal, but the novel remains marked by Bourne’s understandably deep-seated mistrust of American governmental officials, covert or otherwise.

The new individualist intelligence fiction assures readers that even though the intelligence community was corrupt in the early cold war years—even though the government allowed an agency to come into being that would sanction assassination and meddling in democratic elections—there are still strong men who are involved in this work who are able to call out such corruption and set things on right. Where former heroes in this subgenre fought webs of conspiracy in foreign territory, these new dramas often occur on American soil, and their heroes are pursued by their former allies. While these fictions are highly critical of the intelligence community, they ultimately posit that these agencies are redeemable. The work of intelligence is still necessary, but regulation and openness, to an extent, is necessary to prevent American operative from becoming too much like “the bad guys” in the closed Soviet system.

In response both to the Congressional trials and this new brand of individualist intelligence fiction, a new kind of patriotic intelligence fiction emerged. The major practitioner of the new patriotic intelligence fiction was Tom Clancy. A major household name whose work was popular enough to launch him to multimillionaire status, Clancy nonetheless has received virtually no critical attention, even from scholars of genre fiction. This oversight might be an intentional snub, given that Clancy’s blunt, conservative political opinions garnered him few

friends in the wider literary-academic world.³⁵ Nonetheless, Clancy topped the *New York Times* bestseller list with seventeen of his novels, many of which were adapted into major studio films, video games, and a recent television series. His cultural influence is thus arguably wider than any other author examined in this project. His debut novel, *The Hunt for Red October* (1984) is, oddly, Clancy's most accomplished piece of work from a strictly formalist viewpoint. Making use of multi-perspective narration and enough dramatic irony to keep readers guessing, Clancy crafted a tale of submarine espionage with an attention to the intricacies of military bureaucracy and war technology that was at that time unmatched, despite his complete lack of personal military experience. The novel opens from the perspective of Marko Ramius, a Russian military officer who has become entirely disillusioned with the Soviet system, largely because of the death of his wife due to poor medical facilities and his observations of incompetent or corrupt men who are able to excel in the Party government due to nepotism. Ramius has spent the last several years overseeing the development of a cutting-edge new submarine with an ultra-quiet propulsion system, handpicking his crew of officers similarly disillusioned and loyal instead to him. He plans to defect to the United States, presenting the Red October as proof of his sincerity, but he is unable to leave quietly, choosing instead to announce his intention with a letter opened a few days after his crew's departure on a supposed test run. As a result, the entire Soviet navy is sent after the Red October, and the American government is suddenly in a panic over hundreds of enemy naval vessels rushing toward their east coast.

From this point on, the novel alternates between developments on the Red October—Ramius must rid the submarine of the one officer who is not sympathetic to his mission, and fool the enlisted, uneducated men so they suspect nothing when the sub rushes across the globe rather than circling Soviet waters—and the efforts of the American intelligence community and

military to decipher the Soviets' intentions and plan an appropriate response. Here the reader is introduced to Jack Ryan, the CIA analyst who would become one of Clancy's major protagonists. Ryan is a former marine who after his service turned to a history Ph.D. and speculation in the stock world, making enough of a fortune that he can pursue whatever work he pleases. He interrupts work on a historical monograph to help the CIA through the submarine crisis, an interesting nod to the traditional connection between humanities departments and the American intelligence community. Ryan is the first to correctly discern Ramius's defection and the panic of the rest of the fleet, and the reader, who knows that he is correct, watches as he convinces his superiors, who then must convince the president and all involved branches of the intelligence community and the military. The Americans over a few hundred pages plot how to safely intercept Ramius, and how to make it appear that the Red October was destroyed so that American intelligence can examine it, rather than returning it to the Soviets. While the vast majority of the novel deals with this kind of bureaucratic negotiation and strategic, almost academic analysis, the novel does contrive to have Jack Ryan present on an American ship when the Red October is successfully met, at which point he boards the submarine. He is thus present for an intense submarine battle with the one Soviet vessel that managed to follow the Red October undetected, and then for another climactic shootout on the submarine when one enemy agent hidden among the enlisted men attempts to kill Ramius and all of the Americans on board.

One of Clancy's major accomplishments, and what's most appealing to many readers, is the relative realism of his tale. The majority of cold war stories about American intelligence make little pretense to realism. As I've noted, American intelligence fiction is unusual in that writers had to create narratives whole cloth from their imaginations, as there was no access to public information about what CIA work actually entailed. Operatives-turned-authors were

restricted by their secrecy oaths from revealing anything like accounts of their actual exploits, and some operatives went so far as to state that their fictional narratives were fantasies that eased their frustration with the actual lack of resolution or clarity in intelligence work. However, by the late 1970s, enough information had been released through the various Congressional hearings about the role of intelligence work in America that a dedicated author could turn up a reasonably complete picture of what this secret work entailed. Towards the end of the cold war, then, authors were beginning to strive for realism in their depictions of intelligence work. In some cases, like Norman Mailer's titanic *Harlot's Ghost*, discussed in Chapter 5, this newly available detail was used to craft counterintelligence literature that sought to expose a wider reading public to the various crimes and inefficiencies of the intelligence community. But a few authors tried for realist fiction that stressed the need for continual public support of the intelligence community, plucking hero types from earlier spy fiction and relocating them in narrative landscapes that more accurately reflected the world in which real American operatives worked. And Jack Ryan represents a new patriotic hero: as a CIA consultant, rather than a paid analyst, he's part of but also above the established bureaucracy. As an independent millionaire who is exceptionally but realistically talented, he can criticize his employers without fear of serious repercussions, advocating for sharing information across branches of the intelligence and military service. Eventually, as Clancy's fictional world becomes more of a fantasy of an ideal man and less a realist look at the difficulties of negotiating government bureaucracy, Ryan becomes the President and can make even more sweeping changes to the system—but from the outset, he is the everyday superman that can improve American intelligence from within.

One last significant practitioner of patriotic intelligence fiction is William F. Buckley, a former operative and famous public conservative who wanted to respond to the new mistrust of

the intelligence community. Seeing the rise of cynical portraits of the CIA and brutal protagonists with no moral center, Buckley was consciously trying to reinstate intelligence fiction with the nobility and wholesomeness of the 1950s and early 1960s, and his status as a celebrity, talk show host, and founder of the influential *National Review* meant that his fiction automatically had a wide audience. His hero Blackford Oakes is a classic gentleman spy, a Yale graduate who often literally prays that he won't have to take violent action. But rather than being a total fantasy that seeks to erase the idea that the Agency might be corrupt, Buckley's narratives address issues like CIA-sponsored assassination head-on while still aiming to delineate a moral code.

His second novel *Stained Glass* (1979) is the best example of the series' reckoning with how to consider oneself good while loyally following orders that might contradict one's moral code.³⁶ Oakes is sent to the divided postwar Germany to keep tabs on Count Wintergrin, a nobleman running for Chancellor on the platform of uniting the country. Wintergrin is particularly inspiring to the youth of the country, giving nationalist speeches that are alarming to the U.S. government, the memory of Hitler still fresh. Even more alarming is the Soviet Union's threat to invade Eastern Germany should the Count be elected. Alarmed by this specter of a third world war, the CIA orders Oakes to prevent the election by any means possible. But despite his typically ominous name, Wintergrin turns out to be a man of great personal character who Oakes comes to deeply admire. Oakes starts to experience pangs of conscience at earning Wintergrin's trust to the purpose of finding ways to sabotage his campaign: "Was he in a dirty business? ... It was one thing to bring a British traitor to heel, another to ingratiate himself with someone as high-minded as anyone he had ever known—for the purpose of putting that man's confidences on a conveyor belt to his enemies" (76). Oakes gains the confidence of Wintergrin by posing as

an architect who will assist in the reconstruction of St. Anselm's church, a gesture Wintergrin hopes will symbolize the restoration of the war-torn Germany. This cover gives Oakes ample opportunity to reflect on his Christianity, the stark contrast between his values of honesty and the deception he must carry out daily. When Oakes fails to sabotage the elections and Wintergrin gains enough votes to become Chancellor, Oakes is ordered to assassinate him, leading to a dramatic scene in which he literally prays to save the man's life: "Dear St. Anselm: Intercede in behalf of the lord of St. Anselm's. You, who proved the existence of God, help prevent others from playing the role of God" (235).

Ultimately, Oakes is spared from having to carry out the assassination when Wintergrin is killed by another American operative just at the moment that Oakes decides he cannot in good conscience kill a man, especially one he considers a friend. But the novel does not end there: in an odd epilogue, Oakes meets Allen Dulles years later and is granted the opportunity to ask the famous DCI's opinion of the whole operation. When Oakes asks whether or not they did "the right thing" in killing Wintergrin, Dulles refuses to answer, adding, "In this world, if you let them, the ambiguists will kill you... I *don't* believe the lesson to draw is that we *must not* act, because, in acting, we may *prove* to be wrong" (273-4). This exchange articulates the political motivation behind the Blackford Oakes novels: to defend the CIA against the charge that it is no different than the Soviet Union, and to expunge them even from guilt over the Agency's greatest proven mistakes. The novels, in their moral grappling, conclude that to do *something* to fight the forces of evil in the world is better than hand-wringing and standing by while a more decisive enemy does what they will. Buckley ultimately argues that asking the CIA whether or not they did the right thing, as the Congressional investigations did, plays into the hand of communist operatives who will exploit the democratic American system. Rather than asking whether or not

the CIA is engaged in “a dirty business,” Americans should accept that their operatives are the good guys. By giving voice to the entire debate instead of shying away from the scandals of the 1970s, the Blackford Oakes novels are more effective in their defense of the agency.

Conclusion

All of these narratives end more or less happily—regardless of the type of hero, or the setting of the mission, these American intelligence heroes are always able to gather reliable intelligence or carry out their military objective. These stories reassure their audience that the new American intelligence community is a necessary component of the postwar government, something Americans can put their faith in. But running parallel to these narratives was a postmodernist movement that argued the opposite: that American intelligence’s stories were overconfident fantasies, and that it intentionally left out significant portions of its history. In order to show the instability of any story, to communicate the postmodern ideas that all histories and narratives are made up of selective facts that can be combatted with other configurations of the details, the authors discussed in the following chapters work with recognizable elements from the popular intelligence narratives, but turn them, distort them, or deconstruct them. Working within the genre of intelligence narratives, authors of counterintelligence literature use the elements of the genre to combat the ideologies it reinforces, cast doubt amongst the public it assuages, and protect the integrity of the democracy it thinks the genre threatens. Counterintelligence literature seeks to destroy the heroes of intelligence narratives, in defense of an American order that its authors perceive is threatened by the new intelligence community.

Intelligence narratives mirror and reinforce the justifications that CIA officers used during the whistleblower trials: that they were just following orders, or else that they were doing what had to be done, perhaps without explicit permission from the executive and legislative

branches. These two lines of logic aren't necessarily compatible but comprise a network of circular logic that intelligence fiction, which often inspired operatives in positions of power, participated in. Counterintelligence literature seeks to break that exchange by infiltrating the genre, depicting operatives who fail, not because the enemy is too strong—that would only justify further military buildup—but because the work they do is fundamentally flawed. By portraying operatives who are too confident in their ability to predict events and make the best decisions for the world, counterintelligence literature seeks to introduce doubt into that system of logic, not directly attack it. The following chapter begins this analysis by reading Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, two of the most canonical authors associated with postmodernism, writing expansive fictions of American intelligence at opposite ends of the cold war.

CHAPTER 2

REINTERPRETING PARANOIA IN PYNCHON AND DELILLO

In January 1961, the beginning of the craze for American intelligence fiction, *Mad Magazine* began running the regular comic strip *Spy vs. Spy*. The wordless comic, featuring two spies eternally waging war on each other, distilled the American love of the elements and aesthetics of intelligence fiction: increasingly complicated gadgets, overelaborate schemes, twist endings, and two distinct super-operatives committed to besting the other. But importantly, *Spy vs. Spy* was not a story about one good guy who consistently defeats his evil counterpart. The only physical distinction between the two is the color of their clothing—one's hat, long cloak, and shoes are black, while the other one wears an identical white outfit. Both faces are dominated by surreally sharp beak noses and dark glasses, and despite any usual associations with the colors black and white, neither spy is morally better than the other, and neither is working for a particular, recognizable side. We know nothing of their personalities beyond their hatred of the other one, and the pleasure in watching their endless battles isn't to cheer for one or see which one wins, but to marvel and laugh at the increasingly absurd ways they find ways to outwit each other.

Indeed, the lack of meaningful distinctions, moral or otherwise, between the two spies was so key to the text that it was the punch line of the December 1961 strip, in which both spies paint themselves the color of the other—the perfect disguise, as they are otherwise identical. But the strategy is too effective, for when the spies meet each other in the third panel, neither is prepared for the existential shock of seeing not his enemy, but *himself*. The final panel of the strip is a far cry from the usual violent triumph of one spy over the other, as they lie side-by-side on couches in the office of a Freudian analyst, attempting to recover their own identity. What

better illustration of the paranoia and illogic of the Cold War struggle between the superpowers?

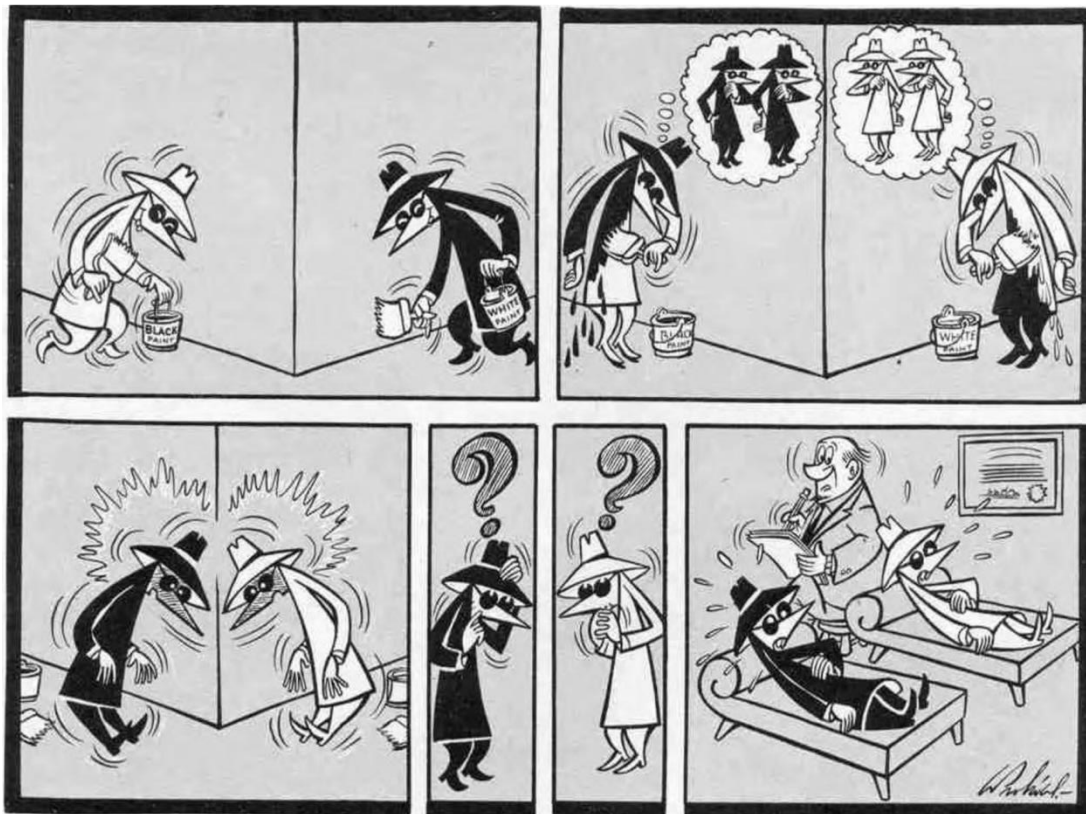


Figure 1. Spy vs. Spy strip from Mad Magazine Issue 67, December 1961.

The long-running popularity of *Spy vs. Spy*³⁷ points to the public fascination with the aesthetics of popular spy fiction that enabled public acceptance of an ever-escalating real world conflict with no apparent end point. As an indicator of the almost elemental love the public had for intelligence hijinks and as a satire of the work of the actual intelligence community, *Spy vs. Spy* is emblematic of what I term counterintelligence literature, the main subject of this dissertation. Counterintelligence literature, again, describes the texts produced by postmodernist authors that use elements of popular intelligence fiction in subversive ways to hinder the promotion of the burgeoning intelligence community. Not separate from or totally opposed to

popular fiction that celebrated America's new intelligence agencies, counterintelligence literature uses the elements of the popular genre to warn against an unmitigated faith in the new American intelligence agencies, revealing how popular media is often complicit in perpetuating cold war conflicts and facilitating the rise of the domestic surveillance state. This chapter analyzes novels by Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo, the two most influential authors of counterintelligence literature.

The fiction of Pynchon and DeLillo is overtly concerned with the human desire to create meaning in a postwar, modernized world saturated with information. Their novels are often rightly read as masterful accounts of "the age of plastics and paranoia, dominated by the System" (Bloom 1).³⁸ Indeed, their novels justify paranoia as a reasonable state of being in a world where there often *is* a conspiracy to be uncovered. In Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and DeLillo's *Libra* (1988), the texts I'll primarily analyze, the intelligence community is involved in a number of wide-reaching schemes that other characters can dimly perceive and suspect, but things are further complicated when these plots spin out of the control of those who initially conceived them. The result is both a condemnation of the means to which the intelligence community puts its extensive power and an argument that they cannot effectively wield it. In their chaotic fictional worlds in which coincidence and conspiracy are equally powerful, and in which intelligence operations frequently fail, Pynchon and DeLillo challenge the idea that cause and effect can be easily traced, that definitive answers in masses of data can be found.

As an entry point to postmodernism, no two authors could serve better. While both Pynchon and DeLillo were immensely dedicated researchers of their fictional subjects, both drew from this mass of information not to present a definitive narrative of a given historical moment, but to demonstrate that no such narrative can possibly exist. There are near infinite definitions of

postmodernism, but in reading Pynchon and DeLillo I particularly make use of Hayden White's theories of metahistory and Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction. White, along with E. H. Carr and other historiographers in the 1960s and 70s, was crucial in challenging long-held ideas that the historian could provide a total, accurate picture of the past. In his influential *Metahistory*, published in 1973, he stipulates that when the historian begins to gather facts, they are perhaps unconsciously selecting only those facts that fit a preestablished narrative that is contingent on their personal experience and worldview. In this way, a given "fact" leads to another fact with which it fits: the historian is not an interpreter of a historical mystery, emerging with the objective truth, but rather the author of a narrative that necessarily excludes more than it includes. These ideas are not surprising to any twenty-first century student of history, but they presented a novel challenge to assumptions on which, for one, the intelligence community was founded: to slightly extend White's theories, intelligence analysts, like historians, cannot produce an assessment of any given situation that is completely true. Linda Hutcheon, building from this work from a literary studies perspective, shows how fiction can be an important part of recovering lost historical voices by recasting these stories in ways that challenge dominant narratives. Reading Pynchon and DeLillo's fiction through the lens of postmodern historiography is not new, but no one has yet identified the particular incompatibility of these authors' postmodern historical visions and the starting point of intelligence analysis. Doing so puts a new point on these authors' antiwar sentiments and their critique of American reliance on these new covert agencies.

This chapter seeks to recast the critical consensus about Pynchon and DeLillo's shared concern with paranoia: reading their major novels in the context of intelligence fiction reveals how these texts reflect a more specific anxiety about the efficacy and scope of the new American

intelligence community. More than merely commenting on the general state of mounting paranoia as the cold war progressed, these novels that follow actual intelligence operatives are particularly concerned with these agencies that were so crucial to the continuation of American intervention in global conflicts. These characters' fundamental uncertainty about whether or not a person can identify useful "facts" that will help them reach a reliable understanding of the world is particularly meaningful, as many of these characters are tasked with interpreting situations for military and political leaders. I argue that this contradiction—the professional need to believe in objective history, and the mounting postmodern doubt that such a thing is possible—represents a more pointed irony than extant scholarships' emphasis on these author's general attention to conspiracy and paranoia has yet identified. By tracing the ways that Pynchon and DeLillo manipulate the tropes of intelligence fiction to question the very concept of reliable intelligence in a postmodern world, this chapter reveals these authors' particular warning against the U.S. government's reliance on the new intelligence community and the media that enables its growth.

Operational Paranoia: Pynchon's Failed Detectives and Analysts

In 1984, a collection of Thomas Pynchon's early short stories was published under the name *Slow Learner*. While readers and scholars of the author's work were enthusiastic about an official edition of works that were otherwise hard to find, perhaps even more valuable was the introduction penned by Pynchon himself, the longest public statement that the reclusive author has ever made about his work or life. Pynchon downplays the value of these early efforts—hence the collection's self-deprecating title—and reflects on what influenced him as a young writer to make what he in retrospect considered embarrassing mistakes in craft. He writes that the particular sin he committed in the story "Under the Rose" was excessively borrowing from

source material, primarily an old Baedeker that he found in a thrift store, but later adds, “I was also able to steal, or let us say ‘derive,’” from “a lot of spy fiction, novels of intrigue” (18).

Pynchon cites several authors of British spy fiction as influential on his early ideas about history, encouraging his fascination with “lurking, spying, false identities, psychological games” (18).

Perhaps because of this emphasis on writers like John Buchan and Helen McInnes, the few scholars who have written on Pynchon’s relationship to popular intelligence fiction only link him to British narratives rather than the American tradition.³⁹ In this section, I trace Pynchon’s particular critique of the burgeoning American intelligence community, the political decision-making it enabled, and the American narratives that celebrated it.

Thomas Pynchon, more than any other author examined in this project, is concerned with the human desire to analyze information for meaning, to detect patterns in a disorienting world. Ultimately, his fiction argues that in the postwar world, that task is impossible. His would-be detectives and spies risk paralysis or total dissolution as they suffer mounting paranoia, and they can never determine if their suspicions about shadowy forces massing against them are real or imagined. Pynchon doesn’t critique specific American intelligence agencies in the way that this project’s other writers do with explicit depictions of the CIA or the FBI.⁴⁰ While American intelligence agencies certainly appear in his fiction, he’s not focused on the CIA as the source of the twentieth century’s evils in the way that other authors’ projects are. Partly, this is because his cold war fiction, particularly *Gravity’s Rainbow*, takes on so much that it can’t be said to zero in on any one subject. But *Gravity’s Rainbow* is the pinnacle of postmodernist play with genre destabilizing cold war assumptions about America’s involvement in global geopolitics. While he doesn’t directly portray the CIA and critique its specific bureaucracy and mission, his picture of the Allied intelligence effort has elements of the wartime OSS and draws heavily from the

intelligence fiction that saturated media in the 1960s, which many scholars have identified as a critical decade for Pynchon.⁴¹

While *Gravity's Rainbow* is Pynchon's ultimate exploration of the limits of intelligence as this project defines it, his early fiction is of course driven by truth-seekers. The story "Under the Rose," which Pynchon cites as a "derivation" of spy stories, grew into a major component of his debut *V*. Half of the novel follows Herbert Stencil as he tries to identify the V cryptically mentioned in his uncle's journal. In the course of his investigation, Stencil reflects on both the frustrated search for such an impossibly flexible sign with so many different meanings and on literal intelligence work, for his journaling uncle was a British spy around the turn of the century. The younger Stencil studies his uncle's theorization of what he called The Situation, a methodology by which one could isolate important events in the world and analyze them for meaning—in other words, a handbook for an intelligence operative. The elder Stencil's waning confidence in the efficacy or even existence of the Situation, echoing the younger Stencil's waning confidence in the possibility of finding V, is a microcosm for Pynchon's treatment of intelligence across his fiction. After Stencil posits that "no Situation had any objective reality: it only existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment," his ultimate conclusion is unsurprising: "Short of examining the entire history of each individual participating, [...] short of anatomizing each soul, what hope has anyone of understanding a Situation?" (189, 470). This sentiment is indicative of Pynchonian protagonists' final, inevitable reckoning with the limitations of human analysis in a world too dense to accurately scrutinize.

Gravity's Rainbow grew out of *V*⁴²—the novels share several minor characters and take up similar themes—but between the two is Pynchon's tightest tale of detection and meaning-making. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, protagonist Oedipa Maas is tasked with unraveling the multiple

mysteries surrounding her former lover Pierce Inverarity. While her story does not intersect with formal intelligence organizations as *V* and *Gravity's Rainbow* do, covert threats line the novel in the form of the masked Tristero and in the figure of Inverarity himself, who was a talented mimic and who at least one character suspected of being a CIA operative.⁴³ The muted posthorns that Oedipa chases are Pynchon's ultimate symbol of troubled signification, and Oedipa's journey from the Tupperware parties of a good mid-century American housewife to investigating a force that was sometimes characterized as assassins reflects the duality of American domestic life in the 1950s and 60s—consumerist domestic bliss muting the anxiety that the U.S. could suddenly become involved in a war anywhere in the world.

Scholarship on *Gravity's Rainbow* has long focused on three things: first, his novels' attention to the human desire to find and interpret signs; second, his play with popular culture in all its crudity, an extension of *Lot 49*'s famous claim that there's "a high magic to low puns" (105); and finally, the novel's antiwar message, a reactive reading to contemporaneous reviewers' critiques that the book was amoral.⁴⁴ Without seeking to contradict these long-held arguments that these elements are crucial to understanding Pynchon's masterwork, in this section I'd like to argue that reading these elements through the lens of intelligence (rather than the detective's search for clues) and intelligence fiction (highlighting these narratives instead of treating all popular culture as a mass) brings out a particular irony in these novels that interrupts the exchange between the American intelligence community and popular cold war narratives. Many scholars and artists have attempted to identify the moment that postmodernism was born;⁴⁵ I argue that for Pynchon, it was not the bomb, or any specific event during or after World War II, but the total mass of atrocities that were committed during the war that brought about the crisis of meaning and the breakdown of history that postmodernism theorizes. American intelligence

and interventionist foreign policy was also created in the wake of World War II. Again, this project posits that there is a fundamental divide between the burgeoning intelligence community that had to believe in the stability of discrete, politically important facts and the postmodernist movement that sought to question all assumptions about reality, history, and truth. Pynchon, by portraying the rise of the American intelligence community at the moment that postmodernism emerges, highlights both the complicity of intelligence in acts of war and the inefficacy of these institutions in a world that is forever changed by these wartime atrocities. Pynchon's wartime and postwar intelligence operatives remain hopelessly unequipped to interpret a fundamentally chaotic world, but they are doubly doomed because their actions during the war are what ushered in the chaos that reigns in the postwar Zone. These operatives act out the behavior of heroes in popular intelligence fiction, but their actions never have the desired effect and they are ultimately revealed to be ineffective at best, and cruel at worst.

To show Pynchon's play with the popular intelligence narrative's elements in *Gravity's Rainbow*, I will first look at his fictional intelligence agency and its traditional hero types, tracing how Pynchon decenters or inverts the roles that characters who would typically be protagonists play. I then turn to examine how the novels' most central character, Tyrone Slothrop, acts out pastiches of the popular spy story in a futile effort to escape the control of various systemic forces and assert his individual identity. In doing so, I show how the critical work of scholars who have elucidated Pynchon's politics can be applied not just to the wider American government or the global market, but more specifically to intelligence work.⁴⁶ In his introduction to *Slow Learner*, Pynchon writes, "John Kennedy's role model James Bond [... made] his name by kicking third-world people around, another extension of the boy's adventure tales a lot of us grew up reading" (11). Pynchon understood the popular intelligence tale to be a fundamentally

colonialist, militaristic, exceptionalist fantasy that denied personhood to most of the world's population in order to reinforce American ideals, and particularly to imbue them in the next generation of American men. I show that this critique of American intelligence and the narratives that celebrate it is prevalent in *Gravity's Rainbow*, largely accomplished through Pynchon's deconstruction of the characters and plots of popular intelligence fiction.

The first section of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "Beyond the Zero," introduces readers to the branch of Allied intelligence operations that holds most of the book's major characters, including the protagonist-by-default Tyrone Slothrop. A brief sketch of this operation's name and leadership indicates that despite being on the right side of the war, this is not the usual story of a band of heroes. The narrator wryly calls the sub-agency "the poor relative of Allied intelligence," holding the astrologically significant name "PISCES—Psychological Intelligence Schemes for Expediting Surrender. Whose surrender is not yet made clear" (18, 35). PISCES is technically headed by the elderly Brigadier Pudding, but he is depicted as vaguely senile and easily manipulated by the Pavlovian behaviorist Dr. Pointsman, who has been accurately characterized as the "rational evil doctor" in an alarming variation on the classic archetype of the mad scientist (Fowler 60). In the first part of the novel, PISCES is given a clear task: finding a way to predict the targets of the V-2 rockets, since they can't be spotted or heard before they fall. But *Gravity's Rainbow*, among many other things, is the story of the agency's failure to learn anything useful about the rocket strikes, despite a range of increasingly desperate tactics. Indeed, PISCES seems like a late-war last-ditch effort to use any means possible to find answers. Their staff is described as "wild talents—clairvoyants and mad magicians, telekinetics, astral travelers, gatherers of light," essentially anyone who can lay claim to supernatural powers in order to predict events—not figures that would be taken seriously under ordinary circumstances (40).

Although readers' confidence in the integrity or efficacy of PISCES is immediately shaken, a few characters emerge who might in another narrative serve as heroes against this backdrop of shady mediocrity. There is the cynical but competent statistician Roger Mexico, who is attributed with many reflections on causation and history with which the narrative clearly sympathizes; the British captain Geoffrey "Pirate" Prentice, whose point-of-view opens the novel and who makes a better traditional protagonist-operative; and Katje Borgesius, a Dutch double agent who seems to embody the femme fatale role. Any of the three might have been the focus of the novel, or at least a section of it, as they perform familiar protagonist roles: effective analyst, globetrotting operative, and mysterious but ultimately trustworthy female agent, respectively. Their stories could reinforce the goodness and victory of the Allied war effort, along the lines of patriotic intelligence fiction, and Pynchon even provides another option as Roger, Pirate, and Katje gradually come to see Pointsman and other leaders of the war effort as a menacing Them, just as much the enemy of a freedom-loving individual as the Axis powers. But their effort late in the novel to form a Counterforce to combat Them ends inconclusively, anticlimactically snuffing a potential individualist intelligence fiction. Neither as agents of a heroic force nor as heroic resisters of an evil force can these three potential protagonist types assert themselves in Pynchon's landscape: all three are relegated to small portions of the novel and ultimately conclude that they are no more moral than anyone else, just as complicit in the continuation of war as any of the forces they try to combat.

In an intelligence agency made up of self-professed clairvoyants, the statistician Roger Mexico is an anomaly rather than the standard, though ironically he begins to be perceived "more and more like a prophet" because his mathematical models come the closest to an accurate prediction of the V-2 rocket strikes (56). While Roger's formulas are moderately effective as a

predictive tool, most of PISCES is more interested in the relationship between Slothrop's sex life and the rocket strikes, a correlation that's ultimately a total dead end. Roger is one of the only sympathetic characters in the novel, in part because his relationship with the PISCES clerk Jessica Swanlake is the only sincere instance of sustained romantic love. But Roger is also attributed with insights on causation and history that read like Pynchon's own meditations and set the stage for the chaotic timelines and rewrites of the historical record that will dominate the bulk of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Arguing with Dr. Pointsman, one of the fiction's chief villains, Roger is frustrated with his superior's insistence that behaviorist psychology will always work:

There's a feeling about that cause-and-effect may have been taken as far as it will go. That for science to carry on at all, it must look for a less narrow, a less [...] sterile set of assumptions. The next great breakthrough may come when we have the courage to junk cause-and-effect entirely, and strike off at some other angle.
(90-91)

Roger's suggestion that moving away from a theory of causation opens up more possibilities is essentially postmodern, and an ideology that aligns with Pynchon's larger fictional project. Though it's an odd way of thinking with which open a novel about intelligence analysis—which is largely based on traditional tracing of cause-and-effect—the narrative clearly invites readers to side with Roger: he's a keen analyst struggling against the unrewarding job he's been given in a poorly funded branch of the Allied war effort. Despite being the most correct about the position of the falling bombs, no one listens to him, choosing to chase wild theories about Slothrop's sex life instead. He desperately tries to hold on to the woman he loves, though he knows that she'll leave him for an established domestic life with a lieutenant who represents everything that Roger hates. The start of Roger's story is a typical setup for a rise narrative, in which his intelligence—both human and tactical—is acknowledged and he receives his rightful professional and romantic

rewards. But Roger is quickly shunted out of the narrative: although four of the twenty-one sections in the first part of the novel are from his perspective, at the start of Part II he nearly vanishes from the narrative, reappearing briefly as part of the Counterforce that also fails to offer any kind of triumphant conclusion for the narratives' potential hero characters.

Two other characters present themselves early in the narrative as potential protagonists, even more in line with the intelligence fiction genre specifically. Pirate Prentice is a British captain whose point-of-view opens the novel, immediately establishing him as a man trying to keep a sense of agency in a chaotically dangerous landscape. Every time the novel tracks him, Pirate is carrying out some covert operation: decoding secret messages, planning psychological operations against the enemy, and controlling the Dutch agent Katje Borgesius, the novel's third recognizable hero type. Pirate retrieves Katje from her posting as a spy working for the German Captain Weissman, codename Blicero, who is an almost literal embodiment of the evils of the war. Katje is the femme fatale type to Pirate as the operative hero, and later to Slothrop who, as I show below, acts out the role of the intelligence hero without actually embodying the role. Beautiful but inscrutable, with unclear alliances, such women appeared frequently in popular intelligence narratives, most memorable today in the form of the Bond girls who might be loyal, romantically and professionally, to MI-6's star operative, but might be using their sexuality to cloud his judgment and sabotage his mission. But again, both Pirate the patriotic operative hero and Katje, a worthy female agent who ultimately remains loyal to her handler, occupy positions on the fringes of *Gravity's Rainbow* and eventually succumb to existential crises about their role in perpetuating the war.

The resolutions of these characters' arcs reinforce Pynchon's antiwar message. More than just being denied the central, heroic roles that they might ordinarily occupy, each of these

characters has to face the realization that their participation in PISCES operations implicates them in the war's atrocities. Pynchon's depiction of Allied intelligence is an extended meditation on the fundamental violence in which intelligence agencies engage. Ultimately, in his depiction, these agencies are seeking to extend their nation's power, not defending lofty ideals of truth or freedom, and each of his sympathetic operative characters ends the novel grappling with the moral implications of their service to intelligence agencies. Roger Mexico worries over his complicity in Pointsman's various schemes, recognizing the doctor's sinister intentions not to win the war but to have the opportunity to experiment on human beings. Roger, who memorably claims, "My mother is the war," also worries that he cannot ever separate himself from the violence in which he has been complicit (40). This fear is confirmed by his lover Jessica, who is perpetually stressed about her wartime lover's pessimism and disbelief in standard ways of knowing: "In his play he wrecks the elegant rooms of history, threatens the idea of cause and effect itself. What if Mexico's whole *generation* have turned out like this? Will Postwar be nothing but 'events,' newly created one moment to the next? No links? Is it the end of history?" (57). Indeed, part of the novel's project is to dismantle the notion of a "postwar" world, as there were still any number of conflicts happening around the world and American military rhetoric only escalated through the early 1970s. Roger can't even conceive of a postwar time; when Jessica, in the final section of the novel, tries to reassure him that the world was at peace, he thinks, "No, we're not. It's another bit of propaganda" (640). Mary Dudziak, in her book-length theorization of the concept of "wartime" in American politics, writes that after the end of World War II, a "new kind of peacetime" was developed which was "not a time without war, but instead a time in which war does not bother everyday Americans" (135). Roger, forever marked by his participation in the war and his disbelief that anything will ever be "normal" again, is one

of the few who will continue to be bothered by it and guilty about his own participation in it.

Katje and Pirate are also made to come to terms with their more active roles in covert operations, even more difficult to justify than Roger's role as an analyst. Katje reflects on whether the intelligence she delivered to PISCES was ultimately enough to overcome her support of the evil German leader Blicero while she was pretending to be on their side. Her most important piece of intelligence, the location of a V2 rocket site, became outdated by the time the Allies could act upon it, and while she delivers plenty of other information, it never seems satisfactory: "What more do they want? She asks this seriously, as if there's a real conversion factor between information and lives. Well, strange to say, there is. Written down in the Manual, on file at the War Department. Don't forget the real business of the War is buying and selling" (107). Katje never feels that she has accomplished anything or saved anyone by her actions, although in several stories she would be painted as a hero who sacrificed her body and personal freedom in order to attain useful information for the good guys. More pointedly, in a surreal sequence late in the novel, readers are asked to imagine that Pirate Prentice and Katje together are made to tour Hell in Dante-esque fashion. Pirate, as Katje has repeatedly done throughout the novel, faces for the first time the militarism of his role as a leader of a wartime intelligence agency. After surveying the occupants of this imagined Hell, many of whom are guilty of straightforward atrocities and war crimes, Pirate reluctantly admits that he is destined to be damned there, too: "With everything else, these are, after all, people who kill each other: and Pirate has always been one of them" (551).

Ultimately, these characters are all minor players in a tale that largely follows Tyrone Slothrop, a protagonist methodically stripped of agency and motivation. Slothrop gradually becomes aware in the first part of the novel that he is at the center of a complex conspiracy, the

subject of competing surveillance and control by a number of governmental, corporate, and military groups, a state that goes back to mysterious experiments enacted upon him when he was just an infant. When he attempts to break free of all of these controlling forces, escaping into the chaotic postwar Zone, he nonetheless finds that every piece of new information he learns about his past does not help him regain a sense of individuality, and as the novel comes to a close he famously dissipates, with nothing to hold his ever-splintering personality together.

Slothrop, throughout his quest to solve the mystery of his past and regain his personal agency, acts out the part of a traditional intelligence hero. Unlike the would-be protagonists discussed above, Slothrop does not have any ideology motivating him to perform covert feats, but rather is a pastiche of the ideal American operative: he is imbued with surprising sexual prowess,⁴⁷ carries out any number of missions (retrieving packages, receiving messages, traveling across contentious borders, eluding capture), and is more often wearing a disguise than appearing as himself. These actions, decontextualized, are all familiar elements of the television and pulp narratives that Americans in the 1960s adored, but in *Gravity's Rainbow*, it's all an empty charade because Slothrop's actions are detached from ideology, the one element that the intelligence story needs to have any meaning. As the last chapter discussed, patriotic intelligence fictions reinforce the dominant patriotic ideology of a nation, while individualist intelligence fiction confirms the personal agency of the protagonist, allowing him to accomplish his mission for the betterment of his country while retaining his own sense of purpose and identity outside his controlling agency. Slothrop, either acting on behalf of PISCES or fleeing from it to pursue answers about his own troubled history, is never granted the agency to articulate his own ideology, and the world through which he travels is so chaotic that no action is guaranteed to have the desired or expected effect. In the end, Slothrop's acting-out of the role of heroic spy (or

superhero, or Hollywood leading man) doesn't allow him to regain his identity, but only hastens his dissipation. Like the three characters discussed above, Slothrop is given the opportunity to act out both a patriotic and an individualist operative role, but Pynchon withholds the catharsis or triumph that either of these roles might bring.

Slothrop's acting-out of an intelligence fiction's plot leads to some of the novel's funniest and most memorable moments. Part II opens with Slothrop and two of his colleagues on an unexpected furlough to a casino in southern France. On their first day away from the war, a picnic on the beach is suddenly interrupted: Slothrop, looking at a beautiful woman standing in the surf, is astonished to see an enormous octopus rise out of the ocean and begin to drag her into the waves. Immediately, Pynchon signals that this is a scene from a popular fiction, too fantastical to be true and yet happening before Slothrop's eyes, something he must respond although he cannot process it: "An octopus? Yes it is the biggest fucking octopus Slothrop has ever seen outside of the movies, Jackson, and it has risen up out of the water [...] Cocking a malignant eye at the girl, it reaches out, wraps one long sucker-studded tentacle around her neck as everyone watches, another around her waist and begins to drag her, struggling, back under the sea" (186). Even as he rushes forward to batter the octopus with a wine bottle, Slothrop recognizes the absurdity of the situation, reaching for movie scenes as the only analogue for the scene before him. The event is so extreme and implausible that it can only be coded as a comic event, larger than life, not actually threatening and yet absurdly necessary to combat. Slothrop's continued jumble of observations stands in stark contrast to the frankly heroic behavior he performs. After he successfully lures the enormous monster away from the woman, he is able to more fully reflect on the oddity of the scene, his "Puritan reflex of seeking other orders behind the visible, also known as paranoia, filtering in" (190). He has acted out a scene fit for a

Hollywood Bond movie, but both the monster and his success in fighting it seem so improbable that it can only be comic. What can be the meaning of this experience?

Of course, the scene is both real and not real, a beast that existed but was lovingly trained by Pointsman and his colleagues at PISCES to play out that exact scene, the woman Katje Borgesius who has been instructed by Pirate Prentice to seduce Slothrop and so learn more about the connection between his erections and the V2 rocket strikes. Slothrop's paranoid instinct is correct, but there is no way for him to follow it and refuse the call to rescue a woman obviously in distress. Katje was in no danger of actually being harmed by the octopus; Slothrop's heroic, surprisingly easy battle with it was not necessary or meaningful, merely a reflex reaction that overrode the immediate suspicion that something was not right. The end result is farcical, exaggerating even further the absurdity of fantastical climactic scenes in intelligence fictions—heroes scaling the faces of Mount Rushmore, or invading Fort Knox with the help of poison gas—but of course the sobering realization is that these narratives, as shown in the previous chapter, have very real policy implications. The more Americans and American leaders believe in these fantasies, not literally but ideologically, the easier it becomes for actual intelligence agencies to carry out militaristic covert operations without public scrutiny or Congressional oversight. By making this scene both comically exaggerated and an empty simulation, Pynchon both points to the absurdity of these narratives and emphasizes the nonexistence of the supposed hero who would carry out such acts.

The scene with the octopus is the point at which Slothrop takes center stage as the shell of an intelligence hero, performing the role with no actual control over the situation, no chance that things could go differently than how some power has scripted them. Again and again across the long middle section of the novel, Slothrop performs such actions, always worried that

somehow he is being manipulated but unable to act in any other way. At the end of his furlough, he escapes into the Zone of continental Europe, occupied by displaced persons and warring factions in the wake of the war, rather than returning to his superior officers in England. Traversing the Zone, he tries to gather the information that will make sense of his past and thus regain a sense of freedom and agency, but only falls under the sway of any number of other groups and remains hounded by his old controllers. One character he meets in the Zone wryly comments, “Is it any wonder the world’s gone insane, with information come to be the only real medium of exchange?” (261). No amount of information about the experimentation done on him as a child—which he eventually pieces together to reveal a conspiracy implicating corporate weapons manufacturers, the U.S. government, his parents, and Harvard University—helps him buck those powers’ influence over him. As he agrees to perform tasks for various political groups and evades capture by disgruntled military leaders, he takes on multiple disguises: the comic book hero Rocketman, an English war journalist, a German film director, a Russian military officer, and a comic god who appears as a giant pig. He travels by train, pleasure yacht, and hot air balloon. He beds beautiful women and meets mysterious contacts in mountaintop ruins. But throughout it all, he has no strong personal identity or motivation other than staying alive and trying to find some meaning in his chaotic existence: he acts out an intelligence fiction, but the core meaning of it all is missing.

Slothrop’s travels as a covert operative, stripped of any consistent ideology or entity on whose behalf he is acting, ultimately implicates all intelligence agencies as farces motivated by the desire for power rather than any ideals. This hypocrisy is poignantly illustrated in the one passage in the novel in which the actual wartime American intelligence agency is mentioned. Just before the end of the war, Slothrop travels to Zürich at the bidding of an anarchist group in

the Zone. As he starts to tour the city, Slothrop is alarmed by its similarities to “the Ivy League quadrangles [from] his distant youth”:

Spies and big business, in their element, move tirelessly among the grave markers. Be assured there are ex-young men, here in this very city, faces Slothrop used to pass in the quads, who got initiated at Harvard into the Puritan Mysteries: who took oaths in dead earnest to respect and act always in the name of *Vanitas*, Emptiness, their ruler... who now according to life-plan such-and-such have come here to Switzerland to work for Allen Dulles and his “intelligence” network, which operates these days under the title “Office of Strategic Services.” But to initiate OSS is also a secret acronym: as a mantra for times of immediate crisis they have been taught to speak inwardly *oss... oss*, the late, corrupt, Dark-age Latin word for bone... (271; ellipses in original)

This passage attacks the image that the American intelligence community under Dulles was aggressively marketing, instead linking those agencies with death both literal and existential. “Intelligence” is in scare quotes, indicating what the narrator thinks of the efficacy of Dulles’s agency. The young spies’ Harvard education and devotion to “life plan such-and-such” rather than patriotism or a strong set of morals reveals that joining the OSS is a strategic career move, not a noble calling. *Vanitas* describes artistic works emphasizing the transience of human life, often depicting skulls next to images usually indicating human progress; Pynchon’s equating of the OSS with literal graveyard bones clearly links intelligence work with death. The graveyard, the setting of so many spy thrillers’ climactic scenes, here is not a glamorous backdrop for a life-affirming tale but the somber reflection of the fundamental emptiness and cynicism of pursuing a career in postwar intelligence. The OSS and the CIA that grew out of it may not be Pynchon’s primary subject, but only because with his fictional PISCES he can cast a wider net of blame.

Intelligence agencies that are used in the supposedly postwar world are military weapons that are always in service of *Vanitas*, not *Veritas*.

In writing on *Gravity's Rainbow*, it's difficult to communicate both its dense, complex ideas and its frequent reliance on replicating the ephemera of popular culture. Slothrop spends a few hundred pages traversing the Zone in the guise of the superhero Rocketman, complete with cape. Other set pieces mimic the action-adventure tale, as when Slothrop flees an enraged American Major Marvey in a hot air balloon or supposedly fights off a giant octopus that has kidnapped a beautiful woman. The one sincere romance in the novel, between Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake, includes a "Hollywood cute meet," and there are innumerable less sweet sexual encounters that run the gamut of pornographic genres (39). And the popular intelligence tale comes into play in scenes where characters decode complicated messages, Pointsman coordinates surveillance of Slothrop, or complicated counterintelligence plots are carried out against the German army. The disorienting effect of this mishmash of genres has been described as a skipping film, as a comic book whose panels can suddenly jump between myriad worlds, or a montage that reflects the modern experience of being immersed in an unprecedented wealth of new media.⁴⁸ Regardless of the metaphor used, scholars typically agree that part of Pynchon's point is that all of these genres can be degrading or empty, that the wild jumps between absurd pastiches of various genres is not a celebration so much as a condemnation of what Jameson describes as the depthlessness of the postmodern condition.

Any reading of a novel as dense, tonally diverse, rich with allusion, and imaginative as *Gravity's Rainbow* necessarily leaves out much. Intelligence fiction is only one of several genres that the novel invokes, but zeroing in on it provides a language to discuss Pynchon's wider concern with the difficulty of interpretation and adds a new dimension to the ongoing

conversation about the novel's political message. In one of the earliest book-length studies of Pynchon's fiction, Tony Tanner evocatively writes, "Pynchon's characters move in a world of both too many and too few signs, too much data and too little information, too many texts but no reliable editions... More than anything else this book provides an experience in modern reading" (76). Pynchon's great theme is the struggle to make meaning in a world saturated with messages, most of which are driven by a desire for profit rather than any sincere humanist sentiment. In his vision, world leaders that perpetuate war and popular narratives that celebrate these actions are equally complicit. The following section takes up Don DeLillo, who makes a similar critique through a much more linear narrative style and a greater attention to the CIA in particular.

"The Jolly Coverts": Layering Genre Tropes in DeLillo's *Libra*

While Pynchon was concerned with wartime intelligence and the prospect of continued American aggression in the supposedly postwar world, he did not specifically depict the CIA or present anything like a realist vision of its operations. Don DeLillo's *Libra* takes the American intelligence committee as its main subject, identifying the Kennedy assassination rather than the war as the moment at which the world's plots could no longer be accurately read. Most critics focus on the novel's status as what Linda Hutcheon calls "historiographic metafiction"—its rewriting of the archive of documents about the Kennedy assassination—and as the culmination of DeLillo's obsession with paranoia, especially as it overlaps with national trauma. Frank Lentricchia's 1991 "*Libra* as Postmodern Critique" and David Cowart's 2002 *Don DeLillo: The Physics of Language* set the tone for much later scholarship, making large arguments about DeLillo's masterful prose craftsmanship to describe American culture in times of flux. This work is in line with this project's concern with how postmodernist authors can create counternarratives that interrupt dominant governmental rhetoric arguing for America's interventionist role in world

affairs, but the critical praise of the novel's historiographic achievement obscures its relationship to popular genres. Rather than revisiting *Libra*'s relationship to the historical record, in this section I focus on the novel's complication of the tropes of intelligence fiction.

Critics typically discuss DeLillo as a writer who grew out of his early genre fiction to write mature literary novels, starting with the 1982 publication of *The Names*. The seven novels published before this are rarely treated academically⁴⁹ and are largely dismissed as DeLillo's attempts to find a voice by playing with low genre tropes. The novels that come after *The Names* are considered his serious work, with particular emphasis on *White Noise* (1985), *Libra* (1988), *Mao II* (1991), and the massive *Underworld* (1996). Although some scholars have begun to challenge this narrative and revisit DeLillo's earlier work to find literary merit,⁵⁰ there is little discussion of the genre tropes that still persist in DeLillo's mature novels. I suggest that *Libra*, although considered one of DeLillo's literary novels, still draws from the tropes of intelligence fiction. These tropes are prevalent across DeLillo's body of work: in *Players* (1977), ordinary citizen Lyle Wynant gets caught up in a CIA counterterrorist operation; *Running Dog* (1978) follows secret agent Glen Selvy, who works for the mysterious Radial Matrix; *The Names* belatedly becomes a spy novel in its final act when narrator James Axton realizes that he has been working for the CIA for years; and even *White Noise*'s Jack Gladney reflects, "It was curious how I kept stumbling into the company of lives in intelligence," thinking of all his ex-wives who were somehow tied up with CIA operations (203–04). This list reveals that DeLillo's interest in the tropes of intelligence fiction spans his career, and so usefully complicates the narrative that sees DeLillo initially as a genre writer who only later develops into a literary artist.

Libra, while a postmodernist elaboration on the historical record, also has a close relationship to popular intelligence fiction. Given that fictional narratives play a critical role in

the formation of American myths, assessing *Libra*'s relationship to these fictions clarifies DeLillo's relationship to the CIA. *Libra*, in addition to being a piece of historical fiction, is an exploration of what happens if several types of spy fiction run parallel to each other at once. In this way, DeLillo surveys and complicates several tropes and trends of the genre to create his plausible yet glamorous operatives. To show this, I refer to the subgenres of intelligence fiction that this project's first chapter defined. Patriotic intelligence fiction, I argue, reinforces the reader or viewer's belief in the morality of their government, assuring them that the U.S. will successfully defend American values on the new, wider world stage. This strand of intelligence fiction was largely a television phenomenon, typified by programs like *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.* and *I Spy*. Simultaneously, what I term individualist intelligence fiction reinforces Americans' belief in the ideals of personal agency, adventure, and masculinity, affirming that the American intelligence hero could still assert his own vision even while working for new institutional forces. This genre was largely circulated in pulp novels with male readerships, as in long-running series by Edward S. Aarons and Donald Hamilton.

DeLillo playfully draws from the wealth of patriotic and individualist intelligence narratives from the earliest appearance of his CIA agents. In *Libra*'s second chapter, the first to follow the spies,⁵¹ semi-retired CIA agent Win Everett shares the great plot of the twentieth century: the staging of a failed attempt on the life of President John F. Kennedy. Everett summons his former colleagues, the suave Larry Parmenter and the crude T. J. Mackey, to the edge of a small Texas town and drives them down a long dirt road before laying out his plot. All three men have either lost face or been cast out of the Agency because of their involvement with the Bay of Pigs catastrophe and their insistence on developing further Cuba operations even when ordered to stop. Everett's new plan takes them from the fringes of legality to completely

out-of-bounds behavior: if anyone discovers their plot, they won't just be demoted—they'll be tried for treason. Nevertheless, Everett makes clear that the plan is morally sound, more patriotic than Kennedy's peace dealings with Cuba. The men will carry out an anonymous, thankless job, but it will be for the sake of a better, more democratic world.

This establishing scene serves as more than *Libra*'s narrative hook: its framing and the introduction of the three conspirators—Everett, Parmenter, and Mackey—contain several tropes of popular intelligence fiction that will follow the three agents throughout the novel. The scene's action is pulled directly from early patriotic narratives: an emphasis on the tradecraft of Everett's plan rather than the violent act of shooting at Kennedy, the remote locale to emphasize the secrecy and danger of their actions, and the reiteration that their plan is moral even if outside the bounds of legal government action. The conspirators' meeting also mirrors the blocking of dramatic scenes in popular intelligence fiction, especially on film and television. After several pages setting up Everett's relationship to the Bay of Pigs, his ensuing career decline, and the ban on any more talk of overthrowing Cuba, a single-sentence paragraph moves readers from exposition to scene: "Interestingly, some of the men continued to meet" (22). After zeroing in on Everett and Parmenter wondering where their third partner is, they walk out of a store to see "a figure in [their car's] front seat, passenger side, a broad-shouldered man in a loud sport shirt. This was T. J. Mackey" (23–24). After Everett drives the men to down the road, he builds up to his plan, and right after the big revelation—"We don't hit Kennedy—we miss him"—there is a section break (28). The white space serves as a dramatic scene cut, the entire chapter adding up to the opening sequence of a *Mission: Impossible* episode: Everett delivers the mission, if the men choose to accept it, and the novel's narrative lens cuts away to show first Mackey and then Parmenter assembling other agents to carry out the complicated mission. Since Everett is the

orchestrator of this aesthetic, he is the one with whom these stylized scenic setups are associated throughout the rest of the novel, and so the primary representative of the patriotic intelligence story that dominated American television in the years leading up to the actual Kennedy assassination.

Of the three conspirators in *Libra*'s original Kennedy plot, Everett is by far the most philosophical and the most passive. Everett does very little of the operation's actual work, focusing most of his attention on crafting materials that are never actually used because Oswald, the "fiction living prematurely in the world," himself supplies most of the paper documents that Everett painstakingly puts together (179). Everett wants to "do the whole thing with paper" and relishes the opportunity to make up fake identifying documents and address books for an invented gunman, going to extreme and circuitous lengths to create a multilayered plan that would lead investigators not only to Cuba but also to earlier CIA attempts to assassinate Castro (28). But like the spymaster of early fictions, Everett displays an unwillingness to conceptualize the violent event at the heart of his plans, preferring instead to obsess over the preliminary stages of the plot and projecting how the event will be interpreted.

Everett takes the tropes of the patriotic intelligence operative to an extreme in that he does not want to acknowledge any violence in his plot: his insistence that the "whole thing" would be done with paper necessarily ignores the basic reality that the plan will have to include firing a weapon—several weapons, in fact, since Everett envisions several shooters all "spectacularly missing" their target (51). Later, Parmenter decides that they might wound a Secret Service agent, just to make it "a realistic-looking thing," and then it is Mackey who pushes the plot into an actual assassination—but in Everett's original plan, no one is supposed to get hurt (119). Everett's moralizing speech about the patriotism of their mission ignores not only

the involvement of several weapons and shooters, but also the fact that if this plan succeeds, it will be an interruption of peace accords—essentially, an act of war. Everett emphasizes the layers of intrigue covering the plot’s violent core, preferring to philosophize on the value of secrets and the supreme professionalism of his tradecraft, always delegating the grisly details of the mission to Parmenter, who in turn often passes them to T. J. Mackey.

Everett’s plot is not only supposedly tidy, but moral. Amy Hungerford argues that *Libra* is one of the first novels in which DeLillo begins to engage with his Catholic upbringing, theorizing a “mysticism of language” in his fiction that mirrors religious feeling. Indeed, several characters in *Libra* refer to either secrecy or the CIA as a kind of church, a higher power that one can trust entirely. But beyond this, Everett wants to reveal some unsavory past CIA operations so that the public will know and scorn the plan, for instance, to assassinate Castro with such inelegant means as an exploding cigar: “He would not consider the plan a success if the uncovering of its successive layers did not reveal the CIA’s schemes [...] Let them see what goes on in the committee rooms and corner offices” (53). He also believes that he is making his decisions for his country, staying truer to the nation’s ideals than the corrupt government that is trying to make peace with a clearly Communist, and thus clearly evil, nation.

Everett’s detachment from actual fieldwork is reflected in his physical location and domestic situation. Unlike Mackey, who “had a wife somewhere” that he evidently abandoned (71), or even Parmenter, who leaves his wife Beryl to her domestic space while he hobnobs with his colleagues, Everett is very much situated in his home in Texas. Jacqueline Foertsch notes, “Alone among the conspirators, [Everett] is modestly though respectably employed, happily married, and finally settled in middle America, even though the novel draws a sharp line between his driven inner life and the homey, quotidian doings of his wife and daughter, who often seem

weightless and clueless by comparison” (289). Foertsch usefully details the ways in which Everett uses domestic items to do his spy work, thus implicating his family in the scheme. Indeed, Everett gets his two worlds scrambled much more than his colleagues. When Everett and Parmenter are waiting for Mackey to arrive for the initial conspirators’ meeting, Everett buys a paint scraper in a hardware store to kill time (23). Much later, when Everett is worried about the deathward movement of his plot, his wife chastises him for using her kitchen knives to scrape paint. Everett replies, “I can’t find the paint scraper [...] There’s something about a paint scraper. You know it’s there. You’re looking right at it. But you can’t quite pick it out of the background. Let’s face it, the background is vast and confusing” (361). What better metaphor for Everett trying to find his original intentions in the hopelessly complex tapestry of *Libra*’s (not Everett’s) plot?

If Everett represents the morality and nonviolence of the patriotic intelligence story, then Larry Parmenter embodies in the more active, social hero type of this genre. Everett provides some basic information about Parmenter in the leadup to the initial meeting of conspirators, informing readers that Parmenter was responsible for the Guatemala coup of 1954. Readers are introduced to him properly a few pages later, as he drives away and tries to delay considering Everett’s scheme:

A line from an old drinking song popped into his head. But where from? From Cairo, 1944, morale operations, Office of Strategic Services. Larry was part of the Groton-Yale-OSS network of so-called gentleman spies, many of them now in important Agency positions. He was not old money, not quite elect, but still a member, ready to accede to the will of the leadership. They were the pure line, a natural extension of schoolboy societies, secret oaths and initiations, the body of assumptions common to young men of a certain discernible dash. He sang aloud, “Oh we are the jolly coverts, we lie and we spy till it hurts.” (30)

This passage is the first extended attention to Parmenter’s thoughts, and immediately we see a noticeable difference from Everett’s character. Much more a man of the world, Parmenter self-

identifies as gentleman spy, purchasing gin martinis with his sizeable means and thriving on social contact. The gentleman spy immediately calls up the image of James Bond (who flits around the edges of *Libra*⁵²), but there are other instances of more American and less dramatically violent intelligence heroes that make a better point of comparison. Several 1960s television series portray their agents driving expensive sports cars, dressing in tailored suits, and generally being men of high-class taste—Napoleon Solo and *I Spy*'s Kelly Robinson certainly exemplify this aesthetic. Additionally, Parmenter is reminiscent of the late patriotic intelligence hero Blackford Oakes, who we recall was a Yale graduate who often literally prayed that he could avoid taking violent action.

Parmenter, as another exemplar of this character type, relies on old upper-class connections and networks to enlist the help he needs. He fulfills his gentlemanly role throughout *Libra*, although the narrative does not present him as an unstoppable hero like his mid-century counterparts. For example, when calling Everett to provide updates on the plot's progress, Parmenter invariably calls from a public pay phone and refuses to provide his name, convinced that the line is bugged. Everett, as much a devotee to code names as anyone, plays along and assures him that he has secured the line by "tinker[ing] in the basement" (74). But the two men are the only ones who indulge in this typical spy-movie behavior, and they come off as old and out of touch, playing children's games. In addition to loving the flashy tradecraft, Parmenter displays his gentlemanly affluence and suavity when he meets with George de Mohrenschildt, another mysteriously gallant and wealthy player in the plot (though a historical rather than entirely fictional character), in a swanky restaurant in Washington, D.C. Parmenter is perfectly at ease as he swaps witticisms and orders an expensive dinner, but with de Mohrenschildt, he seems out of touch in a different way, too soft to be a part of the operation's grittier phases. Parmenter

is happy to talk with de Morenschildt, but when Everett orders him to “get close to the subject [Oswald]” after he reports back, Parmenter quickly backpedals: “Oh no [...] I don’t want personal contact any more than you do, my friend. Give him to Mackey” (137).

Parmenter’s career peaked with his radio broadcasts during the 1954 Guatemala coup that allowed the CIA to establish a dictatorial regime, negating their democratic elections. This triumph was based on technology and psychological warfare, specialties of both the Office of Strategic Service’s Morale Operations branch and the secret agent who does not want to get his hands dirty. As Alan Nadel notes, the Guatemala operation was the perfect example of the American government’s desire to interfere with foreign conflicts in the Cold War landscape without appearing to have taken any action: “The issue, in other words, was the CIA’s ability to control the narrative that made its actions legible to the Guatemalans. The CIA wanted Guatemalan leaders to believe that the insurgent forces were large and represented—were large because they represented—the full commitment of the world’s preeminent nuclear power” (160). Like Everett, Parmenter and the patriotic spy that he represents does not like to directly confront their violent actions. He operates through suggestion, innuendo, style, and apparently clean hands. He acts in the name of democracy even when committing fundamentally undemocratic acts, just as his fictional precursors commit acts of brutal violence without appearing to have done anything less than heroic. Again, patriotic intelligence narratives rarely lingered on the act of killing, but rather on the outcome of the struggle: the conquest of the threatening (often foreign) enemy power, the ideological battle won for the powers the American spy represents.

Parmenter is explicitly linked to popular patriotic operatives when we are told that his “textbook operation” in Guatemala communicated the threat of troops through broadcasts of “cryptic messages from spy movies of the forties. ‘Attention Eduardo, the moon is red’” (127).

When Parmenter attempts to use this technique in Cuba, however, it becomes one of the more laughable failures of the entire Bay of Pigs operation. Rather than suggesting legions of U.S. forces massing for an attack, the radio broadcasts, to Mackey and the others on the ground in Cuba ready to carry out the invasion, “diminished the whole operation, made a comic fucking opera of troops in combat” (127). Intelligence strategies that relied on technology and subtlety rather than force could not be counted upon to work in the late twentieth century, as the psychological operation victory in Guatemala was surely a historical exception, more likely to be repeated on screen than on the world stage. Parmenter might have been the star of an early patriotic spy series, but to men like Mackey he is more than outdated—he is ridiculous.

Parmenter is thus aligned with a set of narrative tropes that is untenable in DeLillo’s fictional landscape. He believes in a gallantry and patriotism that is ultimately revealed to be outdated, hypocritical, and ineffective. He believes in a (masculine) brotherhood of spies, gathering for beers after a mission is accomplished to sing and make light of their actions. If Everett is motivated primarily by a philosophical conception of America’s ideals, Parmenter is much more concerned with the material comforts and fellowship that being part of the Agency brings, both of which problematically downplay the fundamental violence that their plots impose on people around the world. Parmenter conceives of CIA work as a jolly good time with his compatriots, an extension of childhood war games. He recognizes that CIA operations are serious, but at the end of the day he considers it a game to play, a game that he and his fellow men are likely to win without much effort. Parmenter, rather than the rugged individualistic American, believes in fraternity and trust. He looks down on Mackey, considering him to be a crucial part of the conspiracy but ultimately below the cerebral elegance of himself and Everett.

But Parmenter eventually realizes that this is a fiction: in reality, and by the end of *Libra*, men like Mackey are the ones with global power.

T. J. Mackey, *Libra*'s third conspirator, demonstrates what happens when an individualist intelligence hero is dropped into the middle of a patriotic spy fiction. When DeLillo first introduces Mackey in *Libra*'s second chapter, readers are told he is "a cowboy type to Win's mind but probably the most adept of the men in Leader 4, a veteran field officer who'd trained exiles in assault weapons and supervised early phases of the landings" (24). Mackey was the only one of the conspirators who was on the ground for the Bay of Pigs invasion and who specializes in weaponry and military maneuvering rather than the more cerebral planning stages of operations. When only Everett and Parmenter are present, they amble about restlessly, but once Everett sees Mackey waiting for them in their car, he thinks, "With Mackey here, the day took on purpose. T-Jay did not bring news of hirings and firings, the births of babies. He was one of the men the Cubans would follow without question. He was also the only man who'd refused to sign a letter of reprimand when the secret meetings in Coral Gables were monitored by the Office of Security" (24). Mackey is thus a catalyst of action, a no-nonsense man who focuses on results rather than taking pleasure in the creation and execution of a well-wrought plan.

DeLillo's description of Mackey bears a striking resemblance to the pulp intelligence fiction heroes Matt Helm and, especially, Sam Durell. Both Mackey and Durell are Southerners, hot-tempered, and often do not submit to higher authority. They recognize that their line of work requires stepping outside the bounds of what is considered acceptable behavior. The tropes of independence, being motivated by rage rather than idealism, and distrust of others characterize Mackey as he slowly takes charge of the operation. Mackey replaces Everett and Parmenter at the forefront of the CIA chapters as the novel progresses, indicating DeLillo's emphasis on the

militarism of CIA operations. Unlike the stylish, cosmopolitan Parmenter and the domesticized Everett, Mackey is immediately introduced to readers as “a cowboy type” (perhaps the most masculine American archetype), the “most adept” military veteran in the Bay of Pigs organizing committees (24). Mackey’s role in the plot is to assemble the shooters and weapons that will be used in the Kennedy plot; unlike his compatriots, he is not working with paper.

Mackey in appearance and attitude is thus a hero of what Timothy Melley terms the “geopolitical melodrama,” a literary and filmic genre in which a man must fight not only foreign forces, but also the bureaucracy and corruption of the security state at home. The genre is a product of the late twentieth century, an evolution of the earlier patriotic spy tale. Melley writes that the genre’s “most important quality is its narcissism [...] its tendency to address global conflict by obliterating foreign perspectives in a self-aggrandizing focus on U.S. ‘victimization’” (202). Fulfilling this assessment, Mackey, motivated not by loyalty to his government but by rage at the Kennedy administration’s failure to support the men on the ground at the Bay of Pigs, constantly feels surrounded by enemies at home and abroad. He feels that he has to “safeguard the attempt not only from Alpha but from Everett and Parmenter,” especially after he makes the “leap” to understand that Everett’s “anxious, self-absorbed” plan is insufficient, that this has to be an actual assassination operation (304, 219). Where Parmenter is sociable and willing to trade secrets over a lavish dinner without any anxiety, Mackey does not trust anyone and believes that “the thing that hovers over every secret is betrayal,” even as he recruits more and more people to play small roles in the plot (218). And midway through the novel he vanishes so thoroughly that even Parmenter with all of his connections and surveillance skills cannot determine where he has gone or what he is doing (260–61)—like the popular individualist spy hero, Mackey decides to break away from his fellows and make the hard choices that his superiors avoid.

The split between Mackey and the other conspirators is most evident in their attitudes toward the CIA. Everett is certain the Agency will understand should he ever come clean about the plan: “Say what you will about the Agency. The Agency forgives” (363). Talking to his wife, Beryl, Parmenter similarly defends the CIA’s treatment of its operatives: “The Agency understands. It’s amazing really how deeply they understand [...] We are goddamn grateful for their understanding and trust” (259). Mackey, on the other hand, is persistently suspicious of the CIA’s bureaucracy, and he is motivated primarily by anger rather than loyalty. Unlike his co-conspirators, Mackey refused to sign his letter of reprimand and was shuffled to a small-time job that he hates, teaching young college graduates how to use light weapons: “He was not Agency for life. He could wait for them to drop him or beat them to it. He’d seen too many evasions and betrayals, fighting men encouraged and then abandoned for political reasons. They didn’t call it the Company for nothing” (69). The shift from “Agency” to “Company” is crucial. While the two words can be synonymous—“a business, body, or organization providing a particular service, or negotiating transactions on behalf of a person or group”⁵³—they each contain divergent alternative meanings. “Agency” also means “ability or capacity to act or exert power,” indicating movement and American values of individualism—one can have individual agency within an organization of that name. But to call the CIA the “Company” is to erase that individual ability to act or choose: the word has strong military and corporate connotations, working with a large number of others, few of whom are particularly important to the larger organization or its leaders. While Parmenter and Everett believe the Agency will protect them, Mackey knows that the Company will betray him. His long reverie about the nature of the CIA and its operatives culminates in the bitter recollection that during the Bay of Pigs fiasco, he realized, “It was the grimmest, most godawful thing, to be ashamed of your country” (73).

Mackey also displays his distaste for working within the CIA in his attitude toward Everett, the true believer in the Agency's powers. Rather than treating Everett as his spymaster that he will respect and obey, Mackey views the older man as representative of the bureaucratic bog that the CIA, in his eyes, has become: "He knew Everett believed the failure was more complex than one scrubbed mission. A general misery of ideas and means. But Mackey insisted on a clear and simple reading. You can't surrender your rage to these endless complications" (70–71). Parmenter operates under the belief that the CIA is a powerful organization in which glory, wealth, and fraternity can all be gained; Mackey sees it as an essentially fallen organization. This mirrors the shift from the "jolly coverts" of Parmenter's worldview to the murkier, grittier, and more morally confused individualist spy novels. Indeed, even Mackey does not feel good about the decision to assassinate Kennedy, not in the same way that one feels satisfied at the conclusion of a well-wrought and tidily plotted episode of a patriotic intelligence show: "It was a revelation to [Mackey] that in the moment he saw what had to be done, feeling the crash of air on the hood of the car, he felt the oddest goddamn sympathy for President Jack" (220). The individualist spy hero is at odds with traditional concepts of morality but increasingly appears as a necessary evil in American political fictions. In *Libra*, the power shift from Everett and Parmenter to Mackey indicates DeLillo's critique of both the simplistic fantasy of patriotic intelligence fiction and the more realistic violence of individualist intelligence fiction.

Parmenter and Mackey are thus representative of different tropes of intelligence fiction. Their striking similarity to popular spy heroes of the 1960s and 1970s reveals that DeLillo crafted them from established genre tropes, rather than trying to emulate historical figures as he did for most of the novel's other characters. The agents' fictionality is therefore important, rather than any similarity to historical figures or events. Skip Willman, one of many scholars reading

Libra as valuable primarily for its historicity, is yet one of the only critics who focuses on the trio of conspirators, usefully aligning them with dominant attitudes in the CIA. His argument that “Mackey captures the widespread rage within the CIA at Kennedy for his ‘failure of nerve’ at the Bay of Pigs” is particularly convincing, and his claim that Parmenter “see[s] through the myths of the CIA to its duplicitous core but [...] nevertheless continue[s] to act as if [he] believe[s] in its purpose” is perhaps a valid complication of my reading of Parmenter as a loyal gentleman spy (159, 156). Willman, however, reads the conspirators almost entirely as historical characters—in the way that Margeurite and Lee Oswald are—based on the actual CIA operatives Grayson Lynch and David Atlee Philips. This reading is enlightening but doesn’t acknowledge their worth as products of DeLillo’s imagination, much more so than the historical figures who appear in the Warren Report. The CIA operatives, as the only truly fictional characters, are doing something markedly different in this narrative.

DeLillo did not hesitate to create fictionalized versions of men like Guy Bannister and David Ferrie, and, of course, Oswald himself, so why didn’t he use Philips’s and Lynch’s names rather than creating Parmenter and Mackey? One might speculate that he only used the names of people who were proven to be involved in the assassination, but it’s not certain that Oswald’s wealthy friend George de Mohrenschildt, for instance, played an undeniable historical role—yet DeLillo crafts him as a crucial part of the fictional operation nonetheless. Why couldn’t DeLillo make a “fiction” that actual CIA operatives were behind the assassination? On the facing page of *Libra*’s final lines, readers can hardly miss an Author’s Note that attempts to clarify the play of fact and fiction in the novel:

This is a work of imagination. While drawing from the historical record, I’ve made no attempt to furnish factual answers to any questions raised by the assassination. Any novel about a major unresolved event would aspire to fill some

of the blank spaces in the known record. To do this, I've altered and embellished reality, extended real people into imagined space and time, invented incidents, dialogues, and characters. (457)

In 1988, DeLillo told an interviewer, "I'm not so sure now that [the Author's Note] was such a good idea. The afterword is really a dressed-up legal disclaimer. Possibly I shouldn't have dressed it up. But I didn't want one or two stark sentences disclaiming any resemblance between characters in the book and certain living characters" (qtd. in Connolly 31). DeLillo's fear of legal repercussion certainly relates to Melley's idea that fiction is the only way to safely talk about the "covert sphere": "To put it crudely, it is illegal to disclose state secrets but not illegal to write espionage fiction" (10). But DeLillo's Author's Note did not protect him from criticism or political backlash. Most famously, George Will declared DeLillo a "bad citizen" for writing *Libra* and complicating the lone gunman theory.

I suggest that in addition to assuaging legal fears, DeLillo's largely fictional agents better suited his narrative than fictionalized versions of historical operatives. Spies are particularly complex figures because of their secrecy—even if Willman is right in identifying the conspirators' historical counterparts, DeLillo could not have determined how those men spoke because of the secrecy that the CIA maintained before the investigations of the 1970s, and the conflicting or incomplete nature of the records released since then—every professional historian of the intelligence community has to acknowledge the impossibility of producing a definitive account of even a single operation or figure. DeLillo's options were to stay "true" to the historical archive and kept the CIA agents at the far edges of the narrative, or to invent rich inner lives and personalities for them, and it is clear that the latter was necessary to his project. Without the plotting and counterplotting of Everett, Parmenter, and Mackey, DeLillo's fictional

archivist Nicholas Branch couldn't have come to his oft-quoted conclusion that "the conspiracy against the President was a rambling affair that succeeded in the short term due mainly to chance" (441).

DeLillo's work dramatizes the way the CIA both influences and is influenced by popular intelligence fiction, an exchange that the first chapter of this project explored. Within the Agency's history and practices are multiple emulations of strategies and gadgetry pulled straight from the pages of spy novels.⁵⁴ The spies in *Libra* are also conflated with authors at every turn, and Nicholas Branch, the CIA analyst operating decades after the assassination, is a (failed) author much more than he is an operative. The CIA is itself a hybrid, sprawling, largely bureaucratic organization that maintains old practices if it feels they work. Although many Americans still maintain the image of a Larry Parmenter executing orders handed down by an all-knowing Win Everett, or of a disgruntled T. J. Mackey grappling with bureaucratic powers and embarking on rogue missions unbeknownst to the American public, in fact Parmenters and Mackeys alike are probably filling out paperwork; both narratives are untrue, but the popularity of each in its own time indicates the public attitudes toward and misunderstandings of the role of covert operations in Western politics.

The fictional spies, existing in their separate and easily dated literary traditions, also more clearly emphasize the changes in global warfare and American patriotism than any meditative character's speech or narrative exposition could do. *Libra*, then, illustrates not only the death of Kennedy's Camelot, but also the death of the fiction of the gentleman spy who is loyal to his country and fellow men. No longer can covert operations be conceived of as clean, elegant plots; the most efficient and effective fictional spies are the ones who are willing to take matters into their own hands. The most effective spies are also the most paranoid—the Mackey who trusts no

one is much more in control of his plot than the unwitting Everett and Parmenter who trust that everyone will carry out his appointed role without complication. As DeLillo put it, Branch's character was meant to "suggest the ways the American consciousness has changed since the assassination. I think that what has been missing for the past twenty-five years is a sense of the coherent reality most Americans share" (qtd. in Connolly 28). For DeLillo, the Kennedy assassination is a point at which many of our shared national fictions began to unravel, and examining the spy tropes in *Libra* reveals that Americans cannot be satisfied with old, tidy tales of morally good intelligence operatives.

Libra is postmodern not only in its play with fact and fiction, but also in its play with genre. It is crucial to acknowledge that the novel's participation in the genre of intelligence fiction does not devalue it but, in fact, situates DeLillo more firmly as a postmodernist, and allows for clearer commentary on the relationship between covert agencies and the American public. DeLillo draws from both the historical record and the patriotic and individualist spies who find their origins in mid-twentieth-century fiction and film. If *Libra* only contained fictionalized historical characters, however "extended" or placed in "imaginary space and time," it would only be historical fiction. If it were simply a novel about covert operations, then it would be a straightforward spy thriller. But DeLillo uses both historical figures and fictional characters that reflect multiple spy tropes, and this combination situates him in a postmodern tradition of excess and referentiality. *Libra* offers a useful framework for assessing the characteristics and impact of postwar fiction, a question whose relevance has gained urgency as today's public continues to grapple with the role of espionage in American policy.

Conclusion

Pynchon launches the most ambitious ideological attacks upon the assumptions that intelligence work makes, while DeLillo is responsible for the most pointed critique of the CIA in particular. Both writers make extensive use of the tropes of intelligence narratives, among other popular story types, to explore these ideas. Their fiction frustrates the intelligence narratives that pervade American culture, pointedly refusing the ideas that every mystery is solvable and that there are always heroes who will protect American interests. This critique is achieved in their sprawling masterworks only by excessive use of all of these tropes.

While Pynchon's work was read for decades as apolitical or confusingly dense, DeLillo's rewriting of the historical record is more easily accessible. Joanna Freer, commenting on the infamous difficulty of *Gravity's Rainbow*, claims that Pynchon doesn't give the reader neat conclusions, but instead labors to destabilize readers' assumptions: "All of Pynchon's commentaries have an open-ended quality; there are very few, if any final judgments in his work. Rather than asserting one or another particular perspective, Pynchon promotes habits of critical thought" (7). Is the promotion of habits of critical thought an effective way to change the attitudes the American public? While enormously influential in academic circles, Pynchon's difficult novel has always been divisive and obscure to most of the reading public. On the other hand, DeLillo has always been more explicit in his political stance, helped by his status as a writer who gives frequent interviews in which he is open about his views on the responsibility of the writer. In 2005, he famously commented, "Writers must oppose systems. It's important to write against power, corporations, the state, and the whole system of consumption and of debilitating entertainments" ("A Conversation"). But in the same interview, he worries that contemporary society excels at "neutralizing" anything politically charged: "In America and in western Europe, we live in very wealthy democracies, we can do virtually anything we want, I'm

able to write whatever I want to write. But [...] if you're a writer who, in one way or another, comes to be seen as dangerous, you'll wake up one morning and discover your face on a coffee mug or a t-shirt and you'll have been neutralized." Indeed, in a 1997 interview, DeLillo mentioned, certainly with Pynchon in mind, writers who refuse to give interviews or appear in public, remarking, "such writers are refusing to become part of the all-incorporating treadmill of consumption and disposal" ("The Ascendance"). Whether Pynchon's refusal to become a public figure or DeLillo's frequent commentary on his own works makes their political messages more or less pointed is a continuing subject for debate, as is the efficacy of "difficult" prose styles in communicating political critiques. But undoubtedly, Pynchon and DeLillo have immensely influenced American culture and challenged more readers' assumptions about American identity than any other authors of counterintelligence literature examined in this project.

These authors are the universally acknowledged great masters of paranoia literature, but while exploring the effects of the new American intelligence community, they wrote from a position of privilege, unlikely to face any serious consequences for their fictional output. While DeLillo's and Pynchon's greatest fear might have been their appearance on merchandise, there were writers in the cold war decades who felt more at risk when writing political fiction, even in the open American market. The next few chapters examine work that particularly explores the toll the new surveillance state takes on marginalized groups. Chapter 3 examines novels by Ralph Ellison, Sam Greenlee, and E. L. Doctorow that are concerned with the domestic security state's systemic suspicion of racial minority groups, and Chapter 4 analyzes fiction by Joan Didion and Margaret Atwood that follow women who struggle to find a voice as they get swept up in masculine cold war conflicts.

CHAPTER 3

SECURING THE HOME FRONT: DOMESTIC COUNTERINTELLIGENCE IN ELLISON, GREENLEE, AND DOCTOROW

As America shouldered its newly claimed postwar international responsibilities, governmental leaders made sweeping changes to domestic policy as well. Maintaining public support for increasingly involved conflicts potentially anywhere in the world meant changing the conversation at home to emphasize total preparedness, security, and proactive attention to any weakness in the system. Essentially, as the public became accustomed to the new American hero, the intelligence operative, they also learned to fear that figure's counterpart, the Soviet agent who might exploit the openness of the American system to further the destructive communist cause. The narrative of American operatives engaged in containing an aggressive, unethical enemy included citizens at home who had to watch for that invasive force. Governmental rhetoric stoked the belief that sometimes personal liberties must be sacrificed in order to preserve the wider ideal of international freedom, rhetoric that is of course familiar in the post-9/11 resurgence of the national security state. In the context of the construction of that security state in the early cold war years, this chapter examines three works of counterintelligence literature that deal not with the American operative abroad, but with the fear of enemy counterintelligence on American soil.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), Sam Greenlee's *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* (1969), and E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971) all follow marginalized characters who struggle to find a tolerable political outlet to resist the national security state. Dense historical dramas, these novels explore what it means to feel cut off from every potential community at a time when isolation was dangerously akin to dissidence. This chapter examines these novels'

depictions of the American Communist Party and the postwar New Left, their awareness of FBI and CIA domestic counterintelligence programs, and the mentalities of their marginalized narrators who struggle to articulate their identity and purpose as they are batted between opposed systems of power that threaten or exploit them.

Ellison, Greenlee, and Doctorow craft complicated protagonists who are struggling to articulate what political resistance and recognition could look like for them. All try out multiple different possibilities, episodically, and act as self-conscious narrators of this struggle. Ellison's *Invisible Man* tries to find a political affiliation that allows him to express his individual personality, finding no options among the established institutions of the historic black college, the supposedly progressive industrial north, the Communist party, or a group of black pan-African militants. Sam Greenlee's protagonist, operating nearly two decades after Ellison's *Invisible Man*, finds purchase in a black militarism that Ellison never endorsed, but still worries about his personal identity being consumed by his role as leader and symbol of his movement. For Doctorow, writing even later, a troubled relationship to both the anti-Soviet communist movements of the 1930s-50s and to the postwar New Left rejects any neat takeaway for how a citizen, especially a marginalized one, might achieve political agency. Reading these works against each other reveals a spectrum of American writers' responses to both the pressures of cold war anti-communist hysteria and the difficulty of various leftist movements to articulate a cohesive challenge to the burgeoning security state. Ellison's infamously ambivalent text gave him a reputation as an apolitical artist—a reputation that this chapter complicates—while Greenlee and Doctorow embraced their roles as artist-activists.

In addition to looking at the history of the development of the national security state and FBI and CIA domestic counterintelligence programs, I make use of the large body of scholarship

that has discussed race in America as “double agency.” More recently, scholars like Bill Mullen and William Maxwell have examined the relationship between writers of color to various twentieth-century leftist movements. I show that although these novelists depict the widespread cultural fear of Soviet operatives, the novels dramatize the counterintelligence operations not of actual Russian spies in America, but of U.S. covert operations combating various civil rights movements and other movements considered subversive. I argue that by denying the reality of Soviet operatives in these organizations, even as they’re critical of the movements themselves, Ellison, Greenlee, and Doctorow undermine the dominant cold war political narrative that Soviet Communism was an immediate threat to American democracy. On the other hand, the novels portray the psychological pressure put on citizens who are constantly monitored and the intermittent reinvention of the self that being so marked necessitates. Not arguments for support of any specific leftist movement in America, these novels instead situate conflicted, traumatized, marginalized citizens in riotous political landscapes in which various resistance movements cannot cohere into one clear strategy to combat dominant governmental narratives.

Domestic Surveillance of the American Left and American Literature

Each of the novels that this chapter takes up are concerned with an American left that was fragmented both by internal disagreements and external pressures from national security state institutions. This chapter makes frequent use of the term “the left,” but this is not to say that Democratic administrations were any more progressive than their Republican counterparts when it came to national security. Democratic leaders like Kennedy were eager to prove that they were just as tough on communism as anyone, thereby instituting policies that were as nationalistic and sweeping in their scope as any. Historian John Lewis Gaddis describes the importance of appearance in this era: “World order, and with it, American security, had come to depend as

much on *perceptions* of the balance of power as on what that balance actually was. And the perceptions involved were not just those of statesmen customarily charged with making policy; they also reflected mass opinion, foreign as well as domestic, informed as well as uninformed, rational as well as irrational. Before such an audience even the appearance of a shift in power relationships could have unnerving consequences” (90). States become characters, personifications of national capability and ideology, and American governmental leaders had to continually project an image of unflappable strength in the face of adversity. This meant exercising more control than presidents had typically possessed before the twentieth century, relying on powerful personality to accomplish this expansion of centralized power.⁵⁵ Perhaps the prime example of a relatively progressive administration nonetheless enacting centralized power was the Johnson administration’s prioritization of increased involvement in Vietnam over the development of its ambitious Great Society because of the fear of looking weak in the face of the international Soviet threat. In sum, in the first few decades of the cold war, there wasn’t much difference between the two political parties as far as foreign policy went, and domestic programs were often sacrificed to maintain the image of being tough on communism. So, “the left” often referred to groups that were against any given presidential administration, a variety of political groups that attempted to oppose this widespread governmental control over many aspects of American life. The instability of any long-term agreement among these groups is a major concern of this chapter.

The American left had difficulty defining itself in the postwar decades because of fear of the Soviet Union—any call for restructuring of the domestic economic system could be declared by conservatives to be akin to Sovietism. The New Deal socialism of the 1930s quickly collapsed as the postwar Soviet threat rose, while those who continued to declare these principles were

targeted by the FBI and other anti-communist investigatory committees created in the late 1940s and early 1950s, culminating in the House Un-American Activities Committee's Hollywood blacklist and the McCarthy accusations. Even in the face of these pressures, many tried to theorize an anti-Soviet socialism, prominent among them being the New York intellectuals, a largely Jewish community who, as Alan Wald's extensive scholarship shows,⁵⁶ also slowly de-radicalized as the cold war drew on. By the 1960s, the left consisted primarily of various civil rights movements, antiwar protesters, and student organizations. Leaders of what was branded the New Left tried to unite these groups, but there was no center of power and it was nearly impossible to agree on a clear set of goals. When a cause was large enough to unite these groups advocating for individual causes, as happened in the mid-to-late Vietnam War,⁵⁷ the protests were indeed capable of effecting change, but after those changes occurred, there wasn't enough to keep these groups together. Anti-government rhetoric remained widespread through the 1970s with the end of involvement in Vietnam and the revelations of Watergate, but when the Reagan administration was elected in 1980, this quickly faded in the face of his persona as an honest, affable government leader.

Beyond the simple difficulty of finding a common vision for how the country should change, even when they shared discontent, was the problem of the efficacy of the new national security state. This term refers to the bureaucratic infrastructure established by the National Security Act of 1947 that allowed for more centralized control of military operations, with a focus on protecting the integrity of American life. This piece of legislation created the CIA and the National Security Council, as well as creating the Air Force as a new military branch and sublimating Army and Navy command to the new Secretary of Defense. More generally, the Act shifted the national conversation to one of internal security, in which a newly defined American

way of life had to be protected against an aggressive enemy force. As Alan Nadel writes, this resulted in a strict adherence to traditional roles in all parts of life that he terms containment culture: “Corporate production and biological reproduction, military deployment and industrial technology, televised hearings and filmed teleplays, the cult of domesticity and the fetishizing of domestic security, the arms race and atoms for peace all contributed to the containment of communism” (2-3). Increased governmental attention to defending American interests led to a widespread desire in most Americans to fulfill the roles assigned to them, at least until the counterculture movement began to take off in the late 1960s. By that time, the intelligence agencies that were given extensive powers throughout the 1950s had developed effective means to combat any groups challenging dominant cultural ideals.⁵⁸

The national security institution with which this chapter is most concerned is the Federal Bureau of Investigation under J. Edgar Hoover, which had more consolidated, wide-reaching domestic power than arguably any other government agency in the cold war decades. Hoover ascended to the top of the FBI by creating of a system of paperwork that has become a go-to symbol of government surveillance. The FBI’s rows of filing cabinets filled with innumerable dossiers became an image and an idea expressive of the invisible systems of power that postwar Americans accepted as part of citizenship. To have an FBI file has meant many different things since the existence of Bureau dossiers became common knowledge in the early twentieth century, often something to fear but sometimes embraced as a badge of pride. The Bureau under Hoover collected information on people for all kinds of reasons, many having to do with suspected communist sympathies, very broadly defined. This section provides a brief survey of the relationship between the FBI, American leftist movements, and American political writers who were watched by the Bureau, before turning to Ellison, Greenlee, and Doctorow, who

represent very different writerly attitudes toward awareness of this surveillance.

The FBI was created as the Bureau of Investigation in 1908, a few decades before the founding of the CIA in 1947. J. Edgar Hoover, promoted to Bureau Director in 1924, added Federal to the Bureau's title in 1935 and expanded it into the widespread and powerful national police force that it's known as today. The FBI in the cold war decades was a more homogenous organization than the CIA, largely because of Hoover's astonishing 48-year tenure as director. His personality and interests defined the Bureau because of his solidification of the paperwork system, his aggressive marketing of the Bureau in popular culture,⁵⁹ and his particular ability to use his mass of dossiers to both intimidate and ingratiate himself to other government leaders. The FBI was also more ideologically driven than the CIA. While the latter was certainly concerned with the Soviet threat, it primarily existed to serve the president and had a wider range of attitudes toward communism, even including an academic tolerance for the idea of non-Soviet communism. The FBI was almost entirely populated by men with a fundamental intolerance for not only Soviet communism, but anything on the left side of the political spectrum. In 1958, Hoover published *Masters of Deceit*, a tract much more extremist than even the most militant CIA leaders ever conceived, which on the first page defines communism—not just the Soviet variety—as “a threat to humanity and to each of us” (v).⁶⁰ This clarity of purpose enabled the FBI to quickly consolidate power to such an extent that other government agencies feared their power.

The Bureau took on the role of America's national police force in large part through an aggressive marketing campaign orchestrated by Hoover; in countless movies, television shows, novels, radio dramas, news features, comic strips, and cereal box cartoons, the FBI agent was presented to America as the surefire answer to what was perceived as a rampant crime problem

in the 1930s. When the FBI killed several criminals who were so high profile as to be national celebrities—“Baby Face” Nelson, “Pretty Boy” Floyd, and most importantly John Dillinger—there was immense public demand for fictional treatments of these events. Hollywood studios, with the FBI’s support, were able to sidestep the Hays Code ban on gangster films in order to depict heroic government agents tracking down these figures, reinforcing the new national message that “crime doesn’t pay” (Powers 65-73). By WWII, the FBI agent had become the G-Man, a term that used to apply to any government servant, and Hoover had consolidated considerable power. But by the end of the war, there were no high-profile criminals left to wage war against. Hoover and the G-Men needed a new kind of public enemy, and the rise of the Soviet threat in the late 1940s offered the perfect set of candidates.⁶¹

To ensure that foreign enemy elements did not destabilize the American political norm, or, worse yet, steal American secrets, the FBI developed an extensive series of counterintelligence operations (often referred to as COINTELPRO)⁶², which actively infiltrated leftist groups of all sorts to determine if they were under Soviet control. Suspicious that any groups with even a touch of socialist ideology could gain a mass following without professional leadership from the Soviet bloc, the FBI not only gathered data and literature from the American Communist Party and later New Left groups, but in many cases also actively sought to undermine them, reasoning that they were combatting Soviet influence in doing so. The FBI has declassified extensive files on their counterintelligence operations that targeted the American Communist party, the New Left, civil rights groups, and a wide range of other organizations considered to be subversive. The Bureau sought out informers who could give them information about closed meetings among these groups, placed illegal wiretaps on leaders’ phones, circulated false extremist documents attributed to these groups to alienate public opinion, and pressured

media outlets to give them no positive coverage. A 1968 file on recommended methods for undermining the influence of groups like Students for a Democratic Society noted the efficacy of overt as well as covert attacks: “It is further felt that the most effective potential counterintelligence action would involve repeated interviews with new left leaders and activists and that these interviews should be open and aggressive, constantly reminding them that they are of security interested to the United States Federal Government. It is to be noted that these tactics have been successful in racial matters within the field” (“COINTELPRO New Left” 3). In addition to revealing the open hostility with which the FBI viewed their targeted groups, this last line also points to the FBI’s particular interest in monitoring racial minorities.

In his excellent monograph *F.B. Eyes*, William J. Maxwell demonstrates that from its earliest days, the FBI was particularly interested in African American literature and civil rights movements, keeping records on an enormous amount of literature from the Harlem Renaissance on. This obsession with the supposed threat of African American writers, which Maxwell argues is a testament to the political power of those writers: one of his book’s five major theses is that the “FBI was the most dedicated and influential forgotten critic of African American literature.” Maxwell argues that FBI surveillance—and black American writers’ awareness of that surveillance—characterize what he calls Afro-modernism from the early- to mid-twentieth century. Maxwell’s project is primarily concerned with reading the FBI dossiers on a wide range of writers obtained through dozens of FOIA requests. This chapter, building off of this valuable archival research, provides a more in-depth close reading of Ellison and Greenlee, both briefly mentioned in *F.B. Eyes*. These authors are representative, I argue, of two ends of the spectrum of political surveillance, although their novels take up surprisingly similar concerns.

E. L. Doctorow, writing from the different subject position of a Jewish American man in the latter decades of the cold war, when anti-government speech was more possible, represents a position somewhere between Ellison and Greenlee. Doctorow also comments on the particular surveillance of minority groups and leftist groups, two identity categories that are often hard to disentangle in the American 1950s-1970s. He takes up the Rosenberg executions of 1953 as a particular flashpoint of the tensions related to distrust of Communist Party members and Jewish Americans in the immediate postwar years, and, writing in 1971, is also able to assess the character of the burgeoning New Left. The following sections examine these three authors chronologically, demonstrating how they were responding to the events and pressures of their given historical moment.

Ambivalent Leftism in *Invisible Man*

One of the most canonical American novels, Ellison's only book-length work of fiction, *Invisible Man*, occupies a curious place in discussions of twentieth-century political writing. Since the novel's publication in 1952, critics have argued over the political affiliation of its author, the extent to which *Invisible Man* treats universal themes or else particular African American experiences, and there has been particular disagreement over the meaning of the novel's ending. These ongoing debates are tied up in the fractured civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century, part of which is dramatized in the last third of *Invisible Man* when the narrator encounters an organized communist party engaged in political battle with a group of black pan-African militants. Before analyzing the novel's portrayal of these groups, it's important to understand the fraught body of criticism around the text's politics and the unique pressures that Ellison faced as a rather unknown writer suddenly canonized as an eminent literary voice.

Ellison has traditionally been considered one of the most apolitical African American writers of the twentieth century. Unlike writers like Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and James Baldwin, who identified as activists in the civil rights movement, Ellison angered many of his contemporaries with statements like the following on his most important literary influences:

While one can do nothing about choosing one's relatives, one can, as an artist, choose one's 'ancestors.' Wright was, in this sense, a 'relative,' Hemingway an 'ancestor.' Langston Hughes, whose work I knew in grade school and whom I knew before I knew Wright, was a 'relative.' Eliot, whom I was to meet only many years later, and Malraux and Dostoievsky and Faulkner, were 'ancestors'—if you please or don't please! ("The World and the Jug" 185)

Seeming to distance himself from the community of black writers on the frontlines of the civil rights struggle, Ellison associated himself with the academic community, more interested in what makes art universal than in how fiction could most effectively advance minority rights. Not that he wasn't writing on the latter subject—beyond the obvious political content of *Invisible Man*, Ellison continued to write short fiction and essays until his death in 1994 that addressed these issues. But the ambiguities of his towering novel, which would always overshadow his other writing, combined with his public image as an elitist university professor and his cutting of formal ties with leftist political organizations, stuck Ellison with the reputation as apolitical at best, apologist at worst.

Beyond his public statements and persona, Ellison's novel contains a few elements that were particularly objectionable to his more openly radical contemporaries. Critique largely centered on the early section of the novel that takes place in the South and on the epilogue. Many African American leaders found Ellison's depiction of the Truebloods, an incestuous black Southern family, counterproductive, feeling he should have emphasized black victimization in

American society, particularly in the South, if he was going to depict unsavory black characters. More generally, many readers objected to the novel's ludic, joking tone when taking on serious social issues, critiques related to the perception of Ellison as an academic striving for the legacy of his high modernist forebears, more interested in his craft than in the everyday struggles of the black community. Realism, many felt, was the appropriate way to document the difficulties of daily life as a black American.⁶³ While some sections of the novel are set-pieces of traditional literary realism—much of the Brotherhood section, for instance, voices concerns about the place of minorities in the American Communist Party fairly directly—the familiar view of the world frequently bursts into a dreamlike fantasy that draws real concerns in larger-than-life proportions.

The debate around the novel's ending has been even more fraught. Many contemporaneous reviewers read the epilogue, in which the completely disillusioned invisible man addresses the reader from his "hole" in a forgotten coal cellar, as an argument for withdrawal from politics, for being resigned rather than hopeful for change. Among the many critics in the last few decades who have sought to recover Ellison's political activism, Tim Parrish and Barbara Foley have produced particularly useful book-length studies. Parrish analyzes Ellison's life after *Invisible Man*, arguing that he was in fact an important African American leader, even though he did not have the radical persona of Wright or others. Parrish, along with Ross Posnock, points to Ellison's favorite metaphor of "antagonistic cooperation" to characterize his relationship to the university community and to white America as a whole, although Foley later discounts this attempt to recover Ellison's late liberalism. Foley focuses on Ellison's early life, reading his first pieces of short fiction and unpublished drafts of *Invisible Man* to demonstrate that the left was gradually, consciously erased from his life and writing. She

argues that while these formative experiences were important in showing Ellison's affinity for these causes, his anticommunist stance wasn't a given, and the novel is ultimately weaker for this denial of a viable leftist party. For her, putting the novel in the context of Ellison's early writings "conveys the cost of anticommunism, that is, what is sacrificed when a leftist vision is expunged... [W]hat is lost from *Invisible Man* through Ellison's revisions is a full and rich sense of the potential for conscious and radical historical engagement on the part of Harlem's working class" (22). Acknowledging Foley's point that early drafts of *Invisible Man* contained a more concrete, and so potentially more radical, political takeaway, I hope to show that the extant novel is more politically articulate than it has often been read.

Reading the novel as a piece of counterintelligence literature, we can see that the invisible man recognizes and tries to exploit his fractured identity, but no identities available to him will allow him to make an impact on History, unlike white operatives in intelligence literature who are able to use their anonymity to embody different roles for their government in order to effect change anywhere. The novel in this light becomes a meditation on the fractured identity and necessary performativity of the marginalized citizen in mid-century America; of the similarly fractured civil rights movement and how this lack of unity is disastrous; and, when read in the context of other narratives about watching and playing roles, a dark twin to the stories of operatives who are able to don multiple identities to great political effect.

Invisible Man, in its final published form, doesn't contain any direct depictions of FBI or CIA activity, although an early draft of the novel contains a deleted scene in which the invisible man dreams of becoming a G-man, demonstrating that Ellison too was aware of FBI surveillance of African American artists and activists.⁶⁴ The scene is only a few pages long, but it strikingly displaces the invisible man into a popular intelligence tale, casting him as the hero of a

sensational film. This filmic quality is signaled immediately as he enters the dream while riding the bus north to New York for the first time:

As the bus entered the Holland Tunnel the long rows of bright lights gave birth to a fantasy: I dreamed the round spots of brightness were the portholes of a tremendous ship such as I had seen in the movies in which I was about to take a long and pleasurable voyage at the end of which I would complete an important mission. As the amorphous images formed and congealed behind my eyes I became an important undercover man, smart, intelligent, and very clever, assigned important work because, being black, I was unsuspected. I was working hand in hand with a master FBI man. ("New York" 185-6)

The action begins immediately after this scene-setting. The invisible man is disguised as a porter as two enemy agents with exaggerated Russian accents burst into the room and shoot the "master FBI man." The invisible man plays dumb: "I want to shoot back, but ^being under strict orders^ I mustn't give myself away [...] I pretend cotton-eyed fear, like ~~Stephin Fetchit~~ ^Mantan Morland^" (186).⁶⁵ Just like the vaudeville comedians who played the stereotypical roles that were their only entry into early Hollywood films, the invisible man in his self-created spy movie plays the part of the terrified porter, pleading ignorance of the classified papers that he has secreted on his person. In response to interrogation by the "big man with pockmarked skin and a saber scar," he resists the urge to engage them in hand-to-hand combat, trembling in mock terror instead (186). When the enemy agents finally leave, having bought the vaudeville act, the invisible-man-turned-intelligence-hero runs to his fallen fellow agent, who manages to gasp out, "Make my... report... to J. Edgar... Hoo..." before dying (187, ellipses in original). The invisible man rises with "heroic despair and determination" and whirls with his gun drawn when he feels a tap on his shoulder, but at this moment is awakened by the attendant of the bus he is actually riding, who looks in confusion at the invisible man's "pointing index finger" (187).

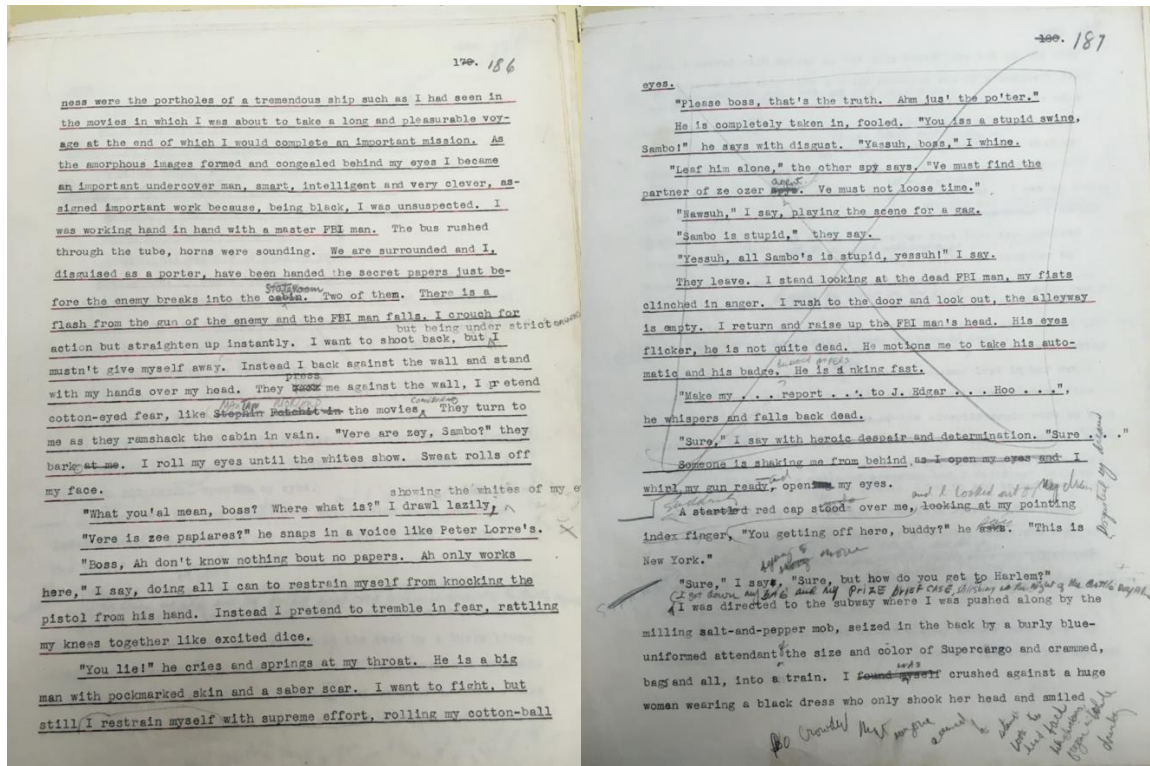


Figure 2. Pages from a deleted scene from *Invisible Man*, held at the Library of Congress. "New York Arrival." Box 145, Folder 13. Ralph Ellison Papers, Part I: Writings File, 1935-1995.

Both the cinematic quality of this vision and its placement in the narrative are notable. This passage occurs right after a reverie, which remains in the final text, about what his life in the North would be like, how he would "speak softly, in my most polished tones, smile agreeably and be most polite" (157). In the midst of this plan to appear humble and agreeable to white men in the North, it's no wonder that he recognizes that the only role available to him in an intelligence fiction would be the undercover agent with a talent for playing the comically frightened servant, the last person anyone would suspect of being an FBI man.⁶⁶ The dumb act that his covert agent avatar deploys is not unlike the performance of servitude that he intends to make in New York, and the secret FBI papers that he carries in his vision are not so different than the documents he carries with him in his prized briefcase. The vision is a heightened fantasy that reflects his plans for finding employment and anticipates the lack of meaningful, dignified

roles he will be offered in a city that remains dominated by white men, despite its supposed progressivism. The invisible man repeatedly attempts to use others' perceptions of his blackness to gain a foothold in one institution or another, but finds that while this strategy can dispose of fantastical Soviet agents, it cannot enable him to gain any status in New York, either as a humble worker or a radical political leader.

Although this episode explicitly related to the intelligence community was excised from the novel, *Invisible Man* remains concerned both metaphorically and, in the Brotherhood section, literally with cold war anxieties about hostile corruptions of what it means to be an American. On the metaphorical level, Ellison is clearly commenting on the performativity of daily life as a marginalized person in America, the burden of DuBois's double-consciousness. The unnamed narrator travels through a dreamscape of different portions of mid-century American society, leaving a blatantly racist Southern community to find a brief respite in a historic black university, only to be sent north with a false letter of recommendation after crossing the head of the school. In the north, the invisible man encounters racist barriers in other forms, heightened by Ellison's ludic postmodern style. Finding work at a paint factory, he is faced with a supervisor who is obsessed with attaining the purest shade of white paint possible and is enraged when the narrator botches his first batch. After an accident at the factory, the hospitalized invisible man literally cannot recall his identity and must be reborn as a new person with the help of extensive electroshock therapy. Soon after, he falls in with Jack, the leader of a communist movement called the Brotherhood. Inducted into the Brotherhood as a speechmaker and racial figurehead in Harlem, he is given a new name—another new identity—and trained in Brotherhood ideology. However, he is punished by the Brotherhood too when he deviates from their ideological platform in his speeches. In leaving the Brotherhood, the narrator is partially responsible for

inspiring racial riot in Harlem, which is coopted by the black pan-African militant leader Ras the Exhorter as an all-out war on the white police and government of the city. As he flees the violence, the invisible man realizes that the Brotherhood had wanted him to inspire this riot to use for propaganda about the oppression of the disenfranchised while also conveniently disposing of rival leaders. By the end of the novel, the invisible man has retreated underground, back in the bunker illuminated by stolen electricity from which he introduces himself to readers in the prologue, trying to catalogue and so understand his various traumatic experiences.

Each of the novel's episodes powerfully comments on the blind spots of midcentury America, particularly the limitations of racial uplift narratives and the hypocrisy of the supposedly progressive north. Taken as a whole, *Invisible Man* is the story of a person performing several different roles in hope of finding his place in history, a space in which he can spread influential ideas, have some active presence in the world—be *seen* as an agent of societal change. The novel's heavy use of metaphors about visibility and invisibility, of sighted and blind characters, among many things expresses anxiety about the cold war fear of invisible enemy agents and whether or not surveillance is an effective way to identify them and predict their behavior. My analysis, necessarily unable to cover every episode in this dense novel, focuses on the Brotherhood plotline, in which different avenues for leftist sentiment are painted vividly, and on the change in the narrator from the Prologue to the Epilogue, in which I believe the novel's most important political message can be found.

The invisible man's greatest desire is to be seen, to be included in a larger historical narrative, and when he is welcomed into the Brotherhood he believes that this it will be the platform that he needs to achieve this dream. However, Ellison's Brotherhood slowly reveals itself to be just as manipulative and oppressive as any of the other institutions that promise to

give the narrator the full recognition he desires. As with every new community he enters, in the Brotherhood the narrator tries to leverage his invisibility by following his grandfather's command to be a "spy in the enemy's country," to "live with your head in the lion's mouth" and "overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let them swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open" (16). However, the invisible man ultimately sees that men like Brother Jack already wield too much power and will always outwit such attempts at sabotage. After several months with the Brotherhood, he realizes that Jack is not essentially different than the other white authority figures he had come across in his journey: "They were very much the same, each attempting to force his picture of reality upon me and neither giving a hoot in hell for how things looked to me. I was simply a material, a natural resource to be used... except now I recognized my invisibility" (508). As his ideas are repeatedly ignored or rejected as overemotional or uninformed, the invisible man gradually realizes that the Brotherhood fears individuality as a threat to their sanctioned ideology: Brotherhood members were containers of a message, not distinct persons with their own unique contributions to their doctrine. After spending several months as a Brotherhood figurehead, the narrator speaks of "becoming aware that there were two of me: the old self that slept a few hours a night and dreamed sometimes of my grandfather and Blesdoe and Brockway and Mary, the self that flew without wings and plunged from great heights; and the new public self that spoke for the Brotherhood and was becoming so much more important than the other that I seemed to run a foot race against myself" (380). Realizing that he must choose between being "outside the stream of history" or being a mere container of the Brotherhood's ideology, seen only in the sense that crowds see the self that the Brotherhood has named and constructed, he chooses invisibility (439).

His time with the Brotherhood is when the narrator's awareness of his double-consciousness becomes most pronounced and most unbearable, which is ironic given the Brotherhood's promise to advance the rights of all people. Although on the surface they show him more kindness and a clearer place in the world than anyone else, they are in fact the most insidious and cause the most psychic stress in the narrator. On the other hand, the other organized political body available to the invisible man, the militant Ras the Exhorter, is not a viable option either. Though justified in his distrust of the Brotherhood, he is unstable, "not only funny, but dangerous as well, wrong but justified, crazy and yet coldly sane" (564). Neither of these organized leftists movements, in Ellison's final vision, are productive channels for his narrator's self-actualizing project. Recognizing that he has no place following either Brother Jack or Ras, the invisible man departs at the end of the narrative on a third path of his own creating, a path which has been the focus of the most contentious critical debates about the novel's politics.

In the fallout from the novels' last big set piece, a race riot led by Ras that was secretly provoked by the Brotherhood, the narrator becomes the invisible man of the prologue, angry and launching attacks on the unsuspecting people walking around his "hole," determined to craft his damning counternarrative of mid-century American life. But somewhere in the process of that narration, he becomes the much more muted narrator of the epilogue, admitting, "There seems to be no escape. Here I've set out to throw my anger into the world's face, but now that I've tried to put it all down the old fascination with playing a role returns, and I'm drawn upward again. So that even before I've finished I've failed... The very act of trying to put it all down has confused me and negated some of the anger and some of the bitterness" (579). Ellison's critics, both in the 1950s and recently, have typically read the epilogue as a statement of defeat, focusing on

statements like this. But this attitude ignores the invisible man's declaration that he is going to come out of his "hibernation" and rejoin the world aboveground. This might seem to be a neutral act, a decision to reenter the society from which he so bizarrely, dramatically withdrew—unless we remember the definition of the word that he provides us in the prologue: after assuring readers that it is "incorrect to assume that, because I'm invisible and live in a hole, I am dead. I am neither dead nor in a state of suspended animation. Call me Jack-the-Bear, for I am in a state of hibernation," he later adds, "Please, a definition: A hibernation is a covert preparation for a more overt action" (6, 13). Alongside the ongoing puzzle of what the narrator's grandfather meant by declaring that he was "a traitor and a spy," the distinction between covert and overt actions takes on a particular charge. To be sure, the invisible man in his period of "hibernation" has been engaged in unusual covert operations, stealing enough electricity from Monopolated Light and Power to fuel 1,369 light bulbs in his den. In the prologue, the invisible man also reveals that he recently assaulted a white man who accidentally bumped into him: "Most of the time (although I do not choose as I once did to deny the violence of my days by ignoring it) I am not so overtly violent. I remember that I am invisible and walk softly so as not to awaken the sleeping ones" (5). But, as with all statements in the prologue, this claim to relative nonviolence is contradicted by another confession: "You often doubt that you really exist. You wonder whether you aren't simply a phantom in other people's minds. Say, a figure in a nightmare which the sleeper tries with all his strength to destroy. It's when you feel like this that, out of resentment, you begin to bump people back. And, let me confess, you feel that way most of the time" (4). So, is the invisible man "most of the time" the one who walks softly to avoid waking sleepers, or the nightmare figure who brutally beats them? In this winding introductory speech, it

is impossible to truly know. He is fighting multiple impulses, hoping that the crafting of his detailed story will provide some clarity of action.

By the epilogue, the narrator takes a much less violent stance, and at times seems indeed to have resigned himself to his ineffectiveness. But at other moments, always ambivalent, there seems to be some hope that he is continuing to search for a way to make an impact on history without having to subjugate his identity to someone else's ideology. Consider the following:

Yes, but what *is* the next phase? How often have I tried to find it! Over and over again I've gone up above to seek it out. For, like almost everyone else in our country, I started out with my share of optimism. I believed in hard work and progress and action, but now, after being first 'for' society and then 'against' it, I assign myself no rank or any limit, and such an attitude is very much against the trend of the times. But my world has become one of infinite possibilities. (576)

The comment about being “against the trend of the times” is insightful given the overwhelmingly negative reception of the invisible man's final speech, but I believe that we should take the narrator at his word when he says that he has “infinite possibilities” rather than no options left to him. Having recognized his invisibility and found a voice—very much his own characteristic, hyper-articulate voice—with which to tell his own strange story, the invisible man chooses to end his hibernation. No longer “for” a society that seeks to define him as essentially less than a white man, nor “against” society through alliance with other organizations that impose limiting definitions on him, the invisible man still seeks some alternate path.

The invisible man's grandfather encourages him to be a counterintelligence agent against dominant white society, a mission which so confuses the narrator that he tries to align himself with a number of organizations in order to carry it out, losing his grip on a stable identity. He perhaps finds some efficacy in writing out his counternarrative, an exhaustive catalog of all the

obstacles put in front of a black man trying to combat the vast network of societal and institutional forces seeking to define and so oppress him. By the novel's end, he finds a perverse hope, after this telling, in the fractures of his identity and the necessary unpredictability of that fracturing. If he doesn't know what he's going to do, then no one else can know either. Far from optimistic, this attitude is yet not the apolitical retreat from activist causes that so many have read in the invisible man's final communication. His determination to define himself—to reject the definitions of the South, the industrial North, the Brotherhood, Ras the Exhorter, and, one can imagine, the G-Men who were once a part of his narrative—opens up some undefined future in which his behavior cannot be controlled or predicted by these oppressive powers. In his first big speech for the Brotherhood, the invisible man does not deliver the party line of political theory but instead says whatever is on his mind, and feels so empowered by the overwhelmingly positive audience response that he ends by exclaiming, “I feel, I feel suddenly that I have become *more human*. Do you understand? More human. Not that I have become a man, for I was born a man. But that I am more human... With your eyes upon me I feel that I've found my true family! My true people! My true country! I am a new citizen of the country of your vision” (346). After this speech, the Brotherhood chastises him for making such vague statements rather than actionable nuggets of ideology, and the invisible man never feels this way when he delivers the speeches they teach him. But the “country of your vision,” in which the invisible man can be truly seen and so actualized, remains a promise that he will presumably continue to chase.

Granted, finding even this kernel of optimism in the invisible man's final speech has to be attained by careful attention to his words. There is no clear political takeaway other than distrust of all existing movements, no defined path forward, and it's easy to see why readers hoping for some more definite conclusion to this winding story would be discontent by the vague

promise of reentering the world to try out the “infinite possibilities” in which the invisible man comes to believe. The next section analyzes a relatively unknown novel that shares the same thematic concerns as *Invisible Man*, but provides readers with a clear, though controversial path out of the racist traps from which Ellison’s protagonist struggles to free himself. Performativity for the invisible man, unlike the heroes of intelligence literature, is detrimental to his psychological wellbeing rather than empowering; in Sam Greenlee’s *The Spook Who Sat by the Door*, an African American man finds a way to use performativity like a hero of popular intelligence fiction to make a dramatic, radical impact on history.

The Spook Who Sat by the Door

Reflecting on the reception of his debut novel, in a 2001 essay Sam Greenlee wrote, “My novel was all but ignored by the American literary establishment. That is still true more than three decades later; in short, I am the Invisible Man of African American literature” (“Writer / Producer’s Statement” 26). While Greenlee has a flair for extreme statements about his life and work, undeniably *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* made almost no mark on the American public immediately after its publication. Whether this was due to plain lack of audience interest or a covert repression of the narrative depends on who you believe. *The Spook Who Sat by the Door* was rejected by dozens of publishers in the U.S. before Greenlee found a small publishing house in London that would print it in 1969. The novel is a remarkable fantasy of a man who works to become the first black CIA operative, realizes that this integration is merely symbolic, and then leaves the Agency and uses his training to organize youth gangs in Chicago into a militarist black nationalist movement. Blatantly celebratory of using violent means to achieve civil rights, it is no wonder that Greenlee had difficulty circulating it in the American 1960s. More curious is the fact that the film made in 1973 from Greenlee’s screenplay was immediately pulled from theaters and

most copies of the film lost. Greenlee has stated multiple times that the FBI was behind the film's repression; since the Bureau has responded to FOIA requests with the frustrating claim that Greenlee's file was lost, it's hard to verify or discount such claims (Maxwell 263-4).⁶⁷

Spook is semiautobiographical. Sam Greenlee worked in the mid-1960s for the U.S. Information Agency, primarily as a propaganda officer in Baghdad, Iraq, and Pakistan. Much like his novel's protagonist, Greenlee was one of only a handful of black operatives, and he was radicalized by his exposure to the U.S. intelligence community. Greenlee resigned from intelligence work after the 1967 CIA-supported coup in Greece, and he wrote *Spook* immediately afterward. Greenlee cites his experience in postcolonial societies, and in places where the U.S. was still exerting overbearing influence, as a moment of dual recognition: he both realized that his continued service for such a government was untenable, and that "the South Side of Chicago was a Third World country," in which "the same tactics were used [by the U.S. government], the same kind of propaganda, the same methods of hiring flunkies to control people" ("Duality" 31). These realizations moved him to become a writer who would attempt to help these oppressed communities. Greenlee wanted to write directly to black Americans like those that his protagonist organizes, not an elite university readership. He wrote *Spook* in the style of a thriller because he believed that working class or impoverished black Americans would be more likely to read something accessible: "If I'd been targeting bourgeois intellectuals, I probably would have written a nonfiction diatribe à la *Wretched of the Earth* and my [actual] target audience probably would have never even heard of it" ("Duality" 48). Greenlee recognized the power of popular genres and aimed to be as accessible as possible, eschewing the stylistic concerns that were preeminent for Ellison. Nonetheless, *Spook* is a cleverly constructed piece of fiction that solicits reader interest before revealing its startling political message. The narrative masks itself

by pretending to be a typical thriller rather than a piece of radical political theory, taking the surprising turn into militarist revolution and reflections on the instability of performed identity only midway.

The first half of *Spook* contains elements of a piece of patriotic intelligence fiction, mixed with an ironic depiction of white American politics. The novel's protagonist, Dan Freeman, is accepted to the CIA after a politician, seeking to win over the African American vote, charges the Agency with discrimination for only having white operatives. To combat these charges, the CIA invites fifty African American men to go through their rigorous training program, with the actual goal of failing every single one of them to prove that they are not fit for the job. As the fictional DCI puts it, "We all know that deceit, hypocrisy, duplicity are the everyday tools of our agents in the field. Much to their credit, the childlike nature of the colored mentality is ill-suited to the craft of intelligence and espionage" (9). Freeman is the only man to overcome the myriad obstacles the Agency puts in front of him, studying intelligence theory, military tactics, physical combat skills, and weapons training, all the while ironically disproving the DCI's statement by playing the part of an obedient, subservient black man. When Freeman surprises everyone by completing the training and becomes the first black operative in the Agency's ranks, the novel highlights the irony in the CIA's belief in the innocence and readability of African Americans: "No one ever blew Freeman's cover. They accepted at face value what he appeared to be, because he became what they wanted him to be. Working for the agency, in the agency, Freeman was the best undercover agent the CIA had" (48). Freeman, like the invisible man, is for a time able to use his awareness of his double-consciousness to advance his own interests. He acts the part of a mild-mannered, industrious employee before returning to his home in a predominantly black neighborhood, changing into flashy clothes and frequenting jazz clubs, finally feeling like

himself. Freeman hopes that this ability will eventually allow him to attain some power within the Agency and combat the systemic racism that every black citizen faces, but he grows increasingly stressed and disheartened by his dual life.

Freeman gradually realizes that he cannot tolerate a position in the Agency in which he is relegated to “sitting by the door,” paraded as an example of the institution’s progressivism while in fact having no role in the CIA’s operations. He is tasked with providing tours and being a face of the Agency, but he is never given any actual work to do as an analyst or a field operative. More trying, he must constantly confront the spectrum of racist attitudes in the Agency, as when his immediate superior congratulates himself for espousing the progressive, to him, idea that black Americans are not genetically inferior, but that their historic social trauma makes them inferior nonetheless. Freeman finally rejects the idea that he can change the Agency from within—that he can “yes ’em to death”—or that the narratives of racial uplift and being an example to his race are valid. Decamping to Chicago, Freeman wins the respect of the young black leaders of a gang called the Cobras, convincing them to become militant revolutionaries for a higher, ideological cause. The novel celebrates Freeman’s shift from belief in slow, peaceful integration to militant activism, and the former attitude is consistently mocked as Freeman prepares his followers for his war.

Using his extensive CIA training, Freeman is able to teach the Cobras guerilla warfare tactics that they can use to attain resources to fund a sustained series of attacks. In this training process, they take advantage of the systemic racism that cannot conceive of certain possibilities for minorities. When the Cobras rob a bank and a National Guard armory, Freeman strategically uses his extensive experience not just with CIA infiltration tactics, but also with negotiating racial stereotypes. Reading the news after their successful heist, Freeman notices the Cobras

“were all listed as Caucasian in the police description of the bandits. Freeman smiled. A nigger with a gun in a bank with a lot of money had to be white because niggers snatched purses and rolled drunks—any cop could tell you that—they just didn’t rob banks” (143). Of the weapons stolen from the armory, “Freeman did not think there would be much searching of the ghetto for the arms because niggers didn’t steal government property and defy the FBI any more than they robbed banks” (146). Indeed, nobody suspects that the Cobras and other gangs could be ultimately responsible for the riots, even after they are identified in the attacks on police and major city landmarks. The police, reporters, and intelligence officials called in as expert counsel on the problem all believe that there must be Soviet counterintelligence operatives organizing the gangs, or at least that the American Communist Party is leading the operation. Freeman counts on this confusion and uses it to his advantage, for “the longer they looked for Communists, the longer they would be looking for whites. The United States Communist Party used Negroes as showpieces and flunkies just like all the other American institutions. The best cover they had was the white stereotypes concerning Negroes” (208). Here Greenlee repeats the conclusion that Ellison’s invisible man comes to at the end of his experiences with the Brotherhood, but rather than concluding that there is no radical, organized action that black Americans can take, offers another alternative, if a fantastical one. *Spook* is a vision of the political landscape that takes black militarism as a serious option, rather than the “not only funny, but dangerous” figure that Ellison created in Ras the Exhorter.

While it’s of course implausible that one superman could singlehandedly inspire an effective radical resistance movement, Greenlee’s text offers an important challenge to defeatist ideas of political inefficacy, and serves as an interesting counterpoint to *Invisible Man*. Adding another chapter to Ellison’s catalogue of institutions characterized by systemic racism, Greenlee

depicts an intelligence community that was as discriminatory as any other mid-century American political entity, fundamentally compromising their ability to defend American interests. Greenlee extends his examination of this prejudice by also depicting domestic intelligence agents seeking to undermine peaceful civil rights movements, pushing Freeman to wage outright war on them. Finally, Greenlee's CIA and FBI are characterized by a particular blindness to the capabilities of an African American agent. Freeman reflects that black Americans are "the only natural agent in the United States, the only person whose life might depend, from childhood, on becoming what whites demanded, yet somehow remaining what he was as an individual human being" (109-10). *Spook's* intelligence community is doubly a dupe because of their inability to recognize this fact, clinging to racist narratives of a childlike black people, and because of a savvy black man's ability to outsmart them.

Greenlee's narrative argues that dominant narratives of peaceful integration and racial uplift will always fail to combat entrenched white prejudice. Before turning to militarism, Freeman pointedly goes all the way down the path of peaceful integration and finds it not only unproductive, but an essential threat to his identity. In a significant passage, Freeman makes the decision to leave the CIA because of the pressure on his sense of self:

Freeman knew from the personnel records at CIA that an agent became burned-out when he no longer had an identity as a distinct personality; after the erosion of the years of cover, constantly becoming someone different, finally wore away what he actually was, until he no longer knew what he was. Freeman had been playing roles for whites and finally for everyone. How long before the edges of his cover and those of his personality would blur, merge, and he could no longer tell where one began and the other ended? (109)

This anxiety echoes that of Ellison's invisible man, the search for a way to express a true self that is difficult for a person to even define for themselves. Passages like this indicate Greenlee's

interest in the instability of identity, particularly for marginalized citizens that are given an identity to perform that is at odds with their actual interests. It also indicates Greenlee's belief that African Americans need a concrete goal that can be attained in the near future—the hope of long-term, incremental societal change isn't enough, for the psychological pressure of living multiple lives will do too much damage before that kind of change can happen.

Greenlee effectively uses popular intelligence literature tropes to work up to his radical ideas. The first third of the novel is a training montage reminiscent of many superspy origin stories, intercut with satirical racial commentary. It's an unexpected turn when Freeman suddenly decides to leave the CIA—up until the start of Chapter 8 it seems that Greenlee is telling a story of a black man proving himself to the Agency and becoming their best operative against overwhelming odds, making the novel a piece of unique intelligence literature rather than radical counterintelligence literature. At the point of this narrative turn, Greenlee writes that Freeman had “shed his old cover as a snake sheds its skin,” not just for the night but permanently: “gone the insecure shuffle, the protective, subservient smile, the ill-fitting clothes” (77). This moment marks the moment at which the narrative, too, sheds its cover and becomes the tract on violent revolution. Greenlee gets readers to buy into the recognizable story of a patriotic intelligence hero before revealing that this is actually a story about a black militarist, and even after the novel takes the turn, Freeman retains many of the qualities of that slick 1960s figure who graced so many television screens: he has exquisite personal style, demonstrates impeccable taste in food and cars, never fails to impress a woman, and is always the most competent person in a room. His recognizable, almost unassailable character type provides a mooring for an otherwise disorienting narrative, and also drives home the earlier point that

Freeman took the path of being an exceptional example of his race to its extreme and still found it an empty ideology.

Greenlee's narrative can be read as a direct response to *Invisible Man*, which largely dismisses militaristic, favoring a comparably vague optimism about another undefined option that the narrator discovered. Greenlee represents the opposite end of the spectrum of responses available to black mid-century writers, who were aware of particularly intense FBI surveillance and the awareness that popular spy narratives and government rhetoric of world leadership wasn't for them. While immensely different stylistically (both authors and novels), they share the fundamental concern with a fragmented black self and the lack of options for African Americans in established leftist movements. At the end of these meditations, Greenlee comes away with a much clearer answer than Ellison ever provides, which makes the novel either stronger or irresponsible, depending on one's stance on violent means to societal change. Both works contain alternate visions of American life, Ellison creating a surrealist dreamscape in which the institutionalized racism of the real world are more recognizable through this heightening, while Greenlee proposes an alternate history in which one superman can overcome the challenges the disempowered black community faced. The final narrative this chapter also combines realism and postmodern play with history in the narration of a marginalized citizen struggling with his limited political options.

The Book of Daniel

E.L. Doctorow is another twentieth-century writer who was carefully watched by the FBI. Unlike Ellison, however, Doctorow was writing later in the century, when it was less dangerous to publish overtly political fictions, and unlike Greenlee he found a wide readership. From a less endangered though still marginalized perspective of a lower class Jewish family in New York,

Doctorow for several reasons was both freer and more interested in publishing fiction that could conservatively be described as irreverent of American history. Doctorow's body of work consistently demonstrates the postmodern play with genre and with the historical record with which this project is concerned. Before becoming a full-time writer and teacher, Doctorow worked in Hollywood and in publishing, both jobs requiring him to read enormous amounts of screenplays and novels that he found to be lacking in quality. But this mass exposure to mid-century fictional production allowed him to replicate and cobble together elements of different genres in order to craft a broad patchwork vision of American history. His first novel *Welcome to Hard Times*, for instance, started as a parody of the Western but eventually became a celebration of what the elements of the story type could do. His most well-known and celebrated novel, *Ragtime*, draws freely from the historical record, presenting fictionalized versions of Harry Houdini, Sigmund Freud, J. P. Morgan, Henry Ford, and Evelyn Nesbit, among others, in a narrative tapestry that involves elements of an adventure tale, a detective mystery, a rags-to-riches story, a social protest novel, and a romance.

Even more significant than Doctorow's mastery of fictional genres is his belief that historical narratives are not fundamentally different than literary narratives. Laid out most clearly in the oft-cited essay "False Documents," Doctorow in multiple interviews and nonfiction pieces claimed that the fiction writer not only has a right to change and embellish the historical record, but that this is in many ways more valuable than scholarly works that stick to the demonstrable facts: "I meant it when I said everything in *Ragtime* is true. It is as true as I could make it. I think my vision of J. P. Morgan, for instance, is more accurate to the soul of that man than his authorized biography" ("The Art of Fiction" 33). This is a fascinating and extreme statement, given that *Ragtime*'s Morgan is the head of a secret organization of wealthy men bent on

discovering the secrets of reincarnation, and Doctorow has frequently drawn harsh criticism from other writers and reviewers of his work for such claims. But this vision marks Doctorow as one of the most ambitious writers of counterintelligence literature: if organizations like the FBI were increasingly dedicated to gathering hard, unchangeable, significant facts about potential threats to American democracy, then Doctorow's viewpoint that such historical facts are less significant than the work of imagination is much more subversive than any support he could give a specific leftist organization. In a 1989 interview, Doctorow laughed off the idea that any government file compiled on him could meaningfully affect his life: after being asked to confirm rumors that he was on an FBI watch list in the 1970s, he said, "Oh, yes, but that was a great honor, you see. To have a file in the FBI is one of the credentials for achievements, like the honor roll of American writing... It's a kind of literary criticism the FBI does" (Interview with Davies). Doctorow thus represents another position available to authors aware of government surveillance: rather than G-men readers posing a threat, in the latter half of the cold war Doctorow was able to see his canonization into the secret federal archives as an indicator of his success.

Although Doctorow was able to be characteristically blithe about his legacy in the American historical record, *The Book of Daniel* demonstrates a keen awareness of the effect that FBI surveillance can have in times of ideological hysteria. The novel's narrator is the son of Paul and Rochelle Isaacson, fictionalized versions of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who in one of the most publicized trials in American history were executed on charges of espionage and conspiracy in 1951. Doctorow's Daniel Isaacson narrates from the late 1960s, and the text he produces serves as a working-through of his trauma, a working draft of his dissertation in American history, and a portrait of how the American Left changed since the days of his parents' communist party. Daniel's text is a memoir of his childhood during his parents' trial and

execution, interwoven with a narrative of his present as he watches his sister dying of a nervous breakdown. Daniel also becomes increasingly politicized, eventually abandoning the pessimistic belief in his lack of political agency as he talks with New Left leaders and participates in Vietnam War protests. Daniel never knows for certain that his parents were falsely accused, but the text strongly implies their innocence by highlighting the extreme bias and illogic of the prosecutors and by giving no indication that the Isaacsons were anything more than working-class idealists.

It's worth mentioning that recent evidence has shown that the historical Julius Rosenberg was likely guilty of passing at least some sensitive information to Communist agents. The effect, if any, this has on our reading of the novel is complicated by the fact that Doctorow, writing in the 1970s, did not have access to this information, and that he made a pointed choice to fictionalize the family by changing the names, collapsing some real-life figures into single individual characters, and changing the gender of the Rosenberg's second son so that Daniel has a sister, Susan, instead. Again, Doctorow was not shy about dropping historical figures into his fiction by name, but in novels like *Ragtime*, those fictionalized historical figures were no longer living and there were several decades between the novel's events and Doctorow's present. *The Book of Daniel*, on the other hand, depicted historical events that were still relatively fresh in public memory, and some of its fictionalized figures were still alive, which might have contributed to Doctorow's decision to create at least a nominal layer of distance from his subject. Regardless of his reasoning, the effect of Doctorow's decision to create an extra, uncharacteristic level of fictionality allows the novel to better withstand any revelations about the Rosenbergs' actual guilt. Regardless, Doctorow's historical critique remains poignant: even if one high-profile defendant could in fact be proven guilty, it remains absolutely plausible that in the

climate of irrational, widespread fear of communist invasion, leftists who are innocent of any actual espionage could and were unjustly imprisoned and executed, and the Rosenberg trials remain an prominent example of misuse of the American legal system. Doctorow was interested in depicting the harm that the general culture of anticommunist hysteria brings about and uses the Rosenberg trial as the ultimate evocation of those tensions; regardless of the actual Rosenbergs' guilt or innocence, this fictional portrait provides an effective counternarrative of what it's like to go up against an unbeatable legal system that is determined to find guilt.

Beyond depicting the Isaacsons as innocent, *The Book of Daniel*'s critique of domestic anticommunist policies works by showing the disastrous effect of constant surveillance on the Isaacson children. Daniel recounts his childhood trauma in order to understand his current troubled identity, but quickly rejects any reader sympathy that this story might garner by narrating in gruesome detail his abuse of his young wife. Daniel wants to understand how his parents' public death affected him and also disprove the governmental narrative that he is broken and potentially dangerous because of these events. Daniel describes himself playing spy games as a child while the trials drag on, reluctantly driven to suspect that his father was a spy after all. In other words, his childhood self is pushed to believe first in his father's guilt and then in his own genetic predisposition to repeat that guilt, beliefs that he is trying to work past by reexamining all the events. After his father's arrest, the young Daniel fantasizes that a microphone he finds in his father's radio shop "broadcasts on a secret frequency directly to my father in his jail cell. I whisper instructions as to what he should do when he hears the hoot of an owl outside his cell window tonight. It will be our rescue team coming to get him. I advise him to be ready and to wait further instructions. Roger, he radios back to me. Roger and out, I reply" (121).

But as the memory of his father fades, the boyhood narrative changes so that instead of Daniel being a hero from a popular spy tale coming to save his father, it's Paul Isaacson who is the master operative: "There was never in any announcement from J. Edgar Hoover a presumption of innocence. An image grew of my father as a master spy. As a master spy and a leader... He was being transformed before my eyes and he wasn't there to stop it from happening. If he was in jail then maybe he *was* an atomic ringleader" (160-1). In these passages, Daniel tries to make sense of his incomprehensible reality by applying the tropes of popular intelligence fiction to his memories of his father. As the two narratives refuse to cohere, Daniel expresses increased cognitive dissonance, but slowly begins to accept the word of the mysterious, all-powerful J. Edgar Hoover. Daniel, both as a child and years later as a doctoral candidate, faces the difficulty of checking the government's word and their "serious and irrevocable paperwork" (106) against an external reality. In the face of the narratives the FBI and similar organizations present as the truth, personal testimony is useless, and popular fictional narratives about "master spies" hiding in American society only reinforce governmental claims.

Under the pressure of constant surveillance, Daniel feels retroactively guilty about his own childhood habits of spying on people, repeatedly labeling himself a "criminal of perception" (31, 34, 75). But although the surveillance of his family has given him heightened awareness of the power of even his own childhood gaze, Daniel feels completely helpless to do anything but watch and be watched. In a famous passage, Daniel explains that he has been entirely neutralized politically:

My dossier is up to date. I live in constant and degrading relationship to the society that has destroyed my mother and father... Nothing I do will result in anything but an additional entry in my file. My file. I am deprived of the chance of resisting my government. They have no discoveries to make about me. They

will not regard anything I do as provocative, disruptive or insulting... I have worked it out. It's true. I am totally deprived of the right to be dangerous. If I were to assassinate the President, the criminality of my family, its genetic criminality, would be established. There is nothing I can do, mild or extreme, that they cannot have planned for. (72)

The government's suspicion of Daniel, embodied in the paperwork that describes his every action, means that there is nothing unpredictable that he can do. If he takes the most rash act imaginable, it will be attributable to the idea that criminality runs in his family, or that he is carrying out an act of vengeance—his actions will only reinforce the logic that rebellion against governmental systems of power is a disease that spreads in predictable ways. He will be guilty of the crimes that the FBI already expected him to commit, fulfilling the governmental narrative of his criminality prophesied in his dossier. If he remains apolitical, inoffensive, then the surveillance of him has accomplished its purpose, and his life becomes another victory for the Bureau. The awareness of this double bind makes Daniel both reluctant to take any political action whatsoever and self-hating for that withdrawal. Although he declares that both the politics of his communist parents and the counterculture of the New Left are pointless posturing, he is clearly fascinated with them, valuing them more than his own political paralysis.

The novel weaves together a past conflict—the arrest, trial, and execution of the elder Isaacsons—with the present-tense conflict tracing Daniel's strained relationship with his sister and adoptive parents, culminating in Susan's death as a result of a nervous breakdown. Susan's illness was accelerated by a falling-out with her brother over her plans to establish a political foundation with her inheritance. Daniel regarded Susan's planned Isaacson Foundation for Revolution as a hopeless endeavor and refused to support her, leading to a permanent break in communication between them. Visiting her in the hospital, seeing her mental state after a failed

suicide attempt, is what finally pushes Daniel to participate in political protests. Reflecting on Susan's funeral, Daniel writes, "My sister is dead. She died of a failure of analysis" (301). This is in one sense a barb at the insufficient treatment Susan received in the psychiatric ward from which Daniel tries to rescue her in the novel's opening sequence, but it can also be read as a hopeful sidestepping of the limited roles Freudian psychology allows people to play. Daniel is deemed as a genetic criminal, who both because of his physical makeup and his childhood trauma is destined to commit some foreseen crime—the FBI is using psychoanalytic methods to define and limit him. But if Susan cannot be cured or figured out through such methods, then in Daniel's view, it proves there are blind spots in this system. Freudian psychoanalysts, and federal investigative analysts of information, of Susan's paper trail, cannot articulate or predict what will happen to her. Her death demonstrates that analysis can fail, which perversely gives Daniel the sense that he can and must get out of the trap. Perhaps he can also be inscrutable, and thus unpredictable—he can be deemed dangerous after all.

But as in *Invisible Man*, exactly what that dangerous political action will look like is unclear. Doctorow paints a portrait of different manifestations of resistance movements that are almost as hysterical as the government rhetoric around the Red Scares. Writing in 1971 also gave Doctorow the opportunity to assess multiple historical attempts to resist security state rhetoric—the communism of the Isaacsons *and* the New Left, in the novel led by a leader of the youth counterculture. Daniel's eventual politicization is generally seen as a positive development, although the depiction of the young people leading this iteration of leftist thought is not uncomplicatedly positive. The last prong on which Doctorow's critique of these decades' politics operates is portrait of Artie Sternlicht. Better at attacking past and current systems of power than at articulating a workable alternative, Sternlicht comes off as obnoxiously irreverent, more style

than substance. Consider, for instance, his offhand remark that “the American Communist Party set the Left back fifty years. I think they worked for the FBI. That’s the only explanation. They were conspiratorial. They were invented by J. Edgar Hoover. They were his greatest invention” (150). Beyond being insensitively blithe about the role that people like the Isaacsons played in trying to articulate a thoughtful alternative to the national security state, Sternlicht here reads as either a laughable conspiracy theorist or else a distastefully ironic political commentator. His political tract is not a set of plans or principles, but a wall-length collage of images titled “Everything that came before is all the same.” The ever-changing collage, which Daniel adds to by giving Sternlicht a Save the Isaacsons poster, is spectacular but lacks the heart of the intellectualism and earnestness of the Isaacsons’ dogged reiteration of their values. Sternlicht is trying to usher in something entirely new, rather than reenact another standard narrative of idealistic resistance to a corrupt, powerful system. *Everything* that came before, on both sides of that good-evil binary narrative, is all the same in his mural: only his youth movement can hope to represent something different. By eradicating history in this way, they are at one moment fundamentally opposed to the government surveillance organizations that need to believe in a knowable, stable history in order to predict future events, but on the other hand they are counterproductively arguing that no historical patterns of systemic power can be traced.

Ultimately, the novel argues that on a personal level, it’s better to be active than cynically nihilistic about political potential. When Daniel’s story ends with a riot in the library in which he has been writing his dissertation-memoir, it seems like a change for the better. But the novel is also a nuanced portrait of the limitations of both the Isaacsons’ intellectual communism and Sternlicht’s reckless New Left, and a particular commentary on the difficulty of organizing resistance to a system with such built-in safeguards of its own power. When dealing with

something like the mid-century FBI, at its most powerful under Hoover, that has the capacity to run a wide program of surveillance and also the ability to infiltrate any organizations seeking to oppose the administration they protect, it's difficult to calmly organize something different enough to inspire a mass movement but plausible enough to not be written off as an extremist threat. Paul Isaacson summarized the impossible position his family and friends found themselves in as a group of sane people assaulted by a mob of self-reinforcing illogic: "It is not just spy arrests, but political trials like Foster and Dennis, and the other Party leaders. It is the defamation of New Dealers like Alger Hiss. It is the Un-American Activities Committee investigations of Hollywood writers. It is the Attorney General's list of subversive organizations. My father paints a picture: our house is completely surrounded by an army of madmen" (109). Daniel, in the course of his narration, struggles both to believe this narrative—that his parents were innocent, which means accepting that the government has gone mad—and to deal with the consequences of that belief: if the government is mad, then what hope is there of combatting it without going mad yourself? To conclude, I will examine how the different political attitudes depicted by Ellison, Greenlee, and Doctorow argue for the artists' prominent role in combatting government mistreatment of minority groups by crafting counternarratives that call for dramatic, new action.

Conclusion

Reading each of these novels as counterintelligence literature highlights their attention to the negotiation of multiple identities, the role of the covert in effecting political change, and the particular pressure that the systematically racist intelligence community placed on minority citizens in the cold war decades. Each protagonist considers himself to be a counterintelligence agent at some point, working against the dominant governmental narratives of national security

in order to advance some leftist cause, and each also cannot find a place in existing political movements and so looks for other options. All of this leads to unpredictable radical behavior, although the disunity and ultimate inefficacy of the traditional counterculture options indicates that the national security state has figured out how to successfully encourage further disunity among these groups. While these novels celebrate the idea of radical political action, it's not always clear what that action could look like.

These novels critique existing leftist movements and strive for some other way forward. For Greenlee, that's radical black militarism. Ellison more vaguely hopes for a way to articulate black identity and make a mark on society without burying themselves in white-dominated radical groups. Doctorow looks toward a New Left that is more focused and humanistic in its program, but acknowledges that activism is better than defeatism. The important thing is that three figures who should not have been threatening—Ellison's unknown man, Greenlee's Freeman who was held up as a model citizen, and Doctorow's carefully watched and supposedly politically neutered Daniel—manage to find a way to act out unpredictably. At a cultural moment in which federal agencies were preaching the stable prosperity of American life, these very different visions of where resistance might unexpectedly be found are important depictions of the actual unrest of the American 1950s and 1960s.

While there is optimism to be read in Ellison and Doctorow, their narrators' catharsis or ultimate revelation is vague at best. Both the invisible man and Daniel seem determined to take some action, but are far from sure about what that action should be, or whether it will be any more effective than all of their failed attempts to find a framework in which they can both enact an authentic identity and make some impact on the dominant culture that oppresses them. Ellison and Doctorow, by crafting narrators who are admirably creative and intelligent but also self-

destructive and prone to cruelty, argue that there needs to be some outlet for these hyper-articulate, imaginative figures to express political identities. These narrators' lack of agency despite their immense capabilities pushes them to the edge of mental breakdown, resulting in fragmented, difficult texts that struggle to give voice to some bearable way to continue living in mid-century America. Ellison's and Doctorow's narratives end suddenly, at the point of some dramatic political action, because the authors cannot envision what that future could look like even as they wish for it. The novels are a call for sympathetic readers to take up the task, figure out which of the invisible man's "infinite possibilities" will lead to significant societal change. Even if they do not present a clear program moving forward, the narratives are important for compellingly depicting the stress that such a consciousness is under when faced with such a thorough trap, and for leaving these characters determined to try something else even after all of their previous failures. On the other hand, Greenlee's work, while providing a clear alternative to extant leftist movements, proposes a narrative that depends on a type of superhero, a one-man solution to a widespread problem. And, while his work was aimed at a wide audience, it did not attain a following until several decades after its publication, possibly because of some covert suppression of the narrative.

Taken together, the accomplishment of these three works is their portrayal the lack of options for marginalized citizens in cold war America, the chilling effectiveness of the national security state, and the difficulties the left has had—because of both internal divisions and external pressure from U.S. counterintelligence programs—in organizing any lasting resistance. However, the lack of viable options for political organizations that will earnestly, effectively represent minority interests points to the usefulness of fiction. If there was no organized leftist political movement that could accommodate the voices of the people most in need of such a

movement, then fictional counternarratives that garner a large readership can go a long way in both publicizing the limitations of these leftist groups and encouraging readers to articulate these vague new, other options that the novels' protagonists seek. These novels are useful calls to continue thinking about what an effective resistance could look like, and valuable to contemporary readers for their portraits of what governmental surveillance can do to even a very intelligence, creative individual. The following chapter examines works by Joan Didion and Margaret Atwood that seek to represent the female voices that were also excluded from U.S. cold war political discourse, finding there other calls for activism over defeatism.

CHAPTER 4

OPERATING AT THE FRINGES: DECENTERED INTELLIGENCE IN JOAN DIDION AND MARGARET ATWOOD

The American intelligence community has always been an overwhelmingly masculine space, and the body of fiction about intelligence work reflects this gender disparity. The CIA had been operating for a few decades before women were invited to join its ranks, and fictional narratives about female operatives were novelties rather than standard fare. Women were not entirely absent from cold war politics, but the postwar years marked a reactive return to traditional gender roles that placed women in increasingly domestic roles, particularly excluding them from the highest levels of legislative and military decision-making. More abstractly, the American national mythos during the cold war decades cast the country as a hyper-masculine man who needed to take a firm stand against his enemies and eradicate any weakness in his own body. In the famous address to Congress that would become known as the Truman Doctrine, Truman identified the U.S. as a nation that could not shirk its duty as a world defender. Highlighting the financial and military aid that Greece and other countries would need from the wealthy United States, he called on Congress to “face these responsibilities squarely,” suggesting that isolationism was now cowardice.⁶⁸ Such rhetoric would only become more pronounced in subsequent government documents, as in NSC-68’s articulation of the “fundamental purpose of the United States,” which manifest in, “Our determination to maintain the essential elements of individual freedom, as set forth in the Constitution and Bill of Rights; our determination to create conditions under which our free and democratic system can live and prosper; and our determination to fight if necessary to defend our way of life.” Reflecting this stirring governmental rhetoric, the tropes of fictional intelligence narratives reinforced these masculine

ideals and created male protagonists who were paragons of steely determination in the face of adversity. Women were largely limited to roles as sidekicks or, at best, femme fatales, sexual puzzles for the male operative to solve. And even rarer than a fictional female operative was a female author of intelligence narratives.

In the face of this multifold gender imbalance, this chapter examines novels by Joan Didion and Margaret Atwood, two writers who among innumerable accomplishments in their long and prolific careers authored notable works of counterintelligence literature. Employing markedly different styles, Didion and Atwood both produced novels featuring female characters who become involved in cold war conflicts despite their indifference to politics. In part as a result of this reluctance to assert themselves politically, and in part because of their repression of personal traumas, the women in these novels drift into cold war hot spots, become romantically entangled with covert intelligence operatives, and ultimately are forced to confront their detachment from the politics of their times. These novels critique individual citizens who attempted to remain apolitical in the 1970s and 1980s, as well as a wider societal attitude that encouraged women especially to passively accept governmental rhetoric in the same way that they were consuming a burgeoning body of popular media. But perhaps more pointedly, these narratives serve as standout critiques of a subject that not many writers at that time were addressing: the American administrations whose covert operations in Latin America and Vietnam serve as the novels' narrative backdrops. The three layers of the novels' critical work—individual, societal, and governmental—work together to classify Didion's *A Book of Common Prayer* (1977) and *Democracy* (1984) and Atwood's *Bodily Harm* (1981) as counterintelligence literature whose critique is particularly attuned to gendered cold war rhetoric.

The works discussed here had probably the least cultural impact of any set of texts covered in this project. While both authors are widely known and canonized in the university, these three novels, each politely reviewed, did not garner much critical attention or a very wide readership. Joan Didion is best known for her recent memoirs about her personal grief, or else for her earlier journalism on social problems in 1960s California and, by extension, the rest of America, but her fiction, less widely celebrated, demonstrates that she was paying attention to subjects beyond the nation's borders. She was one of the first novelists to dramatize American covert involvement in Latin American countries, and her style is well suited to voice to the particular confusion of the Vietnam War years. Attention to Didion's fictional production in addition to her journalism situates her not just as a clear-sighted critic of the American scene, but also of the postwar attempt to spread American democracy across the world. Margaret Atwood, too, is celebrated for her feminist narratives, but *Bodily Harm* is hardly ever included in discussions of her treatment of women in politics, although it is a striking coming-of-age story that also dramatizes the violence of Latin-American revolutionary cycles. I've included Atwood, a Canadian writer, in a project about American writers because of the longstanding close relationship between the United States and Canada and the particularly aggressive spread of American culture during the cold war decades. Atwood is clearly critiquing the American intelligence community that is intervening in other countries' affairs, Canada not having much interest in developing an intelligence community. The protagonist of *Bodily Harm* is Canadian, and the Canadian government's support of violent totalitarian regimes in Latin-American countries is not above blame, but Atwood's critique is directed at a Canadian government and populace that bows to U.S. foreign policy decisions.

In their novels about U.S. covert interference in Latin America and Vietnam, Didion and Atwood importantly invert the common tropes of intelligence narratives by decentering the male operatives. They reject the popular narratives of the spy who heroically carries out his mission or else the rogue agent who breaks orders to do the necessary work that his country is unable to sanction. Beyond this rejection of stock character types, their narratives hardly follow the operatives at all, denying them any space except to trace their impact on the women at the narratives' center. In place of heroic or tragic male operatives, Didion and Atwood emphasize women whose political awakenings cause them act out in ways that make them incomprehensible to the novels' covert operatives. Each of the three novels discussed below are conversion narratives, in which a character or set of characters comes to doubt the efficacy of American intelligence operations and dominant narratives of the postwar world order. In all three novels, the explicit failure of an intelligence operative to predict the geopolitics of the region shakes this confidence—they're all narratives of American intelligence operations gone wrong—as does their smaller, but notable, failure to understand the women in their lives, which suggests a wider lack of communication between male-led government bodies and a feminized American public. Didion's female narrators attempt to use the methodology that intelligence operatives used in order to understand the traumatized women at the novels' center, only to realize that these objective, scientific viewpoints shed no real light on these women's characters. In Atwood's novel, the conversion is a belated shift from political apathy to activism. Rather than the mediation of an overconfident narrator who comes to terms with the limits of her own knowledge, *Bodily Harm* is written from the close-third person perspective of Rennie, a journalist whose commitment to "trivia" rather than subjects of political or cultural weight ultimately collapses when her life is threatened during a Latin-American coup. All three novels

center women who come to doubt the narratives and epistemologies that male-dominated governments used to define a woman's place in society, against the backdrop of American proxy wars in which the intelligence community distinctly failed.

In this chapter, I argue that Didion and Atwood challenge the gendered governmental rhetoric of the cold war decades by inverting the tropes of popular intelligence narratives and foregrounding women who ultimately claim a political identity. As Pynchon and DeLillo worked to challenge the confident cause-effect logic that implied the world could be easily read by American intelligence operatives, and Ellison, Greenlee, and Doctorow challenged the integrity of the growing domestic security state, Didion and Atwood target another set of intelligence narratives' fundamental assumptions: that men would (and should) always be the actors in such dramas, and that the U.S. needed to project an image of hyper-masculine toughness to win the cold war. Didion achieves her critique by creating narrators who use the U.S. intelligence community's surveillance methods to attempt to understand women whose politicization confounds easy characterization through these methods. Atwood accomplishes her critique by providing the interiority of a woman whose flaws are uncomfortably relatable to readers, who in turn are prompted to confront their own disinterest in the U.S. government's cold war operations. I begin by contextualizing these writers in their historical moment, tracing their relationship to political writing and how the American public was responding to recent revelations about covert military interventions in Latin America and Vietnam. I then turn to an analysis of first Didion's and then Atwood's counterintelligence novels, revealing how they employ different styles to challenge the exclusion of women's voices in cold war foreign policy.

Mid-Cold War Counterintelligence

In the 1970s, the U.S. intelligence community was involved in more foreign operations than ever, and the American public began to take critical notice. The escalation of the Vietnam War, the revelations about repressed or incomplete reports of military losses, and the massive protests in response to the draft indicated how quickly the seeming stability of mid-century American life could be disrupted if the public was motivated to combat militaristic foreign policy. Vietnam was one of the most notable failures of American intelligence. The dual tasks of intelligence gathering were to determine an enemy's capabilities and their intentions; the CIA was typically successful at determining what an enemy *could* do, but notoriously limited in predicting what they *would* do,⁶⁹ and the drawn-out U.S. involvement in Vietnam proved this limitation repeatedly. The character of the South Vietnamese leaders that the U.S. chose to support was not accurately read. Early underestimations of North Vietnamese determination to win the war at any cost gave way to the infamous failure to predict the devastating Tet Offensive, with a host of faulty intelligence reports in between. Officials could not agree on how to determine success or loss in the war, for the typical metrics did not apply: territory supposedly conquered by U.S. troops would be shortly retaken by guerilla forces more familiar with the land and the people. Military units were thus instructed to rely on body counts rather than geographical progress as a metric of success, leading to the inflation of numbers of enemy dead, sometimes involving the intentional killing of civilians. Worse yet, the intelligence community, even when it came up with definitive proof that the U.S. was losing the war and had little hope of victory before public opinion forced a withdrawal, began falsifying such reports in order to appease a distressed White House administration.⁷⁰ So, even when intelligence was successful, it was not effectively communicated.

Covert operations were even more controversial. Most notable was the Phoenix Program, a counterintelligence effort to identify Viet Cong soldiers or sympathizers in a given area. Initially conceived as a way to penetrate Viet Cong networks and develop sources of reliable intelligence on enemy intentions, the program in practice moved increasingly toward the torture and execution of any suspected enemy. As historian Thomas Alhern writes, “This effort seems to have been directed more at allowing guerrilla activity than at penetrating insurgent political or administrative organs. The station had, moreover, no way of monitoring the accuracy or utility of the information the informants produced” (255). In the late 1960s, this terror campaign was considered successful in demoralizing the other side, although historians continue to debate this point,⁷¹ but the program was undoubtably responsible for killing an unknown number of innocent Vietnamese men and women. These mixed objectives, combined with the seeming endlessness of a disastrous conflict that intelligence reports initially declared to be winnable, damaged public faith in the country’s leadership, and leaders’ faith in the CIA. In particular, the revelations of the Phoenix program and CIA Saigon station chief William Colby’s denial in the Congressional hearings of the 1970s that any “counterterror operations” existed did irreparable harm to public faith in the intelligence community.⁷²

Beyond Vietnam, which took up an inordinate amount of the government’s and the CIA’s attention and resources, there were a number of covert conflicts that did not garner large-scale societal attention. Several operations in Latin-American and Middle Eastern countries happened quietly. The tradition of such intervention was established in 1954, when the CIA pulled off largely nonviolent coups in Guatemala and Iran to prevent communist leaders from taking power. The actual, long-term success of those missions was questionable,⁷³ but the general attitude in the intelligence community was that these operations represented definitive victories.

The CIA gradually discovered that attempting military coups in South America garnered diminishing returns after this big year of covert adventures. The Bay of Pigs invasion was of course the most obvious failed operation, but this was hardly the only time that American operatives would meddle in other countries' structures of power. The CIA meddled in dozens of foreign elections throughout the cold war, primarily in South America and the Middle East.⁷⁴ In the most benign cases, this intervention involved propaganda campaigns that warned of totalitarian domination by the Soviet Union if a given leftist candidate was elected. More extreme was the infiltration of various communist-leaning parties by agents who would report on closed meetings and steal sensitive documents. In the most shocking instances, the CIA attempted assassination of leaders considered unsympathetic to American interests. It has been proven that there were plots to assassinate Cuba's Castro and Chile's Allende, and documentation that came to light during the Congressional investigations of the intelligence community showed that there was at least discussion of plots against Patrice Lumumba, Rafael Trujillo, Ngo Dinh Diem, and Abdul Kassem.⁷⁵

While American covert involvement in Latin American and Middle Eastern countries wasn't a failure on the scale of Vietnam—U.S. interests or the government's reputation generally were not hurt, with the exception of the Bay of Pigs, until long after the fact, when the 1970s Congressional investigations brought the worst of these operations to light—it was devastating for the people actually living in these countries. Awareness of such meddling was not widespread in the U.S. but was quite well known to South Americans. Salman Rushdie gets at this modern confusion in *The Jaguar Smile*, his brief memoir of his experiences in Nicaragua during the Sandinista revolution: "My reflex reaction to the Agency's entry into the conversation was simultaneously Eastern and Western. The Western voice inside me, the voice that was fed

up with cloaks and daggers and conspiracy theories, muttered, ‘not them again.’ The Eastern voice, however, understood that the CIA really did exist, was powerful, and although it was easy to make it a scapegoat, it was also just a bit too jaded, too cynical, to discount its power” (18). The American public, flooded throughout the 1960s with narratives about fictional covert operatives, by the 1970s had grown so accustomed to the image of the intelligence hero that he wasn’t a source of particular fascination, a fictional trope that was too tired to warrant much attention. Overconsumption of intelligence narratives, which aimed to both entertain and reassure the public about the role of their country’s new interventionist policies, thus played into the hands of the intelligence community who wanted as little direct attention as possible. When news did break about one or another revolution succeeding or failing, it wasn’t a headline that seemed important to a population that was more concerned about events that directly affected them, a state of affairs familiar in contemporary U.S. politics.

Novels as Dossiers: Didion’s *A Book of Common Prayer* and *Democracy*

Against a social backdrop in which it was difficult to determine what to pay attention to, Joan Didion early established herself as a serious writer who could sort through the chaos and come away with a few clear, blunt conclusions. In 1967, she broke into journalistic fame with “Slouching Towards Bethlehem,” an essay on the state of American counterculture that famously opens, “The center was not holding. It was a country of bankruptcy notices and public-auction announcements and commonplace reports of casual killings and misplaced children and abandoned homes and vandals who misspelled even the four-letter words they scrawled” (*SB* 84). The essay describes the cultural scene in California, and by extension the rest of the country, at a time in which the appearance of American domestic prosperity was beginning to collapse in the face of clashes over civil rights and the growing hippie culture. The appearance of firm

foreign policy was also collapsing and would only get worse over the next decade as the escalation of the Vietnam War led to widespread protest and the Congressional investigations into CIA operations further shook public confidence in American intelligence agencies. Throughout these tumultuous decades, Didion established her reputation as a writer striving to make sense of seemingly indescribable societal changes by focusing on the perspective of ordinary citizens. Her steady attention to difficult subjects, sentences that blended the declarative with the poetic, and treatment of amorphous societal ills through their impact on mutable individuals would all make up her distinct voice, in both her essays and fiction.

Didion hasn't always considered herself a political writer, noting in the preface to her second essay collection *Political Fictions* (released, in an unfortunate coincidence, on the day of the 9/11 terrorist attacks) that she had never written on politics until she was asked to cover the 1988 Presidential election. Despite this claim, much of Didion's nonfiction and all of her novels are saturated with the political. Although her fiction does not directly dramatize cold war political events in the mode of a historical novel, she uses fragmented narration to communicate the shattering failures of the American government, foreign wars and domestic unrest that rocked the country in the mid- to late-cold war decades. Importantly, Didion chooses to decenter the drama from the men making the military and political decisions to focus instead on women who are passively drawn into these circles before making one unpredictable decision that signals the scope of their male partners' failure to understand the situation. These stories about women who suddenly awaken to political agency are narrated, importantly, by other women who learn that their sympathy for their female subjects is a more useful diagnostic tool than any of the surveillance strategies the male characters use. In a political landscape that has been broken almost beyond recognition by men in power, Didion leaves it to her female narrators to find a

way to make sense of foreign policy disasters in South America and Vietnam that upended the lives of countless people, and the women who improbably find themselves at the center of these conflicts.

I will return to the question of Didion's narrators and their adoption of an intelligence analyst's perspective, but first I will demonstrate these novels' political content by elucidating the role of their male intelligence agents, whose political maneuvering happens at the narratives' fringes. Both *A Book of Common Prayer* and *Democracy* dramatize instances where American intelligence failed, gradually and quietly in various South American countries, and spectacularly and publicly in Vietnam. By providing the careful reader just enough information to piece together what she's talking about, Didion plays on the growing public awareness of intelligence work and the growing desire to know more about American foreign operations. Once that narrative is pieced together, the reader is left with dramatic political thrillers that cast the American covert operatives not as heroes, but as men who drastically misjudged both their romantic relationships and, on a much larger scale, the geopolitical conflicts in which American interests are at stake.

Piecing together Didion's fragmented plots takes careful attention and at least some knowledge of the political events and institutions she references, often depending on readers' understanding of long acronyms or military jargon. *A Book of Common Prayer* follows an American woman, Charlotte Douglas, who takes up residence in the fictional South American nation of Boca Grande. The novel's narrator is Grace Tabor Strasser-Mendana, the unlikely matriarch of a family that has held a political dynasty in Boca Grande for decades. Grace becomes interested in Charlotte because she is an ostentatious oddity in the country—North American women simply did not settle in Boca Grande, and Charlotte in particular seems

rudderless and bizarrely unreflective about the circumstances that have brought her to this place. As Grace narrates Charlotte's time in Boca Grande, she parcels out information about the current political situation—some members of the Strasser-Mendana family are maneuvering to wrest control of the regime from their relatives—and about the events in Charlotte's life that brought her into this scene. Grace, who has recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer and knows she is soon to die, wryly assesses the narratives' large cast of characters, most of whom are her immediate family, and claims to retain no illusions about the world. She has dedicated her final days to the study of biology and often attempts to use scientific methodology to elucidate the messy personal and political events around her.⁷⁶ However, Grace's efforts come up short when she encounters Charlotte, who Grace struggles to understand or classify. She can create a scientific report on every member of her tempestuous family and on the men involved in covert work who eventually come looking for Charlotte, but she cannot complete an accurate study of Charlotte herself.

Grace eventually learns that Charlotte is in Boca Grande because she hopes to find her daughter Marin, who is on the run from the American government after detonating a bomb in an embassy. Charlotte lives under the fantasy that Marin was "lost" several years ago and stubbornly remains in Boca Grande as political events heat up around her, deluding herself that if she just stays long enough, Marin will eventually come to her door. As it turns out, Charlotte lingers too long and is shot during Antonio Strasser-Mendana's takeover from his brother Victor, despite the efforts of her two ex-husbands, both arms dealers with undefined ties to the intelligence community, to fetch her back to the States. Described as such, the novel sounds like a plot-driven thriller, but most of the narration is meditative, focusing on the character of Charlotte Douglas rather than the men who plot and stage these various coups. Nonetheless, the

message of the novel relies on the reader making connections between Charlotte's passivity and wider public ignorance of U.S. meddling in South American countries, and the drama of the novel would be baffling if a reader had no knowledge of the long history.

In many ways an echo of Didion's earlier novel, *Democracy* is part murder mystery, part political drama, and part romance. Again, Didion creates a female narrator who parcels out information slowly and out of order. The central character is Inez Victor, a woman very much like Charlotte Douglas in temperament, but who chooses to marry not the covert operative in her life but the successful politician Harry Victor. Born Inez Christian, she is part of a wealthy family who owns large land holdings in the Hawaiian Islands and is politically influential in the Pacific region. As the wife of a Senator making a run for a presidential bid, Inez is constantly followed by the press, her words, appearance, and actions all carefully tailored to help her husband's public image. Everything unravels in 1975, the year in which most of the novel's action takes place. Shortly after Inez's sister Janet and a Hawaiian Senator are suddenly murdered by the mentally unstable patriarch Paul Christian, Inez's daughter Jessie leaves her addiction recovery program to fly to Vietnam right as the American-supported government is collapsing. This final crisis drives Inez to leave her family to travel with her former lover Jack Lovett, the American intelligence operative who has never entirely left her life. In this later narrative, however, it is not Inez who is made to die as a result of American covert operations: although Lovett dies anticlimactically from cardiac arrest, Inez is free to settle in Kuala Lumpur and open a relief organization for war refugees that her Senator husband discouraged her from starting, worried about its effect on his political campaign. Rather than a tragic parable about the loss of innocent life in cold war conflicts, *Democracy* ends on a more hopeful note, suggesting that women can find productive political identities.

Both *Common Prayer* and *Democracy* are overtly concerned with American intelligence's mismanagement of a battleground cold war region. The rapid escalation of personal and political events are related but are not linked causally, mirroring the wider cold war feeling of paranoia and barely contained chaos underneath a seemingly thriving American society. Both women at the centers of these narratives win the lifelong devotion of a man in the intelligence community, and the fall of a government, either due to American military support or the withdrawal of it, are key plot points. In these ways, the intelligence community is a central narrative concern of both novels; the political plots catalyze the personal dramas to which the narrators have greater access, and a reader with no knowledge of cold war events would have a difficult time following the narrative lines that deal with the frequency of coups in Boca Grande, or with what Jack Lovett terms "the assistance effort" in Vietnam.

In narratives that are so concerned with the work of covert operatives, readers are introduced to men who are supposed to be hyper-competent cold warriors with the enhanced, no-nonsense perception granted to all heroes of intelligence narratives. But the covert operatives in these novels—Charlotte's second husband Leonard Douglas in *Common Prayer*, and Inez Victor's lover Jack Lovett in *Democracy*—fail to accurately process information as soon as the women in their lives become assertive. Their inability to anticipate the actions of seemingly predictable women is the first signal that the American intelligence community's methods don't always work, and therefore shouldn't be entirely relied upon. Importantly, their failure is due to their assumptions about how women will behave: because women were so rarely factored into cold war politicking, when Didion's covert operatives come across a woman who isn't doing exactly what they are told or expected to do, they begin to make mistakes. Their failure to understand women who act out from their prescribed roles reflects these men's wider failure to

understand a world in which the global public begins to pose challenges to American cold war foreign policy decisions.

As long as Charlotte and Inez are passive, they are understandable by the men in power because they are controllable. Inez serves most of her life as the perfect, placid politician's wife, and in Charlotte's winding tales about her past, she frequently features as a decoration who is able to delight or soothe the tempers of volatile political leaders. Charlotte is introduced as a woman "immaculate of history, untouched by politics. There were startling vacuums in her store of public knowledge" (60). Aligning herself first with a conman and then with an international arms dealer, both with notable but indeterminate links to the American government, Charlotte seems defined by those she gives herself to rather than by her own convictions. Lacking any real awareness of the international politics in which both of her husbands played a role, "She understood that something was always going on in the world but believed that it would turn out alright" (60). Charlotte, drawn into dangerous circles first by her husbands and then by her daughter's alignment with a terrorist group, lives in a new world order in which the American sphere of influence was no longer limited to the country's borders, and in which it was likely that the American government was running some kind of operation wherever one chose to go. But she also holds the newly American attitude that allows her to willfully forget such facts, a determined lack of concern for anything that isn't immediately in front of her. *Democracy's* Inez is a clearer example of a personality entirely constructed by a man, whose presidential aspirations make him representative of the American governmental system. Often seen "via telephoto lens" (49), "Inez Victor had come to view most occasions as photo opportunities [... She] had developed certain mannerisms peculiar to people in the public eye: a way of fixing her gaze in the middle distance, a habit of smoothing her face in repose by pressing up on her

temples with her middle fingers, a noticeably frequent blink, as if the photographers' strobes had triggered a continuing flash on her retina" (50). Inez spends most of the novel being coached by her husband's campaign manager to "trot out the smile" and to say commonplace aphorisms in interviews (122). She can be relied upon to be a beautiful, composed wife and mother, the last person that anyone takes into consideration.

But late in the narratives, Inez and Charlotte make surprising decisions, and the powerful men in their lives are caught off guard: rather than a known factor that can be overlooked, Inez and Charlotte suddenly become actors who need to be analyzed. Charlotte's decision to leave Leonard Douglas and settle in Boca Grande was unexpected, but her stubborn refusal to leave even as another coup breaks out is incomprehensible. This sudden willfulness, put to a suicidal purpose, is figured as a tragedy that emphasizes the inordinate consequences of hypermasculine cold war conflicts on other citizens. In *Democracy*, the Victor campaign team is horrified when Inez declares that she wants to help refugees in the Pacific islands, rather than some neutral but stylish hobby like the interior decorating that they finally convince her to take up instead. But even more startling is her decision to leave Harry and travel with Jack Lovett, which neither man expects. Didion's account of Inez's final decision to remain in the Pacific island region to help refugees is a much more hopeful conclusion that gestures toward the potential of women becoming more active in cold war politicking.

Both women's stories become more important when read as metaphoric of wider public attitudes toward American foreign policy. Inez and Charlotte are often read as symbolic of an American public who is asked to actively repress any questions about American foreign policy decisions. Timothy Melley, for instance, writes that in both novels, "the allegorical figure for the U.S. public is a liberal woman who is unaware of the corruption in the developing world,

stunningly optimistic, ‘apolitical,’ and convinced of her immunity from violence” (Melley 156). This metaphor can be further extended to show that just as Didion’s fictional covert operatives cannot anticipate the actions of the women in their lives when they become willful, the intelligence community and the presidential administrations they support do not know what to do when the American public is attentive rather than passive in the face of news about their covert operations.

The political plot of *A Book of Common Prayer* dramatizes the tumultuous state of affairs in Latin American countries throughout the twentieth century, and how that political instability turned these regions into a battleground for the major cold war powers. Boca Grande’s coups are an obvious dramatization of the many Latin-American countries undergoing cycles of political leaders every couple of years. Ordinarily in these coups, as in the historical record, new *caballero* leaders with personality cult followings would wrest control of the regime from the current leader. As the cold war progressed and both the United States and the Soviet Union took an interest in spreading their respective ideologies around the world, these new Latin-American leaders were backed by more than the power of their own charisma. *A Book of Common Prayer* dramatizes this by providing a typical “script” that the periodic coups always followed, and then breaking from that script. The coups always masqueraded as people’s revolutions, reported in United States newspapers as “a new lease on democracy” for the country, although in fact the native people of any given country are always being exploited by some higher power: “Whoever wants the Ministry that year must first get the *guerrilleros* in the game. The *guerrilleros* seem always to believe that they are playing on their own, but they are actually a diversion, a disruptive element placed on the board only to be ‘quelled’ by ‘stronger leadership’” (194). At

the end of every supposed people's revolution, "the *guerrilleros* would all be shot and the true players would be revealed" (211).

In the midst of this political maneuvering, Charlotte Douglas remains apathetic, although the stories she tells about her past life reveal that she was once present for similar revolutionary conversations. In an early chapter, demonstrating Charlotte's confused way of telling "pointless but bizarrely arresting stories," readers are given their first glimpse of her second husband, Leonard, laying the groundwork for readers to understand the extent of his involvement in the Boca Grande coup that ends the novel (35). Inviting her listeners to "Imagine Leonard on Air Force One," or, "For that matter imagine Leonard on a camel," Charlotte doubles over into laughter without actually telling the stories of what brought them to meet with the U.S. President or a Kuwaiti political leader (37). When one of her interlocutors finally presses her to identify Leonard, she remarks, "He runs guns," stunning everyone present with this sudden, casual revelation (38). Moments later, when the American ambassador to Boca Grande joins the conversation, he hastily corrects Charlotte by saying that Leonard is "a very well-known lawyer" (39). The exact nature of Leonard's work never clearly defined, but he certainly has a number of political connections both in the U.S. and in cold war battleground regions. And the novel's climax reveals links to other hazy figures who occupy even more marginal places in Grace's narrative of events in Boca Grande.

In the denouement of the novel's political plot, Douglas certainly has a hand in the weapons exchange that leads to the typical revolutionary cycle going off-script: "The *guerrilleros* appeared not to know that they were on the board only to be gunned down... [They] appeared to have more of everything than anyone except Leonard Douglas had supposed they had. Some say Kasindorf and Riley supplied the excess, some say other agencies" (264).

The key difference between the ordinary revolutionary script and the events that bring about Charlotte Douglas's death by firing squad is that the *guerrilleros* had access to many more weapons than they'd ever had before. Who supplied them is the key question that would unlock total understanding of the events of the coup, but Grace is unable to identify which "agency" is ultimately responsible, reflecting the instability and murkiness of South American conflicts in this period, the ever-present paranoia that American powers are involved, and the limitations of Grace's perception as a woman who will always be an outsider to this masculine conflict. The lack of clarity about these agencies is encapsulated in the figures of Kasindorf and Riley: the above passage is one of only four times they are mentioned in the narrative, and they never appear in the novels' action. Grace tells readers that they hold various political roles—"Kasindorf was [the American ambassador's] cultural attaché at the Embassy and Riley was a young man who ran an OAS 'educational' office called 'Operación Simpático' downtown" (34)—but the narrative implies that like so many American ambassadors and heads of aid programs in Latin American countries in the 1960s and 70s, Kasindorf and Riley were also reporting to intelligence agencies, or perhaps undercover operatives themselves. CIA operative-turned-memoirist Philip Agee, discussed in the next chapter, was attached to American embassies in Ecuador and Uruguay as part of his cover, and indeed the idea that every diplomat might be a spy is a common trope in popular intelligence narratives. The OAS of which Didion's Riley was a part is the Organization of American States, an economic aid program founded in the late 1940s and one of many tools that cold war administrations used to guard against communist uprisings in South America.⁷⁷ In another offhand reference to Kasindorf and Riley, Grace reveals that meet every morning at the airport at "a time which coincided with the arrival of the night Braniff from Mexico. In fact Kasindorf and Riley went to the airport not because of the night

Braniff from Mexico but because they assumed correctly that Victor had microphones in their offices” (34). Meeting in airports, evading electronic bugs, and rumored to have supplied an excess of weapons to the *guerrilleros* in the novel’s final coup, it’s not unlikely that Kasindorf and Riley are the CIA men in *Common Prayer*’s margins, an almost invisible threat.

All of these figures comprise a group of men who rarely appear in the pages of the novel, but who have an inordinate amount of power over the events that tragically affect women like Charlotte Douglas. Didion’s first novel about the intelligence community decenters the covert operatives, but acknowledges that they have the power to do effect violence that was formerly unthinkable. In her later novel *Democracy*, Didion crafts an American covert operative who plays a more central role and a woman who uses her newfound personal agency to greater, less tragic effect than Charlotte Douglas’s stubborn decision to remain in Boca Grande. This novel thus more clearly indicates the limitations of intelligence work and celebrates the potential of a woman’s political self-determination. The initial description of *Democracy*’s intelligence operative Jack Lovett could be taken from the pages of a pulp spy novel: a handsome man in his fifties, “Jack Lovett was one of those men for whom information was an end in itself. He was also a man for whom the accidental did not figure... All behavior was purposeful, and the purpose could be divined by whoever attracted the best information and read it most correctly” (36). This is essentially a tract on the efficacy of intelligence work, a pledge that Jack Lovett possesses a mind that can find the key detail in any stack of data and turn any situation to his advantage. It’s important to remember, though, that Didion is not offering this as an objective characterization of Lovett, but as a statement on how he sees himself. The rest of his actions in the novel can be read as a test of that self-perception, and Jack Lovett ultimately doesn’t live up to his own estimation.

Jack never appears to be ruffled by any situation, serving in more ways than one as a foil to Inez's politician husband Harry Victor. Other than the obvious love triangle connection, Jack's characterization fulfills a trope of intelligence narratives that the covert operative is harder, more masculine, and blunter than the softer, feminized politicians who are unable to look at the dirty work their policies necessitate. Harry spends much of the novel traveling to different Asian countries to give speeches on how the United States will ensure that basic human rights are always upheld. His vehicle for doing so, the Alliance of Democratic Institutions, looks a lot like the US Agency for International Development, part of the larger Alliance for Progress program developed under the Kennedy administration. USAID runs humanitarian relief efforts and also aims to modernize developing countries on a larger scale with training in resource management, but many commentators have pointed out that the organization was a tool for cold war administrations to influence Southeast Asian and Latin-American countries economically. Historian Lars Schoultz summarizes the problems with the program's sweeping, idealistic mission statement that fundamentally infantilized and denied agency to South American countries: "The Alliance pattern has appeared with striking regularity: U.S. envoys undertake to help Latin Americans change their ways. Latin Americans resist. Envoys become frustrated. And, when their frustration becomes acute, either they call in the Marines (or create something like the Nicaraguan Contras), or they go home and write a memoir about Latin America's inferior culture" (384). In Didion's novel, Harry is the public face of such an organization, and Jack Lovett is the man running the covert operations, in touch with the truth of the hands-on work that implementing liberal politicians' "assistance efforts" entails. While polite to Harry in the States, when the Victors come to his base of operations in Asia, he does not miss an

opportunity to mock the privileged political family for their lack of knowledge about what daily life in these war zones looks like.

But although Lovett looks and talks the part of an American operative in control of every situation, he spends most of the novel confidently making the wrong call. Just as the suave Leonard Douglas is unable to predict Charlotte's actions in Boca Grande's final coup, Jack Lovett's no-nonsense competence breaks down when Inez is present. The very situation of a covert operative holding "a grave attraction to a woman whose every move was photographed" indicates that Inez is a piece of information that Jack can't understand or spin into something useful (41). Despite being a man for whom random behavior supposedly does not exist, the accidental seems to enter the picture every time Inez is involved in a decision. For instance, when he finally invites Inez to leave her family to travel with him, he is surprised when she comes with him. Sitting in his car, he is unsure where to take them, laughing as he says, "I don't know where I thought we'd go [...] Hell, Inez. How was I to know you'd come?" (166).

More seriously than this interaction, Jack of course also misreads the situation in Vietnam, failing along with other American intelligence men to see that the increasing military aid that the U.S. supplied to South Vietnamese forces would always be insufficient. Didion's staging of the novel in the Pacific islands allows her to depict a web in which members of the Christian family are implicated in various arms deals that Jack Lovett facilitates, being "someone who had 'various irons in the fire'" (39). In the novel's final section, after Inez has left Harry and her family to travel with Jack, they live in Vietnam for several weeks while Lovett continues his involvement with the war. After a period of constantly talking about management of assets—"By assets, Jack Lovett seemed to mean aircraft, aircraft and money"—he admits, in a chapter in which his narration takes over the authorial narration, slipping outside of the usual quotation

marks, “They had finally decided to make a count of priority evacuees in case extraction was necessary. In case. Inez should note ‘in case’” (196). But different government agencies had different lists of priority evacuees, so the situation is further confused and delayed: “Nobody seemed in any rush to make it definite. They were talking about evacuating twenty years of American contacts, not to mention their own fat American asses, but they were still talking as if they had another twenty years to do it” (196). Lovett, through Didion, rants about his agency’s desire for a wall map on which they could plot the different types of potential evacuees: “This map was going to be a genuine work of art. Anybody down there had any feeling for posterity, they’d get this map out and put it under glass at the State Department. Pins intact. *Memento mori Metro Saigon*” (198). But despite Lovett’s contempt for the map’s abstraction of human lives, its delay of actual action, and its ultimate inability to appropriately plan for the imminent collapse of the American-supported government, this is not essentially different than the way that he has always viewed information. When she introduces Lovett to readers, Didion writes, “All nations to Jack Lovett, were ‘actors,’ specifically ‘state actors’ [...] and he viewed such actors abstractly, as friendly or unfriendly, committed or uncommitted; as assemblies of armaments on a large board” (37). Lovett is just as likely as any other intelligence man to picture people, groups, and nations as pins, cards, or game pieces, all of the common metaphors by which military strategists discussed plans during cold war conflicts. When that collapse does occur in the novel, Lovett and Inez barely make it out in time, but Jack fails to predict one more event, his own sudden death a few weeks later from cardiac arrest.

Beyond the way that cold war intelligence features in the plots of the novels, treating Didion’s work as counterintelligence fiction is also the best lens through which to understand the fragmented narrative structure of the texts. Nearly every commentator on Didion’s work

mentions her recognizable style, the juxtaposition of striking images without clear explanation of their import. Didion's novels are filled with white space, paragraphs of just a few words not being uncommon. In one of the readings of *Democracy* more attuned to its politics, Melley writes, "It is the dual nature of the Cold War state—and not some individual neurosis—that inspires the elliptical and hesitant style of Didion's novel, its juxtaposition of images in place of continuous, explanatory narrative" (154). In a political state of affairs that can't be easily narratized because most of it is supposed to be unknown, Melley argues, striking, opposed images are a better conduit to true understanding than an expository narrative that could only tell one side of American political affairs, which was shrouded in new depths of secrecy.

Critics have made much of Didion's metafictional narration in *A Book of Common Prayer* and *Democracy*,⁷⁸ in the first creating the writer Grace Tabor who resembles Didion in many ways, and in the latter writing herself into the story as a character who, like the real mid-century Didion, travels around the world to conduct interviews and take notes for a story on the American involvement in Vietnam. This metafictionality, Didion's relationship to her journalistic role as dramatized in the novels, and the act of deliberately fragmenting narrative structures that are ripe for linear realist treatment are all important considerations that inform my understanding of these novels. However, critics have not yet made the connection between Didion's narrators' construction of events and the work of intelligence analysts: her female narrators, first aligning themselves with the narratives' male covert operatives, perform objective analytic work in an attempt to produce a report on the political situation and the role that their female subjects played in events.⁷⁹ The climax of these narratives comes when they recognize that these analytic techniques are insufficient and that their empathetic interpersonal understanding of Inez Victor and Charlotte Douglas enables more meaningful understandings of

their decisions. This recognition again highlights the inability of any governmental or intelligence community institution to understand the world without any women's perspectives.

Structurally, Didion's novels resemble intelligence dossiers, and the narrators identify with their stories' male intelligence operatives, until they have climactic revelations that these methods for understanding the world are limited and that their intuitive understanding of Inez and Charlotte are more telling. Rather than narratives that make connections for a reader, proceed chronologically, and contain only the most important information, these texts are fragmented and contain any odd detail that might prove useful for understanding the main actors. *A Book of Common Prayer*, for instance, includes a chapter that consists only of the information that could be found on Charlotte Douglas's passport (22-23). The novels' fragmentation, which John Hollowell describes as "as series of jump cuts" across time and places, lead to myriad narrative loose ends. Didion's narrators know that they're working with images, impressions, fragments, isolated moments rather than complete narratives. In their work with these discrete pieces of information, Grace and the character Joan Didion can be said to be assembling dossiers on the women who confuse and fascinate them, women who were dragged into the center of covert cold war battles because of their relationships with the men who shape the conflict. These narrators shuffle the information, try different configurations, but ultimately have difficulty answering their central question: what motivated Charlotte Douglas to stay in Boca Grande, and what motivated Inez Victor to leave her life to travel with Jack Lovett. The mystery that engages the narrators is these women's sudden claim to agency, not the motives of the men who attempt to seize or protect political power and who the narrators find predictable. The novels are thus a testing ground of the dossier method of understanding a subject.

The narrators of *Common Prayer* and *Democracy* are sharp, observant women who attempt to use hard investigative methods to make sense of seemingly chaotic events unfolding around them. Identifying with the male covert operatives who drive the political events of the novels forward, Grace Strasser-Mendana and the character Joan Didion nonetheless lack the agency and thorough understanding of covert dealings between various political groups that men like Leonard Douglas and Jack Lovett possess. Timothy Melley notes this gendered division in Didion's narrative landscapes: "Inside knowledge is possessed by men. Women, even journalists, anthropologists, and historians, no matter how smart or sensitive, are at a remove from the clandestine events that shape the political world [...] They cannot enter the world of male power but must rather intuit it by reading between the lines" (159). Melley compellingly argues that this signifies a wider feminization of the American public, who is similarly kept away from the insider information that would allow them to know the scope and purpose of the intelligence community at any given time. In this figuration, the intelligence community has all of the knowledge it needs to run operations, and if the public could be let in on the secret, then they too could understand events that otherwise just have to be "intuited."

But Grace and the character Joan Didion eventually realize that their developing intuition gives them an advantage over these male operatives, enabling them to become better analysts of the available facts. When it comes to understanding the women at the center of these novels, Grace's scientific analysis and Joan Didion's investigative journalistic methods fail, strategies that make up a large part of what the intelligence community was using to predict the behavior of both individuals, nations, and what Lovett calls "non-state actors." But these female narrators also bring an intuition and a personal knowledge of the women under examination that brings them closer to the truth, though they still never reach total understanding. Tim Parrish writes of

the moment when Inez begins to give unconventional answers to journalists following her husband's political campaign, "Inez, momentarily, has escaped her handler[s] and said something that, as it turns out, only Didion is interested in hearing and capable of decoding" (173). The climax and resolution of these novels entails Grace and Didion realizing that their investigations, as modeled on scientific analysis or the attempt to gather absolute, totalizing truths, were wrongheaded. Instead, they learn to rely on a more fluid, intuitive understanding of the world that admits doubt and doesn't assume that women will act a certain way—only then are they able to perform the "decoding" that is based on empathetic listening to these women's articulation of their desires.

Didion's narratives consciously draw attention to this failure of characterization and plotting; the narrators know that they are coming up short, failing to identify the one driving question that moves the narrative forward and makes sense of everything, the one scene that serves as a definitive climax. Grace constantly mulls over the "motive roles of the narrative," who actually holds the power in these social and political systems and what they plan to do with it (21, 199, 214). In *Democracy*, the character Didion admits that she tried to write a conventional novel about the Christians, starting with Inez and Janet's upbringing and their mother's decision to leave her family for more joyful times on the mainland. But she abandoned that novel, getting bored with it, finding that the "novel of glimpses" that she ends up with instead is a more earnest, if not more true, treatment of the events (232). In the novel's second chapter, after which she introduces herself with the wry "Call me the author," Didion lists moments that could serve as starting places for this narrative, but then writes, "Consider any of these things long enough and you will see that they tend to deny the relevance not only of

personality but of narrative, which makes them less than ideal images with which to begin a novel, but we go with what we have” (17).

Grace spends the entirety of her narrative trying to apply scientific methodology to understand the people around her. Formerly an anthropologist, Grace takes up “the amateur study of biochemistry, a discipline in which demonstrable answers are commonplace and ‘personality’ absent” (12). Grace was alarmed that as an anthropologist, even after years of studying a small village of people she ultimately “did not know why any one of these female children did or did not do anything at all. Let me go further. I did not know why I did or did not do anything at all” (12). But in the supposed hard sciences, rather than the social field of anthropology, Grace believes that she can find more concrete, tangible answers, even to such a complex study as that of personality. In the novel’s opening chapter, she informs readers that personality traits like fear of the dark are not learned behaviorally but are passed down genetically: “Fear of the dark can be synthesized in the laboratory. Fear of the dark is fifteen amino acids. Fear of the dark is a protein” (12). The purpose of her narrative, she reveals shortly thereafter, is to identify “the molecular structure of the protein which defined Charlotte Douglas” (13). These ambitions are continually thwarted as the narrative progresses, and Grace has less and less faith in her ability to map Charlotte’s personality, biologically or otherwise.

At several moments in the narrative, she turns to her laboratory methods in order to make sense of seemingly contradictory information, but she finds no help there. Upon considering Charlotte’s inability to construct a coherent narrative of her life before Boca Grande alongside startlingly different anecdote of Charlotte’s level-headed competence in performing an emergency tracheotomy on a fellow diner, Grace refuses to describe Charlotte as “unstable” because, “I am less and less convinced that the word ‘unstable’ has any useful meaning except

insofar as it describes a chemical compound” (105). Ultimately, Grace is forced to admit that while some personality traits might be understood through microscopic study of biological data, a woman like Charlotte cannot be so simply classified: “I know how to make models of life itself, DNA, RNA, helices double and single and squared, but I try to make a model of Charlotte Douglas’s ‘character’ and I see only a shimmer” (215). Grace recognizes before any of the men in her life that Charlotte has unexpected depth, parts of her personality that don’t seem to fit the expected pattern. But although her interpersonal, empathetic relationship with her brings her close to the truth, any attempt to analyze her as a scientific specimen, or a piece of intelligence, is frustrated.

In *Democracy*, the relationship between Joan Didion the narrator and the viewpoint of her covert operative Jack Lovett is signaled from the opening chapter. Before Didion introduces herself to readers with the wry “Call me the author” in Chapter 2, she relates Jack Lovett’s lyrical recollection of witnessing the first American atomic tests: “The light at dawn during those specific years was something to see. Something to behold. Something that could almost make you think you saw God, he said. He said to her. Jack Lovett said to Inez Victor. Inez Victor who was born Inez Christian” (11). Immediately, readers notice the way that Didion revises sentences, clarifying or complicating exchanges between characters, parceling out new pieces of information. But also important is that information is provided in these opening lines as if from an omniscient narrator, before being qualified as the recollection of one specific figure. After these lines, Didion provides another, “He said:” and the material after that colon fills another two pages before a reminder that this is not Didion’s narration but something that “He said to her. Jack Lovett said to Inez Victor (who was born Inez Christian) in the spring of 1975” (13). One more dive into Lovett’s memories is finally broken another page later, when his dialogue is

finally bracketed off into quotation marks and Didion announces herself as a distinct narrative voice with the admission, “This is a hard story to tell” (27). This thin line between Didion the character-narrator and Jack Lovett, whose perspective is so freely shared in this opening to the novel, signaling his perspective and his relationship to Inez as centrally important, reinforces Didion’s alignment with the intelligence operative who tries to piece together a dossier on Inez. The narrative begins by relating fragments of her family history and tracks her through her decision to leave her husband Harry Victor and travel with Jack Lovett, settling in Pacific islands and working for a refugee aid organization after her lover unexpectedly dies. But ultimately, like Grace Strasser-Mendana, Joan Didion admits that she has not written “the novel she set out to write, nor am I exactly the person who set out to write it. Nor have I experienced the rush of narrative inevitability that usually propels a novel toward its end” (232-33). At the completion of her fictional-analytic project, the narrator realizes the limits of her effort to objectively sketch the character of Inez, mirroring Jack Lovett’s inability to predict or understand her actions.

This inability to come to definitive conclusions about Inez Victor or the political events with which her personal life was entangled frustrates Didion, who knows her usual capacity for narrative clarity, in the same way that Grace is frustrated by her failure to use her scientific prowess to analyze the character of Charlotte Douglas:

I know the conventions and how to observe them, how to fill in the canvas I have already stretched; know how to tell you what he said and she said and know above all, since the heart of narrative is a certain calculated ellipsis, a tacit contract between writer and reader to surprise and be surprised, how not to tell you what you do not yet want to know. I appreciate the role played by specificity in this kind of narrative... I mean specificity of character, of milieu, of the apparently insignificant detail. (162-3)

Here the character Didion is once again pointing to her competency as an author—she’s not failing to write this story out of a personal artistic shortcoming, but because Inez Victor can’t be simply explained in the way that most people can be characterized. But she’s also highlighting the similarity between the work of the author and the work of the operative. Both figures need complete command of what details are most important in any given situation, and when it’s appropriate to reveal that information. Didion, by withholding information that the reader is not yet ready to learn, aligns herself with the intelligence operative who needs to protect the American public from hard truths. By ultimately failing to reach any greater truth about Inez Victor, she signals not only the failure of her fictional project but also the shortcomings of the intelligence gathering process that she uses.

Didion’s narrators, by failing to correctly predict the behavior of their female subjects or objectively define their characters, come to doubt the methods of the American intelligence operatives who also populate their fictions, operatives who also fail to protect those they love or correctly manipulate the political events of a cold war battleground. Their murky plots, difficult to straighten out and examine, reflect this crisis of meaning, the impossibility for even the most competent analyst to correctly predict the results of a geopolitical conflict. The narratives emphasize the toll that these intelligence failures take on women and situate empathetic female narrators as the only ones able to reach after any conclusions. Margaret Atwood’s *Bodily Harm* also takes up an apolitical woman who drifts into a cold war conflict and must confront her own detachment from the violence of American cold war ideology.

“There was much to be said for trivia”: Atwood’s *Bodily Harm*

One of the most prolific, pointedly political, and commercially successful writers of the late-twentieth and twenty-first century, Margaret Atwood’s particular engagement with women’s

issues has caused many to regard her as a source of wisdom on contemporary politics. *The Handmaid's Tale* and the Mad Addam Trilogy remain her most popular works, among both the reading public and literary critics,⁸⁰ but her less often discussed 1981 novel *Bodily Harm* also presents a nuanced perspective on the agency of women in the midst of the cold war's hyper-masculine rhetoric. Lorna Orvine argues that *Bodily Harm* in some ways is more politically compelling than Atwood's more celebrated dystopian visions, for here Atwood "brilliantly exposed not what might happen, but what *is* happening" (13), and Heidi Macpherson notes that "the novel follows Atwood's own growing politicization and involvement in organizations such as Amnesty International" (47). But critics who do treat the novel at length, rather than mentioning it briefly in longer analyses of the more blatantly political *Surfacing* or *The Handmaid's Tale*, usually emphasize the text's treatment of the literal female body, sublimating discussion of the novel's politics.⁸¹ Attention to the novel's commentary on the American intelligence community and its frequent reference to the tropes of popular intelligence narratives reveals new dimensions of Atwood's critique of female exclusion from mid-century political conversations.⁸²

In many ways, *Bodily Harm* works from the same premise as Didion's novels. Rennie, a young journalist who exclusively writes pieces on fashion and other "surface" topics, asks her editor if she can write a travel piece on a Caribbean island. Rennie wants the travel assignment in order to distance herself from the triple traumas of her bout with breast cancer, the collapse of a long-term relationship (in large part because of her partner's inability to understand her aversion to his touch after her mastectomy), and a barely avoided encounter with a sexual predator who breaks into her house. After arriving at the fictional St. Antoine, Rennie realizes that there is no tourism piece that she can conceivably write about such a small and impoverished nation. Worse,

an upcoming presidential election is threatening to dissolve into violent revolution. During her stay, Rennie meets Lora, a garrulous British expatriate who has taken up permanent residence on the island with the socialist presidential candidate; Dr. Minnow, the progressive candidate most likely to overturn the current totalitarian administration, who urges Rennie to abandon her travel piece and inform North American readers of the political scene in St. Antoine; and Paul, a mysterious American man who is involved with the island's politics in ways that Rennie never clearly discerns. Out of inertia and an interest in a budding relationship with Paul, Rennie does not leave St. Antoine, even after each of these characters warns her that she's in danger.

Like Inez Victor and Charlotte Douglas, Rennie allows herself to be drawn into a cold war hot spot because of a seeming apathy about what happens to her and a fascination with a man with possible ties to the U.S. intelligence community. After St. Antoine's supposedly democratic election results in a suspicious victory for the reigning authoritarian administration, Dr. Minnow is suddenly assassinated, and tensions between political parties whose allegiance Rennie never bothered to comprehend intensify into a revolution. At the end of the novel, Rennie is imprisoned with Lora, whose rambling monologue about her personal history opens each of the novel's five parts. In this prison, recognizing the reality of political violence from which she has always been shielded as a white woman in Canada, Rennie vows to write the political exposé about St. Antoine that Dr. Minnow urged her to undertake, and so finally fulfill her young aspirations to be an important journalist.

Although Didion's novels and Atwood's *Bodily Harm* all follow traumatized women who improbably find themselves in dangerous cold war battlegrounds, the styles of these two authors could hardly be more different. Where Didion operates by juxtaposing striking images and forcing readers to make meaning from them, Atwood delves into the psychology of her

protagonist rather than viewing her through the lens of a flawed, self-conscious narrator.

Didion's women remain elusive, somewhat inexplicable, but readers are able to understand Atwood's Rennie very well, even if she's not always the most sympathetic character. These two writers thus accomplish similar critiques of the state of American popular culture and government through very different means: Didion exposes the flaws in established intelligence gathering methods by portraying narrators who come to disbelieve in the efficacy of scientific observation, but Atwood provides a very clear portrait of a shallow woman who eventually decides to challenge the political and social climate that discourages her from deeper critical thought. In other words, Didion mimics governmental thinking in order to show the limitations of the surveillance state, and Atwood provides the viewpoint of the representative individual of cold war society to show the consequences of individual political apathy. They're providing two different perspectives on the same core issue: the way that cold war logic and fear limits profound, empathetic understanding of the world and America's role in it.

Rennie is presented to readers as a representative product of totalizing cold war rhetoric. In her interior monologue, as in her journalism, she focuses on the personal instead of the political: she shuns abstract ideas and generalizations, preferring instead to focus on her own individual experience and what she can plainly see. She focuses on surfaces, refusing to read into anything for deeper or hidden meanings. She only finds political responsibility after she is personally victimized by violent political events, happily ignoring or rejecting the existence of instability in other parts of the world up until that point. By making Rennie an understandable but deeply flawed character, Atwood urges readers to examine their own responses to stories of political violence in places like South American nations. Atwood's consistent devotion, both in her fiction and in her public statements, to being politically attentive and active,⁸³ indicates that

Rennie's interest in surfaces is not being held up as model behavior. Simultaneously, we can't simply dismiss Rennie as reckless or malicious or uncomplicatedly unlikeable. Her very real physical trauma that makes her shudder to think of anything underneath her surface skin, her revulsion for the deeply Catholic culture in which she was raised (the only way to examine depths and hidden meanings that she knows), and the publishing world that demanded she write light fashion pieces instead of the socially impactful profiles she originally aspired to write—all of these experiences make it understandable that she would prefer to focus on appearances.

Rennie is self-aware about her interest in surfaces, often articulating sophisticated self-defenses of that attitude. Thinking of all the people who praise her insight on fashion trends, she reflects, "If I could see into the future, Rennie said to one of them (a man, who kept suggesting that they should have drinks sometime soon), do you think I'd waste my time on this sort of thing? The colour of women's lipstick, the length of their skirts, the height of their heels, what bits of plastic or gilt junk they choose to stick on themselves? I see into the present, that's all. Surfaces. There's not a whole lot to it" (17). Rennie is aware that her work is considered by many to be useless, and to some degree she shares this opinion. This self-awareness indicates that she's not unintelligent. She's capable of sharp observation of the people she meets and of her own mental state, but she chooses to engage in easier subjects whenever possible. So, although she is sometimes very critical of her own work, at other times she argues for its necessity: "Rennie decided that there were some things it was better not to know any more about than you had to. Surfaces, in many cases, were preferable to depths. She did a piece on the return of the angora sweater, and another one on the hand-knit-look industry. That was soothing. There was much to be said for trivia" (201). Rennie is a gatherer of trivia, not intelligence. Rather than pieces of information charged with importance, facts that matter to the state, she is a curator of

pointedly unimportant facts. But she's aware that this line of work, this way of thinking, is merely "soothing," an easier way out of the more difficult work of confronting distressing subjects. Rennie isn't shallow by any lack of ability, but by choice, aware that it's easier to take the path of least resistance and be the fashion writer that her magazine encourages her to be. She quiets her doubts about the purpose of her work for her own comfort, but it's significant that she has those doubts in the first place.

As a gatherer of unimportant information, Rennie has a foot in the world of espionage, which is reinforced by her desire to be unseen. She wishes she were invisible, which she recognizes is particularly difficult as a woman. She wants the agency to observe without being observed, typically a male power, and is distressed when men consistently know more about her than she does about them. Early in the novel, Atwood writes that Rennie was not envious of the celebrities who are the subjects of her journalistic pieces: "In fact she found them embarrassing, their eagerness, their desperation, for that was what it was, even when they were successful. Underneath it they would do anything; they'd take their clothes off if there was no other way, they'd stand on their heads, anything, in that frenzied grab for attention. She would much rather be the one who wrote things about people like this than be the one they got written about" (18). Later, teetering on the edge of feelings for Paul, Rennie echoes this scorn as she chastises herself, thinking, "Being in love was like ...taking off your clothes at lunchtime in a bank. It let people think they knew something about you that you didn't know about them, it gave them power over you. It made you visible, soft, penetrable; it made you ludicrous" (94). And Rennie is always frustrated with people like Lora who express a desire to write a book about their own lives: "Why do they think their own lives are of general concern? Why do they think that being in a magazine will make them more valid than they are? Why do they want to be *seen*?" (80). In

each of these moments, Rennie is anxious about her position in the new surveillance state. She yearns for absolute privacy, and also for such total obliteration of her personality and her body that she cannot be observed. In order to achieve this, she makes herself small, her work small, trying to limit her actions to that which could not warrant any unwanted attention.

Rennie remains insistently apolitical even as revolutionary feeling rises to a boil in St. Antoine. She rebuffs anyone who tries to draw her attention to the international power struggles behind the new supposed democracy on the island. For instance, Rennie doesn't believe that agencies like the CIA could possibly be present on the island because she's read too many stories about it for it to be real: popular culture has blotted out political reality for her. When Paul tells her that it's likely that both CIA and Soviet operatives are active on St. Antoine, "Rennie almost laughs. The CIA has been done to death; surely by now it's a joke, he can't be serious" (127). The wealth of popular stories here functions as the perfect cover for actual intelligence operations. The silliness and spectacle of popular intelligence narratives makes it possible for avowed apolitical citizens like Rennie to laugh away the reality of actual covert operations.

Atwood masterfully recognizes the prevalence of this political apathy in North American citizens in the 1970s, and plants a few immediately recognizable images and stories into *Bodily Harm*. She shows that the weapons and plots that the average citizen sees as narrative tripe, consumed daily around the family television set, have real-life analogues that are in no way amusing. Midway through the novel, Rennie is tricked into picking up a few packages for the socialist party on the island. After discovering that the large boxes are packed with machine guns, she isn't immediately able to process the danger that she's in: "This, thinks Rennie, is an exceptionally tacky move" (150). Later, looking at the dead body of Dr. Minnow, her immediate emotional response is, "It seems to her a very tacky way to die" (240). At another point, Rennie

literally reads a pulp novel from which these recognizable story elements are drawn, and even these she engages with incompletely: “Rennie reads the casts of characters and tries to guess who gets murdered. Then she reads up to the murder and tries to guess who did it, and then she turns to the back of the book to see if she’s right. She doesn’t have much patience for the intricacies of clues and deductions” (235). Not only has Rennie’s ability to recognize the real presence of machine guns and revolutionaries and covert operatives been compromised by overexposure to popular media representations of these things—she doesn’t even take these fictional narratives seriously enough to devote her entire attention to it, absorbing it piecemeal as it interests her. Without the willingness to experience the causality of even mass-produced narratives, of “intricacies” in straightforward murder plots, she has absolutely no capacity to find her way safely through the very real and dangerous net closing around her.

The more Rennie resists looking into the political motivations of different characters on the island, the more the reader longs for clear-cut answers, definite information about who is doing what for which country. At one point, Paul tells Rennie, “Spot the CIA, it’s a local game; everybody plays it” (232). Indeed, the reader too is invited to play, and ultimately the correct answer is never handed to us: it’s equally possible that Paul or a number of minor characters on the island are CIA operatives—or that there are none in the narrative at all. Like Didion, Atwood decenters the male operatives in favor of exploring the interiority of a woman who gets drawn into the world of hypermasculine, violent politicking. The only tools Rennie has to make sense of her situation are the fragments of popular culture that she makes it her business to know, which leaves her woefully unprepared when she is cast as a leading figure in the story, rather than an invisible observer.

Rennie's politicization at the end of the novel is both a triumph and tragedy. Again, her insistence on living in a surface world is motivated by her fear of the world rather than lack of ability. And importantly, much of that fear is gendered: she is terrified of her own female body and her position as a watched object rather than the invisible male watcher she wishes to be. Another motif that runs throughout Rennie's consciousness is a nightmare vision of a "faceless stranger" that haunts her, in sleep and in waking life. The first time the image appears is in a dream, in which she imagines being bound by the rope that her stalker left in her apartment: "And when you pulled on the rope, which after all reached down into darkness, what would come up? What was at the end, *the end*? A hand, then an arm, a shoulder, and finally a face. At the end of the rope there was someone. Everyone had a face, there was no such thing as a faceless stranger" (32). But despite her attempts to reassure herself, Rennie later has to reckon with the actual existence of faceless strangers in St. Antoine. She first sees it in Paul, who when wearing mirrored sunglasses has an "expressionless" face as he leans in to kiss her (90).

More troubling is the revelation Rennie has after she is imprisoned with Lora during the revolution, immediately after she witnesses a mass execution of political prisoners. The following passage, the novel's climax, is worth quoting at length:

The best they can do is avoid calling attention to themselves. She leans against the wall, she's shaking. It's indecent, it's not done with ketchup, nothing is inconceivable here... She's afraid of men and it's simple, it's rational, she's afraid of men because men are frightening. She's seen the man with the rope, now she knows what he looks like. She has been turned inside out, there's no longer a *here* and a *there*. Rennie understands for the first time that this is not necessarily a place she will get out of, ever. She is not exempt. Nobody is exempt from anything. (280)

Here, Rennie suddenly recognizes the privilege that has allowed her to live in her world of surfaces, protected her from the frightening depths of violence and helplessness that so much of the world experienced during the U.S.-Soviet proxy wars. On some level, this realization is a universalizing moment, a connection to a wider humanity—she’s part of the “everybody” who can be subjected to violence at any time, who can’t escape a war that could break out anywhere in the world in the new era of globalization and indirect warfare. But this passage also recognizes a key division and an individual self-realization: Rennie is afraid, as a woman who has experienced trauma and limited agency in the cold war decades, afraid of men. The terrifying place in which she finds herself was enabled by governments run almost exclusively by men, and by national policies that celebrated hyper-masculine ideals of toughness and aggression. Rennie recognizes that she’s part of the common people victimized by this state of world affairs, and that she has a responsibility to use her platform and talents as a writer to call public attention to the covert involvement of cold war powers in other parts of the world. Roberta Rubenstein argues that Rennie finds not just political responsibility, but hope in the collective power of the marginalized to prevent the violence like the events she witnesses in St. Antoine: “Rennie learns that the battle against the forces of death and dehumanization is not hers alone, but one in which everyone, regardless of gender, must participate” (274). However, any admiration for Rennie’s new political activism is somewhat undercut when we recall that it takes her own personal experience with these forces for this revelation to occur.

Atwood’s critique, like Didion’s, thus functions on many levels. By decentering the perspective of the male operatives and policymakers, she robs these male figures of reader sympathy. Paul and all the various presidential candidates on St. Antoine are even murkier and more unlikeable than Didion’s Leonard Davis and Jack Lovett. By instead providing us with the

perspective of a deeply flawed woman who only recognizes her political responsibility when personally victimized by cold war events, Atwood gives her readers an uncomfortable analogue for their own apathy about events in South America and the Middle East, a widespread attitude in the U.S. and Canada even as protests of the Vietnam War grew more strident. Rennie's tale is a cautionary one, and a reminder to take an interest in the violence that was being erased or ignored, but that middle-class, relatively safe American and Canadian citizens had the power to hinder. Finally, its gendered language in the moments in which it is most clearly condemning cold war policies is a call for greater equality in political spheres, and a particular message to women that they need not accept the passive roles that they are encouraged to take up.

Conclusion

As Ellison, Greenlee, and Doctorow argued for varying degrees of political activism in response to the burgeoning domestic security state, Didion and Atwood present arguments against political apathy, particularly for women who were encouraged to remain complacent with postwar domestic prosperity. Their novels dramatize women who learn that they have voices they can utilize. Interestingly, their novels do not follow disempowered women struggling to make it in the world, but women in positions of relative comfort and privilege learning not to be content with their material security. So, Didion and Atwood both call for female voices in cold war decision-making and challenge those in privileged positions to care about political issues.

Although none of these novels attained a very wide readership or made much of a cultural impact, Didion's and Atwood's larger careers establish them as authorities on both political matters and in particular on women's rights. Adding these narratives about cold war conflicts expands our understanding of their influence, revealing their attention to subjects outside the boundaries of North America. Didion in "The White Album" writes about "a time

when I began to doubt the premises of all the stories I had ever told myself” (11). Throughout the essay, she suggests that although we must “tell ourselves stories in order to live,” ultimately this process of questioning expectations and the stories we tell ourselves—or are told through repetition in governmental rhetoric and popular media—is equally necessary (11). The next, final chapter in this project analyzes two CIA operatives who penned exposé memoirs that led to a large-scale, public process of Americans questioning the stories they had been told about the intelligence community, and John Barth’s and Norman Mailer’s subsequent questioning of whether that process was enough to truly effect change.

CHAPTER 5

UNAUTHORIZED HISTORIES OF THE CIA: BARTH, MAILER, AND THE INTELLIGENCE MEMOIR

The Central Intelligence Agency's official website provides a "suggested reading list" of intelligence literature, defined as book-length studies covering "history, technology, opinion, and some of the key personalities associated with intelligence, its role in national security, and the forces that have shaped it over the years." The bibliography includes books from the 1950s to the early 2000s, firsthand accounts from former intelligence officers as well as studies from Agency outsiders, scholars and journalists seeking to understand the sudden emergence of American intelligence operations in the twentieth century. But although the list promises to provide "a wide spectrum of views" on the role of the CIA in world history, a few best-selling titles are notably missing: Victor Marchetti and John Marks's⁸⁴ *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* (1973) and Phillip Agee's *Inside the Company: A CIA Diary* (1975). Very different works in their styles and conclusions, these two texts are linked in being the first CIA exposé memoirs, a new genre that emerged in the 1970s. Highly critical of the operations of the CIA, particularly its covert paramilitary operations and the lack of oversight from the legislative branch, Marchetti and Agee wrote the first unauthorized histories of American intelligence operations, providing a skeptical American public with concrete reasons to distrust the intelligence community.

These memoirs, the scandals they sparked, and the Congressional hearings they caused profoundly affected public opinion and intelligence fiction in the United States, leading to more robust critiques of covert operations than were previously possible. This chapter examines three novels that present fictionalized versions of the CIA exposé memoir: John Barth's *Sabbatical* (1982) and *The Tidewater Tales* (1987) and Norman Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost* (1991). Barth and

Mailer, unlike the writers discussed in earlier chapters⁸⁵, were the first American novelists to write about the CIA with the information in these memoirs available to them. Both writers obsessively researched their subjects before writing novels that explicitly play with the genre of the CIA memoir, ultimately launching the most thorough literary critiques of American intelligence operations.

In this chapter, I assess what I term the American intelligence memoir, focusing particularly on those that condemned the state of American covert operations. Whether a memoirist defends or critiques American covert operations, each of these texts reinforces the fundamental belief in the concept of intelligence, themselves purporting to provide the American public with the uncensored intelligence reports they need to properly assess the morality of American covert operations. Marchetti and Agee's work is key because they were the first authors to test the CIA's secrecy oaths, aiming to expose Agency secrets rather than rally American public support for espionage operations, as former memoirists had done. Both works warrant sustained attention because they were bestsellers that were highly influential in the Congressional hearings that led to increased oversight of the CIA. Additionally, they have very different styles that illustrate the range of writing in the intelligence memoir genre, which has exploded in the last four decades.⁸⁶ Their exclusion from the CIA's otherwise robust online bibliography makes these memoirs curiosities, but more importantly, Barth and Mailer explicitly cite both works as source texts for the novels this chapter examines.⁸⁷

While intelligence memoirs reinforce the concept of intelligence as a viable policymaking tool, Barth and Mailer suggest that intelligence cannot be gathered at all, either by the numerous American covert agencies or by any American citizens attempting to investigate those agencies. In this way, these fiction writers not only critique American covert operations to

an extent not possible before the revelations of memoirs like Marchetti's and Agee's, but also note the ultimate inability of such works to curtail nefarious government activity. Barth's *Sabbatical* suggests that the intelligence gathered by the CIA is only comprehensible to a very small elite group at the head of intelligence operations—it's impossible for individual operatives in the organization to know anything about the CIA on a large scale, and a curious American citizen certainly could never learn about it, however great the promises of the former operatives who claim to demystify the Agency's lies and provide readers with the real truth. *The Tidewater Tales* takes this critique further by rewriting the events of *Sabbatical* with a few small changes, suggesting the instability of the "facts" of any story and the difficulty of determining which changes or omissions might hurt an analyst's understanding of the truth. The novel's attention to oral storytelling also points to the unavailability of objectively reliable intelligence. The protagonist novelist Peter Sagamore is reduced to writing short stories, then microfiction, and finally nothing at all because he is overwhelmed by the revelations of his Agency friend who wants Peter to write the most informed exposé novel of American covert operations ever managed. Thus, both of Barth's novels, which claim at every turn to be *not* about the CIA, are obsessively concerned with discovering the capabilities of the American intelligence community, and ultimately anxious that this undertaking is futile.

Mailer similarly crafts a narrative in which only a select few at the top of the Agency's immense bureaucratic pyramid are granted the breadth of information necessary to comprehend the CIA's ultimate purposes and the scale of its operations. Narrator Harry Hubbard tries, by amassing everything he knows about his time in the Agency in excessive detail, to make sense of the true nature of the CIA. However, he too is confronted with the failure of an individual operative to do so, again undermining the ability of an individual author or operative to produce

intelligence on the American intelligence community. But Mailer takes this critique even further by suggesting that even the spymasters who are supposed to have access to this knowledge—his novel's Harlot, who is transparently modeled on the real cold war counterintelligence director James Jesus Angleton—are deeply flawed and paranoid men who mistake their own fantasies and ambitions for truth. Thus, in Mailer's Kafkaesque CIA, *no one* really knows what American intelligence operations are doing.

Barth and Mailer are both authors who were widely read and highly influential public figures in the late cold war decades. Despite this, there is a relative dearth of scholarship on their work for various reasons. Barth's increasing devotion to rewriting his own stories and Mailer's conservative politics and history of violence against women discourages academic interest in their production, as does the sheer length of most of both authors' late works, which makes them difficult to teach and anthologize. Nonetheless, their works of counterintelligence literature are the most thoroughly researched and pointed critiques of American intelligence work examined in this project. It might seem odd to pair Barth's 300-page playful romance with Mailer's largely realist 1300-page unfinished epic. But in many ways the novels are twins, mining the same source texts for episodes to elaborate into fictional scenes that challenge both the complacency with which most Americans think about the intelligence community and the self-aggrandizing narratives of whistleblowers who are not actually able to place serious limitations on the CIA's operations.

Taken as a whole, the works examined in this chapter point to increasing American distrust of the intelligence community and a simultaneous anxiety that anything meaningful can be learned in time to enact lasting sanctions on these agencies. First, I define what I term the American intelligence memoir and trace the development of the genre up to the interventions by

Marchetti and Agee. In doing so, I assess these texts' relationship to American public opinion, arguing that while they led to more strident calls for CIA reform, they also reinforce the idea that intelligence work is necessary and potentially beneficial. Then, I turn to Barth and Mailer's novels, which have never been analyzed in light of the memoirs that serve as their source texts. I conclude that although each of these novels in postmodernist fashion reinforces the anxiety that lasting reform of the American intelligence community is impossible, these novels contribute to what this project has identified as a meaningful body of counterintelligence literature that raises important challenges to the practice of covert operations by destabilizing the concept of intelligence, challenges that were important at the close of the cold war, when the optimism of the Reagan administration engendered renewed complacency after the turmoil of the 1970s.

The American Intelligence Memoir

The 1970s was a difficult decade for the CIA. Although the scandals of the 1960s, most notably the catastrophic Bay of Pigs invasion, rocked public trust in American intelligence operations, simply too much remained unknown to bring about widespread calls for increased oversight of Agency operations. But the cold war mentality of American exceptionalism began to wane in the 1970s, as Americans in all employments trusted their government less than ever before after the revelations of the Pentagon Papers and Watergate. In this climate, when a few members of the CIA, the most ideologically driven intelligence service, resigned and published scathing tracts on their disillusionment with their former employer, the American public listened, and the intelligence community was subjected to several lengthy Congressional investigations.

Before the mid-70s, plenty of former intelligence officers had written about their service. Allen Dulles, the third Director of Central Intelligence and the first to hold the position for a significant length of time, published *The Craft of Intelligence* in 1965, which largely aims to

inform Americans of the great work CIA operatives perform without revealing actual secrets that would endanger intelligence operations. A number of similar celebrations of American intelligence work followed, most notably David Atlee Phillips's *The Night Watch*, and public defenses of the Agency continue to be published in great numbers today.⁸⁸ In fact, the CIA encourages former operatives to write memoirs by funding them for a few years after the end of their service; those memoirs are kept as highly classified records rather than openly published, affording the Agency much more control over an operative's impulse to narrativize his service (Marchetti 70-3). Works like Agee's and Marchetti's pointedly sidestepped the Agency's review process, instead attempting to speak openly about intelligence operations to inform an American public who knew very little about the covert operations in which their country was involved. For the first time, Americans were able to read clear critical accounts of why experienced men in intelligence became stopped believing in their work, and what kinds of unethical and illegal activities led to their break with the Agency's secrecy oath.

Consisting by now of hundreds of books, the genre of the intelligence memoir is worthy of study in its own right, although it has garnered almost no critical attention to date. This lack of scholarship is in large part due to the fact that creative nonfiction as a whole has only recently become the subject of literary criticism, and the range of quality and responsible research in the genre's oeuvre perhaps discourages serious consideration. But as with popular fictional texts that lack the formal qualities that mark canonical literature, these memoirs are worth examining as a useful indicator of what the American reading public wants to know about its country's covert operations and of how far writers can go to reveal secrets and openly critique the intelligence community. "Memoir" itself is a slippery term, distinct from autobiography and fiction but sharing qualities of both. Drawing from the thorough categorizations of the genre by Thomas

Couser, Sidonie Smith, and Julia Watson, I understand the memoir as a nonfictional account of a person's life or of a historical period that is nonfictional and based at least in part on recollection of personal experiences. Thus, a memoir can narrate a time in the author's own life, as in Agee's *Inside the Company*, but it can also tell the story of an organization through the filter of personal experience with that organization, as in Marchetti's work, which is distinctly less personal than what many might consider a memoir because it does not feature a narrating "I" and shares several qualities with a piece of historical scholarship. The American intelligence memoir is thus a nonfictional narrative informed by personal experiences with the American intelligence community. American intelligence memoirs can celebrate or condemn covert operations, but are filtered through firsthand experiences with these agencies, rather than a scholar's or journalist's outsider perspective.

The memoir is of particular interest when discussing intelligence operations because it offers firsthand glimpses into a necessarily top-secret world. Memoir writers, particularly those limited by legally binding secrecy oaths, cannot take the same liberties that fiction writers are allowed. Nevertheless, the revelations that they *can* make carry more weight than claims in the pages of fictional novels, and these revelations typically reach a much wider readership through their repetition in national newspapers. Memoirs can include something like a thesis statement or direct call to action that would be clumsy in even the most political novel, but the efficacy of those appeals is often hurt by the time lag between the author's last involvement in covert operations and the book's public release. With all of this in mind, it's valuable to examine not only the postmodern novels that dabble in both genres, but the straight memoirs themselves from which novelists have mined material. As we shall see, oftentimes Barth and Mailer lift episodes that were first suggested or described in an intelligence memoir, embellishing them into detailed

dramatic scenes. Reading these texts together thus shows both the limitations of the memoir and the invaluable information that memoirs can provide for fiction writers.

Victor Marchetti's *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence* is a history of the CIA's love of covert operations, as opposed to intelligence analysis, and aims to expose the executive branch's tendency to use the CIA to directly meddle in other countries' politics when diplomatic measures fail. Victor Marchetti was a top analyst for the CIA and thus presents a viewpoint that is different than that of most spy novels and, until that point, most histories of the CIA. Much like the CIA that Marchetti describes, the American reading public is more enamored with the operative who travels the world battling enemy operatives than with the analyst who pores over piles of data from a desk in Washington. But the CIA was built on analysis, not adventure, as Marchetti points out: the National Security Act of 1947 that established the CIA does not explicitly allow for covert operations, merely intelligence gathering and analysis. Only the elastic fifth item on the list of the Agency's duties—"To perform such other functions and duties related to intelligence affecting the national security as the NSC may from time to time direct"—allows for the possibility of the paramilitary operations that would come to dominate the Agency. Marchetti writes, "Those few innocuous words [...] provided the CIA with the freedom to engage in covert action, the right to intervene secretly in the internal affairs of other nations. It has done so usually with the express approval of the White House, but almost always without the consent of Congress, and virtually never with the knowledge of the American public" (8). In his own work, Agee more succinctly writes of the same clause, "It's the dagger inside the cloak" (37).

Marchetti methodically provides a history of the CIA's founding and its fall from noble ideal. The Agency, as he tells it, shifted from a sensible division of resources to unfortunate domination by the "dirty tricks department."⁸⁹ His key term, "the cult of intelligence," describes

the exclusivity, hypermasculinity, and exceptionalism inherent in an organization that believes the intelligence community is all-important and above the law, a “secret fraternity of the American political aristocracy” (4). *The Cult of Intelligence* appeals to readers with a fiery thesis and clearly organized revelations, most notably details about the CIA’s budget and the intentional exaggeration of Soviet power to secure more government funding. But even more alluring than these details is what is missing from Marchetti’s pages—168 passages that the CIA censored on the grounds that they threatened current operations. Again, before Marchetti published his work, no one had tried to publish an *unauthorized* history of the CIA. As part of the CIA’s initiation process, would-be recruits are required to sign a series of secrecy oaths, pledging never to reveal details of their work during or after their service. A disillusioned Marchetti believed that this was an unethical contract, given that he had to agree to protect secrets before he knew what they were. His defense for violating his oaths hinged on the conviction that he had a greater responsibility to share what he knew with an American public that he felt was being kept dangerously in the dark about intelligence operations. Marchetti knew he couldn’t bypass the CIA’s review process altogether, but when he submitted his manuscript, the Agency returned it with 20% of the work redacted, omissions that Marchetti felt untenably defanged the work. After several lengthy legal battles, more than half of the redactions were deemed publishable. Marchetti and his legal team took this as an enormous victory but remained frustrated by the amount of work that still could not be presented in its original form. In a brilliant marketing decision, rather than rewrite the passages still considered too sensitive to publish, Marchetti and his publisher replaced the passages with white space to match each redaction’s length, whether it be a word or an entire page, filling the gap with a simple, bold

“DELETED.” The reader is thus invited to literally read between the lines, trying to discern what sensitive information is missing and why the CIA would want it to be kept out of public view.

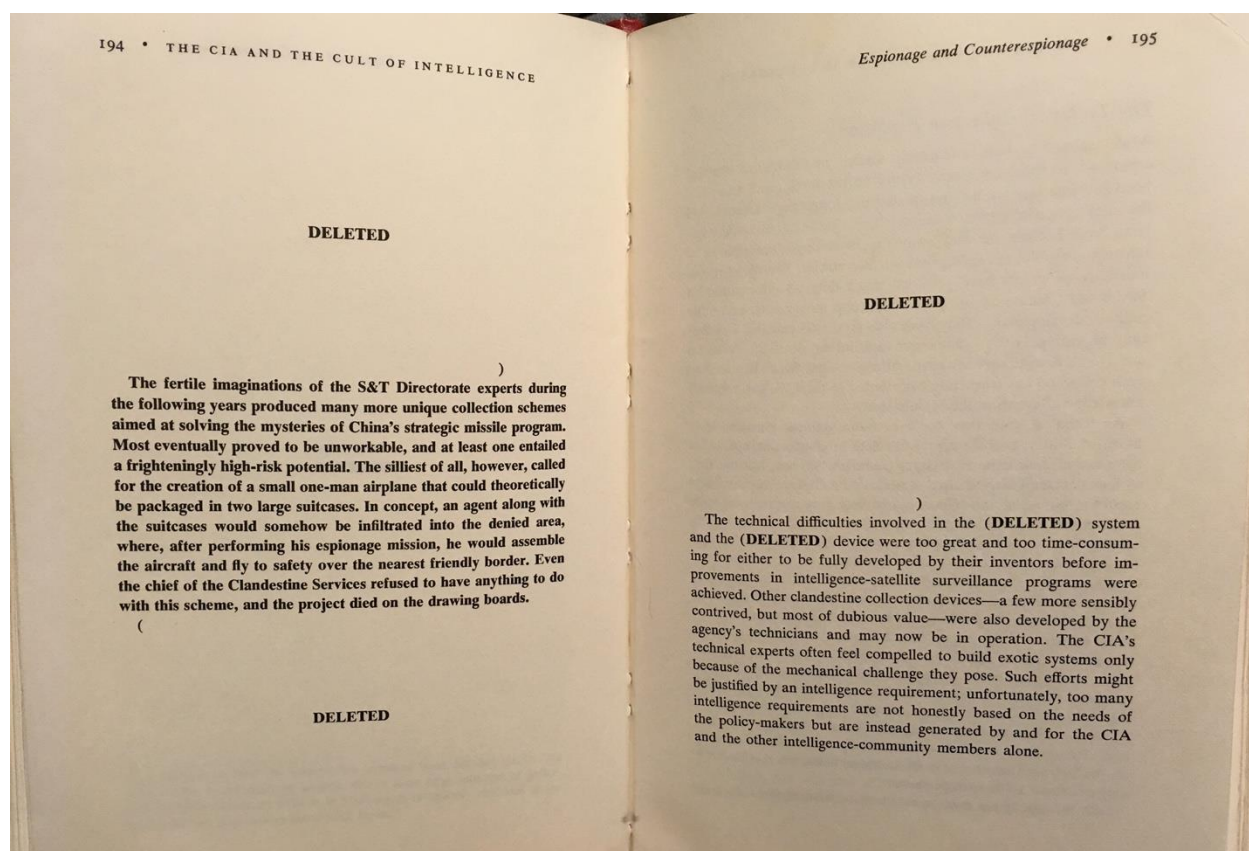


Figure 3. Pages from *The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence*, showing representative CIA redactions. The full paragraph on the left is bold, indicating that it was initially redacted, but added back into the manuscript after Marchetti won the right to publish the material in a lengthy legal battle.

Even more satisfying for readers are the 231 passages that the CIA initially redacted that Marchetti won the right to publish through the legal proceedings. These passages appear in bold and indeed do feel charged with importance: the reader is granted access to information that a powerful government agency doesn't want them to read. The deletions and would-be deletions, in addition to the visceral appeal to reader's curiosity, give *The Cult of Intelligence* a credibility that it might not otherwise carry, the feeling that if the CIA doesn't want the public reading this long-form intelligence report, it must be accurate. Indeed, in the same hearings that granted

Marchetti the right to publish his work, the court also upheld the CIA's wish that anything else that he would ever write, "factual, fictional, or otherwise, on the subject of intelligence, must be censored by the CIA" (xiii). Marchetti's work was deemed so threatening that even an entirely fictional novel would be subject to CIA interference. Marchetti had written a spy novel called *The Rope-Dancer* in 1971 before devoting himself to *The Cult of Intelligence*, dissatisfied with the novel's limitations as a vehicle to call for reform; in response to the court's 1973 restrictions, however, he never wrote about intelligence work, fictionally or otherwise, again.

Since Marchetti was an analyst, his memoir doesn't provide a blow-by-blow account of the daily work in which he was directly involved. Rather, he excelled at reading massive amounts of data pouring in from field agents around the world, largely on Soviet intelligence operations, and was charged with gleaning the key details that the President and policymakers needed to know. He describes this as producing "finished intelligence" out of the mass of "raw intelligence" that field operatives gather, and part of his project is to urge the CIA to devote all of its resources to intelligence analysis, rather than to paramilitary invasions, election interference, and other dirty tricks. His analytic viewpoint also means that he's processing for readers work that he completed over twelve years, presenting it to the American public as a massive finished intelligence report on the efficacy of the CIA. In the book's introduction, he writes that up until 1974 the American public had known very little about the structure and activities of its intelligence agencies. His book promises to be the report that the American public needs to decide how to advocate for different governmental policies.

A few years after Marchetti's work was published, Philip Agee, a former operative involved largely in South American operations, released his more personal memoir *Inside the Company: A CIA Diary*. As the subtitle suggests, the work is made up of hundreds of supposed

diary entries, in fact reconstructed up to fifteen years after the fact “in order to show the progressive development of different activities and to convey a sense of actuality” (7). Much like the deletions in Marchetti’s work, Agee’s diary format gives the reader the sense of peeking into something extra-secret, merging the pleasure of reading a personal diary with the pleasure of learning the classified details that the government tries to keep hidden. The existence of an actual “CIA diary” is an obvious impossibility; to keep a daily log as detailed as Agee’s would be an egregious security breach that no high-ranking operative would ever commit. A more subtle barrier is the difficulty of narrating intelligence work while an operation is unfolding, for to reflect on orders before they’re carried out is to question them, thereby threatening the operation’s success. Only in odd moments of transition and reflection does Agee’s “diary” admit doubt, as when he is leaving his first overseas assignment in Ecuador: after nearly a hundred pages detailing his devotion to the various operations he was running, Agee writes in the last entry of the section, “When I stop to think about the excitement and continual state of crisis over the past year, I realize that we’ve tried to attain only two goals and have failed at both” (216). In the normal course of life as an intelligence operative in the field, there is no time allowed to “stop to think”— as Agee writes in the memoir’s preface, “The life of a CIA operations officer can be exciting, romantic. You belong to a special club: The Company. For most of my career with the CIA I felt that I was doing something worthwhile. There is not much time to think about the results of your actions and, if you try to do it well, the job of operations officer calls for dedication to the point of obsession” (9). Indeed, one of the great successes of Agee’s work is that his ideological transition from the patriotism that motivated him to join the CIA to the radical communism that prompted him to write his book happens very gradually in these quiet moments. In reconstructing his past career, he never pretends that he suspected something was

amiss all along, but intersperses scenes of reflection that move him closer to sympathizing with the communist cause between long sections in which he merely details his actions as a loyal CIA operative.

Agee's memoir in large part is the story of this personal transition, but this story is buried under a mass of information that serves a non-narrative purpose. Although the book provides extensive details about CIA operations in Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico City's 1972 Olympics, these details are difficult for even a very attentive reader to keep straight in the way that one would track the plot of a novel. If read as a piece of literature, Agee's work would come up short by most standards of fictional craft. Rather than making characters out of the people with whom he interacts, Agee is more concerned with listing as many facts about them and their involvement in various operations as he can remember. If a memorable scene or a description of a person does emerge from Agee's largely expository declarative statements, it's all the more surprising. Neither Marchetti's finished intelligence report on the efficiency of the CIA, nor a particularly readable piece of personal nonfiction, Agee's book somewhat awkwardly spans genres. Ironically, its most compelling dramatic narration comes in its final section, which details Agee's struggle to attain the archival materials he needed to "reinforce [his] own recollections" and write the book while he worried about CIA intervention. Agee details his self-imposed exile from the United States, knowing (perhaps in light of Marchetti's very public legal battles) that publication in his home country would be impossible. He also notes that he would be easily within reach of the CIA, the implication being that more than just summoning him to court, the Company might take more drastic measures to stop Agee from writing. On the difficulty of finding a suitable European publisher, Agee writes, "Unfortunately those editors mostly wanted a sensationalist exposé approach—divorced from the more difficult political and economic

realities that give the operations meaning” (563). Rather than the mass of data that Agee largely provides in his entries, publishers want more scene, character—more craft—or else more big-picture analysis like Marchetti presents. A reader frustrated by Agee’s style might smile when he describes the reception of his manuscript’s first full draft: “How is it possible? I cannot believe that somewhere in the five or six hundred pages I’ve written, this editor couldn’t see a book. Or if he could, perhaps he thinks I’m a bad risk. What he wants is drama, romance and glorification of what I did” (577). Agee’s unwillingness to narratize adds credibility to his text, but limits his audience. Nonetheless, his memoir sparked enough headlines summarizing his argument that his revelations reached a huge portion of the American population, even if not many read *Inside the Company* cover-to-cover.

The concerns of Agee’s editors make sense considering how few memorable scenes are included in his work. In one of the only thorough studies of the memoir genre, G. Thomas Couser writes that memoir writers sometimes produce what he calls “hi-def autobiographies” that “trade in implausibly specific details” and thus “reveal themselves as more art than fact”: “The provision of specific details and direct dialogue goes hand in hand with a preference for showing over telling, or scene over summary, in life writing as well as in fiction. But when the reader of a memoir is ‘shown’ what no narrator could possibly remember, then the narrative requires the same suspension of disbelief as the novel. And that seems counterproductive” (74). But Agee seems to err too much the other way and produce so much unanalyzed information that nothing particularly sharp emerges, and he’ll often let moments that are ripe for good storytelling slip away. For instance, late in the story of his service in Ecuador, he mentions that in order to test out a new tranquilizer drug for guard dogs that the CIA was developing, he fed a steak imbued with it to his dog Lanita. In the past, the drug had not been strong enough to have any

noticeable effect, but almost immediately sent Lanita into a coma, his nervous system paralyzed. Agee mildly closes the anecdote, related in a short paragraph, with, “He’s still at the kennels and if he dies I will send a big bill to the TSD [Technical Services Division]” (294-5). Lanita is never mentioned again, and Agee never mentions any emotional fallout from the episode. There’s little more immediately affecting to readers than the story of an animal in peril, but Agee willfully resists giving a moment like this special weight, favoring instead his own dry analysis of the CIA’s economic inefficacy in South America. Even other moments of human suffering are similarly downplayed: in Guatemala, Agee gives the name of a suspected informer to the police chief, and shortly thereafter, over a radio in the police headquarters, he hears the man being tortured. Everyone in the room says nothing and merely turns the radio down, and Agee provides a rare description of his emotional response: “Hearing that voice [...] made me feel terrified and helpless. All I wanted to do was to get away from the voice and away from the police headquarters [...] We just sat there embarrassed and shocked. I’m going to be hearing that voice for a long time” (456). While this is notable attention to emotional response for Agee, it ultimately amounts to a few clipped sentences expressing the urgent desire to not think more about it. These truncated episodes offer opportunities for Barth and Mailer, gifted storytellers, to pick up where Agee left off and elaborate on the emotional state of someone in his position.

Agee’s work is not a piece of fiction, and so of course should not be judged solely by its narrative power. Agee’s insistence that readers focus on his analysis of the failed American economic reform in South America, and the immorality of using covert operations to prop up those unsuccessful programs, can be taken as a compelling reason for him to resist dramatic narrative. But it’s notable that the most narratively driven portion of the memoir is the final section, in which he details his paranoia that CIA agents are following him while writes his book

in London. In detail that is rarely applied to other people who appear in his story, he describes three London friends who support him financially as he works, one of whom gives him a typewriter that he later discovers has been bugged, the final proof that the Company is keeping tabs on his progress. As if to reinforce that the book is just as much a narrative of a man throwing off enemy agents as he writes as it is an exposé of CIA operations, the book's cover pictures Agee's bugged typewriter.

The dramatic emphasis on Agee's act of writing, reinforced by the cover image, announces *Inside the Company* as a narrative of a man taking agency over his own life and work. Once a man who wholeheartedly believed that the international spread of democracy was a cause worthy of his lifelong devotion, Agee slowly shows readers how he came to believe that a Leninist worldwide revolution was the only way to redeem the state of international politics. The final chapter of Agee's struggle to complete his work makes him seem empowered, if not heroic—his dedication to revealing the truth in the face of interference by an organization he knew to be powerful and unscrupulous is exactly the type of narrative that garners reader sympathy. However, this narrative of agency is complicated by later discoveries that Agee was working with Soviet operatives as he finished his work, particularly when he traveled to Cuba to conduct research on CIA Latin American operations. Agee even deleted some portions of his diary that detailed successful CIA penetration of South American communist parties at the urging of the KGB officers handling him (Andrew and Mitrokhin 231). In *Reading Autobiography*, Smith and Watson write, "We like to think of human beings as agents of or actors in their own lives rather than passive subjects of social structures or unconscious transmitters of cultural scripts and models of identity. Consequently, we tend to read autobiographical narratives as acts and thus proofs of human agency. They are at once sites of

agentic narration where people control the interpretation of their lives and stories, telling of individual destinies and expressing ‘true’ selves” (54). But as with so many stories of individuals caught up in webs of espionage, Agee perhaps merely moved from the control of one agency to another, rather than discovering that elusive individual agency for which so many operatives, real and fictional, strive. A now declassified internal CIA review of *Inside the Company* notes, “The book's main achievement is to provide the Communists and extreme Left with specific knowledge of CIA's Latin American operations and insight into CIA *modus operandi* in order to permit them to counter U.S. and particular CIA actions. As such, it will doubtless make the required reading list of the KGB midcareer course” (“Book Review”). Agee’s work, then, while claiming to be another intelligence report for the American public—less “finished” than Marchetti’s, reflecting Agee’s role as a gatherer rather than an analyst of information—could be read as a Soviet victory in the information war, as it is difficult to determine how much Agee was ideologically influenced after he began work on his memoir. Certainly, some information was redacted by Agee’s Soviet contacts, so it’s not the unfiltered tract that it claims to be.

Whether in the service of personal vengeance or righteousness, or the maneuvering of the Soviet agents handling him, Agee’s book had an explosive impact on the political landscape. What it lacks in fictional craft is more than made up for in detail, which was particularly important for all of the active operatives and agents that Agee named and thus exposed. Rather than making characters of a few important figures, Agee lists as many names as he can remember, exposing his former colleagues and their agents at every station. The book even provides a handy index of names, supposedly for readers who need their memory jogged, but which essentially served as a blacklist for anyone still operating in those areas, their cover now thoroughly blown. After the publication of *Inside the Company*, Agee went on to publish several

other books arguing for the fundamental immorality of the CIA,⁹⁰ and also ran the journals *Counterspy* and the *Covert Action Information Bulletin* with the same purpose. Taken together, Agee revealed classified information about thousands of American operatives and agents around the world and is credited with the death of several. The U.S. Congress created the Intelligence Identities Protection Act in 1982, which made it a federal crime to reveal classified information about American operatives in the field, in direct response to these actions, mentioning Agee by name in its opening paragraph as guilty of “a systematic effort to destroy the ability of intelligence agencies to operate clandestinely.”

Despite these various laws dictating what can or cannot be published by former CIA operatives, several memoirs and “inside stories” have been released each year since Marchetti and Agee drew attention to the genre in the mid-1970s. By the late 1980s, when Barth and Mailer were beginning to write their fictional versions of the intelligence memoir, a wealth of information was available to them that was completely unknown to most other writers of intelligence fiction that this project examines. Barth and Mailer thus had the benefit of knowing more about actual CIA operations than any previous writers, and both were thorough researchers in their own right. The following sections read their counterintelligence fiction in light of their source texts, looking particularly at the way that, unlike Marchetti’s and Agee’s work, their novels destabilize the concept of intelligence.

“The truth is more postmodern than fiction”: *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales*

Often considered a foundational figure of literary postmodernism, John Barth is associated with a devotion to metafictionality and self-conscious rewriting of both his own tales and classic literary epics. After a pair of fairly realist novels, Barth’s work became increasingly experimental, including a towering satire of the 17th-century epic (*The Sot-Weed Factor*), a

novella that draws explicit attention to the process of crafting fiction (*Lost in the Funhouse*), and a novel in which characters from his first six books interact with each other and a character named The Author (*LETTERS*). His essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” is often cited as a groundbreaking postmodernist manifesto,⁹¹ in which he argues that literary realism has reached the end of its rope and that artists must learn how to make new material out of extant stories, as no new stories are possible any longer. Regardless of whether one agrees with Barth’s contentions about the viability of non-metafictional stories, a reader dedicated to consuming all of Barth’s fiction might well feel exhausted by the time they reach his later novels. The two works discussed here occupy parallel universes—all of the characters in the first, *Sabbatical*, reappear under different names and with slightly altered biographical details in *The Tidewater Tales*, which also features rewrites or sequels to *The Odyssey*, *Don Quixote*, *The Thousand and One Nights*, and Barth’s early short story “The Night Sea Journey.” In addition to this shared history, the novels share one other key detail: although the narrators claim to be no longer interested with the activities of the CIA with which they were once intimately involved, their narratives circle endlessly around the mysteries of potential intelligence operations in progress around them.

Despite Barth’s reputation as the most self-referential mid-century American writer,⁹² his later novels have just as much to do with explicitly political and historical concerns as they do with dramatizing the act of writing. The two pairs of narrators in *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales* attempt to literally sail away from their knowledge of American covert operations, and from the responsibility to narratize that knowledge. It’s not difficult to draw further parallels between the self-referential writer-professor Barth and his characters who are self-conscious authors and academics—not only because all are engaged in the act of retelling old stories, but

also because they are futilely running from their anxiety about intelligence operations and the responsibility of perceptive American authors to make sense of them. Thomas Haddox, before intervening to analyze Barth's radical attention to social issues like racism in the American south, summarizes the popular perception of Barth: "His sensibility is primarily comic, his fiction largely free of tragic and gothic monumentalism, and his public persona that of a nice guy who likes to write, wants readers to like his work, and smiles bemusedly when accused of a lack of gravitas" (307). But, as Haddox goes on to show, this view of Barth as a kindly academic out of touch with the tumultuous political events occurring around him ignores the fact that even his earliest fiction deals with controversial, violent subjects like abortion and suicide. And his later novels, as this section will demonstrate, are the most political of all his work, pieces of what Linda Hutcheon terms historiographic metafiction, even as their authors fight impulse to write realist historical novels.

Sabbatical follows former CIA operative Fenwick Turner and his wife Susan, a professor of American literature. Before the events of the novel, Fenn published an intelligence memoir in the tradition of Marchetti and Agee—less profitably than either of those authors, the first-person-plural narrative voice wryly notes (115). Shortly thereafter, the couple is haunted by the disappearance of John Paisley, another recently resigned operative, under very suspicious circumstances. Paisley fell, jumped, or was pushed off his boat in the Chesapeake Bay; a body recovered several days later revealed a bullet hole under the ear, and scuba weights insufficient to sink the decaying corpse. Although the body was presumed to be Paisley's, it was a few inches too short and wearing jeans a few sizes too small, and the teeth could not be matched against Paisley's dental records for all of his CIA files had mysteriously disappeared. Susan and Fenn refuse to relate the details of the Paisley case to readers themselves, instead making "the

author take the helm of the story” (85). What follows after this authorial delegation is twenty pages, comprising roughly the midpoint of the novel, of reprinted articles published in actual local and national newspapers as the Paisley investigation unfolded—for although the scene sounds like the opening of a classic spy novel, the Paisley case was very real, and Barth followed the story avidly because Paisley was his neighbor.

In addition to the troubling Paisley mystery, which clearly fascinates Fenn and Susan even as they resist telling it, the narrating couple is troubled by the disappearance of Fenn’s twin brother and nephew, both of whom were active CIA operatives. Alan Hepburn argues, “A vanished body serves as a hieroglyph for conjecture, crime, wish, anxiety, transcendence, conspiracy, factuality... In *Sabbatical*, missing bodies allegorize political ambiguity” (231). Indeed, Barth’s novel takes the trope of the disappeared body to an extreme, with not one but three missing persons to search for in the waters of the Chesapeake Bay. Largely in response to this triple anxiety, the narrating couple decides to go sailing during Susan’s sabbatical semester, to process their recent traumas and make decisions about how they want to spend the next years of their lives. Part of this project involves distancing themselves from the shadow that intelligence work has cast over their personal and professional lives. But as they sail, they wonder about the Agency’s ability to “disappear” them as it did those near them, about the possibility that the CIA can induce cardiac arrest or cancer, about the potential CIA safe house on an unmarked island that the couple accidentally stumbles upon early in their voyage, and about what might happen to them if they choose to pursue answers to the mystery of their lost family members. *Sabbatical*, while on the surface the fantastical “romance” that its subtitle promises, nonetheless labors to capture public paranoia around what the Agency is capable of

doing. And its ultimate admittance that no satisfying answers can be discovered to counteract that paranoia constitutes a postmodernist challenge to the concept of intelligence.

One of the decisions that Fenn and Susan try to make on their sabbatical cruise is what Fenn will write next, following a period of writer's block after the publication of his intelligence memoir. He wants to transition into fiction writing, perhaps even drama, and to leave his Agency work behind him entirely. Readers ultimately realize, in a typical Barth twist, that the book they hold in their hands is Fenn's next work, both the story of his and Susan's love and the narrative of how they came to write it. In conversations with his editor and with a former CIA colleague, Fenn stresses that the only thing he knows about his next novel is that it won't be about the CIA. This satisfies the CIA man, Douglas Taylor, who is still very active in the Agency and resents the recent surge of literature condemning spy work: "All the half-baked novelists in the land, and not a few full-baked ones, are writing spy novels, for example, many of which, like the latest crop of tsk-tsk exposés of the Agency, barely conceal their fascination and envy beneath their knee-jerk moralizing against our skullduggery. Fenn's will not, he trusts, be another CIA novel" (144). But despite Fenn's protestations that the CIA will not feature at all in the story, and his ultimate declaration that he and Susan will together write their love story instead, there's more mention of intelligence operations than anything. Barth, in the novel's foreword, similarly declares that although critique of the CIA, which he considers a sinister organization, features in the novel, it isn't his primary concern. But he too can't seem to get away from making several statements about the Agency, including a meditation on the relationship between paranoia and espionage: "By the end of the American 1970s one had learned that paranoia concerning the counterintelligence establishments was often outstripped both by paranoia *within* those establishments and by the facts, when and if they emerged" (4). With just as many levels of self-

referentiality, nested fictions, and intentionally misleading plots as the most experimental twentieth-century novel, the American intelligence community makes it impossible to reach any “facts” about their operations; or, as Barth simply puts it in the preface to *Sabbatical*, “The truth is more postmodern than fiction” (6).

Of the relatively limited scholarship on Barth, not much has been written on the late novels *Sabbatical* and *The Tidewater Tales*. Of the extant writing on them, most of it is concerned with Barth’s layers of metafictionality and his stylistic relationship to truth, the way that he obsessively undermines the conceit that any narrator can be truly reliable, or that any text can accurately represent reality. Indeed, both novels constantly remind readers that the text is an artificial construct. The pleasure of sinking into the narrative and forgetting reality is pointedly withheld—the reader is always aware that she is reading a novel, for the narrators are constantly interrupting each other to comment on how the last line of dialogue was a neat symbol, or how a certain decision they make might fit into the classical structure of the hero’s journey, or whether they are guilty of “Forced Exposition” or “Author Intrusion” or other cardinal sins of craft (85). Creed Greer argues that it’s ultimately unproductive to attempt to untangle how much Barth is drawing from the “real,” verifiable historical record, as many scholars have tried to do: “Neither the books nor the claims of authorship are in danger of being confused with reality because they continually disrupt the division between the ‘fictive’ world of the narration and the ‘factual’ world of the exposé or the historical record on which questions about a text’s factuality are based” (252). In other words, Barth’s novels highlight the fact that a supposed exposé can’t really bring readers that much closer to the truth of American interference in other countries, since all such texts are just one story, manipulated for readability as are fictional texts, within an infinite host of stories that could be told about intelligence operations.

One of *Sabbatical*'s great ironies is that it cannot ultimately determine what the CIA is capable of doing, despite the fact that Fenn authored an exposé memoir about Agency operations. Whatever intelligence Fenn purported to provide his readers with his memoir, in this new "romance" that's excessively concerned with intelligence operations, nothing intelligible about the CIA can be articulated. The Agency may or may not have killed Paisley and Fenn's family members, may or may not have a secret base on Wye Island from which they shot at the unwitting Fenn and Susan, and may or may not be able to induce cardiac arrest and cancer in order to silence other would-be memoirists. By depriving Fenn of the ability to learn anything about the current CIA, *Sabbatical* detracts from the authority of men who supposedly know enough about the Agency to expose its operations: if it's possible to provide the public with meaningful intelligence on their country's covert agencies at one moment, that report will very quickly get outdated and useless, and the formerly authoritative operative will find himself baffled by the current state of Agency affairs. Even developments unrelated to the Agency's dirty tricks are startling to Fenn; he is surprised to learn that his ex-wife is serving as an operative, unaware that the CIA had begun to recruit women to its ranks.

Sabbatical is thus inordinately concerned with explaining Agency operations even as it claims not to be a intelligence narrative. Foregrounding a man who feels especially watched by this organization, the novel wonders who has the authority to assess and narratize intelligence operations. If the individual operative—even a once high-ranking, clear-sighted, and narratively talented operative—is robbed of authority, then the ultimate authority for collecting intelligence rests with the Agency itself. Individuals in the CIA and other covert organizations necessarily know only part of the institution and are punished if they try to understand more. Only a handful of top-ranking Agency men, and the politicians in the White House whom they primarily serve,

have a wide vision of the CIA's ultimate goals and the means they use to achieve them. In other words, only a few people even have the ability to provide thorough, accurate intelligence on the large-scale operations and purposes of the Agency. This again highlights the relationship between the work of intelligence operatives, fiction writers, and academics: Susan and Fenn, an English professor and a former spy who is also a successful writer of fiction and nonfiction, are robbed of the ability to cast any light on the menace of CIA operations. Instead, they author a "romance," a tale that they hope will be the story of their love, with whimsy and fantasy as the dominant tone, for as they state bluntly, "Realism is a fucking bore" (136). And indeed, there is plenty of love and delightful chance in their story: Fenn loses and finds his beloved hat a few times against incredible odds, the tale of the couple's meeting and re-meeting is a bulwark against the many failed or failing marriages in contemporary literature, and the two witness the Chesapeake Bay's legendary sea serpent at their tale's end. But for all their insistence that theirs is a lighthearted romance, acts of alarming, very realist violence frequently erupt: Susan insists on telling the lengthy story of her sister's multiple rapes ("Rape and Torture and Terror are just words; the details are what's real" (66)), they share multiple graphic stories shared about family members being tortured or torturing in the service of the CIA, and readers are given a long account of Susan's abortion in the novel's present-tense. The story might be fantastical in stretches, and it might fit the narrative patterns of classic epics and romances, but at least half the time it's a very realist account of the physical pain that humans undergo and the ways in which these torments are largely random and uncontrollable.

The structure of an overwhelmingly optimistic, implausible or intangible fantasy, interrupted by startling, realistic violence reflects the larger context of American intelligence operations. The soaring rhetoric of containing communism, which Nadel has shown extended to

maintaining traditional power structures domestically, and protecting international democracy barely covered the reality, revealed to the wide American public for the first time by memoirs like Agee's and Marchetti's, that the Agency was in fact supporting fascist regimes and blocking democratic elections in Latin-American and Middle Eastern countries, often by violent means. Government leaders who articulated these ideals while assigning missions to the CIA can thus be figured as authors of romances, myths of America's leading role in a new world order. As with Susan and Fenn's love story, for every bright moment in which improbable circumstances lead to a choice piece of intelligence that enables the protection of a truly endangered community, there is an act of brutal violence that everyone tries not to discuss, murmuring, "The details are just dreadfulness" (65).

Susan and Fenn's final decision to stop pursuing the answers to intelligence-related mysteries is in part motivated by one last fantastical occurrence: a message from the ghost of Fenn's twin brother Manfred. Susan's mother Carmen, who was partnered with the spy nicknamed "The Prince of Darkness" before his untimely death, sees Manfred's ghost a few times, once appearing before her when she is awake and once in a dream vision. The ghost, Carmen relays, told her that both he and his son are definitively dead, not just missing, and that the family should move on with their lives. The reports of these ghostly visitations are the only source that Susan and Fenn ever find that answers questions about Manfred's mysterious disappearance and the fate of his son Gus, but they take the secondhand supernatural reporting as reliable intelligence. This is perhaps appropriate: intelligence men are after all frequently referred to as "spooks," and Allen Dulles begins *The Craft of Intelligence* with a meditation on how the very first intelligence accounts follow Biblical prophets and ancient Greek oracles who claimed a direct line to otherworldly omniscience. But the reliance on the supernatural to make

real-world decisions about next steps points again to the immense difficulty of the gathering reliable intelligence: the only way for Fenn and Susan to attain concrete, actionable answers about mysteries covered up by intelligence agencies is to tap into otherworldly powers. Based on the information that Manfred's ghost gives Carmen, who then passes it on to Fenn and Susan, the narrating couple decide not to pursue the mystery of Manfred and Gus's disappearances any farther, trusting that they are in fact dead and that they should focus on their life together. A skeptical reader might observe that this is a convenient and easy choice for them; but after all, what better comfort could they hope for in dealing with an agency that, Fenwick fears, might have figured out a way to "do ghosts" to frighten its enemies (256)?

In *The Tidewater Tales* (1987), Barth expands on the themes laid out in *Sabbatical*. The narrators this time are the celebrated fiction writer Peter Sagamore and his librarian wife Katherine. Another pair of writers and academics, the Sagamores also embark on a sailing expedition in order to exorcise CIA-related demons. In particular, they are trying to come to terms with their decision to have children in a world they believe to be populated by too many "Doomsday Factors" to track, and with Peter's slide from long novels to microfiction to no writing at all (246). These two stressors turn out to have the same cause: Douglas Townshend, a slightly rewritten version of the CIA operative who lunched with Fenwick Turner in *Sabbatical*, befriends Peter Sagamore and suggests that he write a great novel that would expose all of the CIA's nefarious covert operations. Townshend wants to enlist Peter because he has become disillusioned with the morality of intelligence work but realizes that he cannot expose the misdoings himself. For one thing, he's a mediocre writer at best, and he recognizes the power that an accomplished artist would have given access to the truth about intelligence operations. But more importantly, Townshend realizes that he has to stay in the Agency to continue learning

secrets so that his intelligence would not be out of date by the time of publication. So, continuing to work for an organization that he believes to be fundamentally tainted, he chooses to be a “mole for the USA,” reporting to Peter (256). His rationale for the decision is worth quoting at length:

He kept his own counsel and did his share of the devil’s work with the intention of writing a thoroughgoing exposé of what we [the U.S.] had become by deluding ourselves that fire must be fought with fire. As the first such exposés began to appear, however, he had realized that their publication virtually ends the author’s critical effectiveness... Once the author resigned from the Agency to complete it, he would have nothing more to expose except what little he might learn at second hand from his former colleagues. Moreover [...] aroused public opinion might temporarily encourage and enable a congressional watchdog committee; might even lead the president to appoint a strong and scrupulous Agency director. But [operatives] would be constrained thereby merely to work that much more carefully and covertly, not to terminate their work. (255-6)

This extended meditation on the limitations of the intelligence memoir indicates that Barth, even after the publication of *Sabbatical*, was still working through the duty of various writers to try to make sense of intelligence operations. If the memoir by the former operative is essentially limited, then it falls to artists to interpret the international impact of intelligence work. Barth thus stages *The Tidewater Tales* as a fantasy of how concerned individuals might sidestep all of the barriers to writing the truly effective exposé, combining the knowledge of an active operative with the persuasive ability of an artist at the height of his powers to paint the picture of a corrupt intelligence community that would finally make the world listen.

Unlike Peter Sagamore, Barth did not have a current mole in the Agency giving him detailed updates on current operations, but he did make use of the information available in the exposé memoirs that Townshend denigrates. Rather than just making readers trust that Townshend has valuable information to give Peter, Barth drops long lists of shady CIA

paramilitary operations into conversations, essentially summarizing the big reveals from the intelligence memoirs of the 1970s. Sometimes he pulls headlines from his own present tense too, as when he lists the offenses of the Reagan administration, particularly its commitment to building up military weapons stocks and reviving early cold war nationalist rhetoric. But notably, none of this information is dramatized—it all takes place as outraged lists of information that overwhelm the listening characters because Peter, upon hearing Townshend’s account of CIA operations, is suddenly unable to produce fiction. Unable to process the information, Peter finds himself powerless to write at all: “Peter Sagamore’s stories were not about all that—but so possessed by these matters was his reluctant imagination, very little was left for his stories to be about” (266). Or, as Peter wryly complains to Townshend, “All this central intelligence has done nothing for my writing except to constipate it” (268). When Peter eventually does begin to write again, it’s not the long novel about CIA affairs that Townshend wants him to write, but a three-part short story about Don Quixote that not even a reader as suspicious as I could interpret as a metaphor for American intelligence work. And when readers once again accept that the book they hold is the story of how the writer-narrators came to write their latest work of fiction, *The Tidewater Tales*, it’s just another (much longer) narrative in which intelligence operations insistently haunt the lighthearted love story the narrators are trying to tell.

Barth’s novels, in their repression and rewriting of information about intelligence operations, challenges the ability of the individual author to produce a meaningful narrative about organizations like the CIA or hinder their operations. However, these narratives still suggest that men in positions of power in the Agency can fully understand the scope and impact of its covert activities. The next section analyzes Norman Mailer’s towering *Harlot’s Ghost*, in

which the viability of intelligence work is further destabilized through the depiction of a spymaster whose paranoia cripples his credibility.

Superior Histories made of Serendipitous Facts: *Harlot's Ghost*

Norman Mailer's *Harlot's Ghost* is a work of fiction, but after the narrative's sudden conclusion, readers will find a bibliography that would impress any scholar of the American intelligence community. Another towering literary figure of the late twentieth-century, Mailer in every other respect is John Barth's opposite. Never affiliated with a university, Mailer made his career on journalism and historical, largely realist novels. Where Barth theorized a literary movement and traveled largely in academic circles, Mailer appeared on talk shows to argue political questions of the day. He publicly criticized J. Edgar Hoover often enough to warrant a hefty FBI file that's largely a catalog of these personal insults.⁹³ An even more obsessive scholar of the intelligence community than Barth, Mailer writes in *Harlot's* afterword that fiction writers who conduct enough research can write a story just as accurate and effective as an account by a writer with firsthand experience of the subject. By this logic, he argues that he can write a CIA memoir just as well, if not better, than a man like Agee or Marchetti, for after all they "have only their part of the CIA to know, even as each of us has our own America, and no two Americas will prove identical" (1131). Indeed, according to Mailer, the fiction writer can do something even better than the memoirist, for fiction writers can "press beyond the nonfictional constraints" of scholars and autobiographers who are hamstrung by peer review and laws like the Intelligence Identities Protection Act (1133). In sum, "Novelists have a unique opportunity—they can create superior histories out of an enhancement of the real, the unverified, and the wholly fictional" (1133).

Harlot's Ghost chronicles one operative's exhaustive attempt to narrate a true experience of the CIA. A large part of this narrative is the story of one of the powerful men responsible for

crafting those national fictions that CIA operatives are tasked with making reality. Narrator Harry Hubbard is the son of a CIA operative, and his godfather Hugh Montague, codenamed the titular Harlot, is a counterintelligence legend who claims to run an “Agency within the Agency”: “All those thousands of others are but the insulation we need, our own corps of bureaucrats there to keep the other Washington bureaucracies away from us. At the center, however, it can be splendid” (217). Harlot frequently serves to give Harry and other young operatives authoritative lectures on the nature of the CIA and the truth of the cold war. But as Harry’s career in the CIA progresses and nothing turns out to be as clear-cut or logical as Harlot claims, the older man’s professions appear less credible. While Barth’s novels challenge the ability of individual operatives to understand the nature of intelligence operations, Mailer questions whether even those who lead the organization can truly know everything about the Agency’s role in international affairs.

The novel is split into two parts, the Omega manuscript and the Alpha manuscript, two works-in-progress penned by Harry Hubbard. The Alpha manuscript is the overwhelming bulk of the novel, though it is only the first half of a supposed memoir that Harry wrote to chronicle his years in the CIA.⁹⁴ The Omega manuscript, which makes up the brief introduction to the Alpha manuscript and an even briefer epilogue, follows Harry in present time as he learns of Harlot’s supposed death and decides to travel to the Soviet Union, where he believes he will find Harlot alive. Harry decides to read the Alpha manuscript over a single sleepless night before he begins his search in earnest—perhaps using the speed-reading skills that the Agency taught him, as the Alpha manuscript is a dense 1,100 pages. The Alpha manuscript is realist, largely made up of diary entries—Agee’s conceit literalized—and letters that Harry wrote and kept during his tenure at the CIA, of course in breach of countless security policies. The Omega manuscript, on the

other hand, reads like a Gothic novel. Harry returns to his home during a violent thunderstorm in the middle of the night to find that his wife Kittredge, formerly Harlot's wife, has locked herself in their bedroom upon the news of Harlot's death and refuses to talk to Harry. Kittredge, not just an Agency wife, is a brilliant psychologist who pioneered CIA research into the uses of LSD and other hallucinogens in interrogation and operative training. Early in the novel she tells Harry that she is "a madwoman spook," and indeed it's unclear if it is her mental instability, her own self-experimentation with hallucinogens, or some actual contact with the supernatural world that allows her to communicate with the titular, literal ghost of Harlot in the novel's strange opening scene (145).

This fantastical establishing scene gives a charge to the Alpha manuscript, which provides numbingly thorough details about Harry Hubbard's personal and professional life. Throughout the relatively unremarkable events of his CIA career, readers are invited to wonder what will lead the novel's main characters to the much stranger scene in which they were first introduced. After the hallucinatory Omega manuscript, Harry includes a foreword to his exhaustive but half-finished memoir of his years in the Agency with the warning, "Any sophisticated reader of spy novels picking up this book with the hope of encountering a splendidly plotted work will discover himself on unfamiliar ground. As an Agency officer, I certainly encountered my fair share of plots, initiating some, concluding others, and serving as messenger for many, but rarely was I able to see them whole" (94). Harry's warning that he will present intelligence work as it really is echoes the promise of many intelligence memoirs. But the choice is here interesting, for of course Mailer's work is a fiction, a spy novel that could have been "splendidly plotted." Part of Mailer's—and thus, Harry's—project is to show that the "emplotment," to use Hayden White's term, of history, be it the history of a person or an

organization or a country, is fundamentally disingenuous and biased. Harry's account revels in dead ends, unsolved mysteries, and obsessive attention to interpersonal romantic affairs rather than to the professional conflicts that might be more interesting to a reader curious about intelligence work.

Beyond making a fairly obvious point about the falsity of most spy novels and any particularly plotted memoirs, *Harlot's Ghost* suggests that the Harry's uneven work and limited understanding of the Agency is caused by his insistence on writing about it. The effort to discover the true nature of the CIA as a whole while still conducting small-scale operations makes Harry both a bad intelligence operative and a bad writer of intelligence fiction. Harry flouts security regulations by keeping notes, letters, and diary entries with detailed descriptions of his daily work. He botches operations by acting as if he is in one of the "splendidly plotted" spy novels that he scorns, as when he sends transparently coded telegrams to Harlot, who scolds him, "You were intoxicated with yourself. In our work, that's equal to catching typhus [...] You simply don't have the expertise to send open telegrams" (674). Indeed, Harry frequently relies on Harlot to get him out of trouble. Immediately after training, Harry is assigned to file fetching duty in CIA Headquarters' giant warehouse of documents known as the Snake Pit. Harry, resentful that he was not assigned to a foreign station or even to important analytic duty, quickly proves unable to find files fast enough to suit the operatives requesting them. In particular, he crosses the head of the West Berlin station, who asks via an impatient telegram, "File-rat, are you inept?" when Harry fails to quickly provide information on a suspected Soviet agent (206). Harry is not chastened by this rebuke, but instead is "full of unspoken rage at Harlot. Why had I been left at the Snake Pit?" (206). The next day, he meets with his father and Harlot and shares his plight, at which the two men not only cover for Harry so that the Berlin station chief will not

know that he was the inept file manager, but also get him reassigned to a more glamorous, high status assignment as a field operative in Germany. When Harry fails to track Soviet agents in his new posting in Berlin, Harlot has him moved to Montevideo, where he gets some of his field agents killed and fails to secure information from a potential Soviet defector. Toward the end of the narrative, he works with his father to plan a doomed assassination attempt on Fidel Castro. Harry's professional story is one of repeated failures, which doesn't make for a compelling intelligence narrative.

As if to drive home that actual operatives cannot pen narrative accounts of their service, Mailer mines intelligence memoirs for events that can be spun out into fictional scenes. Sometimes, this entails simply retelling a story already charged with the dramatic tension one would expect to find in fiction; for instance, Mailer's Harlot recounts to Harry the story of a CIA party that got out of hand when the flamboyant intelligence man Guy Burgess, then working for the British MI6, drew a lewd picture of the CIA operative Bill Harvey's wife. Harvey, a real historical figure who rose to the top of the early CIA and ran the infamous Berlin tunnel operation, attacked Burgess in a rage, and his lingering hurt over the incident led him a few months later to put together a series of odd facts about the men close to Burgess, which led to the neutralizing of the most notorious double agent of the cold war, Kim Philby. The story has all of the personal drama, unlikely coincidence, and heroic powers of individual memory that makes up a great intelligence narrative, but it is an anecdote related in several different histories of the Cambridge Five spy ring, backed up by the primary texts of Harvey's written testimony of his suspicions about Philby. Mailer particularly seems to have drawn from David Martin's biography of Angleton and Harvey, *Wilderness of Mirrors*. David Martin is a more descriptive writer than many biographers, but he deals with the incident in a fairly brief paragraph. But

Mailer, as a great fiction writer, is able to spin the story out as a long recollection of Harlot's, spanning several pages with spectacular new details and pauses for effect. Harvey becomes a towering awkward figure whose "handshake was even clammier than his pistol butt," while Guy Burgess is "the most improbable KGB asset [...] a holy, roaring mess. You did not measure his drinking by glasses, but by bottles" (219, 218). Kim Philby's stutter is worked into his dialogue, and Harlot is able to interject his own analysis of a party scene that spins slowly out of control and his own emotional turmoil upon realizing that Philby was "KGB all along" (221). The story is positioned at the end of the novel's Part I, giving it particular narrative weight as a fable Harlot tells his young protégé, with the moral, "The Devil is the most beautiful creature God ever made. Drink to Kim Philby, a consummate swine" (222). Before Harry travels to Germany to meet Bill Harvey himself, readers are given a vivid picture of the man's temperament, understand Harlot's simultaneous resentment and admiration for Harvey's ability to see through Philby, and see that Harlot is not at all infallible, but can disastrously misjudge a person's intentions.

Mailer creates such "superior histories" out of the facts available to him with particular frequency in the section of the novel in which Harry is stationed in Montevideo, where Phillip Agee spent much of his career. Agee, as discussed above, resisted making narratively memorable scenes out of his experiences; Harry Hubbard resists making a totalizing, neat plot, but has no qualms about crafting highly dramatic scenes, although they often don't pay off by leading up to a major revelation or fitting into a significant character development arc. Mailer is thus able to create vivid individual episodes without the responsibility of delivering a final conclusion on the nature of intelligence operations, because Harry gets himself into some highly entertaining conflicts but absolutely lacks the ability to understand their significance. In the most notable of these, Mailer creates an entire plotline out of a series of almost offhand mention in Agee's

account of a Sergey Borisov, “the Soviet Consul and KGB Officer” with whom Agee’s superiors wanted him to “develop a relationship” (410). Summarizing this effort in a single paragraph, Agee writes that he and Borisov entertained each other and their wives a few times: “Borisov knows I’m a CIA officer without any doubt, so I wonder sometimes why I bother meeting him. Headquarters says that’s just the reason to keep the relationship going—on the chance that Borisov could be disaffected and trying to ‘build a bridge’” (410). Agee mentions that Borisov was excellent at chess but terrible at driving, but offers no other characterization of the man. A few months of “diary entries later, Agee mentions some awkwardness when he learns that another man from the Soviet consul is having an affair with Borisov’s wife. Agee and his superiors discuss how they might use this information to sow discord among the Soviet ranks, but it ultimately comes to nothing, and the possibility is never mentioned again.

While Sergey Borisov is not particularly important in Agee’s memoir, Mailer seizes on these facts and makes it the central drama of the section of *Harlot’s Ghost* set in Montevideo. Borisov becomes Boris Masarov, whose wife Zenia is having an affair with a clerk at the embassy, Georgi Varkhov. Harry develops a meaningful friendship with Masarov and narrates in detail an occasion when he is invited to their house for dinner and gets trounced in several games of chess. Zenia, an aspiring poet, gives him a piece that Harry promises to send to a literary journal in the States. The next day, Harry is summoned back to Washington by his superiors, including Harlot, who ask him to relate every detail about Masarov’s house, to reconstruct the moves made during their chess game, and to analyze Zenia’s remarks when she handed him the poem—but Harry cannot remember half the details that they ask for, to the point where even he sheepishly admits, “I began to wonder at my lack of motivation in memorizing relatively so little” (512). Eventually, Harry arranges to meet Masarov again, but despite the KGB officer’s

clear willingness to consider defecting, Harry is unable to secure this. Masarov offers a cryptic clue about there being a mole in the highest tiers of the CIA, which sends Harlot into a panic when Harry passes the information along, reminiscent of the mole hunt that ruined the credibility of Harlot's historical model, counterintelligence chief James Angleton. But when Harry is moved to another station, there is no follow-up on the episode: Harry never hears about or witnesses the "end" of the Masarov plotline, in line with Mailer's larger point about an individual operative having only a very limited ability to understand the operations of the CIA. In the preface to his manuscript, Harry admits, "We who spend our lives in intelligence usually read spy novels with the wistful sentiment, 'Ah, if only my job would turn out so well shaped!'" (94). Mailer, occupying the gap between memoirs that have a responsibility to stick to the dull facts of life and intelligence narratives that are sensational but too neatly plotted, elaborates on the facts of history enough to make compelling scenes, but intentionally withholds the narrative satisfaction of a clear conclusion or takeaway in order to emphasize the limited perspective of individual CIA men.

Mailer also undercuts the credibility of other historical CIA figures, such as E. Howard Hunt, infamously implicated in the Watergate break-in and the station chief of Montevideo for the time that Harry is stationed there. When Harry first meets him, Hunt admits, "I did not think I wanted to be DCI, no, I was here for the double life" (482). Harry, learning to distrust the man's enthusiasm for spectacular operations, comments, "Hunt had been a novelist, I kept reminding myself, before he became a Company man. I could sense a romantic fellow who might be even more of a wild goose than me" (642). But no matter which strong personality Harry aligns himself with, they all turn out to be flawed, Harlot most of all. By robbing Harry of the ability to come to any definitive conclusions about the nature of the CIA, Mailer follows Barth in

confirming that no individual operative can see the big picture of Agency operations. Where Barth's protagonists were so overwhelmed by their knowledge of Agency operations that they could hardly write anything, Mailer's narrator compiles masses of pages but can draw no moral from it. But Mailer takes the point a bit farther—where Barth suggests that there are men, such as his novels' Manfred Turner and Douglas Taylor, who are so authoritative in the Agency that they have access to the intelligence needed to understand the true scope and purpose of American covert operations, Mailer undermines the existence of such figures by creating the very flawed Harlot.

Although Harlot begins the novel as a character in whom Harry and readers are inclined to trust, his steady descent into paranoia and his increasingly tortured theories about the role of the CIA indicate that he is a less than reliable narrator of CIA affairs. His description of the daily lived reality of an intelligence officer, delivered as part of a lecture to new recruits, perhaps best summarizes the instability of his status as a messenger of reliable intelligence: "What, after all, are our working materials? Facts. We live in the mystery of facts. Obligatorily, we become expert observers of the permeability, malleability, and solubility of so-called hard facts. We discover that we have been assigned to live in fields of distortion. We are required to imbibe concealed facts, revealed facts, suspicious facts, serendipitous facts" (359). Rather than a treatise on the CIA's ability to gather discrete pieces of objectively true information that will aid American policy-makers, this speech sounds downright postmodernist. In other words, the man who is supposed to know the most about the CIA as a whole is voicing the most troubling challenge to the validity of intelligence work.⁹⁵ Looking beyond the narrative limitations of one operative—who is particularly flawed and at least a bit reliant on the protection of his accomplished of his relatives—Mailer suggests that no one could possibly have total knowledge

of the American intelligence community's operations. And if no one can articulate the scope and power of Agency operations, then surely no one could effectively regulate it.

Conclusion

The 1970s Congressional investigations of the intelligence community damaged the reputation of organizations like the CIA and for a time certainly limited its operations. The revelations of "the Family Jewels," a document containing the details of the most damning covert operations in the Agency's history, particularly hurt the reputation of the CIA and, as Chapter 1 discussed, notably changed the tone of popular intelligence narratives. Nonetheless, by the mid-1980s, the triumphant tone of documents like the Church Committee's final report and the Reagan administration's confident rhetoric led to a general mood of optimism. To many Americans, it felt as if disasters like Vietnam and Watergate were behind them, the intelligence community's crimes thoroughly exposed—the government could be trusted again, and one could be proud to be an American.

Read in this context, Barth's and Mailer's novels were a prescient warning against complacency and a call for fiction writers to contribute what they can to ongoing political conversations. As readers in the twenty-first century know well, the intelligence community was not permanently limited by the sanctions placed on them in the 1970s. Barth's writer-scholar-narrators flee their knowledge of intelligence operations, but ultimately author fiction that meaningfully explores their anxiety over the scope of the CIA's power. Their anxious answers to the call to political writing mirror Barth's own efforts to square the circle of being politically vocal even while feeling that there's little any one person can do. Susan and Fenn, and later Katherine and Peter, continuously revisit their memories of the CIA, looking for answers to their lingering questions and searching for a way to act on their concerns. Similarly, Barth returns to

the same story about people trying to work past their experiences in immoral covert work, rewriting it and lengthening it as he comes to realize that insider exposés are ultimately ineffective correctives. And Mailer's towering fiction challenges the myth that even the heads of the CIA, its counterintelligence masters, are in complete command of the facts. By limiting the credibility of not only one deeply flawed operative-narrator but also of all the men at the top of the CIA, *Harlot's Ghost* paints an immense picture of a covert community too extensive and ill-organized to understand the scope of its own influence. All of this reflects a postmodernist view of history best expressed by Edward Carr and later Hayden White,⁹⁶ in which history cannot be definitively known but is constructed by the historian, who inevitably brings their own biases and limitations to that construction. The authors of CIA exposés challenge the dominant governmental narrative of history but present a revisionist history that they claim is the new stable, definitive construction of events. Barth and Mailer, as postmodernist fiction writers, highlight the instability of any historical facts, particularly when dealing with intelligence work, in which such facts are intentionally obscured.

Unlike Marchetti and Agee, Barth and Mailer did not believe that one person could set the record straight in one exposé, or that a single document like the final report of the Church Committee could right the wrongs of the intelligence community. But as the novels' characters come to rely on each other, they form communities of people traumatized by intelligence work, working toward recovery and positive change. Similarly, perhaps we can hope that an individual voice revisiting the dominant narrative of American history can be part of a wider conversation that enacts public change. In the twenty-first century, having seen again how quickly intelligence agencies can be built up given a sufficient climate of crisis, we nonetheless like to believe that individual whistleblowers can keep these agencies in check. Barth's and Mailer's late novels

offer a timely reminder that the historical record cannot be definitively corrected, but that while individuals may not have much power in curtailing covert agencies of unknown scope, continuous collective inquiry can move us in the right direction.

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Notes to the Introduction

¹ Other surveys of intelligence fiction have also been very informative. Erin G. Carlston's *Double Agents: Espionage, Literature, and Liminal Citizens* is a fascinating look at the anxieties around spies because of their ever-present potential to turn double agent, and how these anxieties parallel the discomfort around homosexual, Jewish, and racial minority characters in the same narratives who might similarly "pass." Alan Hepburn's *Intrigue: Espionage and Culture* (2005) provides some unique theories of the tropes of espionage narratives, and the meaning of his titular word in modern culture. Bruce Merry's *Anatomy of the Spy Thriller* (1977) and Lars Ole Sauerberg's *Secret Agents in Fiction* (1984) were useful early formalist surveys of the genre. Robert Lance Snyder's *The Art of Indirection in British Espionage Fiction* (2011), Oliver Buckton's *Espionage in British Fiction and Film Since 1900* (2015), and Clive Bloom's edited collection *Spy Thrillers* (1990) provided a wealth of terminology describing the tropes of British intelligence fiction, which was very useful as I identified the key elements of these texts' American counterparts.

² I will not devote any sustained attention to the various CIA-backed literary outlets that operated for the first few decades of the cold war, as Saunders has already covered this topic in more historical depth than a literary studies project could likely manage. I am indebted to this work and will certainly draw from it in my discussion of literary authors who are pushing back against dominant governmental rhetoric—in many ways, Saunders's exploration of artists who were funded, with or without their knowledge, by the new American national security state serves as the other side of the story that this project seeks to tell.

³ I draw my understanding of this term from Douglas Stuart's *Creating the National Security State*, which provides a thorough history of the debates leading up to the National Security Act of 1947 and Norrin Ripsman and T.V. Pauls's *Globalization and the National Security State*, which focuses more on how these institutions operate in the contemporary political landscape. Paul Robinson's *Redefining Science* was also helpful, an interesting study of how scientists were enlisted to assist in the arms race, largely through a governmental effort to neutralize the moral discourse around scientific research.

⁴ See Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment*, for a full narrative of the divide between Kennan's views and the later Truman administration.

⁵ See Michael J. Hogan's *A Cross of Iron*, pp. 1-22, for an excellent, thorough account of the initial arguments between interventionists and isolationists immediately after WWII. The rest of Hogan's study traces the ongoing conflict between these groups as the Truman administration progressed, a narrative which has informed my condensed retelling of this time period here.

⁶ While the Soviet Union did not have the atomic bomb at the time of the Truman Doctrine, the fear that they would soon develop it was widespread and was central to foreign policy discussions.

⁷ Importantly, the Act also established the Air Force as a separate branch of the military and created the Secretary of Defense position to oversee consolidated military operations, information silos and competition between the different branches having been a problem in World War II.

⁸ In addition to Robin Winks's *Cloak and Gown* and Saunders's *The Cultural Cold War*, mentioned in the main text, I particularly benefited from *The Central Intelligence Agency: History and Documents*, a curious collection of key legal texts defining the CIA's powers with a particularly useful history of the early Agency, put together in preparation for the Congressional trials on intelligence of the 1970s. Jeffrey Richelson's *A Century of Spies* provided a good general overview of America's role in cold war global espionage and Douglas Garthoff's *Directors of Central Intelligence* revealed how the different personalities of the cold war DCIs helped define different eras within the intelligence community. But perhaps most useful were some of the detail studies of individual figures whose careers spanned most of the cold war: the biographies of James Jesus Angleton cited in Note 9, and Thomas Powers's excellent biography of DCI Richard Helms, were just as instructive as the more comprehensive histories of the intelligence community in this period.

⁹ Chapter 1 provides an overview of the intelligence community's fall from favor during the Congressional investigations of the mid-1970s. Chapter 3 provides background on the FBI and the rise of the domestic security state. Chapter 4 covers the Vietnam War and CIA involvement in Latin America.

¹⁰ Angleton's infamous distrust of almost everyone and the particular sensitivity of the CIA's counterintelligence documents means that there's even less information about his career than most intelligence figures. As Robin Winks puts it, "there are no Angleton papers, of course," in the way that there are archival collections of the letters and records of other historical figures (527). Nonetheless, a few excellent biographies of Angleton have been written, in addition to Winks's long chapter on him in *Cloak and Gown*. David C. Martin's *A Wilderness of Mirrors* (1980) provides a biography of Angleton through his rivalry with fellow operative Bill Harvey. Michael Holzman and, more recently, Jefferson Morley provide biographies written for a general audience that add new details that earlier studies did not include. All of these have informed my account of Angleton's career.

¹¹ Angleton was eventually pushed out of the CIA, one of many firings caused by the Congressional investigations of the 1970s. Curiously, what eventually damned Angleton in the eyes of the public was not anything that he did in foreign countries or to those he interrogated, but a long-running operation in which the counterintelligence department read every piece of mail entering the U.S. with an address in the Soviet bloc. Americans were scandalized by such a clearly illegal act happening on American soil, and there was little justification for the operation—no one could point to any useful intelligence gained through the operation that would appease a public upset by this breach of privacy. Angleton also did not conduct himself

well during the various Congressional investigations, giving winding, abstract answers that indicated to many listeners that he believed himself above the law. In December 1974, he submitted his resignation and has had a wildly controversial legacy ever since.

- ¹² Although this line is widely quoted, it's not often mentioned that Angleton delivered it to the British reporter Peter Williams on an episode of the news series *This Week* in 1976, notably after he resigned from the CIA in the wake of the Congressional investigations. Video from the interview can be found on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vTgneJQxCts> David C. Martin's biography of Angleton and Bill Harvey uses the line as his title.

Notes to Chapter 1

- ¹³ Former intelligence operatives like Howard Hunt and William Buckley, Jr. sometimes authored spy novels, but they were open about the fact that these fictional works were sensational tales based on the fictional models that had come before their works, not on their actual intelligence careers, as will be discussed at greater length in the section on patriotic spy fiction. For more on CIA secrecy oaths and the consequences for breaking them, see Chapter 5, which analyzes exposé memoirs by operatives Victor Marchetti and Phillip Agee.
- ¹⁴ For a more thorough account of lesser-known spy programs, see Kackman's *Citizen Spy: Television, Espionage, and Cold War Culture* and Wesley A. Britton's odd encyclopedia *Spy Television*. Kackman's study is particularly insightful in its analysis of how espionage programs reflected the tensions of the nascent television market and mid-century public discourse about the potential harm or benefit of the medium.
- ¹⁵ This fact, often cited as general knowledge, was professed in a *Life* profile of the president's reading habits, particularly celebrating the speed at which he read: "He eats up news, books, at 1,200 words a minute!" John Buchan, celebrated author of spy novels like *The Thirty-Nine Steps*, also appears on Kennedy's top-ten books list, but for a biography of a seventeenth-century British soldier rather than a fictional thriller.
- ¹⁶ *The Man with the Golden Gun* (1965) and *Octopussy* (1966) were published posthumously. The series has since been continued by a series of other British authors. Most recently, Anthony Horowitz published a prequel to *Casino Royale* in 2018.
- ¹⁷ The plan was one of many proposals included in the Trout Memo of 1939, which likened counterintelligence operations to fly-fishing. Admiral John Godfrey, who Fleming served as the personal assistant to, was listed as the author, but historians have noted that the style is distinctly Fleming's and that the two often collaborated on such memos. Godfrey, incidentally, was the inspiration for Bond's spymaster, M. See Macintyre, especially 11-22.
- ¹⁸ On Bond and empire, Oliver S. Buckton's *Espionage in British Fiction and Film since 1900* provides an excellent reading of how Fleming's work fits into the wider landscape of British spy fiction. On masculinity, the following recent studies are useful: Lisa Funnell and Klaus

Dodds's *Geographies, Genders, and Geopolitics of James Bond* applies gender studies to the landscapes that Bond traverses, assessing how these stories feminize certain spaces; and Erin G. Carlston's *Double Agents* reads Bond among other British and American intelligence fiction for anxieties about queerness. On the films, Sinclair McKay's *The Man with the Golden Touch* looks at the production and marketing of the Bond films to explain their lasting popularity; and James Chapman's *License to Thrill* examines the uneven reception of the films internationally. Manchester UP also released a second edition of *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader* in 2010.

¹⁹ Other British authors that were well established before American intelligence fiction developed as a genre are John Buchan and Eric Ambler. Buchan's *The Thirty-Nine Steps* was adapted into a film by Alfred Hitchcock. Nonetheless, these authors' work did not have the massive appeal of Fleming's series, which hit an odd cultural nerve. Examples of important intelligence fiction by canonical authors that were certainly influential in different ways are Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*, Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (from which the notorious British defector Kim Philby took his nickname), and Joseph Conrad's *The Spy*. These works were more influential on the authors of counterintelligence literature addressed in later chapters than works with massive popular appeal, however.

²⁰ The recent reboot of the series starring Daniel Craig pointedly tries to capture both Bond's vulnerability and the distasteful aspects of his character, not shying away from his misogyny and alarming capacity for violence, but not painting these elements as positive character traits as the novels and earlier films did.

²¹ As a point of contrast, *Thrilling Detective Stories*, the magazine from which *Thrilling Spy Stories* spun off, ran from 1931 to 1953.

²² The script was written by American screenwriter Eric Lehmann, and of course directors aren't automatically even the primary force behind movies, mileage varying on auteur theory. But Lehmann wrote the script with Hitchcock in mind, and the film is recognizably his, although its American elements certainly justify its inclusion in this project.

²³ Truffaut was the first to make this claim in his influential *Hitchcock*: "the James Bond series [...] is nothing else than a rough caricature of all Hitchcock's work, and *North by Northwest* in particular" (20). This argument has since been treated as a given in writing on Hitchcock's spy thrillers, although Robin Wood performs a productive analysis of why *North by Northwest* is often overlooked by critics: by reading the crop duster scene against a similar sequence in a Bond film, Wood illustrates the superiority of suspense in Hitchcock's thriller, concluding "that *From Russia with Love* represents precisely that pandering to a debased popular taste that Hitchcock is widely supposed to be guilty of" (67). For more on Hitchcock's influence on the genre,; Spoto 299-311; and Britton 89-91.

²⁴ Of course, the relationship between Hitchcock and the Bond texts can be viewed as an exchange, the novels existing before Hitchcock's film and probably of interest to someone so preoccupied with suspense and espionage. But Hitchcock was undeniably influential in the

cinematic language of the filmic spy thriller, and the Bond movies' updates to the novelistic character are undoubtedly indebted to Grant's portrayal of Roger Thornhill.

²⁵ See Jenkins; and *New York Times* columnist Anthony Boucher's "The Year of the Spy" (Dec. 1963) and "When Will the Spy Go Back Into the Cold?" (June 1965). Boucher is an interesting figure in the history of intelligence fiction, loaning the genre a great deal of credibility in his periodical column, "Criminals at Large," in which he reviewed the latest best mystery, detective, and espionage fiction. His devotion to these narratives contributed both to mass popular celebrations of tales of intrigue and to the development of high literary art: on the one hand, after his death, a yearly convention of the "mystery community" called Bouchercon was founded and continues to meet nearly 50 years later; on the other hand, Boucher's involvement with *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine* led him to author one of the first English translations of Jorge Luis Borges's "The Garden of Forking Paths."

²⁶ Most notably, Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1959) introduces the heroic Major Marco, who is ultimately able to solve the mystery of the brainwashed Raymond Shaw and reprogram him before he shoots a presidential candidate. The novel of course has seen many filmic adaptations; the original Frank Sinatra version was pulled from theaters after the Kennedy assassination, an event which is probably most responsible for the narrative's lasting cultural impact.

²⁷ Worland's "The Cold War Mannerists" is representative of this analytic line.

²⁸ One anomaly in this study is Mel Brooks's long-running series *Get Smart* (1965-70), a show that did target the U.S. intelligence community and government yet was ultimately not pointed enough to be considered counterintelligence literature. The series thus falls into the category that I term "critical intelligence fiction" later in this chapter, which otherwise consists of texts created after the various Congressional investigations into the intelligence community in the 1970s. *Get Smart* was truly ahead of its time. Analyzing the show at length in this chapter's section on critical intelligence literature would confusingly break this chapter's critical narrative, and I do read this as the exception that proves the rule rather than breaks the theory. But, *Get Smart's* important, prescient critical message is worth a few notes here.

A satire of the patriotic intelligence story, the series follows bumbling agent Maxwell Smart, a top operative for the agency CONTROL (a clear pun on the policy of containment) who every episode must thwart the enemies of the rival agency KAOS. Of course, Max is too incompetent to ever really understand what KAOS is up to, or to properly use the complicated that the technicians at CONTROL make for him. He stumbles his way to victory every episode by a combination of sheer luck and the help of his female partner Agent 99, the only person in the agency with any real ability. In part, all of this is a play for laughs, a lighthearted flipping of a narrative that had come to saturate the American market in the mid-1960s, responding to the wealth of patriotic intelligence stories and allowing the audience to laugh at their own immense enjoyment of an often-silly genre. But importantly, the show does not just satirize Max, and so the figure of the heroic, idealistic spy: CONTROL itself is shown to have just as little sense as their leading field operative, losing at least a few agents most episodes, sinking millions into gadgets that Max immediately breaks, and failing to have anything but a reactionary response

to KAOS's operations. The whole show generally suggests that the CIA has only been successful thus far through bravado and luck, and that some failure more permanently catastrophic than the Bay of Pigs invasion is the inevitable result when men like Maxwell Smart are running covert operations.

²⁹ Hamilton's second Helm novel, *The Wrecking Crew*, was adapted as a movie starring Dean Martin, but Helm is portrayed as much more of a Bond-style gentleman than the self-described monster that narrates the novels. The film, moreover, is more a campy parody of the spy type than a faithful adaptation of the morally nuanced books, many Hollywood producers believing that it was better to mock the Bond phenomenon than try to compete with it on its own terms.

³⁰ Douglas Waller's *Wild Bill Donovan* is a trove of anecdotes attesting to its subject's sometimes-excessive creativity in planning operations. Robin Winks's chapter "The Campus" also includes a sharp portrait of Donovan, particularly how his support of the Research & Analysis branch of the OSS (rather than just operations departments) is not a disparate fact, for he used Ivy-educated to encourage a "draw-and-shoot" atmosphere of enthusiastically researching anything that Donovan or the head researchers found interesting (68).

³¹ The Church Committee, officially the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, was the most effective investigation and is discussed at length in the body of this chapter. President Ford also established the independent Rockefeller Commission to investigate CIA activities, and the House had their own investigation named after and led by Democratic Representative Otis Pike.

³² See Melley's *Empire of Conspiracy*; Coale's *Paradigms of Paranoia*; and Knight's *Conspiracy Culture*.

³³ Marie is another iteration of the female captive who develops Stockholm syndrome and eventually becomes the lover and critical support figure for the male operative. See Chapter 4 for more discussion of the role of women in intelligence fiction and how Joan Didion and Margaret Atwood present a counternarrative in which women embrace political agency.

³⁴ The prolific thriller writer Eric Van Lustbader continued the series after Ludlum's death, adding twelve new novels to date. As one might expect, the reasons why Bourne would continue to have anything to do with an intelligence community that has betrayed him multiple times become increasingly strained, and then abandoned altogether. The series is now considered a reliably competent spy saga, but has none of Ludlum's critique of the systems of power that swallowed the initial Bourne.

³⁵ A good example of the bad impression Clancy made on many writers and reviewers of fiction is an interview published in the *Washington Post* in 1993. Described in the article's opening as, "Tom Clancy, best-selling techno-novelist, multimillionaire, gun fancier, friend of Republican presidents, hobnobber with FBI and military honchos, would-be professional sports team owner, quasi-would-be politician, disillusioned presidential blue-ribbon panel member, battler with Hollywood moguls and self-proclaimed expert on national defense, international politics and just about everything else," Clancy is later quoted making a surprising connection between

his own work and Shakespeare's: "Well, Shakespeare wrote for the masses and he wrote to make money. He didn't know he was turning himself into the greatest man in the English language. All he did was, he was trying to tell good stories that ordinary people could understand and give himself a decent living out of it. Well, I'm in the same tradition. I don't put myself alongside the Bard for a lot of reasons—like I'm not that good, for one—but it's an honorable tradition."

- ³⁶ The first entry in the series, *Saving the Queen*, is a less impressive, more sensational romp that portrays Oakes as a new American James Bond rather than a man with a strong moral center. While singlehandedly saving British intelligence by identifying a highly placed mole, Oakes manages to bed the Queen before returning to American soil. *Saving the Queen*, fortunately, is the exception rather than the rule in Buckley's typically quite nuanced intelligence novels.

Notes to Chapter 2

- ³⁷ The comic's original author, the Cuban expatriate Antonio Prohías, continued to write and illustrate the comics through 1987. The series continued into the 2000s under other authors after that, and the text was also adapted for television shorts and video games.
- ³⁸ Bloom, who in this quote describes Pynchon's fictional landscapes, had less regard for DeLillo, although he hailed *Underworld* as a great work. Other major scholarly works on Pynchon that emphasize his attention to paranoia are Schaub's *Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity*, which interrogates the purpose of fiction in which "stories do not resolve in ways that align form with meaning" (103); and David Cowart's *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History*, which while a fresh new historicist account also pays ample attention to Pynchon's play with the historical narrative. Cowart's study of DeLillo also emphasizes metafictional play with the historical record. Peter Knight devotes a chapter to reading Pynchon and DeLillo together in his *Conspiracy Nation*, showing that in their fiction "conspiracies are constitutive of rather than epiphenomenal to contemporary civilization" (255). Samuel Coale treats the two authors in separate chapters of his *Paradigms of Paranoia*, in which he compellingly argues for the shared roots of conspiracy and the romantic sublime.
- ³⁹ Kyle Wishart Smith provides the most thorough account of Pynchon's relationship to British intelligence fiction writers, reading *Gravity's Rainbow* against the four British authors Pynchon cites as influences in *Slow Learner's* introduction. Bernard Duyfhuizen also usefully traces Pynchon's relationship to popular intelligence narratives, historicizing the novel's relationship to both intelligence agencies and extending the critical attention to Pynchon's awareness of film by reading portions of the novel against the 1965 British spy film *Operation Crossbow*. Linda Calendrillo notes the importance of spy tropes to *V.*, arguing that it anticipates "most of the concerns that appear in the modern spy novel" (58).
- ⁴⁰ Ellison, discussed in Chapter 3, is the other author who doesn't explicitly include the CIA in his novel's drama.

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- ⁴¹ See Carswell and Freer. Pynchon in his introduction to *Slow Learner* also writes of being particularly influenced by the various campus political movements as a college student in this decade.
- ⁴² Weisenburger makes this claim in his Introduction to *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion*, a page-by-page annotation of the novel in which Weisenburger tracks, among many other things, the multiple references to Pynchon's earlier novel.
- ⁴³ This character is Jesús Arrabal, the leader of "a clandestine Mexican outfit known as the Conjunción de los Insurgentes Anarquistas, traceable back to the time of the Flores Magón brothers and later briefly aligned with Zapata" (96). When Oedipa, who met Arrabal in her past life with Pierce Inverarity, reencounters him on her quest to find the Tristero, she asks him, "How is your CIA?" (96). But Arrabal's anti-government CIA is not the only irony in this passage, for he recalls being terrified of Inverarity, in the guise of Lamont Cranston, a "rich obnoxious gringo." Arrabal was convinced he was an American spy, for he was "too exactly and without flaw the thing we fight [...] An anarchist miracle" (97).
- ⁴⁴ Readings of Pynchon's antiwar politics has been a more recent scholarly trend, responding to the long-held focus that the novel's aesthetic difficulties. Notable monographs that historicize Pynchon and ascribe political messages to his fiction are Joanna Freer's *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture* (2014), which traces the effect of various leftist movements on Pynchon's developing political consciousness; David Witzling's *Everybody's America* (2008), which reads Pynchon against African-American authors of the 1960s and 70s and analyzes his fiction's treatment of race and radical black political movements; and Pedro García-Caro's *After the Nation* (2014), which historicizes Pynchon in the context of discourse about the Mexiican-American border. The edited collection *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins* (2003) was probably the first sustained effort to read Pynchon through a historical-political lens. Sean Carswell's *Occupy Pynchon* (2017) suggests that Pynchon's first three novels are pointedly critical of globalized oppressive systems of power, but only after the publication of *Vineland* does he offer the potential for political resistance rather than dismal, hopeless conclusions.
- ⁴⁵ DeLillo, as will be discussed later, identifies this moment as the Kennedy assassination. Alan Nadel traces how the atomic bomb was the most important factor that defined the cold war, but also identifies the Bay of Pigs operation as the moment when postmodernism truly emerged in the American scene.
- ⁴⁶ In formulating this argument, I benefitted from work done by Kyle Wishart Smith, who in a 2003 contribution to *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins* wrote, "What connects spy fiction and Pynchon's texts most interestingly are issue at the core of imperialism," Pynchon is interested "in revealing the United States' role within the history of empire" (185). Smith proceeds to read the influence of pre-cold war British spy novels on Pynchon, showing how the genre, "with its clumsy attempts to negate its enemies and disguise the fact of Britain's own spies," highlights the parallel irony of America claiming to be an anti-colonialist power while engaging in markedly imperialist behavior (184). While this work is enlightening and Pynchon

has indeed admitted to being influenced by these early British authors of spy fiction, there is also a rich American tradition from which Pynchon draws to make this critique. Smith seems less aware of this body of American intelligence fiction: in a 2015 article that makes more connections between *Gravity's Rainbow* and the British spy fiction tradition, Smith claims that “before the seventies an American spy text was a very unusual thing,” which overlooks the wealth of pulp fiction, major network television, and blockbuster films analyzed in Chapter 1.

⁴⁷ In addition to his conquest of innumerable women across London, Slothrop's virility is highlighted as a particularly American quality in one of the novel's many songs. Slothrop's British friends Teddy Bloat and Oliver “Tantivy” Mucker-Maffick burst into a foxtrot called “The Englishman's Very Shy” in response to his suggestion that they go meet some girls on their shared furlough: “At bowling the ladies o-ver, / A-mericans lead the pack-- / You see your Englishman tends to lack / That recklessness so transatlantic, / That women find so romantic [...] The polygamous Yank with his girls galore / Give your Brit-ish rake or carouser fits” (184-5). Indeed, in all of Slothrop's covert activities, his American identity allows him to be more easily disguised as a person of any nationality. His Americanness with all of the odd advantages it brings might be part of Pynchon's commentary on the particular new excesses and bluster of the new interventionist U.S. intelligence community.

⁴⁸ See, for instance, Thomas Moore's *The Style of Connectedness*, particularly the chapter “*Gravity's Rainbow* as the Incredible Moving Film.” Megan Condis's “Failure to Launch: Not-So Super Heroes in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Superfolks*” draws useful connections between Slothrop's donning of the Rocketman cape and mid-century comic book narratives, tracing the particular irony of Slothrop's helplessness as he embodies a godlike archetype.

⁴⁹ As a rough illustration of this trend, we can look at the number of full-length articles published in English in peer-reviewed journals on DeLillo's novels: his first, *Americana*, has 4; his third, *Ratner's Star*, also has 4; *Players*, 3; *Running Dog*, 3; at the turning point, *The Names* has 13; *White Noise* has 47, as well as a collection of essays on teaching the novel, Lentricchia's edited collection *New Essays on White Noise* (1991), and Leonard Orr's *Reader's Guide* (2003); *Underworld* has 43, as well as John Duvall's *Reader's Guide* (2002) and Dewey, Kellman, and Malin's collection, *Perspectives on Don DeLillo's Underworld* (2002). This data was collected from and checked against the Don DeLillo Society's Bibliography, last updated in August 2018. DeLillo's five novels published since *Underworld* are less well regarded, but still garner a healthy body of critical essays.

⁵⁰ See especially John Duvall's Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Don DeLillo*.

⁵¹ *Libra* follows a clear narrative pattern, alternating between chapters that focus on the movements of Lee Harvey Oswald, and chapters that follow the CIA agents and their widening web of conspirators, counting down until 22 November 1963. Towards the end of the novel, the plot lines converge, and Oswald increasingly appears in the dated chapters.

⁵² *Libra* often returns to the idea that both Oswald and Kennedy are avid readers of Fleming's novels, one of many psychic “bonds” they share (180, 317, 334).

⁵³ All definitions are taken from the OED.

⁵⁴ See Melley, especially 23-31; and Saunders.

Notes to Chapter 3

⁵⁵ Sean McCann's *A Pinnacle of Feeling* is an excellent study of how this historical phenomenon was reflected in postwar literature.

⁵⁶ Wald's *The New York Intellectuals* was a groundbreaking look at the political evolution of this group of thinkers, a recent 2017 edition of which contains a useful preface updated the relevance of its argument. I found his *American Night: The Literary Left in the Era of the Cold War* to also be a valuable recent study of various writers' relationship to leftist movements, particularly his reading of *Invisible Man* as "ideologically woolly" and the beginning of Ellison's "steady march toward an African American version of neoconservatism" (152).

⁵⁷ This is a particularly good example of how the interests of individual groups were equally represented for different reasons. Black civil rights leaders, for instance, were particularly concerned about the disproportionate number of black men being drafted to fight.

⁵⁸ As this project's introduction discusses, the national security state was not easy for the Truman administration to create. Many heated Congressional debates about whether the United States needed to abandon its traditional isolationism, or whether the new national security institutions would lead to a garrison state that was no better than Soviet totalitarianism, had to happen before NSA 1947 could be passed, with significant revisions. It's worth noting again here that the language that established the CIA is so notoriously vague because most of the debates were centered around the reorganization of the military, while everyone agreed after Pearl Harbor that a national foreign intelligence agency was necessary. See this project's introduction, 8-13; and Hogan, 55-66.

⁵⁹ The popular image of the G-man as a super detective, part action hero and part American masculine ideal, came about in the mid-twentieth century through Hoover's strategic publicizing of successful cases and his close relationship with Hollywood filmmakers, going back to *The Birth of a Nation*. For a thorough account of this relationship and the depiction of the FBI in twentieth-century popular culture, see Richard Gid Powers's *G-Men: Hoover's FBI in American Popular Culture*.

⁶⁰ This actively takes part in a wider, less intentional slippage in American governmental discourse from the division between freedom in America and totalitarianism in the Soviet Union, to a fight between democracy in America and communism elsewhere. This oversimplification made it difficult for organizations like the U.S. Communist party to operate, for the general American public couldn't recognize the difference between the original Marxist ideology, Stalinism, and any variety of socialist movements. Hoover, for one, was never one to turn an ear to these shades of difference.

⁶¹ FBI anti-communist sentiment predated this time period, although the emphasis on finding Soviet agents became more pronounced in the cold war decades. Many believe that Senator McCarthy, when raising national hysteria over communist sympathizers and agents in the government, took inspiration from the earlier “First Red Scare” in the late 1910s, consisting of raids in which Hoover as a young Bureau man was heavily involved. Maxwell goes so far as to call these “Hoover raids.”

⁶² Despite clear restrictions on CIA operations on American soil, the Agency also ran a few domestic counterintelligence programs that, when revealed in the whistleblower trials of the 1970s, caused notable public protest. The most widespread, but least immediately harmful, was counterintelligence head James Angleton’s Operation HTLINGUAL, in which all mail to and from the Soviet Union was secretly opened and read for decades. Other smaller but even more morally questionable operations included CHAOS, which like FBI counterintelligence programs infiltrated various leftist and civil rights movements to look for evidence of Soviet control, and the training of local police officers in explosives and surveillance technology, in violation of the National Security Act’s declaration that the Agency shall have no police powers.

⁶³ For a thorough discussion of Ellison’s contemporaneous reviewers, particularly how his work was received by other black writers, see Jackson, 16-18. Also relevant is bell hooks’s famous essay “Postmodern Blackness,” which several decades later points out the difficulty of trying to write experimental prose rather than the social realism that is still expected of black writers, arguing that “racism is perpetuated when blackness is associated solely with concrete gut level experience conceived either as opposing or having no connection to abstract thinking and the production of critical theory.”

⁶⁴ I first learned of this draft through Barbara Foley’s valuable *Wrestling with the Left*, which analyzes all of the extensive *Invisible Man* drafts.

⁶⁵ I have retained Ellison’s strikethroughs and additions in an effort to maintain similitude. My thanks to the staff at the Library of Congress’s Manuscript Reading Room for their assistance in finding this scene in the extensive Ellison Papers collection.

⁶⁶ *Invisible Man*, published in 1952, came before most Hollywood spy and American television shows depicting the intelligence community. Nonetheless, a few filmic spy thrillers, notably Hitchcock’s early *The 39 Steps* and *Secret Agent*, and a number of films featuring FBI shootouts with American gangsters rather than Soviet agents had modeled the sort of action scene that Ellison parodies here.

⁶⁷ Greenlee, again, was in the habit of making dramatic statements about his work, and so stories like this should be taken with a grain of salt. He liked to relate another anecdote, obtained secondhand from his novel’s publisher, that *Spook* had become required reading for upcoming FBI agents—another story that is impossible to disprove, but is only supported by the claims of Greenlee and his friends.

Notes to Chapter 4

⁶⁸ The full text of Truman's address to Congress is reprinted in the collection *Caging the Bear*.

⁶⁹ For more on this disparity, which was an issue as early as the Truman administration, see Gaddis, pp. 82-86. Gaddis describes presidential administrations' "emphasis on capabilities at the expense of intentions a tendency to equate the importance of information with the ease of measuring it—an approach better suited to physics than to international relations" (82).

⁷⁰ For more on faulty intelligence reports on Vietnam, see Powers 210-19, and Gaddis 235-71

⁷¹ Alhern's study generally takes a more forgiving view of CIA operations in Vietnam throughout the entirety of U.S. involvement, but nonetheless is very critical of Phoenix. Douglas Valentine's *The Phoenix Program* is also highly critical, with a particular attention to the euphemisms inherent in the program—"neutralization," "infrastructure" as it referred to suspected Viet Cong supporters—that enabled the program's most unethical operations and eventually turned it into "an instrument of counterterror—the psychological warfare tactic in which VCI members were brutally murdered along with their families or neighbors as a means of terrorizing the neighboring population into a state of submission" (13). Dale Andradé's *Ashes to Ashes* argues that while many Phoenix programs were disastrous and "doomed to almost certain failure," those operations that "were presided over by enthusiastic South Vietnamese officers who deeply believed in the Phoenix concept and were advised by equally devoted and competent U.S. advisers" were successful contributions to the war effort (99). Mark Moyar defends many U.S. intelligence programs but deems Phoenix ineffective.

⁷² For a detailed account of the attempted public coverup of Phoenix, see Hastings pp. 564-572, and Powers pp. 181-83.

⁷³ The 1954 CIA-staged coup that deposed democratically elected president Jacobo Árbenz was a particularly inventive covert operation. Knowing it wasn't viable to send US troops to the area, but also that significant American military presence would terrify the Guatemalan administration, the CIA launched a complex psychological warfare campaign to make them believe that a US invasion was imminent. Sending a few planes to strafe the capital city, broadcasting false radio reports of troop movements, the CIA terrified Arbenz into fleeing the country, allowing the right-wing military leader Carlos Castillo Armas to take command. The largely nonviolent operation was touted as a resounding success: Eisenhower personally called in those who headed the operation to congratulate them on a job well done, something almost unheard of in the intelligence community. However, the legacy of this operation, too, is more complicated than it first appears. A few years after Armas took over the presidency, he was assassinated, and a long period of civil war ensued from which Guatemala has still not entirely recovered. Operation PBSuccess, as the coup was termed, was a win for the United States in that a communist leader never took over the country, but it certainly wasn't good for Guatemala long-term, and this operation is one of many instances of U.S. intervention in Latin-American governments that the people of that region came to bitterly resent. It is also one of the prime examples used when critics accuse the CIA of having a preference for right-wing dictatorships, in clear conflict with its professed democratic ideals.

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- ⁷⁴ International relations specialist Don Levin recently created the Partisan Electoral Intervention by the Great Powers dataset, which tracks U.S. and USSR interference in national elections between 1946 and 2000, finding that one or both of the countries “intervened in about one of every nine competitive national-level executive elections” during this time period (89).
- ⁷⁵ These actions were brought to light during the Congressional investigations of the 1970s, with particular attention paid to the assassination attempts, and are thus narrated in most histories of the intelligence community. Thomas Powers provides a particularly compelling account of DCI Richard Helms’s variable awareness of these operations (131-58).
- ⁷⁶ Not unlike Didion herself, who wrote a book-length journalistic study in 1982 in which she tried to articulate “the exact mechanism of terror” at work in El Salvador (21).
- ⁷⁷ While the OAS was conceived as a path for states to collectively intervene in human rights violations in South America, given the region’s history of oppressive dictatorships, it was increasingly controlled by U.S. administrations to effect their preferred policy in the region. See Peter Smith pp. 169-72, and Allcock pp. 139-62, for an account of OAS cooperation with the Johnson administration to intervene in a conflict in the Dominican Republic. In 1965, the intelligence community ran an actual Operation Simpático in Colombia, an espionage program designed to warn the Johnson administration of political events that would warrant American military intervention. For a brief description of it, and a wider examination of U.S. economic policy in South America during this period, see Kofas, pp. 68-71. It’s unlikely that Didion would have known about this specific, small operation while writing her fiction, though—and the name itself is certainly suggestive enough to be a fiction writer’s creation.
- ⁷⁸ Tim Parrish reads *Democracy* against the Henry Adams text of the same name, arguing that Didion’s narrative is semi-autobiographical and as such, an effective reflection on what has become of the understanding of history that Adams put forward in *Education*” (168). Bimbisar Irom reads Didion’s white space as zones of particularly irony that prompts political reflection in lieu of articulating positive political messages.
- ⁷⁹ Although she does not read the novel’s structure as reminiscent of an intelligence report, Patricia Merivale does read *A Book of Common Prayer* against the Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American*, arguing that Didion creates a feminine version of Greene’s critique of intelligence work, one that is “far more ironic” because of Grace’s ultimate confession that she has not reached any truths. Victor Strandberg draws connections between Grace and Fitzgerald’s Nick Carraway, both “detective-narrator[s] assigned to search out the inner truth about a mysterious newcomer” who ultimately are “transformed by a correction of vision” (148). Michael Tager gives Lovett a great deal of attention, characterizing him as “a man of action” with an “attitude of cool, amoral detachment,” but while his description aligns with that of any number of popular intelligence heroes, he does not explicitly make this connection. Tager’s reading of Lovett’s fundamentally undemocratic viewpoint, opposed to Harry Victor’s liberal ideology, is a constructive reading of the implicit political debate that informs the novel’s personal drama.

⁸⁰ Irvine (pp. 15-24) argues that a factor in the negative American reviews of the novel was the perception that a Canadian writer had no business writing about a Caribbean setting and resentment of her critique of American foreign policy, pointing out that Canadian reviews of it were more positive.

⁸¹ For an overview of the critical reputation of the novel, particularly critics' overwhelming focus on feminist readings of the text and the ongoing debate about the efficacy of its postcolonial critique, see Wisker pp. 76-86.

⁸² While there has been no scholarship on Atwood's use of intelligence tropes in *Bodily Harm*, Irvine provides an interesting reading of the novel's play with detective tropes, in particular the game Clue (96-99). Earl Ingersoll is attentive to detective tropes in her later works *Alias Grace* and *The Blind Assassin*.

⁸³ One of the most alarming elements of *The Handmaid's Tale* is the flashback sequences in which Atwood shows how the Gilead society came about in large part because of the public's justification of even such extreme acts as freezing all women's bank accounts. The average citizens' willingness to go with whatever policy decisions ruling powers make is the most powerful tool, in Atwood's eyes, that those who would abuse power have.

Notes to Chapter 5

⁸⁴ For brevity, I hereafter only list Marchetti as the author of this work. The memoir's contents are primarily based on Marchetti's extensive work as a CIA analyst, and Marks was brought on late in the project to assist largely with stylistic concerns, much like the common partnerships between operatives and journalists.

⁸⁵ With the exception of Don DeLillo's late work—*Libra* (1988) of course is the product of extensive research about the Kennedy assassination, although as my analysis in Chapter 2 pointed out, it is notable that the only entirely fictional parts of this novel are the portions dealing with the CIA. Barth and Mailer draw from these exposé memoirs to craft visions of CIA bureaucracy that are more extensive and realist than any other earlier work.

⁸⁶ The genre has undergone a particular revitalization since the terrorist attacks on 9/11. A 2016 article in the CIA's internal academic journal reveals that while there were relatively few Prepublication Review Board meetings before the mid-1970s, "From 1980 to 2003 the CIA's PRB reviewed between 200 and 400 manuscripts per year. In 2010, more than 1,800 manuscripts were reviewed" ("Right to Write" 17).

⁸⁷ *Sabbatical* includes a footnote by the fictional narrators, referencing Agee and Marks and Marchetti, p. 50; Mailer draws attention to both as "works for which I feel a considerable debt" on the bibliography included in the author's afterword to *Harlot's Ghost* (1134-8).

⁸⁸ In the last few years, for instance, the following positive firsthand accounts of intelligence work have been published and displayed on the CIA's "Intelligence Reading List": Jack

Devine and Vernon Loeb's *Good Hunting: An American Spymaster's Story* (2014), Henry Crumpton's *The Art of Intelligence* (2013), and Martha Peterson's *Widow Spy* (2012).

⁸⁹ This phrase, which seems simultaneously melodramatic and a comic understatement of the rampantly illegal and immoral activities to which it refers, is commonly used across writings both by Agency insiders and scholars writing on the American intelligence community.

⁹⁰ Agee published two volumes titled *Dirty Work*, one on CIA operations in Western Europe (1978) and one on African operations (1979), as well as another memoir, *On the Run* (1987), that details his travels after he published of *Inside the Company* and had his American passport revoked.

⁹¹ Barth modifies some of his statements in the later "The Literature of Replenishment" and expresses alarm at what he considers a misreading of his major claims in "Exhaustion."

⁹² Patricia Tobin's *John Barth and the Anxiety of Continuance* is typical of book-length studies that read the author on formalist grounds, suggesting that "the heavy reality of CIA intrigue...intrude[s] in this book of Barth's reinvention of the couple" (151). Rather than seeing intelligence agencies as intruders in a romantic tale, I believe any fair reading of these texts has to acknowledge espionage's central role.

⁹³ For instance, Mailer was interviewed for a segment of *Harper's Bazaar* called "Antidotes," in which public figures are asked to respond to different category titles with "something that has seemed to you dismal, disastrous, and distasteful." In the category "Celebrity," Mailer answered, "Not Henry Luce, not Bennet Cerf, not Lenny Bernstein, not Dean Acheson—that pretentious power-mad popinjay—not Dr. Edward Teller; but J. Edgar Hoover, head of our thought police—a martinet, a preposterous figure, but not funny." The two pages of the interview are included in Mailer's FBI dossier with the above quote underlined, and an explanatory note precedes it: "This material was brought to my attention...by an employee who noted it while perusing this magazine at a local hairdresser's" ("Norman Mailer" 39-41).

⁹⁴ Mailer planned to write a sequel called *Harlot's Grave* that would complete the memoir and tie up the several narrative threads hanging loose at the end of *Ghost*, but the project never got very far underway.

⁹⁵ Mailer explicitly states that in the novel's epilogue that Harlot is based on James Jesus Angleton who, as discussed in this project's introduction, was the founder of American counterintelligence operations and nicknamed "The Poet" because of his highly academic leanings and particular love of T. S. Eliot's work. Angleton, while highly influential for most of the cold war, was eventually cast out of the intelligence community because he became so immensely paranoid. He eventually made an ill-phrased comment during the Congressional investigations of the 1970s, effectively claiming that the Agency shouldn't be subject to legislative oversight. One can imagine that if Mailer had ever written his sequel, it would detail a similar crisis for his titular character, especially when we remember that Harlot has definitively fallen from grace in the Omega manuscript's frame narrative.

⁹⁶ Carr's *What Is History*, initially delivered as a lecture series at the University of Cambridge, is often cited as the first articulation of these historiographic doubts. White's *Metahistory* is a more thorough treatment of the theme, positing that all historians work by "emplotment," using similar narrative structures as fiction writers to arrange historical events.